

1 Kings

The Book of 1 Kings opens with Israel rising to the pinnacle of power, wealth, and prominence during the administration of its third king, Solomon. The first 11 chapters describe Solomon’s legendary wisdom and architectural achievements. In sad contrast, the last 11 chapters detail the beginning of the end of all Solomon had built. The book closes with the people of the covenant—both north (Israel) and south (Judah)—wandering far from the God of the covenant.

FOCUS	ONE NATION BECOMES TWO											
DIVISIONS	Solomon: Third King of Israel		Solomon's Temple Built and Dedicated			Solomon's Fame, Fortune, and Failure		The Kingdom Divides: Israel and Judah		Elijah: God's Spokesman in the Days of Ahab		Ahab's Final Days as King in Israel
	1	4	5	8	9	11	12	16	17	19	20	22
TOPICS	The King with a Divided Heart						The Divided Kingdom He Left Behind					
	Dedication						Disruption					
PLACE	Jerusalem						Northern Kingdom: Israel Southern Kingdom: Judah					
TIME	About 130 Years											

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Solomon: Third King of Israel

Key Passage: 1 Kings 2:1–4, 3:3–15

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4
Solomon's Opposition	Solomon's Retribution	Solomon's Request	Solomon's Organization
Receiving the Throne		Ruling the Nation	

OVERVIEW King David's advanced years and restricted activity create a leadership vacuum that Adonijah seeks to exploit by proclaiming himself king. Though he enjoys support from Joab the general and Abiathar the priest, Adonijah is opposed by Nathan, Zadok, and others from David's administration. God had previously made it clear (and David had privately acknowledged) that Solomon was His choice to succeed David. Now the time has come to make that declaration public and official. Solomon's anointing as the third king in Israel spells the beginning of the end for Adonijah's conspiracy. But while Solomon's position is secure, his need is great for godly wisdom to rule the kingdom—a request that God willingly grants. And God also provides the blessings Solomon could have requested but didn't: riches, victory, and honor.

YOUR DAILY WALK How would you respond if God appeared to you as He did to Solomon and extended a blank check invitation: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (3:5)? Be honest! Could you resist the urge to ask for riches, power, or fame? Is there anything in this world more lasting and important than financial success? Do you place wisdom over wealth in your priorities?

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God" (James 1:5).

Solomon's response to God's offer is exemplary. First, he recognizes his need, saying "I am only a little child" (3:7). Next, he recognizes his responsibility as king. And finally, he recognizes his resource—the wisdom of God. If you need wisdom, you can ask God. Turn to James 1:5 and pray that verse back to Him as the expression of your need for wisdom and as your desire to put His wisdom to work in one of your responsibilities today.

INSIGHT *Following in His Father's Footsteps* David became known as "the sweet singer of Israel" for his skill in composing a large number of the psalms in Israel's hymnbook. But Solomon was not far behind. According to 1 Kings 4:32, he composed more than a thousand songs himself, of which Psalm 127 is an outstanding example.

Solomon's Temple Built and Dedicated

Key Passage: 1 Kings 6:1-14; 8:12-61

CHAPTER 5	CHAPTER 6	CHAPTER 7	CHAPTER 8
Preparation for the Temple	Dimensions of the Temple	Decoration of the Temple	Dedication of the Temple
Construction		Consecration	

OVERVIEW Today's reading features the realization of David's dream to build a house for God, a plan God said would be carried out by David's son (5:5; 2 Samuel 7:12-13). Solomon enlists the help of his father's friend Hiram, king of Tyre, to provide the cedar and fir lumber for the temple and royal palace. With keen organizational skill, Solomon sets the conscripted laborers to work and seeks out a master craftsman to do the intricate decorations. Though David's planning was inspired by the Spirit of God (1 Chronicles 28:11-12), the exact dimensions and details of the temple are not recorded in Scripture. However, the general pattern of the tabernacle and its court is followed. In his address to the people at the dedication of the temple, Solomon offers a majestic prayer to God with the oft-repeated refrain, "Hear from heaven . . . and forgive" (8:30, 34, 36, 39, 49–50).

YOUR DAILY WALK English clergyman J. B. Phillips wrote a book titled *Your God Is Too Small*, in which he accused Christians of cutting the infinite God revealed in Scripture down to puny human dimensions. While giving mental assent to an "infinite" God, we often live like (and pray like) He is weak, finite, and fickle in keeping His promises. Solomon could hardly be accused of doing that. In speaking to God, Solomon said, "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" (8:27). "The Lord is God and . . . there is no other" (8:60). "Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (8:56).

Does your God match the infinite dimensions of the God of the Bible? Make a list of all the evidences of bigness that describe God in chapter 8. In light of this, can any of your problems be too big for Him?

"I am the Alpha and the Omega."—God (Revelation 1:8).

INSIGHT The Missing Wonder of the Ancient World

The temple of God built by Solomon in Jerusalem is not listed among the seven wonders of the ancient world, most likely because it was destroyed before Antipater drew up his famous list of architectural marvels in about 140 B.C.

Solomon's Fame, Fortune, and Failure

Key Passage: 1 Kings 9:1-9; 11:1-13

CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10	CHAPTER 11
God's Reminder to Solomon	God's Reward to Solomon	God's Rebuke to Solomon
Warning	Blessing	Chastening

OVERVIEW A fitting epitaph over Solomon's life might read, "The wise king who acted foolishly." Solomon's spreading fame and mushrooming wealth begin to fill his heart with pride. His wholehearted devotion to God is replaced by a growing love for foreign wives (of whom he will eventually take more than a thousand). At first Solomon only tolerates the presence of pagan deities; later he accepts them; finally he worships them, and the one true God is forsaken and forgotten. But while Solomon ignores God, God is still very much interested in Solomon. He reminds the wayward king of His covenant with David and declares that, because of Solomon's idolatry, the kingdom will be torn apart, leaving only two tribes for his son.

YOUR DAILY WALK Fellowship with God is a lot like electricity. It is a moment-by-moment phenomenon. And when you are enjoying it, you and others around you will know it!

Fellowship depends on constant contact with the Source of power. If something interrupts the connection, the flow of power ceases because the power is not in the receptor but in the Source. Spiritually, the severing of fellowship might not be immediately obvious, but the vitality soon wanes because the power flow has stopped. That is why Scripture warns, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Check up on your own personal fellowship with God. Are you giving God a chance to speak to you daily through His Word? Are you regularly responding to Him in prayer? Are you dealing promptly with sin in your life? Are you filling your thought life with meditation upon His actions and attributes? Why not fellowship with your Heavenly Father right now?

INSIGHT *Taking to the Sea*

Solomon was the first of Israel's kings to create a merchant navy, a refinery fleet that brought smelted copper from the colonial mines of the Phoenicians in Sardinia and Spain. The copper was used to make bronze and to build Solomon's temple and other structures.

The Christian is strong or weak, depending upon how faithfully he has cultivated his relationship with God.

The Kingdom Divides: Israel and Judah

Key Passage: 1 Kings 12

CHAPTER 12	CHAPTER 13	CHAPTER 14	CHAPTERS 15-16
Rehoboam's Revolt	Jeroboam's Religion	Two Nations at War	Two Nations in Turmoil
Division		Contention	Confusion

OVERVIEW Supporting Solomon in the manner to which he is accustomed puts a heavy burden of taxation on the nation of Israel. After Solomon's death, the people demand relief from their crushing taxes. Rehoboam, Solomon's headstrong son and successor, rejects the wise counsel of his father's advisors and follows the foolish advice of his younger associates. Rather than lessen the burden, he multiplies it 10 times over. The result is predictable: rebellion, civil war, and a divided kingdom. Only 2 of the 12 tribes remain true to Rehoboam. The rest form a new nation under the leadership of Jeroboam, who sets up his own system of worship in the north, and in the process sets the pattern for the wicked rule that will characterize all his successors.

YOUR DAILY WALK "Like father, like son" is a familiar and sometimes painfully accurate adage. Do you want to see how a son will turn out? Carefully study the life of his father, and more often than not, you'll have your answer. Similarly, if you are curious to know what a girl will be like in 20 years, look at her mother now.

The influence of parents on their children is hard to over-estimate. Children are born mimics, and they will imitate others around them (especially their parents) almost from birth. Proper exhortation in the lives of children is important, but have you overlooked the importance of proper example? Hold up a spiritual mirror and examine your life right now. Make a list of some of the things you like and don't like about what you see. Now ask yourself this penetrating question: "If my children grow up to follow in my footsteps, will I be pleased where those footsteps lead?" If you're not satisfied with the answer, the time for a mid-course correction is now.

Children learn best from example.

INSIGHT *The Long and Short of It*

During the 41-year reign of Asa, the first good king in the southern kingdom of Judah, no fewer than seven different men occupied the throne of Israel in the north. One of them, Zimri, had the dubious distinction of being a king for a total of only seven days.

PLACING THE BOOKS OF 1 Kings– 2 Chronicles

TIME LINE	1000 BC	750 BC	500 BC
HISTORICAL BOOKS	1 KINGS (971–848)	2 KINGS (848–561)	
	1 CHRON. (1011–971)	2 CHRONICLES (771–538)	
POETIC/PROPHETIC BOOKS	Psalms of David	Proverbs	Jonah (780)
		Ecclesiastes	Hosea & Amos (755)
		Song of Songs	Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk (627)
		Obadiah & Joel (840)	Isaiah & Micah (740)
			Nahum (640)
			Haggai & Zechariah (520)
			Micah (440)
BIBLE MILESTONES	Solomon's temple completed (959)	Kingdom divides (931)	10 Tribes of Israel dispersed (722)
		Ministries of Elijah & Elisha (860–795)	First invasion by Babylon (605)
			Decree of Cyrus (538)
			Temple destroyed (586)
ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD	Phoenicians colonize Spain (ca. 950)	First Olympic games (776)	Acropolis built (650)
		Romulus founds Rome (753)	Nineveh destroyed (612)
	Homer writes Iliad & Odyssey (ca. 850)		Byzantium founded (ca. 660)
			Births of Buddha (563) & Confucius (551)

Elijah: God's Spokesman

Key Passage: 1 Kings 18:20–19:21

CHAPTER 17	CHAPTER 18	CHAPTER 19
Elijah Faces the King	Elijah Slays Baal's Prophets	Elijah Flees from the Queen
Drought	Downpour	Discouragement

OVERVIEW Elijah appears on the center stage of Israel's history without introduction. Acting as God's prophetic mouthpiece, he announces to wicked Ahab that Israel will have no more rain except by the prophet's word. Then Elijah leaves Israel for three years, moving at God's direction first east to the Kerith Ravine, then north to the city of Zarephath. In every location God provides for his needs. As the drought intensifies, Elijah returns to challenge Ahab, and the prophets of Baal lose both their jobs and their lives. But when an enraged Queen Jezebel seeks his life, Elijah retreats to the wilderness exhausted, discouraged, and full of self-pity. There God strengthens him, restores him, and sends him out to minister anew.

YOUR DAILY WALK Elijah was a fearless man of faith. He stood toe-to-toe with the most powerful man in Israel and boldly announced God's judgment of drought. Three years later he delivered God's challenge to all those who worshiped Baal, called down fire from heaven, and personally "dispatched" the prophets of Baal!

Then suddenly, after the dramatic and exhilarating moment of his greatest achievement for God, Elijah fell victim to the "Lone Ranger" mentality: "I am the only one left" (19:10, 14). Strength gave way to self-pity, doubt replaced determination, and the fearless man of faith began to falter. Have you faced a similar temptation in your own life, thinking you are the only servant of God in your neighborhood, office, or school (you may be) and feeling sorry for yourself because of it? Then write out this thought and carry it with you today: "God is never without a witness, and with God I am never alone."

God is never without a witness, and with Him, I am never alone.

INSIGHT *Divine Therapy for Human Depression*

It should not be surprising that God, who created humans, knows best how to treat their emotional distress and spiritual anguish. For the distraught Elijah, God prescribed rest, food, exercise, solitude, and a job to do—in that order. That's a pretty good prescription for tackling depression in our age as well.

Ahab's Final Days as Israel's King

Key Passage: 1 Kings 21

CHAPTER 20	CHAPTER 21	CHAPTER 22
Ahab's Winning Battle with Syria	Ahab's Winning Battle with Naboth	Ahab's Losing Battle with Death
Victories of Ahab	Vineyard of Naboth	Verdict of God

OVERVIEW Today you finish reading the Book of 1 Kings. But the division between 1 and 2 Kings is only literary, not historical. Tomorrow the story will continue as smoothly as if there had been no book division at all (which, in fact, was the case in the original Hebrew). Although God's mercy and patience are great toward Ahab, the rebellious king of Israel simply refuses to follow God. Yet, Ahab's disobedience pales by comparison with the wickedness of his wife Jezebel. In cruel treachery, she engineers the murder of Naboth so that Ahab can seize his vineyard. At last, Ahab reaps what he has sown for so long.

YOUR DAILY WALK You can outsmart your friends; you can outsmart your family; you can outsmart your enemies; and sometimes you can even outsmart yourself. But you can never outsmart God.

Consider Ahab. Warned by a prophet of God not to go into battle, Ahab gambled with his life and lost. He concluded that a clever battlefield disguise would make it impossible for anyone to recognize him, even God. The result? "Someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor" (22:34). Lucky shot—or a divine bull's-eye?

God not only sees men, He sees through them.

Trying to outsmart God has never been a wise move. Even the psalmist David learned that, in the game of hide-and-seek, God always comes out the winner (Psalm 139:7-12). But if you find yourself playing the game, the choice is yours: Remove the disguise you've been hiding behind and come to God in humble repentance, or wait for God Himself to unmask you. To his sorrow Ahab selected the second course. Choose now your own path.

INSIGHT *An Unjust Act of Justice (21:1-16)*

Naboth's cruel and unjust murder, masterminded by Queen Jezebel, was nonetheless carried out "justly." Cursing the king was forbidden (Exodus 22:28), and crimes had to be confirmed by at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). So even in her wicked deed, Jezebel followed the letter of the Law.

2 Kings

In 1 Kings, one nation becomes two; in 2 Kings, two nations become none.

Nineteen consecutive evil kings consistently lead Israel downhill. Even the miracle-working ministry of Elisha cannot stop the nation's slide. Meanwhile to the south, the occasional good king in Judah is powerless to reform the evils of his many bad predecessors. The "tale of two nations" ends disastrously: Israel is dispersed by Assyria (chapters 1–17); Judah is marched off to exile in Babylon (chapters 18–25).

FOCUS	TWO NATIONS BECOME NONE											
DIVISIONS	Reign of Joram		Record of Elisha		Revenge of Jehu and Reforms of Joash		Ruin of Israel		Reforms of Hezekiah		Ruin of Judah	
	1	3	4	8	9	12	13	17	18	20	21	25
TOPICS	Elisha			Kings and Queens of Israel and Judah								
	Downfall of Israel						Downfall of Judah					
PLACE	Israel and Judah						Judah					
TIME	About 130 Years						About 155 Years					

Reign of Joram

Key Passage: 2 Kings 2

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3
Fire from Heaven	Whirlwind from Heaven	Water from Heaven
Elijah's Ministry Ends . . . and Elisha's Ministry Begins		

OVERVIEW While 1 Kings centers on the ministry of Elijah, 2 Kings focuses on the ministry of Elisha. After Elijah makes his last prophetic utterance—the prediction of Ahab's death for turning to lifeless idols rather than to the living God—he is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, leaving his understudy Elisha to continue the prophetic work of calling the nation back to God. With the mantle of Elijah on his shoulders and a double portion of Elijah's spirit to fortify him, Elisha wastes no time beginning his prophetic and miraculous ministry. He predicts that God will fill the valleys of Edom with water, enabling King Joram to defeat the forces of Moab and turn back the enemy threat.

YOUR DAILY WALK If a miracle is something so difficult that only God can do it, what area of your life most needs a miracle? And how does it compare with these "miracle stories"?

The Lord said to Abraham: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). And Abraham fathered Isaac at age 100.

Jeremiah affirmed: "Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17). And God delivered His people from exile.

The angel told Mary: "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). And a virgin gave birth to the Savior.

When Elisha instructed Joram to dig trenches in the valley because God was going to fill them with water in spite of a drought, Elisha assured the king, "This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Kings 3:18). The next morning, the waters came.

What challenge in your life seems too big for anyone but God? Write your name by one of the stories above as your testimony of confidence in God's ability to do the impossible.

INSIGHT *Going to School with the Prophets*

The "company of the prophets" (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1) were probably young men studying the Law and the history of Israel in order to teach the people.

Though you may ask God to do something for you, He generally wants to do something in you.

Record of Elisha

Key Passage: 2 Kings 4–6

CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5	CHAPTERS 6–8
Elisha and the Shunammite Woman	Elisha and the Syrian Captain	Elisha and the Syrian King
Provision	Purification	Protection

OVERVIEW Elisha, the great miracle worker of God, performs no fewer than nine miracles in the space of today's section: providing an "oil well" for a destitute widow, giving new life to a dead boy, making poisoned stew harmless, multiplying bread for a hungry crowd, curing a leprous army captain, making an ax head defy the law of gravity, reading the mind of an enemy king, opening the eyes of a servant to see the angels of God, and closing the eyes of the enemy to the same spectacle. In each case, God's power at work in the individual shows His readiness to do the same in the nation He has called His own.

YOUR DAILY WALK Myopia, simply defined, is improper focus. Images appear fuzzy or blurred because the eye is incapable of bringing the light to a sharp focus. Physical myopia can be detected and corrected quite easily.

There is a similar visual problem in the spiritual realm. Let's call it spiritual myopia. The symptoms: clear focus when it comes to identifying problems, obstacles, and difficulties in everyday life, but great difficulty in focusing on the reservoir of power and protection that God has provided to meet those problems head on. Spiritual myopia was the condition of Elisha's servant when he focused on the problem (6:15) but not the provision (6:17). He saw only a horde of Syrians, while Elisha saw the host of angels.

On an index card, draw a small eye chart (similar to what you would find in an ophthalmologist's office), using the words of 2 Kings 6:16, and place it on your mirror or near your computer screen. Let it remind you often of the importance of proper spiritual focus in your walk with God.

INSIGHT *How to Fly Off the Handle*

In biblical times the iron head of an ax was attached to the handle by leather thongs. Thus, it was common for the head to fly off the handle whenever the thongs broke or slipped. Accidents with axes were so common that a special provision was included in the Law of Moses to handle such cases (Deuteronomy 19:1-6).

It is not the darkness that blocks your vision so much as what is between you and God.

Jehu's Revenge, Joash's Reform

Key Passage: 2 Kings 9–10

CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10	CHAPTER 11	CHAPTER 12
Jehu Slays Two Kings	Jehu Slays Ahab's House	Athaliah Slays Her Own House	Joash Repairs God's House
Jehu's Ministry of Judgment		Joash's Ministry of Reform	

OVERVIEW Anointed king over Israel at Elisha's direction, Jehu wastes no time carrying out his mission. He heads straight for the city of Jezreel, where Joram is recuperating from his battle wounds. There he slays the ruling heir of Ahab's house in the vineyard of Naboth for which Ahab's wife had committed murder a generation before. But Jehu is far from finished. In addition, he kills Ahaziah, king of Judah (who was making an untimely visit to Joram), Jezebel (Joram's wicked mother-in-law), and finally the entire surviving family of Ahab, thus fulfilling God's sentence of death. But while Jehu is executing judgment in Israel, a different and potentially more dangerous execution is taking place in Judah. Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, seizes the throne and seeks to remove the rest of the royal line. The sole surviving heir, Joash, grows up to be Judah's youngest monarch and one of its greatest reformers.

YOUR DAILY WALK Whatever else you can say about Jehu (and you can say plenty), his single-minded attention to the task God gave him is exemplary. Jehu was a man with a divine calling, a man with a mission, who lost no time in carrying it out. He brought to fulfillment the prophecy of Elijah against the house of Ahab (1 Kings 21:19-24) and completely rid Israel of the heathen worship of Baal for a time. God approved of Jehu's faithfulness to his calling and rewarded him for it.

Get on fire for God, and men will watch you burn.

How do you tackle the assignment God has set before you? Carelessly? Halfheartedly? Or with the zeal of a Jehu? Whether you are a student or a parent, a minister or an office worker, you can put your heart into your work—if the God of Jehu is in your heart.

INSIGHT *Judgment Can Be Murder*
 Jehu was anointed as God's instrument for the task of exterminating the house of Ahab, and along with it, the worship of Baal. Baalism was so viciously cruel that only a person of Jehu's relentlessness could have done the job. By the end, Jehu had indeed wiped out the entire house of Ahab and had thoroughly purged the nation of Baal worshippers.

Ruin of Israel

Key Passage: 2 Kings 13, 17

CHAPTER 13	CHAPTER 14	CHAPTER 15	CHAPTERS 16–17
Elisha Dies	Jeroboam II Reigns	Anarchy Reigns	Assyria Prevails
Decline in Israel		Dispersion of Israel	

OVERVIEW On his deathbed, Elisha offers King Joash of Israel the opportunity to utterly rout his Syrian enemy. But the king's lack of faith results in something far short of complete victory, and presents a picture of the problem that has plagued Israel's kings for centuries. The alliance between Israel and Judah, secured under Jehoshaphat, now gives way to constant warfare. Anarchy and apostasy rip the land of Israel as first one king and then another is assassinated. When Israel and Syria form an alliance against Judah, Ahaz (king of Judah) buys the help of Assyria. But the downward spiral continues, and soon the 10 tribes in the north are deported to the remotest corners of the Assyrian empire, while other conquered peoples are imported to fill the vacuum.

YOUR DAILY WALK Historians and political scientists have developed elaborate explanations for the conquest of Israel, and later of Judah. "These were small countries," they say, "in the buffer zone between large, powerful neighbors to the south (Egypt) and north (Assyria and Babylon)." But the Bible states that the conquest and exile were God's judgment because of the sin of His people. Israel had turned her back on the Lord, turned to idols, and ignored the repeated message of God's prophets to "shape up or ship out." They had no one to blame but themselves.

That biblical principle remains in force today for nations as well as individuals, Christians as well as unbelievers. God will deal with an individual, with a family, or with a nation according to the unchanging principle that "a man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). When was the last time you "sowed" a word for God by means of a brief phone call or email to one of your elected officials? If an issue is crucial, we can't afford to remain silent.

*The power
of man
can never
reverse the
sentence
of God.*

INSIGHT It's a Long Way to Captivity

In the Assyrian dispersion, many Israelites were resettled in northern Mesopotamia (more than 400 miles away) and others in the area of the Medes (a full 1,000 miles from Samaria).

Reforms of Hezekiah

Key Passage: 2 Kings 18, 20

CHAPTER 18	CHAPTER 19	CHAPTER 20	CHAPTER 21
Assyria at the Door	Assyria on the Run	Hezekiah on His Deathbed	Manasseh on the Rampage
Hezekiah's National Problems		Hezekiah's Personal Problems	

OVERVIEW With the captivity and deportation of Israel, the curtain drops on the northern 10 tribes. But what of their countrymen in the south? Will they learn from Israel's calamity and turn back to God? At this crucial juncture, God raises up Hezekiah, who does "what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done" (18:3). Spiritually, Hezekiah institutes sweeping reforms to bring the nation back to a wholehearted worship of God. Politically, he refuses to pay tribute any longer to Assyria, choosing instead to trust God for protection from reprisal. In answer to his prayer, God decimates the Assyrian army, breaking the back of that once mighty nation. However, by the time of his death, Hezekiah's pride and family negligence ensure that Judah's days are numbered.

People may spurn your appeals, reject your messages, and oppose your arguments, but they are helpless against your prayers.

YOUR DAILY WALK If you're looking for some help in your prayer life, spend some time studying an Old Testament character whose every recorded prayer was answered.

Hezekiah was a man of faith (18:5) and a man of prayer. His first reaction when confronted with a problem was to bring it before the Lord. Whether the problem was 185,000 uninvited Assyrians (19:35), or a painful illness (20:7), Hezekiah took it to God in prayer. And when he prayed, things happened.

Prayer is not a magic formula, but verbal communication with the sovereign God of creation. Examine your own prayer habits. Are they built on a personal relationship with God? Are you strengthening your prayer life with daily exercise? Are you more comfortable talking to God today than you were a year ago? Try this: Every time you get into or out of your car today, spend a few seconds in prayer. You'll find it habit-forming.

INSIGHT *Smashing an Ancient Artifact*

Hezekiah's zealous reform included even the destruction of the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8-9), to which the people were burning incense.

Ruin of Judah

Key Passage: 2 Kings 22–23

CHAPTER 22	CHAPTER 23	CHAPTER 24	CHAPTER 25
Recovery of the Law	Reform of the Nation	Siege of Jerusalem	Sack of Jerusalem
Reforms by Josiah		Removal of Nebuchadnezzar	

OVERVIEW Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it, and Judah is no exception. Though Israel has been swept away in judgment, the southern kingdom continues its pagan “business as usual.” Good King Josiah makes a last desperate attempt to turn the nation back to God. He locates the long-lost Book of the Law and institutes sweeping reforms. But though he can impose a change of actions on the people, only wholehearted repentance can change the attitudes of godlessness and self-indulgence that are the root of the problem. As a result, when Josiah dies, his successors revert to their pagan patterns and practices. At last God brings down the curtain on the southern kingdom as Babylonian soldiers topple the walls, homes, and temple of once-mighty Jerusalem.

YOUR DAILY WALK What is the most important book in the world to you? Assuming your answer is “the Bible” . . .

THINK: How many days this month have you spent time in the Bible? Assuming your answer is “at least one” . . .

THINK: How did you respond to the truth you encountered there? Assuming your answer is an honest one . . .

THINK: Are you satisfied with your response to that truth? Assuming your answer is less than a resounding “yes” . . .

REREAD 2 Kings 23:2-3. The power of God’s Word to change lives is perhaps nowhere more evident than in those two verses. The Word pierces where no manmade sword can reach: to the very heart of the king, priests, prophets, and people, turning their hearts collectively back to God. The result: a national spiritual awakening.

God’s Word convicts, but only you can commit yourself to doing God’s will. Is there an area of your life where a response is overdue?

INSIGHT *The Short and Long and Short and Long of It*

The length of time each of the last four kings in Judah reigned is easy to remember once you see the pattern. The sequence is 3 months—11 years—3 months—11 years.

The degree of our spiritual vigor is in direct proportion to the time we spend in God’s Word.

1 Chronicles

Recalling the period of Jewish history from 2 Samuel through 2 Kings, the priestly writer of Chronicles focuses on the exciting life and righteous reign of King David (1 Chronicles) and the fortunes of the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Chronicles). The first book falls into two parts: Chapters 1–9 trace David’s royal family tree all the way back to Adam; chapters 10–29 detail David’s successful administration as Israel’s second king, showing the importance of proper worship for God’s covenant people.

FOCUS	A PRIESTLY VIEW OF DAVID'S REIGN				
DIVISIONS	David's Family Tree	David's Throne and Capital Established	David's Influence and Kingdom Expanded	David's Worship and Kingdom Organized	David's Kingdom Passed on to Solomon
	1 9	10 16	17 21	22 27	28 29
TOPICS	Ancestry	Activity	Anticipation		Advice
	Royal Roots	Righteous Reign			
PLACE	United Kingdom of Israel				
TIME	Thousands of Years	About 40 Years			

David's Family Tree

Key Passage: 1 Chronicles 1

CHAPTERS 1–3	CHAPTER 4	CHAPTERS 5–8	CHAPTER 9
Genealogy from Adam to Exile	2 Tribes	10 Tribes	Genealogy After the Exile
Historical	National		Levitical

OVERVIEW Chronicles is more than just a repetition of the books of 2 Samuel through 2 Kings. Though it covers the same period of history, Chronicles approaches the task from an entirely different perspective. It focuses on religious (not political) history, giving special attention to events surrounding the temple (not the palace) and the southern kingdom of Judah (the continuing royal line of David). Down through the centuries, God has provided a witness for Himself and protected the people who were the ancestors of the coming Messiah of Israel—a fact clearly seen in the table of genealogies.

YOUR DAILY WALK Before you write off today's section as a lost cause in your pursuit of excitement in daily Bible reading, look beyond the monotonous repetition of "begat" and "the sons of" to see the personalities and events involved. For example:

- How many of the names do you recognize?
- For how many of the characters can you recall at least one fact or story from the Old Testament?
- Who would you say are the five most important people mentioned in these lists? Why did you select those five?
- How many reasons can you think of that God might want to include these chapters in His Word?

The opening chapters of 1 Chronicles give not only the historical roots of God's people, but also the spiritual roots. Can you trace yours? Who are the important people in your spiritual heritage? Which of them are still alive today? Is there a tangible way you could say thank you for their role in your spiritual development? You might want to begin a page of spiritual roots in the back of your Bible and add to it as your research continues.

*One live coal
may set a
whole stack
on fire.*

INSIGHT *Curious Omissions in a Copious List*

Chapters 1–9 may seem like an exhaustive genealogy, but they are not. Careful study reveals several significant omissions, including the family of Eli and the tribes of Zebulun and Dan.

David's Throne Established

Key Passage: 1 Chronicles 11, 13, 15

CHAPTER 10	CHAPTERS 11–12	CHAPTERS 13–15	CHAPTER 16
Saul's Collapse	David's Companions	David's Confusion	David's Celebration
King of the Covenant		Ark of the Covenant	

OVERVIEW Think of 1 Chronicles as a sort of “divine commentary” on the Book of 2 Samuel, a second volume covering the action-packed life of King David. With the passing of Saul, the new shepherd-king assumes the throne and promptly establishes his new capital at Jerusalem, the place around which virtually the entire history of the nation will revolve. Along with his new capital, David selects a corps of mighty men who will support him during his reign. David next attempts to return the ark of God to its proper place—a task that proves more difficult than anticipated. But when at last the ark safely resides in Jerusalem, David leads the nation in a celebration of praise.

YOUR DAILY WALK No man is an island . . . and very few are peninsulas! It is difficult and often dangerous to attempt to stand alone without the support of others who share your convictions and commitments.

Today's reading devotes 78 verses to the naming of David's mighty men: his trusted friends, confidants, bodyguards, and counselors—in short, the backbone of his kingly court. Without them, David might never have risen to the greatness that he would ultimately achieve. Even though his role as king was unique in the nation, God never intended David to function as a solo performer in the palace.

Perhaps you will never rise to the place of power and prominence of King David. But everyone can be a mighty man or woman in the life of another person. Think about those who exercise leadership over you, such as your pastor or boss. First Chronicles 11:10 says David's mighty men gave him strong support in his kingdom. Can that be said of you in your support of your pastor? Your boss? What are one or two ways you can do something “mighty” for them this week?

*It takes
dedicated
teachers
to produce
consecrated
pupils.*

INSIGHT A Thoroughly Anointed King

David's anointing as king over all Israel (11:3) was, in fact, his third anointing. The first was done privately by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13), the second publicly as king over Judah (2 Samuel 2:4).

David's Kingdom Expanded

Key Passage: 1 Chronicles 17–18

CHAPTER 17	CHAPTERS 18–20	CHAPTER 21
Desire of David's Heart	Defeat of David's Enemies	Deception of David's Mind
Covenant	Conquest	Census

OVERVIEW While David enjoys a palace of cedar, the ark of God resides in a mere tent—a fact that prompts David to contemplate a monumental building project. Even the prophet Nathan encourages David in his God-honoring ambition. But then through the prophet, God delivers a ringing “You are not the one” (17:4) along with a heartwarming promise of an ongoing dynasty and an eternal kingdom for David's descendants. However, David, the mighty man of war, must leave the fulfillment of his dream to his son Solomon and concentrate instead on the business of enlarging the kingdom God has entrusted to him.

YOUR DAILY WALK Consider the following contrasts taken from the lives of a father and son: David and Solomon.

David was a man of war; Solomon was a man of peace. David dreamed of building the temple; Solomon erected and dedicated the temple.

David was told by God, “I will not give you what you asked for.” Solomon was told, “I will give you what you did not ask for.” Yet, in spite of the differences in their lives, there is one resounding similarity: Both men glorified God in their lifetimes.

There is something far more painful than being denied a cherished dream or ambition, and that is undertaking the ambition anyway, only to find that God is not in it. Has God set up a red light in your path? And are you ignoring the signal or looking for alternate routes to His glory? Each time you stop for a red light today, commit one of your dreams or goals to God. Where He has put a period, don't put a question mark.

INSIGHT *No Cover-Up Intended!*

David's sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of Uriah took place between 20:1 and 20:2. In his intention to focus on themes of true worship and true kingship in the nation's history, the Chronicler was selective in his choice of material. He omitted details of David's private life, not because he wanted to whitewash the past, but because he knew those incidents were already known and recorded.

You cannot lift your children to a higher plane than the one on which you live yourself.

David's Worship Organized

Key Passage: 1 Chronicles 22–23

CHAPTER 22	CHAPTERS 23–24	CHAPTER 25	CHAPTERS 26–27
Instructions for Solomon	Levites and Priests	Arrangements for . . . Musicians	Officers
David's Temple Preparations			

OVERVIEW Though David's desire to build a house for God must wait, nothing keeps him from preparing for it. He chooses a most appropriate site (the threshing floor of Ornan), gathers the building materials, charges his son Solomon with the duty of finishing the task, and enlists the support of all the key men in Israel. Then he outlines the 24 orders of priests, 24 divisions of singers and musicians, gatekeepers, treasurers, and other officeholders who will oversee the military and civil affairs of the nation in its new place of corporate worship.

YOUR DAILY WALK What are you doing today to help your children accomplish great things for God tomorrow?

David is a marvelous example of a farsighted father. The greatness that Solomon would later achieve was in large measure due to the careful planning and provision that David made before his own death. Though Solomon receives the acclaim for building the temple which bears his name, it was David who drew the blueprints, gathered the materials, signed up the workers, and instituted a vigorous public relations program to ensure support for the project. In his heart, David envisioned a greatness for Solomon that he himself would never achieve, and he did his best to pave the way for it.

What sort of heritage will you leave for your children and even your grandchildren to build upon? Will they someday be able to thank God for your farsightedness in building a library, providing for their education, or instilling a vision for ministry that they can continue after you are gone? Plan a "Project for Future Greatness" and begin it this week.

Don't handicap your children by making their lives too easy.

INSIGHT *An Ironic Twist to the Priestly Office*

In chapter 24 the priests were divided into 24 orders or "divisions" for service in the temple. They were called "officials of God" (v. 5) and had charge of the sacrifices. Their work was to cease with the coming of Christ, but ironically it was the priests themselves who engineered the crucifixion of Christ (Matthew 27:1, 6, 20, 41).

David's Kingdom Passed On to Solomon

Key Passage: 1 Chronicles 29:22-30

CHAPTER 28		CHAPTER 29	
David's Sayings . . .		David's Supplication	David's Successor
to Israel	to Solomon		
The Final Days of David's Reign			

OVERVIEW Today's reading forms a fitting conclusion to the life of David, for here he is portrayed in all his wisdom and humility as David the counselor, encourager, exhorter, and worshiper. In sharp contrast to the bitter infighting and civil unrest that characterized David's ascension to the throne, Solomon's ascension is attended by national worship and rejoicing. Even David's death cannot dampen the mood of optimism and thanksgiving the nation feels for the godly leadership they enjoy. The crowning epitaph of David's life is that "he died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor" (29:28).

YOUR DAILY WALK The saddest contradiction to the Christian life is all too often the average Christian funeral. While grief is a necessary part of any loved one's passing, the Christian has cause for rejoicing when a brother or sister in Christ is finally "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). There is hope and comfort in those words that the world knows nothing about.

The one sermon you can be sure everyone important to you will hear is the one preached over your casket. Have you given any thought to the words you want spoken on that occasion? Will those in attendance hear a clear presentation of the good news of Jesus Christ? Will they find out why you could face death fearlessly, knowing it would bring you face to face with your Lord?

Jesus Christ turned every funeral He ever attended into a cause for celebration. The morbid wailing of the mourners would be cut short by the miraculous life-giving touch of the Savior, and the dead would live again. What plans are you making today to ensure that your funeral speaks as eloquently as your life that "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)?

*Death is
only a
horizon, and
a horizon is
nothing save
the limit of
our sight.*

INSIGHT *David's Building and Loan Association (29:1-9)*

Before David's death, he had diligently gathered a temple building fund of gold and silver from personal and national contributions that would, by modern standards, be valued at several billion dollars.

2 Chronicles

The Book of 2 Chronicles spans four centuries of Judah's history from the glory days of Solomon to the conclusion of the Babylonian Exile. Following the death of Solomon, a succession of good and bad kings rises to power. As go the leaders, so go the people, until finally the spiritually bankrupt nation is carried off into captivity. But the final verses of 2 Chronicles sparkle with hope. After 70 years, the Persian King Cyrus decrees the rebuilding of God's house and the return of God's people.

FOCUS	A PRIESTLY VIEW OF JUDAH'S DEMISE									
DIVISIONS	Solomon's Temple Erected	Solomon's Temple Dedicated	Rehoboam's Kingdom Divided	Asa's Reforms	Jehoshaphat's Reforms	Judah's Kings and Queens	Ahaz's Corruption	Hezekiah's Reforms	Judah's Last Days	
	1 5 6 9	10 12 13 16	17 20 21 25	26 28 29 32	33 36					
TOPICS	A King's Glory		A Kingdom's Disgrace							
	Judah's Zenith		Judah's Ruin							
PLACE	Southern Kingdom of Judah									
TIME	About 40 Years		About 400 Years							

Solomon’s Temple Erected

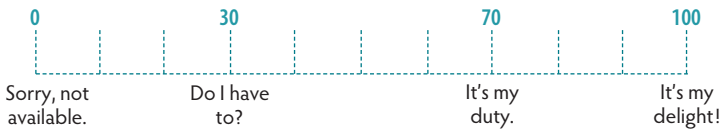
Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 1, 5

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTERS 4–5
Promoting the King	Planning the Temple	Building the Temple	Furnishing the Temple
Solomon’s Wisdom		Solomon’s Works	

OVERVIEW A father’s dream becomes a son’s delight as Solomon undertakes the greatest architectural feat of his lifetime: building the temple in Jerusalem. Large numbers of men and great quantities of materials, plus seven years of Solomon’s life, are invested in the task of completing the house of the Lord. When at last the temple stands finished with the ark of the covenant in place, Solomon leads the people and musicians in heartfelt praise to God. “They raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang. . . . The glory of the LORD filled the temple of God” (5:13-14).

YOUR DAILY WALK When commissioned by God to do a job, Solomon allowed nothing to stand in the way of completing his God-given assignment. With breathtaking speed he organized more than 150,000 workers and tons of materials.

Solomon’s zeal and enthusiasm for God left scant time for coffee breaks as long as there was still work to be done. If you were to evaluate the degree of your own enthusiasm for God’s service, where would it fall on the following scale?



This month you learned to do everything “as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23). Now add this thought from 1 Corinthians 10:31—do everything honorably “for the glory of God.”

INSIGHT *Gold, Gold, Everywhere*

Nearly every feature of the temple—including the walls, doors, nails, and furnishings involving gold or gold overlay—were made possible by King David (1 Chronicles 22:14), who set aside from his personal treasury 3,750 tons of pure gold. In 1 Chronicles 29:4, David gave an additional 100 tons of gold.

By the time you get your shoulder to the wheel, your nose to the grindstone, and your ear to the ground, it’s usually time for lunch.

Solomon's Temple Dedicated

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 6, 9

CHAPTER 6	CHAPTER 7	CHAPTER 8	CHAPTER 9
A Prayer of Dedication	A Promise of Forgiveness	A King's Reputation	A King's Vast Riches
Solomon's Relationship to God		Solomon's Relationship to Goods	

OVERVIEW In a setting fit for a king's inauguration, Solomon now leads the nation in dedicating the newly completed temple to the glory and worship of the God of Israel. Kneeling on a specially constructed bronze scaffold, Solomon prays one of the most majestic and moving invocations found anywhere in the Bible. He overflows with praise to God, thanking Him for His unchanging character and unfailing promises on behalf of the nation. When Solomon finishes, the glory of God fills the temple, prompting the people to respond: "He is good; his love endures forever" (7:3). But even in the midst of worship and rejoicing, there is cause for concern. By night, God appears to Solomon to warn him that if the nation fails to remain true to Him, He will uproot them from their beloved homeland and will destroy the magnificent temple which they have labored so long to complete.

YOUR DAILY WALK What do these three words have in common: salt, magnet, light? Answer: They are all descriptions of your task as a Christian.

Each day that God leaves you here on earth, you are to be like salt (making others thirsty for God), a magnet (drawing others to God), and light (showing the way to God). The queen of Sheba came hundreds of miles to learn of the wisdom and wealth of Israel's king (9:1). Notice her conclusion: "Praise be to the LORD . . . who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD" (9:8). After looking at Solomon's life, the queen gave glory to Solomon's God. Is that what happens from day to day when others rub shoulders with you? Today, remember your God-given role—salt, magnet, light—and practice it.

*If the service
of God
is worth
anything,
it is worth
everything.*

INSIGHT *Great Achievements of a Great Monarch*
Chapter 8 describes more than a dozen of the major accomplishments of Solomon's reign militarily, architecturally, religiously, and commercially. How many can you find?

Rehoboam's Divided Kingdom

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 10

CHAPTER 10	CHAPTER 11	CHAPTER 12
Rehoboam Follows Bad Counsel	Rehoboam Follows the Lord	Rehoboam Forsakes the Lord
Divided Kingdom	Devoted King	Disciplined King

OVERVIEW Solomon is barely cold in his grave when the nation turns from worship to waywardness in its commitment to God. Solomon's son Rehoboam imposes a foolish tax increase, prompting a bitter division of his kingdom. On the verge of civil war with Jeroboam (the newly established king of the northern 10 tribes), Rehoboam obeys the word of the prophet and breaks off the conflict. But once his kingdom is established, he forsakes the Law of the Lord yet again. God sends a stinging rebuke in the person of Shishak, king of Egypt, who defeats Rehoboam's army and plunders the wealth of the Lord's house.

YOUR DAILY WALK Is your religion . . .

. . . like a spare tire? (You only use it in an emergency.) . . . like a wheelbarrow? (Easily upset and must be pushed.) . . . like a bus? (You ride it only when it goes your way.) . . . like a pacemaker? (You rely on it constantly.)

Rehoboam's up-and-down spiritual life could be likened to a spare tire. When times were tough, he turned to God; when things were running smoothly, he forsook the Lord. It may remind you of God's words through the prophet Hosea: "They were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me" (Hosea 13:6).

Take stock of your own life. Are things going smoothly? All bills paid? Enjoying good health? No major conflicts in your family, church, neighborhood? Job secure? Refrigerator full? Watch out. Satan would love to trip you up by turning your eyes away from the Source of your supply. On the memo line of each check you write today, add the words "Don't forget!" This might even provide an opportunity to witness for your Lord.

INSIGHT "Dear Diary, Today I Plundered a Temple . . ."

Inscriptions found on Egyptian temple walls show Shishak's military success in plundering the Jerusalem temple during Rehoboam's reign (12:9). One picture shows Shishak holding a group of Israelites by the hair and hitting them with a club—a painfully accurate rendering.

The one who is ashamed of his religion probably has a religion of which he ought to be ashamed.

Asa's Reforms

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 15–16

CHAPTER 13	CHAPTERS 14–15	CHAPTER 16
Abijah's Spiritual Recession	Asa's Spiritual Reforms	Asa's Spiritual Regression
Reliance on an Army	Reliances on God	Reliance on Syria

OVERVIEW Abijah, king of Judah, is used by God to discipline and defeat Jeroboam, king of Israel. During their battle, 500,000 Israelites fall—a shattering defeat from which Jeroboam will never fully recover. What Abijah accomplishes in the military sphere, Asa attempts to duplicate in the spiritual realm. He removes all traces of foreign religion from the land and commands the people to return to the careful observance of God's statutes. But toward the end of his reign, Asa faces a threat from Baasha (king of Israel) and seeks an alliance of protection with the king of Syria. Even on his deathbed he puts his trust in earthly physicians alone, rather than in the Great Physician.

YOUR DAILY WALK Have you ever found yourself in a seemingly hopeless situation, one in which you looked at your circumstances and felt fear? Or despair? Or discouraged? What did you do? Did you try to fix the situation yourself? Or did you ask God to step in? Things were looking bad for King Asa. Baasha, the king of Israel, had sealed off all escape routes, and the situation looked hopeless. So Asa, instead of asking God to help, turned to the king of Syria, Ben-hadad, and bribed him to come to his rescue. From all outward appearances, the strategy worked.

But God saw it differently. Earlier, Asa had trusted in the Lord, not in foreign powers. Now he was turning from trust in God to trust in himself, and God disciplined him.

What is the pattern of your life: belief in God or belief in yourself or others? Faith or sight? God or self? Each time you are tempted to rely on yourself, remember that it's always safe to trust the Lord.

INSIGHT *A Dubious Distinction (16:7-10)*

Hanani the seer, who condemned Asa for his reliance on foreign armies rather than on the Lord, becomes the earliest “persecuted prophet” in the pages of the Bible. (Check Luke 11:47-51 for the name of one other man who, though seldom thought of as a prophet, might also lay claim to this rather dubious distinction.)

*Weave in
faith, and
God will find
the thread.*

Jehoshaphat's Reforms

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 17, 20

CHAPTER 17	CHAPTERS 18–19	CHAPTER 20
Seeking the Lord in Worship	Seeking the Lord in Ramoth-Gilead	Warfare Against Moab and Ammon
Jehoshaphat's Righteous Reforms		

OVERVIEW Only 10 verses are given to godly King Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings, but the chronicler devotes a full four chapters to his life, and with good reason. Jehoshaphat knows that the key to spiritual revival in the nation is a renewed interest in and commitment to the Law of the Lord. He institutes a nationwide “Bible study program,” using as teachers the princes, Levites, and priests—an effort that God richly blesses with peace and prosperity. In contrast to his predecessors, Jehoshaphat manages to make peace with the king of Israel. But a friendly visit nearly costs him his life as he becomes entangled in a war between Israel and Syria. His reaction to divine rebuke, his appointment of judges to rule not “for man but for the LORD” (19:6), and his Godward response in the face of crisis all point to the day-by-day reality of his faith.

YOUR DAILY WALK Chapter 20 describes perhaps the most curious battle scene found anywhere in Scripture. Jehoshaphat leads his army out to confront the combined forces of Moab and Ammon.

His battle plan is simple: “Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you” (20:17). Then, as if to add insult to injury, Jehoshaphat selects singers to go before the army and chant choruses of praise. While the singers sing and the soldiers stand at attention, God produces a mighty victory for Judah as the enemy forces “helped to destroy one another” (20:23).

Have you yet learned the lesson Jehoshaphat and the people of God learned? When the battle seems overwhelming, when the enemy is large and imposing, don’t turn and run. Instead, stand still, sing out, and watch God work.

*Regeneration
has made
our hearts a
battlefield.*

INSIGHT A Big Mistake

Jehoshaphat’s alliance with Ahab (18:1–19:11) was a serious blunder, fully deserving the rebuke of the prophet Jehu (not to be confused with Jehu, grandson of Nimshi, who later wiped out the line of Ahab). The prophet’s question, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?” (19:2) rebuked Jehoshaphat and prompted him to restore justice and priestly order in Judah.

Judah's Kings and Queens

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 21–22

CHAPTER 21	CHAPTER 22		CHAPTERS 23–24	CHAPTER 25
Jealous Jehoram	Healed Ahaziah	Usurper Athaliah	Junior Joash	Immature Amaziah
	1	9, 10	12	
Wicked Rulers			Righteous Rulers	

OVERVIEW Jehoram's life is living proof that a bad marriage can undo even the best of upbringings. Raised by a godly father and grandfather, Jehoram marries the wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, embraces her pagan deities, and leads the nation into idol worship once again. The atmosphere of trust and affection which characterized his father's administration is replaced by a mood of suspicion and jealousy. As Jehoram's first public act, he slays all his brothers and many key rulers in the nation—a move designed to secure his position as king, but which in fact leads to an excruciating and premature death. In rapid succession, his son, wife, and grandson come to the throne in a tale of family intrigue that must be read to be believed. Joash and Amaziah both become long-reigning kings with halfhearted commitments.

YOUR DAILY WALK No matter how many good apples you pack around a rotten one, you can't make the rotten one good. But you can ruin an awful lot of good apples.

The same is true in the relationships people have with each other. One corrupting friendship is enough to drive a person away from God, even in the presence of countless righteous lives—provided that friendship is close enough and lasts long enough to exert its corrupting influence.

Sometimes the right enemies can do you more good than the wrong friends.

That's why your close friends will mark you for life. That's why your choice of a life mate is critically important. God states very clearly in His Word: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Examine your relationships. If you're courting disaster, make the necessary changes now—before the "rotten apple" becomes you.

INSIGHT **The Unenviable Life of a Ruler in Judah**
All five rulers discussed in today's reading met violent deaths. Four were murdered and one was stricken by God with an incurable disease. Of the 20 rulers in Judah's history, half died from unnatural causes.

Ahaz's Corruption

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 28

CHAPTER 26	CHAPTER 27	CHAPTER 28
Uzziah and His Battles	Jotham and His Building Project	Ahaz and His Unbelief
Good and Evil	Good	Evil

OVERVIEW King Uzziah does mighty things for the nation of Judah, both militarily and architecturally. But spiritually his life resembles a roller coaster. “As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success. . . . But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall” (26:5,16). Uzziah dies a leper’s death for his half-hearted devotion to God. By contrast, his grandson Ahaz is wholehearted in his zeal for false gods and pagan practices. Ahaz introduces images of Baal, worship on the heathen high places, and infant sacrifice. Though God repeatedly warns Ahaz of the danger of his ways and to turn the king’s heart back to Him, there is no response. Only one question remains: How long will God’s patience continue with His rebellious people?

YOUR DAILY WALK In the carpentry business, a 2 × 4 can come in many different lengths. But every 2 × 4 has one thing in common: It is about 2 inches thick and 4 inches wide.

When God disciplines an individual or a family or a church or a nation, often He does so with a painful set of circumstances. And though it would be easy to liken such an experience to being “hit over the head with a 2 × 4,” there is a fundamental difference: 2 × 4s used like that are for punitive reasons; God’s discipline is therapeutic.

Think back over the life of Ahaz as you have seen it unfold in 2 Chronicles 28 and 2 Kings 16. How did God try to get his attention and change his course of action through defeat in battle? The word of the prophet? Enemy occupation?

Before you are too hard on Ahaz, is there a lesson God has been waiting patiently for you to learn as well?

INSIGHT A Pagan Practice Punishable by Death

Infant sacrifice by fire was a brutal Canaanite ritual introduced into Judah by Ahaz. Not only was it abhorrent for human reasons, it was also a capital offense under the Mosaic Law, punishable by stoning (Leviticus 20:1-5).

Because God loves His people, He disciplines them as a loving father disciplines his children.

Hezekiah's Reforms

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 29, 32

CHAPTER 29	CHAPTER 30	CHAPTER 31	CHAPTER 32
Revival of Righteousness	Restoration of Worship	Preparation for Passover	Provision to Priests
Hezekiah's Righteous Reforms			

OVERVIEW The Assyrian assault and dispersion of Israel are totally omitted at this point in the Chronicles account, though they have a profound impact on Hezekiah's life and rule in Judah. Inheriting a disorganized country and a heavy burden of tribute to Assyria, Hezekiah nevertheless puts first things first. In the very first month of his administration he reopens and repairs the house of the Lord, restores the long-neglected temple worship and Passover celebration, and declares war on idol worship and pagan practices. When the Assyrian King Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem and the situation looks hopeless, Hezekiah puts his faith to work once again in earnest prayer for deliverance. God answers his plea and crowns his life with prestige and power.

*If I could
hear Christ
praying for
me in the
next room,
I would not
fear a million
enemies.
Yet distance
makes no
difference;
He is praying
for me.*

INSIGHT “Dear Diary, It Was a Bad Day in Jerusalem . . .”

Sennacherib's own account of this invasion has been found on a clay prism, which he himself had made. It is now in the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago, and reads in part: “As for Hezekiah, king of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, 46 of his fortified cities . . . I besieged and captured . . . 200,150 people . . . I took as booty. Hezekiah himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city. I built a line of forts against him, and turned back everyone who came forth out of his city gate.”

No Assyrian king would ever record a defeat, especially one as devastating as the Jerusalem debacle, but it is significant that Sennacherib did not claim to have taken Jerusalem—a most remarkable confirmation of biblical history.

YOUR DAILY WALK Wouldn't it be wonderful to know that someone like Hezekiah was praying for you every day? Here was a man whose every recorded prayer was answered.

Wouldn't you like to have that kind of “clout” working for you? Then read and ponder the margin's sermon-in-a-sentence by Robert Murray McCheyne, Scottish missionary and preacher who never lived to see his 30th birthday. See Hebrews 7:25.

Judah's Last Days

Key Passage: 2 Chronicles 34; 36:17-23

CHAPTER 33	CHAPTERS 34-35	CHAPTER 36
The Lawless Days of Manasseh and Ammon	The Law-Abiding Days of Josiah	The Last Days of Judah
Rebellion	Reform	Ruin

OVERVIEW The final century of Judah's national history reads like a bad dream. After Manasseh's 55-year reign of terror and apostasy, even a godly reformer like Josiah is powerless to prick the hearts of the people, though for a time he is able to stem the external appearances of evil. But after his death the nation swiftly returns to its abominable ways. Oppressed and eventually overthrown by the Babylonians, the people of Judah are slaughtered, their homes and temple destroyed, their city walls leveled. The survivors are dragged off to Babylon, there to ponder their fate for 70 long years. But in the midst of this doom and destruction shines a ray of hope. Cyrus, king of Persia, issues a decree: The house of the Lord must be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Who among His people is willing to return?

YOUR DAILY WALK For the Jews, Jerusalem represented their place of greatest failure. To stare at the rubble of what was once mighty Jerusalem—with its shattered temple and broken-down walls—must have broken the heart of even the most callous of God's people. They had failed Him. They had gone their own sinful ways. And they had been punished.

Now, through Cyrus, God was calling His people back to "the scene of the crime" for a second chance.

Have you failed God in recent days, then gone off to your own personal exile? Take heart—you are in good company. Abraham, Moses, and Jonah (to name a few) suffered similar setbacks. But they emerged from failure to accomplish great things for God. And you can too.

Is God calling you back to repentance, back to your family, school, job, or ministry? Will you answer that call—right now?

INSIGHT *Judah's Final Kings—Brothers in the Business*

For more than three centuries the kingdom of Judah had passed in an orderly fashion from father to son, interrupted only briefly by the reign of Queen Athaliah. But now, in Judah's final, frantic years, like a top winding down and toppling over, the kingdom passes quickly between three sons and a grandson of Josiah.

Some people never change their opinion because, after all, it has been in the family for generations.

A BRAND-NEW You

Face lifts. Exercise clubs. Makeovers. How-to and self-help books. Surrounding us daily are hundreds of ways we can “improve” ourselves. We eagerly take advertisers up on claims that their products are “new and improved” to make us “new and improved.”

God wants us to be our best. He wants us to be continually upgraded, improved . . . new! But we go wrong when we think we can bring about such changes on our own. God made the first you, so only He can make a brand-new you.

How? Through the blood of His Son, the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Through Him and Him only, each of us can become a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17); with a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:19); and a whole new way of life (Romans 6:4-11) by accepting His sacrifice to save us. Here’s how:

- Admit that you are a sinner, justly deserving the penalty of death. (Read Romans 3:23; 6:23; John 8:24.)

- Acknowledge that God loves you and has provided for your salvation through His Son’s death on the cross (John 3:16; Acts 4:10-12).
- Accept Christ’s death on your behalf by trusting Him for your salvation and by claiming Him as the new Master of your life (Acts 16:30-31; Romans 3:24-26).

Talk to God right now in prayer.

He will hear your heartfelt words of repentance from sin and of acceptance of Christ. And when you do repent and accept Christ, you are saved and welcomed into God’s family. You become His special child, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Trust God now to save you. Then take a look in the mirror at a brand-new you.

*If you want to speak
to someone about a
relationship with Jesus,
call 1-888-NeedHim.*