

**Series:** **KING ME!** God's People Get MORE Than They Ask For

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## **HOW THE MIGHTY FALL**

2 Chronicles 7:11-22

1. Has anyone here ever spent much time in a tent? When I was a kid, we used to go to an old camp meeting—called **Mahaffey Camp**. It was **very** basic! No showers. Golf course bathrooms—i.e., big outhouses—18 holes and a path. No sinks—only basins—and a community water faucet. Believe it or not—about 2000 people used to come each summer! Ten days was all they could stand of each other!

-And our family stayed in a tent. It was one of those old canvas army tents—that smelled like mold. We had these rusty spring beds—and **ticks**—bags stuffed with straw that we slept on. Now, at the age of 8—it was an adventure! But everyone looked forward to going home to a real room and a real bed and a real bathroom.

-David, the first king of Israel, knew what it was like to sleep under the stars and live out of a tent. He did that as a shepherd—and he did it as a fugitive for 10 years. One day, after he'd been king for a number of years, he was walking through his palace—and a thought hit him: He was living in a palace—and the Presence of God was represented by this small gold-plated chest—the Ark of the Covenant—resting under a shabby 500 year old tent. So David decided that he wanted to build God a magnificent temple that would represent the Majesty and Power of Who He was. But God stopped him through the prophet Nathan—who reported these astounding words:

**'I declare to you that the LORD will *build a house for you*: When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.'** "

**(1 Chronicles 17:10-14 TNIV)**

2. Well his son, Solomon **did** build the temple and it was magnificent--one of the wonders of the ancient world. The book of 2 Chronicles describes it in great detail. The inside of the temple was plated with 20 tons of gold—with massive gold cherubim over the ark. A magnificent molded bronze bowl—15 feet across. And then there were 2 massive pillars molded from bronze—that stood at the entrance to the temple--35 feet tall—six feet thick! They even had names: **JAKIN**—meaning, "*He—the LORD--establishes*" and **BOAZ**—meaning, "*In Him—the LORD--is strength*."

-Then Solomon dedicated the temple—and prayed that God would take possession of it. He said, "Lord—I know how great you are—not even the universe can contain you—but would you come and dwell among your people?" And God did. The Glory of His Presence unmistakably filled that building. God once again dwelled with his

people—in a specific address in Jerusalem. This was the culmination of all the promises that God had made to Abraham; that He would make Him a great nation—that He would give them the land. And **now** they would bless the nations!

-Now, here's the **really** strange part about this specific book of the Bible. It starts with amazing promise—and ends with David's descendants flipping God off. I mean, this wasn't just a few instances of disobedience; this was contempt. And by the end of the story, David's descendents were de-throned by a pagan king, the Jewish people were hauled out of the land God had given them, and how the temple God had once filled with his glory was stripped and burned to the ground.

-The final scene is of these giant pillars being broken into pieces—and hauled off to a pagan king's treasury. The **unthinkable** had happened! The place that officially represented the dwelling place of God on this planet was obliterated!

a. Just think about this for a moment. God had narrowed and narrowed and narrowed things down—that his plan for the nations of the world would be accomplished through Abraham—then through Israel—in a special place—with David founding a kingdom that would last forever. And **now?** It was gone. The kingdom, the temple, the people—**gone!** And it would seem to all the nations watching—Pagan idols—1; Israel's God—0. No glory there! You **have** to ask, "How did this whole thing unravel?"

b. If you do the forensics-- the turning point is Solomon's ego. God never wanted Israel to have a hierarchy—with the king at the top of the foodchain—lording it over his underlings out working the cubicle farm—thinking he was better than they were.

-David knew that—and stayed humble before God and others pretty much through his entire reign. The perfect picture of this is David, in essence, dancing in his boxer shorts like a little kid before the Ark of God being brought to Jerusalem. His wife Michal was embarrassed—and **furious!** David wasn't.

c. Now, compare that to Solomon sitting on a specially made gold-plated in a gold-plated palace—collecting wives like hockey cards! It's a little different than the young king who prayed, at the beginning of his reign, "God, I can't do this job—I'm just a kid!"

3. Anyone recognize the title of this series, **King me!** It's from the game of checkers. It's what happens when your checker has made to the opponent's side. You say, **King me!** And they put another checker on top—which means you're the boss of the board! You can go **anywhere!**

-Change the inflection to **King ME!**—and it means something **very** different. "I'm the big shot. I'm the master of my destiny—the center of my universe! I do things **my** way!" How many of you have ever been around a **King ME?** Did you **enjoy** the experience?

-**King ME = arrogance**—and it's what took Israel down. It morphed into lots of different forms—from idolatry to oppression—to bragging. This stuff **starts** when leaders become big shots—and they bow to **nobody! Not even God!** Let me give you a few examples from this history book.

- a. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, had watched his Dad ascend his throne, conscript 70,000 foreigners into labor to build his stuff and collect his gold. When he became the next king he ruled over two segments of the kingdom—the southern kingdom, called **Judah**, and northern kingdom, Israel. The allegiance was a little shaky because Rehoboam was from Judah.

-When the leaders of Israel gathered and asked him to lighten their workload—guess what happened? Let me give you a clue. The first words out of his mouth were:

**'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist...' (1 Kings 12:10bTNIV)**

That day, the nation of Israel cracked right in two and were often at war with each other. Know why? Pride alienates. It's divisive—wherever it shows up.

- b. The examples of arrogance are too numerous to list. Really. Just a couple of examples. Asa, Rehoboam's grandson, is an amazing man—and seems to be leading the whole nation toward submitting to God as David did. You think, "Finally! Things are getting back on track! God's mission for His people to be a light to the nations is gonna happen!" He trusts God in the face of overwhelming odds—like, for example, when an army of 1 **million** Ethiopian soldiers marched on Israel—and God gave them victory.

-Guess what Asa did toward the end of his reign when there was another threat. He stripped the temple to pay another nation to help them. And when a prophet rebuked him, **King ME** kicked into gear.

**Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people. (2 Chronicles 16:10 TNIV)**

-When a leader's ego runs his heart—**everyone** is in trouble—especially the vulnerable people of the world.

- c. Another descendant of David—named King Uzziah—had the same kind of track record. Early in his reign—he honored God and accomplished a lot of good. But his ego got the best of him—and he thought he should be able to do what God had called only priests to do—burn incense. When a priest rebuked him—Uzziah **lost** it! "No underling's gonna tell **me** what to do!"

**While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he**

**himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. (2 Chronicles 26:19-21 TNIV)**

- d. One more example. Hezekiah. You have to understand, Hezekiah was a bright light in a **very** dark string of leaders. And he was an **amazing** leader. He restored the worship of God, trusted God in crisis, and had Isaiah, the prophet, as one of his best friends. When he contracted a fatal illness and was dying—God healed him and gave him 15 more years of life. Then this:

**But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD's wrath did not come on them during the days of Hezekiah. (2 Chronicles 32:25-26 TNIV)**

- e. Just a side note here—in every example I know of, these kings got **worse**—not wiser—as they got older. Hmmm!

4. Now there were other factors that had huge effects on the leadership of Israel. For example—influence. One of the issues that comes up again and again is influence. One young king, Joash, was raised by a priest named Jehoida. And he did really well when he was propped up by the scaffolding of Jehoida's life. When Jehoida died—Joash undid almost **all** the good he'd accomplished—and even had Jehoida's son murdered. Sometimes the bad influence came from good kings allying themselves with evil kings.

-But the **major** factor that brought Israel down was the worship of idols. That was the trap they fell into in Egypt, it was the trap they fell into as soon as they got out of Egypt—and it haunted them—both kingdoms—until it took them down. God had warned them in the wilderness, “The price tag on idol worship is **way** more than you want to pay. **Don't do it! I'm God.**

-And this stuff, friends, was not about offering fruit and flowers to a statue. It was horrible stuff. The one Solomon set up on the Mount of Olives involved burning children to death. Most worship ceremonies involved ritual sex with both male and female prostitutes. It was addictive, degrading, destructive—and **demonic**.

- a. Now, I want you to think carefully with me for a minute about idolatry. Do you think that these people were just so ignorant that they couldn't tell the difference between a God who could create universes with a word—and an idol made of wood, stone or metal? At the heart of idolatry—ours, and their's—is putting something—anything—before God. It all comes back to **King ME!** See, the deal with idol is this: “If God won't give me the power, food, money, love, sex or influence I want—then **I'll shop someplace else!**”

-The cool thing about idols is that you don't have to humble your pride or obey. Why serve a God who holds you to higher standards and asks you to love Him and others—when you can when there are **other** gods out there that will let you be a big shot and have it **your way**—every day—with no interference? Of course, those gods can't save you or give you life either.

- b. Now, I realize that there are a lot of factors in why these kings took the paths they did and led the people the way they did. The influence of other nations and other kings, the pressure of the people they served, the precedent set by Solomon all figured into this. But *I* believe the **core** issue was, “How can *I* get what *I* want as quickly as possible—***without obligating myself to God?!?***”
- c. So how can a nation called by God to be His light to the nations fulfill His Mission if they won’t be faithful to Him? They can’t. And it was getting worse and worse and worse. And, from what we read here—to keep His Mission to reclaim this world going forward before it was totally extinguished by paganism, God put an end to the whole thing and sent them into exile.
- d. **Everyone** watching at this point would’ve thought that all the promises God made to Abraham, Moses and David were over. Done. Nada. The nation? Sent to Babylon. The land? Taken over by Babylonians. The establishment of David’s throne? The joke of the world. The temple—where God had taken up residence? Stripped and obliterated. It is impossible to over-estimate how devastating this was to the Jewish people.

5. When the **mighty** fall—you have to ask why. Jim Collins—author of the best-sellers, **Built To Last** and **From Good To Great**, describes himself as a student of companies. **Great** companies. Does anyone remember the darkness that fell on Wall Street—and the entire world economic community back in August/September, 2008? Suddenly great, longstanding companies were collapsing—one right after the other-- that no one **ever** suspected would go down.

-Stellar companies filled with really bright, hard-working people—like Merrill-Lynch, and Lehman Bros. were flaming out. GM, Ford and Chrysler were in Washington—on their knees, hands out. And a major bailout from the US government was the only thing that saved legendary institutions like **Fannie Mae** and **Freddie Mac**.

-In the middle of this chaos, Jim Collins found that some of the companies he’d praised in his previous books—were going down. And he asked the question, “Why? **How DO The Might Fall?**” So, in September 2008, he wrote about it in a book: **How The Mighty Fall**. There are some **fascinating** parallels—both to what happened to God’s people—and what happens in our lives.

-Know where it all starts? Jim says it starts with the **hubris born of success**. Anyone know what **hubris** is? I didn’t either—so I looked it up. Hubris is **exaggerated self-confidence**. **Arrogance**. You could call it, **King ME!** And it comes from **success**.

a. Jim Collins lists the stages like this:

**Stage 1: Hubris/Arrogance born of Success**

**Stage 2: Undisciplined pursuit of More**

**Stage 3: Denial of Risk and Peril**

**Stage 4: Grasping for Salvation**

**Stage 5: Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death**

-Here's what he's saying. When leaders of companies have a string of successes and wins and profits for share-holders—**success makes them sick in the soul**. They become arrogant and overly confident. And it's not enough. They're greedy. And they pursue more—denying that the risks of doing so will every take them down. And when they feel the ground giving way under them--they start grasping. "Let's get a newer, shinier CEO! Let's buy **other** companies." They're **grasping for salvation!** Then they die. Or go the way of the Studebaker, or the 8-Track tape.

- b. Solomon's picture is on the front cover of the book. Well actually—not—but it could be. His success led to arrogance—and an undisciplined pursuit of more in **every single arena of life!** Maybe he thought, "Hey—I gave God an address here—with a magnificent temple! I've paid God off—so now I can do what *I* want! And the other kings, for the most part, saw him as wise, successful and rich—and followed the precedent he had set.

-And the word **death—irrelevance**—would describe the final picture of Israel. A sightless king; a people-less nation, and a shell of a temple with no God.

- c. Know what the irony of all this is? In his book of wisdom, Proverbs, Solomon wrote about pride:

**The LORD detests the proud; they will surely be punished. ...Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall. (Proverbs 16:5,18 NLT)**

-When the temple was dedicated and God's glory filled the whole thing, Solomon prayed this magnificent prayer—begging God to hear the voices of those who cried out to Hi there. That night, God spoke these words to Solomon:

**...If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14 TNIV)**

-But God **also** said:

**"But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. (2 Chronicles 7:19-20 TNIV)**

-The sad thing is that it would appear that Solomon and all those who followed him—pretty much forgot both the promise...and the warning.

6. The record of Israel's kings would be God's version of the book **How The Mighty Fall**. What Solomon wrote about pride and arrogance and this whole ***I did it MY way!*** kind of attitude is true. God hates pride in all of its forms—and He cares **too** much about the souls of humans and his redemption of the world to let it continue.

-Pride got Satan thrown out of the presence of God; pride got humans thrown out of the Garden; pride took down the nation of Israel—and the pride that comes from success has the potential—to damn a person’s soul forever. Friends—we need to hear God’s voice—calling us away from the pride that comes from the wealth and success, the pride that comes from simply loving the sound of our own voice—and calling us away from the idols we would secretly place before God.

-Sometimes pride takes up residence in the hearts of God’s people—just like it did in the people of Israel. We begin to sometimes think that because we are the church—founded by Jesus, Son of God, Savior of the world—that we have the right to judge and criticize the others in our world. We do a **lot** of talking. **I** do a lot of talking! Too much! And some people who’ve heard this talking have interpreted our message as one of superiority, finger-wagging, moralizing and shaming.

-And, actually, the message of Jesus is Good News—meant to be matched by people who incarnate Jesus as **Good News**—wherever they go. The message of our **lives--** kindness, mercy, love, goodness, compassion and generosity—needs to get to people before our **talk!**

- a. If you study the history of the church, what you find is that we have been tempted to follow the very same downward curve as Israel. We’ve always been tempted with idols—putting something—usually ourselves—before God and others. But the **biggest** thing is pride—usually seen as the need to either be **right**—or to be more spiritual, more acceptable to God than someone else. -And when the church became the big deal in the Roman Empire and made kings cringe and kneel? The pride and arrogance that came from that was enormous—and devastating to the world. See, a fall **always** comes after pride. God just won’t stand for it.

-There have been some parts of the church of today that have been very successful—at least outwardly. And there is an unhealthy pride that can grow in that kind of soil. Some Christ-followers think that they should make all the rules—and other people be forced to follow them. And that’s very different than what Jesus called us to.

- b. And God’s call is **always** to come back. To come back to sanity. To come back to where we understand that **He** is God—and we are not—we’re just servants. God’s promise to Solomon still fits:

**...If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.**  
(2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT)

-See, we have a choice in life. We don’t **have** to be God’s people—we can choose **not** to be. We don’t **have** to call ourselves by His Name. We can just say, “I like **my** name: **King ME!** I think I will do my own thing, make my own rules, treat people the way I want—and serve the god of work, money, success, relationship, power—you know, the religion of **ME!** And we can do that.

-But we **can't** call ourselves Followers of Jesus and do that. Jesus wasn't like that. The Bible is **very** clear about the attitude of Jesus. There was no smugness, no superiority, no arrogance whatsoever about Him. In fact, the record is clear. He **laid aside** his rights as God, humbled himself, and took the likeness of man—and became a **servant**. Can you see how obnoxious it is to God when he humbled himself—and we **refuse**?

-And the promise of God remains. If we will humble ourselves. If we will be God's servants—and love Him with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds and all our strength. If we will call out to God—if we will seek **Him**—and not just all the things we want from Him—and if we will turn away from the garbage, He will **hear** us. He will wash our sins away—and make us clean. And He will heal our lives, heal our hearts, renew our minds—and restore the **shalom**—the peace, joy, love and **life** that we crave.

- c. If we will live as servants of Jesus and serve others for **His** sake—some unbelievably good things can happen. See, sometimes we think we can buy God off—you know, by giving money, or by going to church, or by acquiring Bible knowledge. These aren't bad things. But years before the exile, God spoke through the prophet Micah to his people and said:

**He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 TNIV)**

And **if** we do that? Then people will begin to believe that there **is** a God in Heaven—and He is kind, good merciful, forgiving—and Lord of all! When we live like this—wherever we are—open to God's voice, seeing ourselves as God's servants wherever we find ourselves—the potential for God's power showing up is **amazing!**

7. This is a dangerous time—and Toronto is a dangerous place—to be a servant of Jesus. We, in this part of the world, tend to see ourselves as successful. Smart. Capable. Knowledgeable. Deserving of what we own. And it breeds pride. And it leads to emptiness and idolatry. It's possible, in a world like this, to begin to think you're god. I mean, not the "**Big G**" God—but, a little god.

-You know--a god who can be selective about what you believe about what's right and wrong; about how you're going to live—and what you'll live for. Heck, we're arrogant enough sometimes to think we can just edit out of the Bible the parts we don't like—and run after the same stuff everyone else runs after!

-And we can bless our need to be right—because we think we **are** right—you know, that we and God agree on so **very many** things! We can refuse to humble ourselves. We can excuse why we just don't have **time** to seek God's face—and listen for what He has to say. We can bless what He doesn't. But we can't do that and be called by **His** Name, be heard, and be healed. God stands ready to heal and offer grace and hope and forgive. The other option is exile.