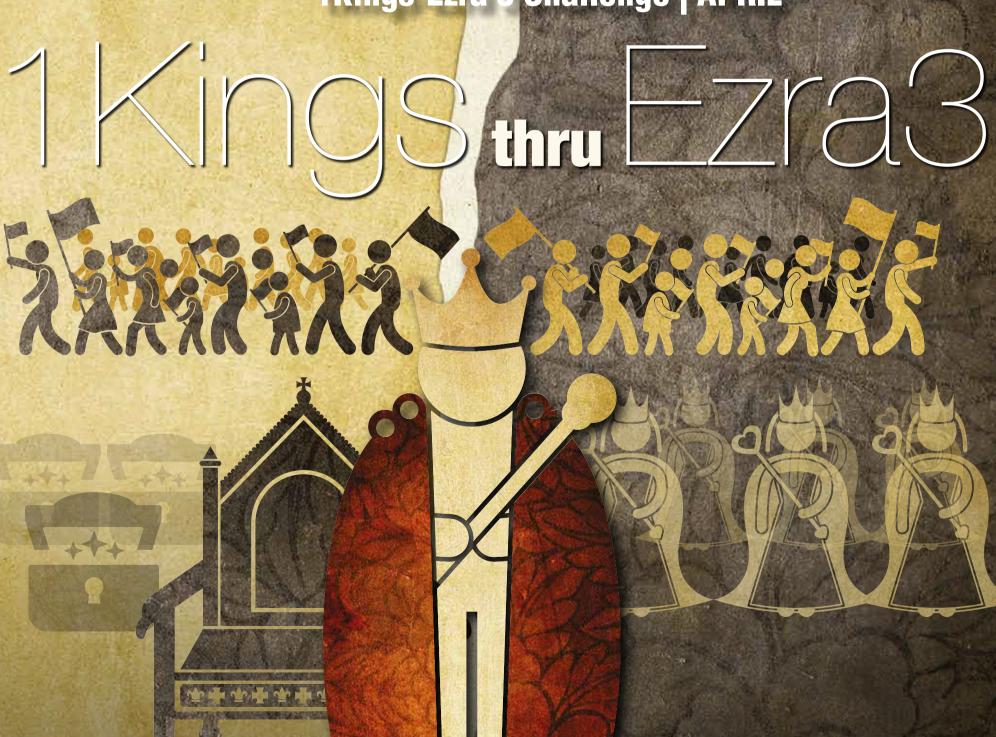


# VEAD OF THE BIBLE

1Kings-Ezra 3 Challenge | APRIL





## VEAR OF THE BIBLE

1Kings-Ezra 3 Challenge | APRIL

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### **YEAR OF THE BIBLE**

elcome to Walk Thru the Bible's Year of the Bible 2022!
God gave us His Word because He wants us to know who He is and what He's like and all that He went through to redeem us. And what better way to get to know Him than to read through His Word from cover-to-cover?
Each devo has three sections—God's Story, God's Heart, and Insight. The "God's Story" section summarizes the Scripture you're going to read that day. The "God's Heart" section shares what God reveals to us about who He is in that day's Scripture passage. The "Insight" section shares a little tidbit of information that you might not have known about the passage. Then, after you've read all of the devo, read through the chapters of Scripture that go along with the devo.

This issue contains 26 devos—that means reading a devo a day, with a few days off. It leaves room for about one day off per week—one Sabbath rest. And if you stick with us from January to December, we're going to read the Bible cover-to-cover together and leave and leave and leave and leave and leave to the leave to

together and learn a whole lot about who God is and His great love for us.

### **READING SCHEDULE**

**Day 91** 1 Kings 1–4

**Day 92** 1 Kings 5–8

**Day 93** 1 Kings 9–12

**Day 94** 1 Kings 13–16

**Day 95** 1 Kings 17–19

Day 96/97 1 Kings 20-22

**Day 98** 2 Kings 1–3

**Day 99** 2 Kings 4–8

**Day 100** 2 Kings 9–12

**Day 101** 2 Kings 13–17

**Day 102** 2 Kings 18–21

**Day 103/104** 2 Kings 22–25

**Day 105** 1 Chronicles 1–9

**Day 106**1 Chronicles 10–16

**Day 107** 1 Chronicles 17–21

**Day 108**1 Chronicles 22–29

Day 109 2 Chronicles 1–5

**Day 110/111** 2 Chronicles 6–9

**Day 112** 2 Chronicles 10–12

**Day 113**2 Chronicles 13–16

**Day 114** 2 Chronicles 17–20

**Day 115** 2 Chronicles 21–25

**Day 116** 2 Chronicles 26–28

**Day 117/118**2 Chronicles 29–32

**Day 119** 2 Chronicles 33–36

**Day 120** Ezra 1–3

### Day\_**91** 1 Kings\_**01-04**

## The Wise King

**[GOD'S STORY]** King David is old and frail. Adonijah, likely his oldest surviving son, seizes the opportunity to round up supporters—including Joab the army commander and Abiathar the priest—and declare himself king. He even throws a celebratory "coronation" feast.

Nathan the prophet informs Bathsheba of Adonijah's treachery. She goes to David to appeal for her son, Solomon, since David had already promised that Solomon would succeed him. After hearing from Bathsheba and Nathan, King David commissions Solomon to be anointed king that very day. Adonijah backs down and his followers disband.

In essence, David gives his son the totality of his life's wisdom in one weighty statement: "Follow God." Then, a warning: There are some bad characters within the kingdom. Solomon will need to be cautious of them.

King David, the God-chaser, the undignified worshiper, the grace-knower, dies.

In a dream, God visits Solomon and makes an audacious offer: He will give Solomon anything he asks. Solomon asks for God's wisdom to live and lead well. Delighted with Solomon's choice, God gives him not only wisdom but riches and honor too. Solomon becomes the wealthiest, most prosperous king Israel ever sees.

**[GOD'S HEART]** More than anything, Solomon wants to look out on his life—his decisions, his life circumstances—not through the lens of his own sight but through God's lens. He wants to live his life the way God would have him live. He wants to lead God's people the way God wants him to lead. In asking for wisdom, Solomon is asking for a heart that's attuned to the Wise One.

Solomon is saying, "God, You and Your ways are good and true and beautiful. I realize that and I value it above anything. It is what I want the most."

What Solomon wants most is God.

At long last—a man who sees God for who He is, loves Him and wants Him. The Pursuer is being pursued.

And the God who has spent centuries longing for people to respond just that way is overjoyed. Pure Goodness responds with pure goodness—He lavishes gift after gift on the one who wants His heart.

**[INSIGHT]** David's advice to his son was to walk with God, following His ways. Sadly, Solomon wasn't consistently able to walk with God well. But Jesus, "the son of David" (Matthew 1:1), would. Jesus would be the son of David who would reign forever on David's throne.

Day\_**92** 1 Kings\_**05–08** 

## God's Always-Love

**[GOD'S STORY]** David's son sits on Israel's throne while the nation is at peace with its enemies. So, 480 years after God rescued His people from Egypt, Solomon begins the world's most significant building project, just as God had promised David.

Solomon gathers the supplies and manpower and breaks ground on God's magnificent earth-home. The king of Tyre graciously contributes cedar and juniper logs. Stones and timbers are chiseled and shaped off-site. For seven years, God's people devote themselves to building God's glory-home. Solomon also oversees the construction of his palace and the nation's justice hall.

Finally, the stunning new temple is finished. King Solomon assembles the nation and thousands of sacrifices are offered as the people praise and honor the God of heaven and earth. The nation watches as the priests carry in the holy furniture. And then, the pinnacle: The ark of the covenant is brought into the Most Holy Place. As the priests exit the Holy Place, God's glory comes in a cloud so thick they can no longer see to perform their duties. God is pleased with His new home.

In awe-filled worship, Solomon hits his knees, raises his hands, and prays.

**[GOD'S HEART]** A relationship is only as strong as the commitment of its two parties. As Solomon prays, his God-wisdom helps him understand that in their relationship with God, the Israelites are the weak link. "We're going to mess this up, God," he prays. "We're going to forsake You, sadden You, sin against You. And when we do, I beg You, please don't abandon us. Please hear us and forgive. We're depending on Your faithfulness. We won't make it without it."

The all-knowing God knew how true Solomon's prayer was. He saw every detail of the future—every hurt, every abandonment, every betrayal, every sin. For Israel, the next several hundred years would be mostly filled with failure. God's people wouldn't just walk away from Him, they would spit in His face as they did.

But God saw beyond Israel's future failures to a cross-shadowed hill at Calvary. There God's Son would bleed the answer to Solomon's prayer. The Israelites wouldn't be able to uphold their end of the covenant. But, thankfully, God didn't base the relationship on their faithfulness. He based it all on His.

**[INSIGHT]** For a time, God's ark was in Jerusalem while the rest of the tabernacle was in Gibeon (see 1 Kings 3:4; 2 Chronicles 1:2–6). When Solomon built the temple, he reunited all of the components of God's dwelling place.

## God's Sad Choice

**[GOD'S STORY]** The nation of Israel is at its zenith. God is in His lavish glory-home while history's wisest king reigns on his throne. And Israel thrives.

King Solomon pours out wisdom to foreign leaders. He builds ships. He restores cities. He collects horses and chariots.

He also collects wives—one thousand of them. Most are foreigners, women God has forbidden His people to marry because of their worship of dark gods. Solomon loves his wives and is soon pledging his love to their vile gods. He sets up idolatrous altars—even to the detestable god Molek—outside Jerusalem.

Because of Solomon's ghastly sin, God is going to rip away the kingdom. But because of His promise to David, God will wait a generation. The prophet Ahijah anoints a hard-working manager, Jeroboam, to be king over ten of Israel's tribes.

Once Solomon dies, the kingdom splits; Jeroboam becomes king in the north, while Solomon's son Rehoboam reigns over Judah in the south. Jeroboam crafts two golden calves for the ten tribes to worship—he doesn't want his citizens worshiping in Jerusalem. The people of Israel don't just fall from their highest point; they crash.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God's nation hadn't completely followed His commands to remove the foreigners and their demonic idol influence from the promised land. And evil is getting a hold on God's people. The cosmic war that has been playing out since before creation is playing out on the stage of God's nation.

The All-Knowing One is well aware of the downward spiral that lies ahead for the northern ten tribes of Israel. He knows that she will never turn back to Him. So He anoints a new king over the northern tribes and causes the nation's split.

Something similar had happened earlier in human history—when sin and darkness had made God's people sick. God had known that the only way to bring redemption was to flood out the evil and begin again (see Genesis 6–8). Perhaps His motivation for splitting the nation was the same. Israel would end—she was just too sick—but He would continue to move the story of salvation forward through Judah.

**[INSIGHT]** The idol-worshipers in the promised land often represented their gods as standing on the backs of calves and bulls as a sign of their strength. Jeroboam's calves were likely symbolic of God's strength, although he didn't put an "image" of God riding on their backs. Like Aaron (see Exodus 32:4–5), Jeroboam attempted to combine the pagan calf symbol with the worship of God. But it wasn't what God had commanded.

### Day\_**94** 1 Kings\_**13–16**

## God's First Command

**[GOD'S STORY]** The spiral into darkness is beginning: The people of Israel are worshiping a golden calf. God sends a prophet from Judah to condemn the altar: in the future, human bones will be burned on it.

When King Jeroboam's son is sick, he sends his wife to Judah to seek possible healing from the old prophet who anointed him as king—Ahijah. But healing is not in God's plan for Jeroboam's evil family. Every male in Jeroboam's household is going to be murdered. His sick son will die too.

The two nations of God's split kingdom constantly war against each other, brothers slaughtering brothers.

In Judah, Solomon's son Rehoboam reigns. Sex shrines are built throughout the nation, and God's people offer themselves in worship. God's temple is plundered by Egypt. When Rehoboam dies, David's great-grandson Abijah reigns; but he is evil. After three years, Abijah's godly son Asa becomes king and does his best to clean house of the vile idolatry. But he can't uproot it all.

The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel are purely evil. Jeroboam is succeeded by Nadab (who murders all of Jeroboam's family, fulfilling Ahijah's prophecy), Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab. Dark worship, murder, and evil. It is all Israel knows.

**[GOD'S HEART]** When God gave His people His Ten Commandments, His very first words were: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:2-5).

God didn't want other gods before Him or His people making idols.

God listed these commandments first because they were of utmost importance.

God's sole intention with these first two commandments was a command for obedience wrapped up with a warning. He knew there would be real, evil forces, real "gods," that would be seeking to enslave His people.

And Israel was seduced. Terribly. Despite God's warnings, they had fallen. And sadly, they never looked back.

**[INSIGHT]** Were the false gods that God's people worshiped actual demons? They weren't of God, and God has revealed that evil powers and authorities exist in this world (see Ephesians 6:12). The false gods were at least tied to forces of darkness, if not actually demons.

## When God Brings the Snack

**[GOD'S STORY]** Israel's sin is so rampant that God is going to stop the rain. God calls Elijah to bring the news to Israel's king, Ahab. Ahab has married Jezebel, an idolatrous foreigner, and has set up shrines across the nation to the wicked storm god she worships, Baal. During the drought and the ensuing famine, the Great Sustainer feeds Elijah through ravens and a poor widow's flour and oil.

In the drought's third year, God tells Elijah to confront King Ahab. Elijah sets up a deity showdown—the one true God versus the evil weather god Baal and the vile sex goddess Asherah.

Elijah calls for all the dark-god prophets. He assembles two altars, and the god who completely consumes the offering is to be declared the real God. No matter how much the dark-god prophets chant and worship, their gods do nothing. But the instant Elijah calls on the one true God, He burns up the entire altar—including the water Elijah has drenched it with. Elijah then slays the false prophets.

Jezebel is incensed—she vows to kill Elijah like he killed her prophets. Elijah runs. God meets His scared servant in the wilderness, giving him a snack, a nap, and encouragement. Following God's instructions, Elijah places his mantle over Elisha; a new prophet will be needed for the long journey ahead.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "God, these people have abandoned You, and it's awful. I've been standing up for You, and they've killed everyone else, and I want to give up. Please just let me die." The stress of the past few years of confronting evil has broken Elijah's will to even live. But God has endured centuries of it.

Tender and understanding, God's angel delivers some food and refreshing water to His exhausted prophet and lets him rest from his heavy weight.

If anyone knows what a lonely, hard journey it has been, it's God. Elijah has gotten a taste of it. And for a moment, God has some heart camaraderie. God strengthens His weary prophet, encourages him with the reality that there are 7,000 Israelites who have not bent the knee to Baal, and sends Elijah on his way.

Centuries later, when Jesus is on the Mount of Transfiguration, Elijah and Moses join Him, talking with Him—perhaps even encouraging Him. God has His burden-bearing friend uplift His own Son.

**[INSIGHT]** The prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel beckoned Baal to answer. They were expecting the dark idol to answer. Idol worshipers weren't foolish, just enslaved. Real, evil powers existed behind the idols they worshiped.

## Day\_**96/97**1 Kings\_**20–22**

### What God Is After

**[GOD'S STORY]** God warns Ahab that the Arameans are going to strike again. When the fighting starts, God tells Ahab that he is going to win this battle. Israel kills 100,000 Arameans in a single day. But instead of killing their evil king, Ahab makes a covenant with him. God tells Ahab, "It will be your life for his."

Some time later, Ahab covets land that belongs to Naboth, a fellow Israelite. Ahab asks for it, but Naboth refuses to give him his family's piece of the promised land. Ahab sulks, and his evil wife Jezebel arranges for Naboth to be killed. Ahab then claims the murdered man's family land.

God sends Elijah to let Ahab know he hasn't gotten away with anything. Where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they'll lick up Ahab's. Jezebel will have nearly the same fate. And Ahab's entire family is going to be killed. Ahab grieves greatly, and God softens His judgment, delaying it a generation. When the Arameans attack again three years later, however, Ahab is killed.

Meanwhile, Asa's son Jehoshaphat reigns in Judah and seeks God. While he rids the lands of "sacred" prostitutes, he can't get rid of all of the nation's "high places" of worship—altars to God other than the temple at Jerusalem, altars God didn't authorize.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Ahab has introduced the entire nation to his wife's idol worship. He has shunned God through His prophets Elijah and Micaiah. He looked the other way when Jezebel hunted Elijah to kill him and when she arranged for an innocent man's murder.

But when Ahab receives God's message that his family is going to be killed for his mountain of sins, Ahab repents, mourning and wearing sackcloth. And God is merciful.

God says to Elijah, "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son" (1 Kings 21:29).

Ahab turns his heart toward God, and the Merciful One relents—because Ahab's heart was what God was looking for. Ahab's sins were great, but God's mercy would always be greater. God simply wanted His wayward son to come back to Him.

**[INSIGHT]** Jehoshaphat wanted to "seek the counsel of the Lord" (1 Kings 22:5). But the 400 false prophets don't use God's personal name; they only use a title—Lord, or Master (see 1 Kings 22:6). Perhaps that's why God rightly distrusts them.



## An Hour of Need

The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land. 1 Kings 17:14

**IN WORD** A drought had made food scarce in Israel. Elijah the prophet had been fed by the ravens, but God had a new command: Go to a widow in Zarephath. She would supply the need. Elijah did, and though the woman was preparing to die of hunger, God miraculously provided enough for her, her son, and the prophet.

Have you ever wondered why God told the prophet to go to a woman who had nothing? She was no source of great wealth, no prominent benefactor. She was about to make her last meal so that she and her son could then die. But God's providence comes to barren places, and the woman learned a valuable princi-

ple: Obey God first, even when He asks for your last meal. Then your supply is up to Him.

Can you imagine giving your last dollar to a ministry while your stomach gnaws at you for attention? This is exactly what God ordered. The deep principles of providence kick in only after we've demonstrated a greater desire to invest in obedience than to invest in ourselves. No one ever received the blessing of God by desperately hanging on to his last dime. The greatest inflow of providence comes when we determine that nothing will hinder our outflow. God is looking for those who will do what He says before fulfilling their own desperate plans—just as the widow of Zarephath gave Elijah what she thought might be her last meal.

IN DEED At what point do you have so little that you stop giving to God? That is the point where God will demonstrate the futility of your plans—not because He enjoys frustrating us, but because He has greater plans for His people than their self-preserving instincts will allow. The miraculous flow of His providence is only miraculous to us when it seems unlikely. Our hour of greatest need is His hour of greatest supply. A Phoenician widow survived a famine on that principle. So can you.

You will never need more than God can supply. - J.I. Packer

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## God's Newness Offer

**[GOD'S STORY]** Ahab's son, Israel's King Ahaziah, is injured. He sends messengers to consult a foreign idol to see if he will heal. God tells Elijah to intercept the messengers with God's message: "Why are you seeking a false god when the one true God is in Israel? You will never get out of bed alive." Joram, Ahaziah's brother, becomes Israel's next king.

God is about to bring his friend Elijah home. Elisha, Elijah's protégé, asks Elijah for a double portion of his spirit. Elijah tells Elisha that he will get what he's asking if he sees Elijah taken up to heaven. Soon after, Elisha watches as God brings Elijah to Himself in a whirlwind with fiery chariots and horses. He takes the cloak Elijah left behind and strikes the Jordan with it. It parts. God has given Elijah's prophetic power to Elisha.

Israel's King Joram isn't getting his annual tribute from Moab. So he recruits the kings of Edom and Judah to go to war against Moab. When they get stuck in the waterless wilderness, Judah's God-fearing King Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet to seek God. Elisha comes, and because of his respect for Jehoshaphat, he seeks the Lord's direction. God promises to fill the valley with pools of water. God miraculously provides both water and victory over His people's enemies.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Maybe it's symbolic. As Elijah's final journey, God guides him to three places—Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan. Years before, God led His people into the promised land by this exact route—but in reverse. Joshua and God's people traveled through the parted Jordan, to Jericho, to Ai. Elijah and Elisha are symbolically backtracking, perhaps reversing the journey—God even parts the Jordan like He had done years before.

Then, once Elijah is taken into heaven, Elisha tracks Joshua's exact path back into the promised land. He parts the Jordan, goes to Jericho, and then to Bethel.

It's as if God is saying, "Things haven't gone so well here in the promised land. Let's go out the way you came in and start over." It's a fresh start.

Our Creator-King has experienced atrocious betrayals and unimaginable insults. Yet He is willing to forgive everything and start anew. With the God of infinite goodness, love, forgiveness, and faithfulness, it is never too late to start over.

**[INSIGHT]** Instead of allowing Elijah to experience the slow descent of bodily breakdown that comes with death, God brought him home healthy—and by fiery chariots and horses. It was a tender and amazing gesture of friendship.

## God Keeps His Heart Open

**[GOD'S STORY]** God's supremacy is on display in Elisha's miracles. God fills a penniless widow's borrowed jars with valuable oil. He knits a baby boy in the womb of a barren woman, and several years later He raises that same boy back to life. He purifies a poisonous pot of stew and heals a leprous enemy army commander. But Israel is still worshiping false gods.

God tells Elisha the Aramean army's every move, and Elisha tells Israel's king. Angered, the Aramean king sends an army to surround the city where Elisha is staying. Elisha's servant panics at the show of force, but Elisha assures him that God's forces are mightier. God opens the servant's eyes so he can see the full reality: an entire army of fiery horses and chariots. God is there in power. At Elisha's request, God strikes the enemies blind. The conflict ends.

Later, the Aramean king surrounds Samaria, causing a famine. Elisha predicts the famine's end—the next day the Israelites will be feasting. His prediction seems ludicrous. But God causes the Aramean warriors to hear the sound of a mighty advancing army and they run for their lives, leaving food, clothing, and equipment. The Israelites plunder the Arameans' camp. The famine is over.

In Judah, King Jehoshaphat dies. His son Jehoram—an evil king—reigns for eight years. His son Ahaziah succeeds him, ruling for one evil year. God's people are very sick.

**[GOD'S HEART]** She should have hated him. Raiders from Aram, serving under Naaman, had taken her from her homeland, her family—stealing her freedom and her future. The young Israelite girl spent her youth serving Naaman's wife. It would be an easy place for bitterness to grow, but she allowed a heart of love and compassion to grow there instead. "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3).

Every day, people insulted Him, splaying themselves before demonic stones and poles and shrines. He saw every offense, felt every injury. It would be an easy place for bitterness to grow. But the good King's heart of love remained there instead—longing, forgiving. "If only My people would come to Me, the Healer among them. I am the cure for their captivity, the remover of their sin."

**[INSIGHT]** When God opened Elisha's servant's eyes, He showed him a reality that is always true for us: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

## God's Peaceful Hush

**[GOD'S STORY]** God had said that Ahab's family was to be wiped out. The time has come.

Elisha sends a prophet to anoint Jehu, an army officer, as king of Israel. Jehu's royal orders are fitting for his military background: "Kill all of Ahab's male relatives." He does. He hunts down Ahab's son, Joram, Israel's king. Joram's dead body is thrown onto Naboth's field, in fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy years before. The servants of Jezebel throw her out of a tower, and her remains are trampled by horses and then eaten by dogs—just like Elijah had foretold. Jehu commissions the murder of Ahab's 70 sons and collects their skulls in piles at Jezreel's gates. Ahab's family is eliminated—just as Elijah said.

In Samaria, during a fabricated Baal worship service, Jehu's 80 warriors rush in, killing the demonic-god followers. Jehu purges Israel of Ahab's idolatry influence, but he doesn't remove Jeroboam's blasphemous golden calves. Israel is still sick with evil, and God shrinks the borders—the king of Aram takes all of Israel's land east of the Jordan River.

In Judah, Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, reigns. She slaughters the royal family—including her own grandchildren. But one young grandson, Joash, is rescued. He is taken to God's temple and raised there for six years until Athaliah is overthrown by a coup. King Joash honors God while his spiritual mentor, Jehoiada the high priest, is alive. He even repairs God's dilapidated temple; but later, when Aramean invaders come, Joash strips the temple of treasures to pay them off.

**[GOD'S HEART]** The high priest Jehoiada brings young Joash out before the people at the temple, crowns him, and places God's Word in his 7-year-old hands. Jehoiada makes a covenant between God and His people—they will be His and He will be theirs. The people go to Baal's temple and demolish it. Joash's reign begins.

The people turn once again to their Creator. God ushers in peace over the land. Judah's rebellion has been painful, but when the people return to the Good King, he brings calmness. There is rest. Peace.

The dark idols aren't completely cleaned out, though. Judah is still a sick nation. But for a moment, God's people have turned to Him. And in that moment, God does what He loves to do—pour out His goodness on His people.

**[INSIGHT]** In dark-god temples, "sacred" stones or poles were kept in a recessed niche in the wall. When Jehu destroys the temple of Baal, he burns the stone and then, appropriately, makes the temple a public toilet (see 2 Kings 10:27).

## The God Who Allows Consequences

**[GOD'S STORY]** Israel's days are numbered. And Judah is mortally ill too. God allows the Arameans to make Israel a puppet kingdom under Jehu's son, King Jehoahaz. Jehoash succeeds his father Jehoahaz, and when he comes to visit a sick Elisha, Elisha prophesies that Israel will defeat the Arameans three times—but won't destroy them. Elisha dies, and Jehoash defeats Aram three times. He even routs Judah and plunders Jerusalem when Judah challenges Israel. But Israel will soon have a bigger enemy.

In Judah, Amaziah's son Azariah reigns and honors God, except he doesn't rid the nation of the high places. His son Jotham rules the same way. Ahaz, Judah's next king, commits atrocious blasphemies, offering his son as a child sacrifice and making a treaty with Assyria for protection. Because Ahaz likes the Assyrian demongod's altar, he directs God's priest to make one and place it in God's temple. God is being mocked.

Evil king after evil king reigns in Israel—Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. The Assyrian Empire incessantly attacks, increasingly oppressing the nation.

Finally the Assyrians strike Israel, and God doesn't come to His people's aid. The Israelites are absorbed into the Assyrian Empire. Other conquered people are brought into the promised land, filling it with idol worship. The northern kingdom has fallen and will never rise again.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Long ago God had told His people, "If you fully obey the LORD your God... You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country... The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity... in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you" (Deuteronomy 28:1,3,11).

"However, if you do not obey the Lord... You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country... Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand... You will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you" (Deuteronomy 28:15,16,32,48).

God's people in Israel had made their choice. And they were no more.

**[INSIGHT]** King Jeroboam II's 41-year reign was one of the northern kingdom's most prosperous. The prophet Jonah said this fulfilled God's promise (see 2 Kings 14:25). God even mercifully raised up Amos and Hosea to call the people back to Himself. But Israel didn't listen—the nation was too sin-sick.

## The God Who Limits Evil

**[GOD'S STORY]** Ahaz's son Hezekiah becomes king of Judah, and he yearns to know God's heart. He purges every bit of idol worship and high-place worship from Judah.

In the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign, the mighty Assyrians overpower and absorb Israel. Eight years later, Assyria turns its army against Judah, demanding the tribute that Hezekiah has ceased paying. Even though Hezekiah pays the tribute—and more—King Sennacherib sends his top brass to Jerusalem to confront Hezekiah. They brag about their military power, threaten to destroy Judah, and publicly mock Hezekiah's trust in God. Hezekiah beseeches God for help. God speaks through Isaiah, telling Hezekiah that He will make the Assyrians retreat to fight another opponent.

But Sennacherib isn't done threatening. He sends a message to Hezekiah: No god of any foreign country has been able to save its nation from Assyria. Hezekiah takes the message to God's temple and spreads it before him, begging God to help. Through Isaiah, God rebukes Sennacherib, and that very night the angel of the Lord kills 185,000 Assyrians. Sennacherib and his surviving soldiers limp back to Assyria. Judah is safe.

Later, when Babylonian visitors come to Jerusalem, Hezekiah proudly shows them every treasure in the palace and temple. It's a foolish move. Isaiah warns him: Some day every last treasure will be taken to Babylon.

During the rule of Hezekiah's unfaithful son and grandson—Manasseh and Amon—Judah reverts to its evil, idolatrous ways.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Assyria was breathing down Hezekiah's neck. He was terrified, but trusting. God stood up for His threatened king. To arrogant King Sennacherib, He said, "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone" (2 Kings 19:25).

"Sennacherib, any power you have is by My permission. I am in charge here." Evil has power, yes. But it is on a leash controlled by the good, strong arm of God. God is not evil, but the evil in this world answers to Him. Over and above all evil the good, all-powerful Creator God reigns.

People may scheme, insult, and injure. Darkness may attack and accuse. But evil is restrained by God. And one day it will be ended by Him. Forever.

**[INSIGHT]** Hezekiah's son Manasseh was the one of the most sinful kings to reign in Judah, even stooping to the abominable practice of sacrificing children. According to Jewish tradition, one of Manasseh's evil atrocities was the murder of the prophet Isaiah.

## When God Lets His People Fall

**[GOD'S STORY]** Josiah, Amon's son, is only eight when he becomes king. But he is nothing like his evil father—Josiah pursues God.

While repairs are being made on God's temple, the high priest finds the Book of the Law. When Josiah, now 26 years old, hears its words, he is struck with grief—his people have neglected God's Word for generations. God tells Josiah that He is angry.

Josiah calls the people to God's temple and reads the long-neglected Scriptures to them. He recommits the nation to God's covenant. The people devote themselves to God—heart and soul.

But after Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz reverts back to evil. So does the next king, Jehoahaz's brother Jehoiakim. During Jehoiakim's reign, God sends invader after invader to destroy Judah. And during his son Jehoiachin's reign, the mega-empire Babylon attacks, capturing Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar plunders God's temple, stripping it of its sacred treasures. He takes Jehoiachin and thousands of God's people to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar makes Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, Judah's new king. Zedekiah eventually rebels against Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar retaliates. He destroys Jerusalem, burning God's temple to the ground. Only the poorest Israelites are left in the promised land to work it. God's surviving people are either taken into exile in Babylon or flee to Egypt.

God's people in Judah are ripped from the promised land.

**[GOD'S HEART]** They presented offerings to a dark storm god. They bowed to the cosmic powers that were associated with the sun and stars. They "worshiped" sex gods with male prostitutes living in God's temple. Their priests slaughtered sacrifices at pagan shrines. They burned their children alive for Molek.

These "gods" were instruments of powerful demonic forces. God's people weren't aware that they were playing into the evil schemes of the powers that are at war with the Most High God. But as God's people worshiped darkness, they were becoming sick and enslaved.

As these forces got a tighter grip on God's people, the God who was being insulted, hurt, and defamed through His people's adultery continued to work to bring about their rescue. Unlike the forces of darkness, God is good.

**INSIGHT**] In 605 BC, during Jehoiakim's reign, the Babylonians attacked Judah and took many captives—including Daniel (see Daniel 1:1–7). In 597 BC, the Babylonians attacked again, taking King Jehoaichin, the prophet Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 1:1), and 10,000 others into captivity. Finally, in 586 BC, after a two-year siege, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and conquered Judah.



## Low Priorities

The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. 2 Kings 12:3

**IN WORD** Joash was a decent king—for a while. The verdict on his reign is split. While under the guidance of Jehoiada the priest, he did well. He restored and maintained the Temple, and he did "what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 2). But after Jehoiada had died, Joash was a different king. He killed a priest and bought off the Syrian army with the Temple's sacred objects.

God's assessment of Joash's reign is two brief chapters: 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 24. He was neither Judah's finest king nor its worst. He was good part of the time and bad part of the time. And one reason for the shift may have been the problem in verse 3: He never dealt with the high places.

Why not? Perhaps he was somehow attached to them. Or perhaps it was simply a problem of neglect. Either way, his reign demonstrated the condition of his heart. In a time of peace, he tolerated the high places. In a time of war, he violated the Temple. The sacred objects were apparently more expendable than the places of false worship.

That's easy for us to judge, but we can be just as double-minded. We often find time for a favorite hobby but say we just don't have time to serve in our church's ministries. We find ways to pay for that vacation or new gadget, but we cut back our missions giving when things are tight. In other words, we tolerate the high places, even while selling off the sacred parts of our lives. We act like Joash.

**IN DEED** There's nothing wrong with hobbies and vacations, of course. The problem is in making them a higher priority than the Kingdom. The high places in our hearts are often not what we zealously pursue but what we passively tolerate. We avoid dealing with idols and are then forced to make painful compromises to our true worship. We fall into the sin of Joash, and we pay the price.

Avoid double-minded worship. Flee from compromises. Get rid of the high places in your life.

The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be; help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee. – William Cowper

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## God's Family Tree Faithfulness

**[GOD'S STORY]** God's people are back from exile and God has inspired them to rebuild their land. But a king from David's line isn't sitting on the nation's throne—the people are under the rule of the Persians. Were God's rich promises still true for them without a king from David's line? Did God still care for them?

God knows His people need a reminder of who they are, where they come from, and how He deeply loves them. God prompts the Chronicler to trace Israel's lineage, in copious but selective detail, all the way from the very first man, Adam, right up to the time of the Babylonian exile. Hearers' hearts would lift as they recognized the heroes of their history, as name after name was read. These names were reminders that each person is a part of God's story.

From Adam to Noah to Jacob's 12 sons to the great King David to the later kings and their descendants after the exile, God's people would read their ancient family tree and find comfort in its deep roots and in the God who had been cultivating it all along.

**[GOD'S HEART]** For the Ever-Present One, the list of names is a list of shared life-journeys. God had chosen each person to live during their time, selected their families, designed their bodies, given them breath, numbered their days. God had been with every person, every moment, every day. He saw every event, knew every situation, and was aware of every person's thoughts and feelings through it all. These genealogies are not lists of names to God; they are personal—a different perspective by which He experienced the same grand story.

He was working through, in, among each life. Within free will and failures and faithfulness, God was writing the story of His rescue. While God's people weren't aware of it, through flesh and family, circumstances and situations, God was within people and working through people to bring about the fullness of time when He would step into a genealogy, becoming a man Himself, and rescue us all.

The list of names in 1 Chronicles is more than a list of names. It is a brilliant tapestry of humanity and situation, companionship and rescue, held together by God's sovereign love.

**[INSIGHT]** First Chronicles 6 is central to the genealogy list. It focuses on the family of Levi, God's ministers. After the exile, ancestry was very important. A priest or Levite had to prove he was part of the Levitical line in order to serve.

## The God Who Inspires Praise

**[GOD'S STORY]** The Chronicler wants God's people to see His hand in their story. "Remember how good God was to us here? And here?" So as he recounts their history, he highlights God's good heart.

After the Philistines kill Saul's three sons in battle and Saul takes his own life, the brutish enemies place the royals' bodies on public display. But brave Israelite warriors risk their lives, cross enemy lines, and retrieve the bodies. God and His anointed ones are not to be mocked.

Israel crowns David king. He captures Jerusalem and then fortifies the city. God's nation now has a capital.

King David longs to make God the center of life in Israel. So he formulates a plan to bring the ark of the covenant, God's presence, to Jerusalem. David's first attempt fails—he neglects to honor God's holiness in the way he transports the ark. But the second time he worshipfully follows every procedure. David commissions the Levites to both carry the ark and to be in charge of worship—including singers, instruments, and cymbals. God is praised all the way home.

Once God's ark is at home in Jerusalem, Israel lavishes God with worshipful sacrifices. David instructs the men who led the worship on the ark's journey to Jerusalem to stay with the ark. God is to be worshiped continually.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "God, we can't hold our love back from You. So we will sing it to You."

So David assigns men to sing songs and hymns and adore God continually (see 1 Chronicles 16:4–6, 37–38). Before the ark, Asaph and his colleagues praise God. Before the altar in Gibeon, where the tabernacle remained, Levites "were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cymbals and for the playing of the other instruments for sacred song" (1 Chronicles 16:42). God's presence is surrounded by praise.

God didn't mandate this worship—His people are choosing to praise Him. In the midst of sacrifices and ceremonies rose up the freely given songs of those who were thankful to be His. Love for God is flowing out of the heart of His nation.

The worthy King was getting His heart's deepest desire: His people's heartfelt love.

**[INSIGHT]** First Chronicles is written from a positive perspective—to encourage the returned exiles. For example, the account of David's life leaves out his struggles with Saul, his many wives, his sin with Bathsheba, and the arranged murder of Uriah.

## God's Heart Home

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember how His dwelling place came to be in Jerusalem and why His heart is there. So the Chronicler continues recounting their story.

As David settles into Jerusalem, he is struck by the differences between his home and the tent where God's ark dwells. He wants to build God a house. The prophet Nathan, David's spiritual advisor, hears from the Lord that night. God is pleased with David's idea, and God is going to build *David's* house—his family line—forever. David's son will be the one to build *God's* house.

Honored and humbled, David praises the God who has been too good to him. In every battle David fights, God gives him the victory. Still, Satan successfully tempts him to count his fighting men—to trust in his own strength rather than God's. God is betrayed, angry. There is a penalty for David's distrust, and God allows David to choose it. Rather than a three-year famine or three months of war, David chooses the third punishment—three days of "the sword of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 21:12) through plague.

God's angel travels throughout Israel, slaying people. Arriving in Jerusalem, the angel is about to begin killing the residents of the city. God interrupts. "Stop! Enough!" God spares Jerusalem. David buys the plot of land where the angel stops, and worships there.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God's angel stood over Araunah's threshing floor—sword-drawn, battle-ready.

"Stop! Enough!" God commanded him.

This command echoes an order God had given to a knife-drawn father generations before. Abraham was poised and ready to slay his own son because God had asked him to. "Stop! Put down your knife!" God's angel had said.

God's angel had given that command to Abraham at the very same place: on Mount Moriah, or Araunah's threshing floor.

Perhaps, centuries later, as the sword-drawn angel was poised over that familiar mountain, God remembered the deep faith and love of the father who was willing to give Him his most precious possession—his everything.

And perhaps God looked ahead to that same place in Jerusalem where His own Son would walk. Perhaps He looked to the day in Jerusalem when He would not stay His hand, a day when the blood of His own Son would mingle with the dirt.

The place was too meaningful, too sacred—too much love had been and would be shared there. It was precious to Him. So God stayed His hand.

**[INSIGHT]** Solomon built God's temple on Mount Moriah, the site of Araunah's threshing floor (see 2 Chronicles 3:1).

## God's Architect Friend

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember the passion and the planning that went into His temple. So the Chronicler retells the story.

Even though King David isn't allowed to build the temple, he gets everything ready so his son can. He creates detailed blueprints, collects building materials, and plans for the reorganization of the Levites—their responsibilities will be different once God's home is stationary. David appoints some Levites to oversee the daily sacrifices, some to sing and praise, some to guard the temple, some to watch over its finances.

When David's life is coming to a close, he gathers all of Israel's leaders together. He challenges both his son Solomon and the people to follow God and obey His commands. David presents Solomon with the temple plans—for the lampstands, furnishings, utensils, every last detail God had given him. Then he charges the people to contribute to build God's temple. The precious metals and jewels pour in—God's people give willingly and abundantly.

The next day they ceremonially crown Solomon and celebrate.

[GOD'S HEART] As David hands the temple plans to his son he says, "'All this,' David said, 'I have in writing as a result of the Lord's hand on me, and he enabled me to understand all the details of the plan" (1 Chronicles 28:19).

It had been a project between friends. Years of dreaming, envisioning, imagining, explaining, and planning. Countless conversations as God had shown David His temple design and helped him understand the symbolism.

Even though David didn't physically construct the temple—it didn't exist in his lifetime—in the Psalms he wrote of it as if it already existed. Between the numerous conversations with God and visions from Him about it, it probably seemed like it did. David even wrote this prayer: "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

God answered the prayer of His friend. David never actually saw the finished temple. Instead, David went from the visions in his head of God's earth-home directly to the real place—God's home in heaven.

**[INSIGHT]** David received the plans for God's temple from God in a similar way as Moses received the plans for God's tabernacle (see Exodus 25:40). God wanted His people to become familiar with His home, so He communicated the plans Himself.

## The Love Who Comes Close

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember the artistry and majesty of Solomon's temple, so the Chronicler recalls the story.

While King Solomon is worshiping at the tabernacle in Gibeon, God comes to him and says, "If you would like something from Me, ask." Instead of riches or a long life, Solomon asks for wisdom. God is pleased and honors Solomon's request, giving him not only wisdom but riches too. God's king is now wise and wealthy.

Solomon arranges for hundreds of thousands of workers, and asks the king of Tyre for lumber, as well as for his most gifted artisan to lead the design work. With supplies and workers collected and ready, Solomon breaks ground on God's temple on Mount Moriah, Araunah's threshing floor, just like his father directed.

The building is magnificent—gold-veneered and cherubim-covered. The thirty-foot cube-shaped Most Holy Place contains two massive golden cherubim with wings that stretch from wall to wall. The thirty-foot bronze altar and large sea, or reservoir, resting on metal bulls, dominate the outer courtyard.

With the construction completed, the nation gathers as the Levites bring God's ark and all of the sacred furniture from the tabernacle to the temple. The people worship and the priests sacrifice offerings without number, all accompanied by the choir. God fills His temple with a thick cloud. God has come home.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "It is the very best we can do, God. We have worked so hard. We know that You are majestic, that You are worthy of so much more than the work of our fallen human hands. But will You come and dwell here?"

The temple was majestic, yes. But as Solomon realized, "Who is able to build a temple for [God], since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him?" (2 Chronicles 2:6).

A kindergartner's artwork on the fridge is only a masterpiece in the eyes of the one who loves the artist. When God, who created every jewel, every ounce of gold, every stake of lumber, came to live in the temple, it was an act of love. People had built the temple, but it was God who loved them so deeply that He came close. God's cloud filling the temple was a monumental declaration: "I love you."

[INSIGHT] The laborers who assembled God's earthly home were foreigners (see 2 Chronicles 2:17–18). "Outsiders" were assembling the holy. It was a glimpse into the future when all would be welcomed into God's great love.

## God Promises to Remember

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember the temple dedication and to etch the promises He made that day to Solomon on their hearts. So the Chronicler reviews the story.

After God's cloud falls thickly in the temple, Solomon kneels in front of the congregation and prays. He asks God to confirm all that He has promised, and expresses his awe that God would make promises to His creations. Then Solomon asks God to remember His people when they forsake Him.

When Solomon finishes praying, fire from heaven consumes the sacrifices on the altar. The people drop to their knees. God is in their midst. They offer thousands of sacrifices in joyful response.

That very night, God tells Solomon that He accepts his prayer, and that His eyes, heart, and Name will always be at His temple. God promises that when His people pray to Him, He will hear, forgive their sins, and heal them.

For the next few years of Solomon's life, God blesses him. Riches and gold pour in by the shipload. Foreigners hear of his wisdom and come to see if it's true. God pours out blessings on His wisest king.

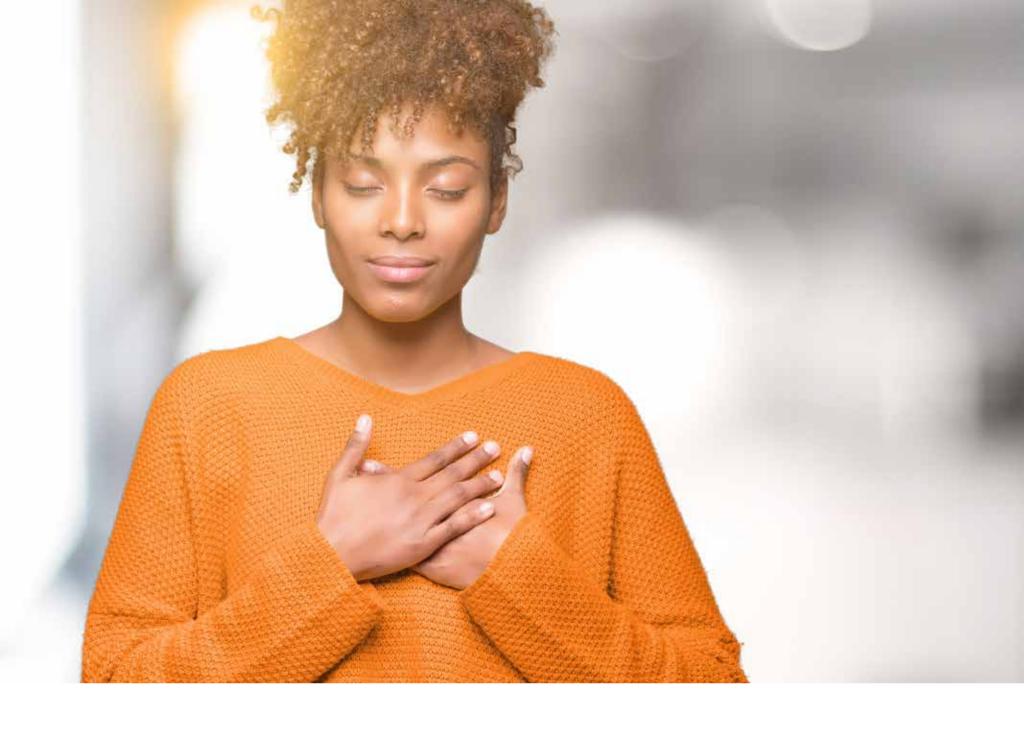
[GOD'S HEART] Solomon's prayer was prophetic. God's people betrayed Him shamefully. Then they had been defeated and demeaned by other nations. No one felt the weight of that more than the exiles listening to the Chronicler's account. They had seen how Solomon's temple became a pile of rubble. Although they had rebuilt the temple, it wasn't nearly as magnificent as Solomon's. God hadn't come in power at its dedication.

"Is God finished with us? Do His promises still apply to us?" they must have wondered.

Imagine as they heard God's answer to Solomon's prayer, the promises God had made to him later that night: "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).

God's response spoke right to their fears. "I knew this would happen," God declared. "I knew you would forsake Me. But I have not given up on you. You are still Mine."

**[INSIGHT]** God promised that His heart would always be with His temple, and that He would look on it with favor and love. Centuries later, Paul writes that we are God's temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19). We are the place where God puts His love.



## Begin with Gratitude

"Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" 1 Chronicles 17:16

IN WORD David has gotten some good news and some bad news. The news came from God Himself, so David understands its finality. The bad news is that a dream of his has been denied; he will not be the one to build a house for God. The good news is that God will build David's house, establishing his throne forever.

For most of us, the good news would far outshine the bad. It probably did so for David, too. But his prayer seems to have just a touch of bittersweet flavor, a disappointment that though God has richly blessed His servant with lavish promises, He has not promised that a temple will be built during David's reign. So

David has bowed in reverence, humbled at the plan of God.

David's opening line (v. 16) would be a good one for us to use whenever God has denied us our plans. Yes, we will be disappointed sometimes when our will for serving God does not match His plans for us. The disappointment could be overwhelming if not for one thing: God has given us promises as lavish as the ones given to David. We have been grafted into that very same eternal Kingdom that has come through David's line. David's house has been established forever through the Messiah, and so has ours. We're in the same house—the Kingdom of the One who has redeemed us. We can say with David: "Who am I . . . that you have brought me this far?"

IN DEED Perspective is the key to our disappointments. No matter what prayer God leaves unanswered, He has promised us an eternity with Him. And it will be more than just an existence: it will be an eternity of unimaginable quality. The riches of our God have been poured out on us in Jesus! An awareness of that wealth is where all prayers should begin. Every disappointment will pale in comparison to what He has already blessed us with.

When thou hast truly thanked the Lord for every blessing sent, but little time will then remain for murmur or lament. – **Hannah More** 

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### The Gentleman Hero

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to see His hand at work in their muddled history. So the Chronicler tells the histories of God's split kingdom.

After Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam becomes king. Jeroboam and the people go to him to ask if he is going to be as tough on them as his father was. Against his seasoned advisors' recommendation, Rehoboam threatens the people. They revolt. God's nation splits in two. Jeroboam reigns over the ten tribes in the north. Rehoboam reigns over his own tribe of Judah, the tribe of Simeon, and a few Benjaminites who live near Jerusalem.

Rehoboam prepares for battle to get the ten defecting tribes back, but God stops him. "This is My doing. Don't fight your brothers." Rehoboam calls off the army.

Jeroboam sets up golden calves so his people don't have to travel to Jerusalem to worship. It is an evil abomination. Priests, Levites, and other people who want to follow God migrate south to live under Rehoboam. Judah is filled with Godfollowers.

But their king abandons the God-King. God sends Egypt to chastise him, plundering the temple and the royal treasury. Rehoboam repents, but he isn't consistently faithful. God is not first in His heart, and Judah suffers.

**[GOD'S HEART]** The split between Israel and Judah is one of the most traumatic events in Israel's history since their slavery in Egypt—and God had arranged for it to happen.

Love cannot be forced, and the northern tribes had made their choice. God honored that choice and let them go. He made it clear that if, at any point, His people sought Him, He would hear them and heal them. But under their 20 kings in the coming years, Israel would abandon God and never look back. And after years of wicked rebellion, God would let them go.

For years God had pursued His people, calling them His own. But they didn't want anything to do with Him. Saddened and rejected, the unwanted Sovereign arranged for His people to get what they had chosen.

But God continued to work through Judah to set His people free.

**[INSIGHT]** Bethel, the southern location where Jeroboam set up one of the altars to a golden calf, was only about 12 miles north of Jerusalem, but it was a part of the northern kingdom of Israel. Bethel had been an important location in God's people's worship of God—Abraham himself first worshiped God there (see Genesis 12:8).

## What God Longs For

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember His sovereignty during the messiest times of their history. So the Chronicler continues his accounts of Judah's kings.

When Rehoboam dies, his son Abijah becomes king. War breaks out between Israel and Judah, and Abijah stands on a high place to confront Jeroboam and Israel for abandoning God. He declares that his kingdom is sticking with God—his priests, his temple, his worship.

Jeroboam has positioned Israel's army so that Judah is surrounded. It's an ambush. The men of Judah cry out to God, and even though Israel has twice as many troops, God gives Judah a stunning victory: Half a million Israelites fall.

Abijah's son Asa assumes Judah's throne. When Cushites attack, Asa calls out to God, and God destroys them. Through a prophet, God exhorts Asa to remain faithful, so Asa cleans up the country. He removes the demonic shrines throughout Judah—he even removes his own sex-goddess-worshiping mother from power. And he calls the nation to renew their covenant with God.

But when Israel's king, Baasha, attacks Judah, Asa doesn't trust God and instead makes a treaty with the king of Aram. God sends a prophet to explain the consequences to Asa, but Asa has the prophet put in prison. The king is rebelling against God.

[GOD'S HEART] Abijah stands on a hill, shouting at the army of Israel not to attack. "God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. People of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed" (2 Chronicles 13:12).

Abijah didn't want to fight against family, but Israel was clearly making a choice; God was on one side, and Israel was choosing to stand on the other. Israel was forsaking the God of their ancestors—and forsaking God would lead to being seduced by darkness. Their choice would end in their death.

But Israel needed more than an impassioned speech. They were too soulsick—they needed rescue.

Like us, they needed another Man on another hill. They needed the Man who would sacrifice Himself for every person stained by sin, captive to darkness, separated from God. They, like us, needed the Man who would lay down His life to set us free. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

[INSIGHT] Asherah—the wicked demon-god to whom Asa's mother built a shrine—was a prominent Canaanite goddess who was said to have 70 offspring.

## God's Victorious Banner of Praise

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to see that walking with Him led to the most fulfilled parts of their nation's history. So the Chronicler continues recounting the history of Judah's kings.

Asa's son Jehoshaphat seeks God like his father did. In his third year as king, he sends out a team of officials, Levites, and priests to travel around Judah, teaching the people God's law. But Jehoshaphat makes an unwise alliance with Israel's evil King Ahab—even marrying his daughter. After Jehoshaphat fights a battle alongside Ahab, God confronts him through a prophet: God's king is to have no business with God's wicked enemies. God is angry.

Later, several of Judah's enemies band together and attack God's people. Jehoshaphat issues a nationwide fast, and the people prostrate themselves before God's temple, begging Him for help. Jehoshaphat makes a declaration: The nation is putting their trust in God. God responds—He is going to defeat the enemies the very next day. The entire nation rejoices.

The next day, Jehoshaphat appoints a holy choir to go before the army, singing, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever" (2 Chronicles 20:21). Judah's enemies turn on one another, killing each other. Before Judah's army sets foot on the battlefield, every enemy is dead.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God's people are marching into battle under His banner of protection and love. They trust that He is going to come through for them, even though they don't know how. God's people are vastly outnumbered, yet they trust Him with their very lives. Before any victory happens, they go out to battle praising His goodness.

For once, God's people are showing great faith in Him! And He makes every enemy fall.

The citizens of Judah finally step into their place as God's people. The God to whom all life answers is on their side. Every battle can be approached under a banner of praise because the good God is on the throne.

That day went down in Judah's history books as the day God defeated their enemies without them having to raise a single sword. God probably remembers it a little differently—human armies are nothing for Him. But on that day, His people believed in Him and stood bravely under His protection like He had always wanted them to—and that, to Him, is the greatest victory.

**[INSIGHT]** Solomon had asked God to hear His people when they prayed from His temple (see 2 Chronicles 6:34–35). When Jehoshaphat got news of the impending battle, that's exactly where he went and what he did. And the faithful God responded.

## The Covenant Keeper

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember how faithful He has been to uphold their covenant. So the Chronicler continues telling about Judah's kings.

Nothing like his God-following father Jehoshaphat, King Jehoram murders all of his brothers who might be threats to the throne. God is furious. "You have abandoned God. He is going to abandon you," a prophet reports. Jehoram gets sick and dies.

His vile son Ahaziah reigns for a year before being killed by Jehu. Ahaziah's wicked mother, Athaliah, takes over, slaughtering the royal family. One of Ahaziah's infant sons, Joash, is spared, rescued by the high priest's wife. Joash lives at the temple under the protection of Jehoiada the high priest for six years. When Joash is seven, Jehoiada stages a successful coup. The evil Athaliah is killed.

Joash walks with God while Jehoiada, his spiritual mentor, is alive. But after Jehoaida's death, Joash listens to idolatrous leaders who steer him away from God. Jehoaida's son, Zechariah, comes to Joash to give him God's message: God isn't pleased that Joash has abandoned Him. Joash has his loyal mentor's son killed—in the courtyard of God's holy temple.

Members of Joash's own court assassinate him. His son Amaziah doesn't wholeheartedly walk with God, and when he challenges Israel to go to battle, Judah loses. Badly. God's temple is plundered.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God told David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

Yet when King Jehoram came to power, he killed all of his brothers—slaughtering potential future Davidic kings. Whether he was aware of it or not, he was doing more than that—he was sabotaging the covenant. But God intervened. "Nevertheless, because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever" (2 Chronicles 21:7).

Then Jehoram's wife, Athaliah, slaughtered the Davidic royal family. She didn't think she left any heirs. Again, God's people were sabotaging His covenant. But God intervened again, rescuing Joash.

Through people's sin and selfishness, slaughter, and subterfuge, God protected His promise. As history—and our everyday lives—testify, the only thing holding God's covenant together is . . . Himself.

**[INSIGHT]** Jehoiada is God's man in a dark time. He preserves Joash, makes sure God's law is in his hands, renews God's covenant with the people, and is the catalyst for tearing down Judah's demonic Baal-altars. God blesses him with 130 years of life and honors him with the burial of a king.

## God's Brave Love

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to see the monumental weight of their sin so they can get a sense of the lavish extent of His grace. So the Chronicler tells of Judah's flawed kings.

After King Amaziah's murder, his 16-year-old son Uzziah is crowned king. His godly mentor Zechariah shows him the ways of God, and Uzziah follows. God blesses him with a strong army, a strong city, and abundant food and livestock.

But Uzziah becomes proud, arrogantly marching into the Holy Place, where only priests are allowed to go. He burns incense on the altar of incense, as only priests are allowed to do. Eighty priests confront him—unsuccessfully. As he stands, censer in hand, the skin on his forehead starts to flake. Leprosy. The rest of his life is spent in quarantine.

His son Jotham takes over, walking with God. God blesses him.

But Jotham's evil son Ahaz casts metal figurines for the dark idol Baal, gives offerings, and even sacrifices his own son at a demon shrine. God punishes him, allowing Judah to get pummeled by enemy armies. But it doesn't have any effect. When Ahaz is beaten by an enemy, he offers sacrifices to their gods, thinking they will help him. He slices up the furnishings in God's temple and shuts the temple doors. Judah's king has abandoned God, serving darkness.

**[GOD'S HEART]** King Ahaz desecrated the temple, dismantling the holy implements. Then he shut the temple doors. He even arranged for God's daily offerings to be made on the altar of a foreign dark god (see 2 Kings 16:15).

And God gets angry (2 Chronicles 28:25).

It is meaningful anger. Apathy and indifference—if God just walked away—would be proof of a lack of love. But God loves. So He gets angry.

And even more beautifully, He presses on. Lesser loves would get the message and call off the relationship. It is a braver, bolder move to carry on—hated, unwanted, scorned. Our Good King pressed through because He knew the greater goal was not to save face but to rescue us from the soul-entangling darkness so that we could be together with Him.

[INSIGHT] Judah's pagan neighbors thought that Molek—the god that King Ahaz sacrificed his children to in the Valley of Ben Hinnom (see 2 Chronicles 28:3)—granted favor to those who sacrificed their children to him. Only an evil, anti-God force would seduce someone into believing the lie that child murder could lead to gain.

## The Day God Silences the Enemy

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to remember how good it is to walk closely with Him. So the Chronicler continues his account—telling about the rule of King Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had shut up the temple and polluted Judah with shrines. As his first royal act, Hezekiah repairs the temple doors and reopens God's glory-house. He purges the temple of idols. God's nation is turning back to Him.

Once the priests are consecrated, Hezekiah and Judah's leaders bring offerings to the temple to atone for themselves and the people. As the sacrifices are offered, a choir sings and the king worships.

For centuries most of the Israelites have neglected to keep the Passover. Hezekiah sends couriers to even the former northern kingdom, inviting every Israelite to Jerusalem for the festival. Some from the north scoff, but others come. The seven-day feast is so joyful that everyone decides to celebrate for another seven days. After the fourteen-day celebration, the nation purges its dark shrines.

When Assyria's king poises to attack Judah and mocks Judah's God, Hezekiah prays. God sends an angel to destroy the Assyrian army and save His people.

[GOD'S HEART] "When Hezekiah says, "The Lord our God will save us from the hand of the king of Assyria," he is misleading you, to let you die of hunger and thirst" (2 Chronicles 32:11).

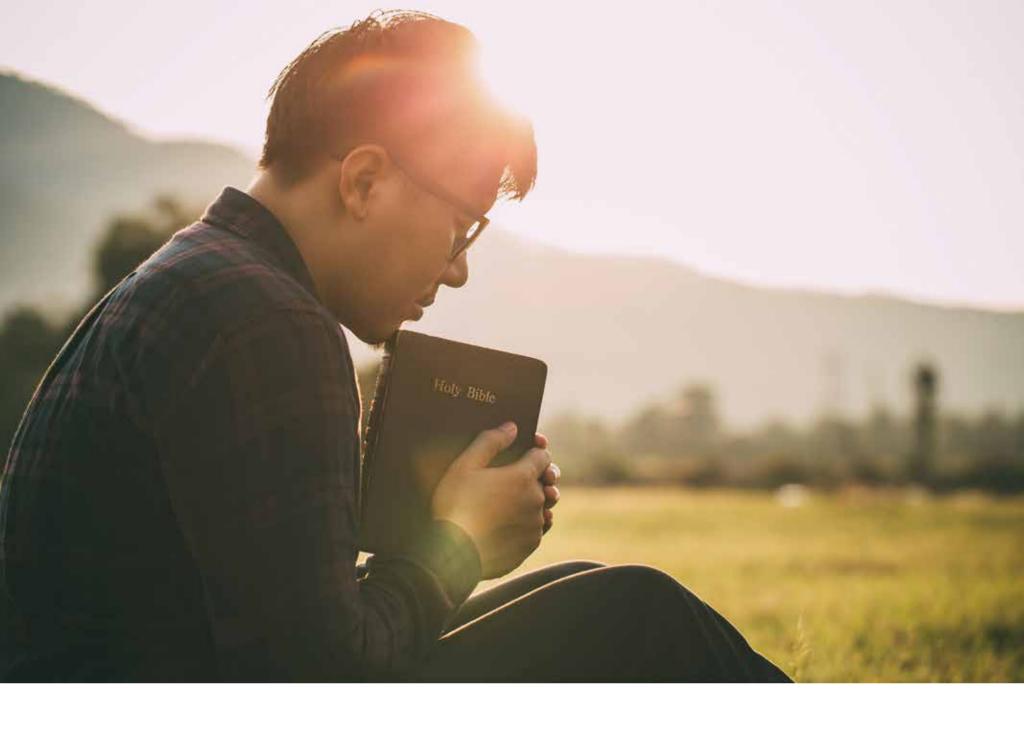
Assyria's King Sennacherib is the voice of Judah's enemy, but he echoes our enemy: "God is not really good. He won't take care of you."

But the God whom Sennacherib was disparaging sent one angel and wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (see 2 Kings 19:35). King Sennacherib was the liar.

In the same way, at the end of time as we know it, the one who has hounded us with lies about God and His goodness will gather an army and encamp around the city of God's people. In one instant God will end them. He'll consume the army with fire and condemn Satan to eternal torment (see Revelation 20:7–10). No fight, no battle—the enemy will be forever silenced with just a thought from the Great King's mind.

The enemy may taunt, but history will stand as testimony: The Accuser is the liar. God is always worthy to be trusted.

**[INSIGHT]** Some of the people who came to eat the Passover weren't ritually clean according to the Law. But Hezekiah asked God to overlook the violation and heal them. God listened and answered—the condition of their hearts was more important to Him than following the letter of the Law.



## Asa's Folly

The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. - 2 Chronicles 16:9

**IN WORD** King Asa of Judah, the great-grandson of King Solomon, was a remarkably modern man. No, he didn't have the technology or the historical perspective that we have, but his approach to his problems fits the modern era easily. Though he had begun his reign with devotion to God and the heart of a spiritual reformer, he ended it with passive faithlessness. Though he had removed idols from the land, he had not replaced the idols in his own heart. He became secular.

In chapter 16, As a twice made a foolish mistake. He trusted something other than God. When the king of Israel attacked, As a made a pact with the Syrians for protection. The prophet Hanani came to him with

the remarkable message of verse 9. God is actually searching for hearts devoted to Him in order to bless them. He wants to protect, to guide, and to provide. He is not reluctant—unless we're not devoted to Him.

As a should have learned that lesson, but he didn't. He came down with a severe disease that led him not to God but to doctors. His secular mind sought out kings and physicians as his first resort and God as his last. He would fit into our culture well.

IN DEED Where do you go when you're in trouble? Have you made the mistake of going to the doctor first and then praying to God only when medicine fails? Have you thought our only hope for peace lies in political treaties and cooperative governments? Have you thought of God as a means to fill in the gaps around our science, technology, economics, business strategies, and other areas of secular competence?

Science, medicine, law, business, and every other aspect of modern know-how do not need to conflict with God. They aren't necessarily wrong. They just cannot be our hope. Avoid Asa's folly. God is always our first resort.

There is no other method of living piously and justly than that of depending upon God. – **John Calvin** 

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## The God Who Never Gives Up

**[GOD'S STORY]** God wants His people to see how He has been sovereignly orchestrating their rescue. So the Chronicler concludes with the account of Judah's last kings.

Hezekiah's son Manasseh reintroduces the nation to the demonic worship his father had expelled. Witchcraft, child sacrifice, idol altars in God's temple—God's people become more evil than the nations God had driven out of the promised land. Manasseh's evil son Amon continues the wicked worship.

Amon's son Josiah pulverizes the shrines throughout the nation and cleans out the temple, finding the Book of the Law in the process. Josiah does everything to turn the nation back to God.

But Judah's last four kings are evil. After three months, Egypt's king replaces Josiah's son Jehoahaz with his brother Jehoiakim. The king of Babylon attacks Jerusalem, taking Jehoiakim and several of Judah's top citizens into exile. Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin reigns for three months, until he too is taken to Babylon—along with treasures from the temple. King Nebuchadnezzar installs Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah to serve as Judah's king. The prophet Jeremiah calls the vile Zedekiah back to God, but to no effect. God unleashes King Nebuchadnezzar completely—he burns the temple to the ground and either kills God's people or hauls them off to Babylon.

But years later, after the Persians conquer the Babylonians, God moves King Cyrus to decree that His people are free to return home and build a new temple for Him.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Everything happened just as God said it would. The destruction, the exile, and the release. The restored people in Judah listening to the Chronicler's account, stood as testimony: Even in their rebellion, God had not abandoned them.

They had lived the promise in Jeremiah's prophecy: "This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:10–11).

God's people had forsaken Him, hurt Him, angered Him—and God had known they would. Despite their evil, God continued working His hopeful, prosperous plans. Because as their history testified (and ours), despite all evil, God's goodness will trump it all.

**[INSIGHT]** In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar took temple implements and a group of God's people into exile, including Daniel. It was the beginning of the 70-year captivity. Seventy years later, in 538-537 BC, the first exiles returned home.

## The God Who Loves Our Gifts

**[GOD'S STORY]** God had promised that He wouldn't leave His people in exile forever. The Persians conquer the Babylonians, and God prompts Cyrus, the new emperor, to allow His people to return to Judah. About 50,000 people pack up and make the four-month trip from Babylon to Jerusalem. Some of God's people stay in Babylon, but send valuable gifts with the people making the journey. God has once again set His people free.

After settling in their towns, God's people convene in Jerusalem at the site of the old temple. Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest head up the rebuilding of God's altar. God's people bring offerings to Him, even without a temple. The priests give God's daily offerings, committing each day to Him. And they joyfully celebrate the monthly New Moon sacrifices and sacred festivals with offerings too.

Just over a year after arriving in Jerusalem, God's people start rebuilding the temple. Once the foundation is laid, the priests and Levites sound trumpets, clash cymbals, and sing. People weep and shout as they worship. God has brought them home—and more importantly, back to Him.

**[GOD'S HEART]** More people stayed in Babylon than returned to Judah. After all these years, Babylon had become both comfortable and "home." But thousands of God's people decided to return to the promised land. And each step on the dangerous, robber-infested, 900-mile journey was a statement: "We want You more than anything, God. We're coming back to You."

Once in Jerusalem, the returning exiles pushed through the threats of their neighbors, steadfastly rebuilding God's altar and bringing Him offerings. They gathered building materials, sacrificially giving as much as they could.

They laid the temple's foundation, and there was great joy. Older men and women who had experienced the glory of Solomon's temple wept—their joy laced with sorrow. Solomon's temple had been so magnificent, and they knew this temple would be humble in comparison.

It was a meager physical building project from a very small portion of His once-flourishing people. But God—who felt the weight of every step and every sacrifice—knew His people's heart-song wasn't meager. During the celebration, no one was more joyful than Him.

[INSIGHT] Only 74 Levites returned from exile with Zerubabbel and Joshua (see Ezra 2:40). Since they did menial tasks in the temple, they might have found work they liked better in exile and stayed there. When Ezra gathered the second wave of exiles, he made an intentional effort to recruit more to come back (see Ezra 8:15-20).



de've seen it in the lives of people all over the world. When people encounter the living God in His Word, everything changes. Eyes are opened. Hungry hearts are filled with truth. Lives are transformed. Families are reconciled. Entire communities are challenged to see the world through a different lens—the lens of Scripture.

When people have the tools to understand and apply the practical truths of the Bible to their lives, nothing stays the same. But for many Bible readers, obstacles stand in the way of life transformation: apathy; confusion; persecution from family, friends, or a closed government; an absence of resources; few training opportunities for pastors and Bible teachers. From "The Bible is old and irrelevant" to "I don't know where to start," from "I can't even own a Bible" to "I've never been taught the Bible," from "I don't understand the Bible" to "I don't have time to read the Bible," and so much more, we help people everywhere live God's Word ... and understand it.

### That's why we exist.

Since 1976, Walk Thru the Bible has helped people overcome obstacles to knowing and living God's Word. Our innovative live events and high-quality biblical resources inspire passion and advance biblical literacy in 130 countries around the world. By following the 2 Timothy 2:2 model of equipping teachers to teach others, we will reach and impact nearly four million people through our events and biblical resources this year.

Every day, God is using Walk Thru the Bible to share His Word around the world. We serve the **biblically unengaged**, the **persecuted church**, and **under-resourced pastors** and **Bible teachers**—from Philippines to Honduras, from Kenya to Moldova, from the UK to Venezuela, and the U.S. and Canada, we ignite passion for God's Word.

EEvery year, that's nearly four million souls we impact with God's Word. Every day, that's an opportunity to reach a life with the hope of Scripture. And every day we offer God's truth to a broken world with this certainty:

### The Bible changes everything.

For more information about Walk Thru the Bible, visit: www.walkthru.org

### RESOURCES

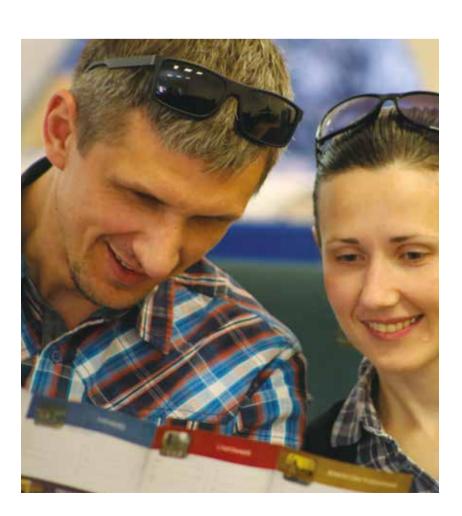
## If you want a **closer walk** with God through His Word, these resources are a great place to start!

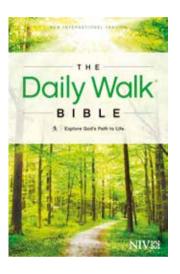


### \*otRECALL

"Creation! Fall! Flood! Nations! ..."
Our Old Testament flashcards will help you remember the storyline and hand motions from the *otLIVE* event.

\*Available only at otLIVE events





### **Daily Walk Bible**

Read through the Bible in one year with the *Daily Walk Bible*—it offers a simple 365day reading plan and tools to enrich your experience and your understanding, to help you on the journey of walking with God.





### 90 Days Thru the Bible

A 90-day devotional journey for individuals or small groups that guides you through the major sections of Scripture, meditating on how each story and theme, like the pieces of a puzzle, beautifully contributes to God's great story. You'll come to understand the heart of God, and the awe-inspiring story He's telling, like never before. Comes with a 13-session guide and discussion questions for reflection.





### **Keyword Learning System**

[OT & NT]

The Keyword Learning System is an innovative and fun way for children to learn and remember the "big ideas" of the books of the Bible. Eye-catching graphics filled with lots of hidden keys help unlock the big ideas of each book—from Genesis to Revelation!

### Devotional Magazines



### **Daily Walk**

Daily Walk is designed to guide you through your daily reading of the Scripture, taking you from Genesis to Revelation in the span of a year. With application and insight for each daily reading, this is the Bible reading plan that will get you through Leviticus! Includes a downloadable small group guide.



#### **Closer Walk**

Closer Walk is a bimonthly devotional magazine that is designed to help you read through the entire New Testament in a year. At an easy, manageable pace, you'll go deep with the help of timeless devotional messages from such esteemed theologians as Charles Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis, John Wesley, Matthew Henry, Oswald Chambers, and so many more.



#### indeed

Award-winning *indeed* magazine is a bi-monthly devotional that helps you explore the heart of God and is designed to illuminate themes in Scripture. Each week focuses on a new theme with daily readings to deepen your understanding of Scripture as well as God's heart. Insightful articles punctuate the themes with application and testimonies of how God works through His Word. Includes a downloadable small group guide.

### RESOURCES

These resources will take you on a deeper walk with God!

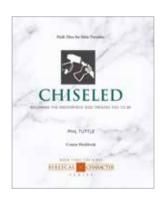
WALK THRU THE BIBLE°



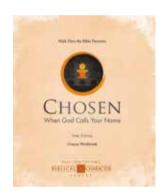


### **CHARACTER**

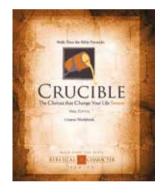
SERIES



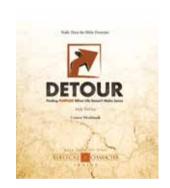
**Chiseled** (the life of Peter)



**Chosen** (the life of Mary)



**Crucible** (the life of David)



**Detour** (the life of Joseph)



**Revolution** (the life of Josiah)





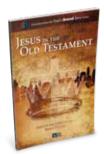




small group study that delves into God's story and His work to redeem, restore, and renew His people. Dives deep into the big picture of the Old Testament (or the New Testament), giving greater understanding, points of application, what it all means, and why it's important to your life.

### God's Grand Story Series

[the Bible study series]



#### **Jesus in the Old Testament**

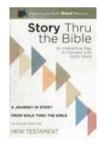
This Bible study shows us how Jesus can be seen all throughout the Old Testament—in the creation story and God's intent for mankind; the promise of God to Abraham to create a great nation; and the periods of slavery, wanderings, the promised land, and more.



### **Old Testament in the New Testament**

Just as the coming of the Messiah was a fulfillment of numerous ancient prophecies from Hebrew Scripture, so was His life and ministry. Jesus pointed to ancient prophecies in the Old Testament that referred to Him, and He demonstrated how He fulfilled them in the New.



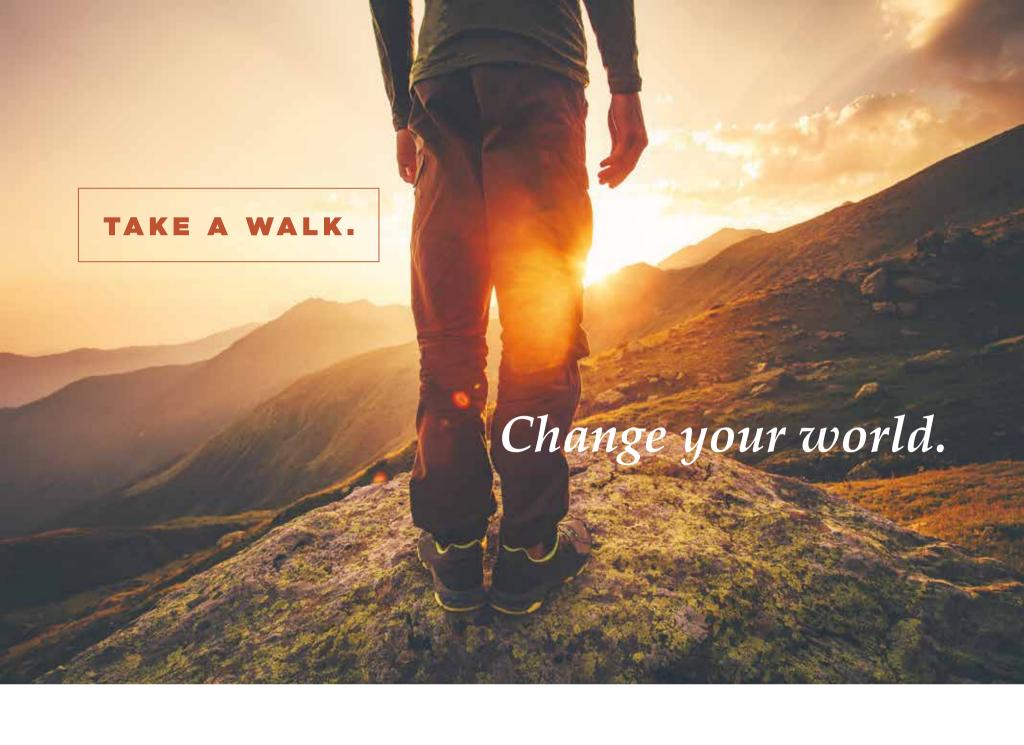


#### Story Thru the Bible/Old Testament or New Testament

The Bible is a collection of stories of real-life experiences of people who heard His voice, encountered His presence, or experienced His works. Each volume contains 26 stories from Scripture.



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