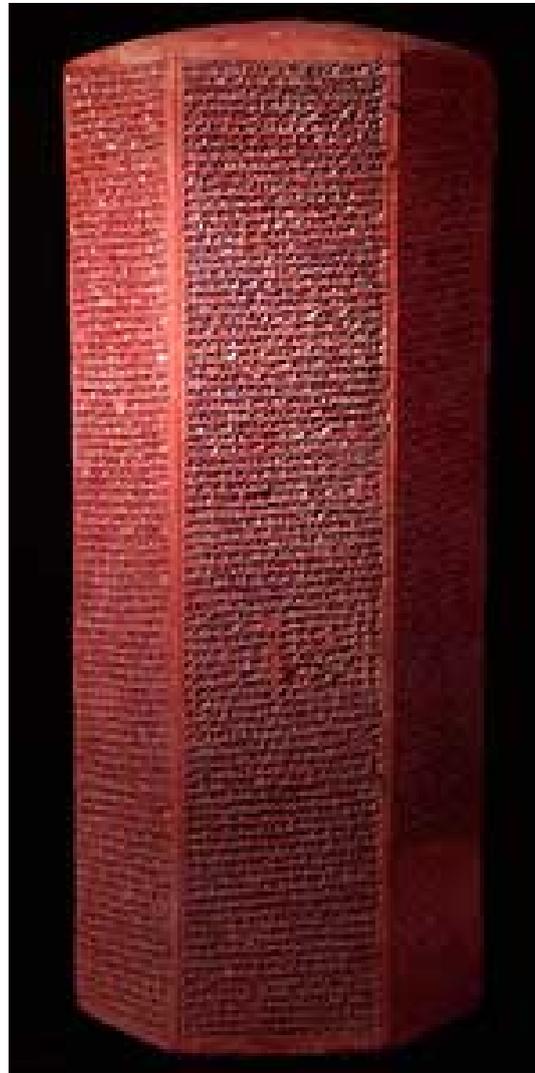


# 1 and 2 Kings

Quiet Time Series, Oct–Nov 2014



[EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com)

# Preface

The aim of this booklet is to help you to read, understand and apply the Bible to your life, via a series of short daily studies on the Old Testament books 1 Kings and 2 Kings. For each section of scripture, we provide a mixture of notes and/or questions to help you get started, more detailed points for delving deeper into the text when you have time, suggestions for applying the text, and prayer recommendations. We have prepared studies for each week day, leaving weekends free for other study or catching up. The dates are a suggestion; feel free to read at your own pace.

At the beginning of the booklet is some background material on the two books of Kings, addressing basic questions such as: Who wrote it? To whom was it written? Where and when was it written? What were the religious, political, economic, cultural and geographical circumstances at the time? Is it relevant? How can I apply it to my life? Since the historical data is limited, there are inevitably differences of opinion on some of the details, as you will no doubt discover if you do any further reading.

For each day's reading, we recommend that you read the Bible passage first — it is God's word, this booklet is not! — and write down any thoughts and questions you may have, and then look at the questions and notes for the passage. Try to work out the main theme of each passage you read, and look for central themes over both books. Do not rush the material just to be “up to date” with the reading schedule. When you have time look up the references given and reflect on these; wrestle through the difficult passages and perhaps check more than one Bible translation.

If you have time you might want to read Kings straight through at first, to get an overview in your mind. Do not be distracted by the details to begin with. Then the second read would be based on the quiet time series, at which time you can delve deeper into the text. For those who have time to read further, 2 Chronicles gives more details and a complementary perspective (mainly regarding the southern kingdom). The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and some of the minor prophets also shed invaluable light on specific issues during this period of Israel's history. 1 & 2 Samuel are also useful references for some of the characters mentioned in 1 Kings.

Any questions that are not answered here can be raised at the end of the Friday night lessons, or with one of the east teaching ministry (Andy, Randal, Simon, Steve, Tony, Tuka and Ugo) personally. You are also welcome to send any comments, criticisms and questions at any time by email to [EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com).

This document is available for download from <http://www.icoc.org.uk/east>

# Introduction to Kings

## Composition

The Hebrew bible is made up of three components which are collectively called the “TaNaKh”. The first five books comprise the Torah (T), meaning instruction or law; from Joshua to 2 Kings, then Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea to Malachi make up the Neviim (N) or prophets; and the remaining writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1,2 Chronicles) represent the Ketuvim (K), the writings.

First and Second Kings were originally one book in the Hebrew bible with the Hebrew title “melakim” translated as “Kings”. The book was first divided when the OT was translated into Greek (the Septuagint, LXX) around 250-200BC. Since then it has remained as two separate compositions.

Although Kings is a historical narrative of events in Israel’s history, it is still considered to be a book of prophecy. Kings is different from a history book in two ways: only relevant parts of the history were *selected* (those which teach us about God), and the historical events are *interpreted* in the light of God’s revelation and His covenant with His people. Also, as we will later see, many canonical and non-canonical prophets preached during this 400 year period.

## Authorship and Date

Since chapter 25 of 2 Kings concludes with the regency of the Babylonian king Evil-Merodach (562-560BC) and the prison release of the exiled Judahite king Jehoachin (561BC), the final editing or writing of Kings would have been during the Babylonian exile but before the Persian takeover (561-539BC). Clearly it is based on documents which were written much earlier (some of which are mentioned in Kings). Some commentators attribute the authorship to Jeremiah because 2 Kings and Jeremiah have identical endings. This is unlikely however for a couple of reasons: firstly Jeremiah was not in Babylon with the other exiles, but was taken along to Egypt with some Jewish fugitives a year after the temple was destroyed (585BC, Jer 43:6); secondly, according to God’s judgement, those who went to Egypt against His instruction would imminently perish, including Jeremiah (Jer 42:13-17). Although the author is unknown, it is very likely that one of the many unnamed prophets exiled in Babylon would have narrated through God’s Spirit to the Babylonian Jewish exiles residing with him.

## Themes

Though there are many subthemes throughout Kings, there are a few central themes that stand out. Before Kings, Israel had been a united political kingdom during the reigns of Saul and David. As we enter Kings, there is a further 40 year peaceful reign under Solomon as a united kingdom. However, the kingdom is divided due to the king’s unfaithfulness to the Lord by the end of his life. This becomes a trend in both the northern and southern kingdoms, where kings through personal sin or advocating national idolatry were held responsible for leading the people astray. Furthermore, God was not happy with cheap, convenient religion or syncretistic (mixed with other religions) worship.

Prophecy is the second main theme. God sent prophets to warn the two kingdoms of disaster if they failed to repent. Primarily the role of the prophet during this period was to confront the kings and their officials and call them back to the covenant of God.

Another theme is judgement: God inflicts judgement upon both Israel and Judah for their disobedience to His law, including military defeat, famine and eventually exile.

Finally there is one theme of hope throughout the book. Despite the people’s continual unfaithfulness, God remembers and keeps His promise to David by preserving the Judahite monarchical dynasty, even in exile.

## Chronology of Kings

Kings opens with the coronation of Solomon as king over all Israel in 971BC, and closes with the prison release of an exiled king of Judah, Jehoachin in the reign of Evil-Merodach (562-560BC). When Solomon died in 931BC, the kingdom was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. The Southern kingdom (Judah) comprised Judah and Benjamin, while the northern kingdom (Israel) included the remaining 10 tribes. The northern kingdom lasted till 722BC when they were deported into exile in Assyria. The southern kingdom lasted a little longer, until 586BC when the temple was destroyed and the people were exiled to Babylon. The table below might be a useful resource as you read through Kings.

King of Judah	Reign	King of Israel	Reign	Prophets
Saul			1050-1010BC	Samuel
David			1010-971BC	Nathan, Gad
Solomon			971-931BC	Nathan
Rehoboam	931-913BC	Jeroboam I	931-910BC	Ahijah, Shemaiah, others
Abijah	913-911BC	Nadab	910-909BC	
Asa	911-870BC	Baasha	909-886BC	Hanani, Jehu, Azariah
		Elah	886-885BC	
		Zimri	885BC	
		Tibni	885-880BC	
		Omri	885-874BC	
Jehoshaphat	872-848BC	Ahab	874-853BC	Elijah (874-848BC), Micaiah
		Ahaziah	853-852BC	
Jehoram (Joram)	848-841BC	Joram (Jehoram)	852-841BC	Elisha (848-796BC)
Ahaziah	841BC	Jehu	841-814BC	
(Athaliah)	841-835BC			
Joash	835-796BC	Jehoahaz	814-798BC	Joel (835BC?)
Amaziah	796-767BC	Jehoash	798-782BC	
Azariah (Uzziah)	792-740BC	Jeroboam II	793-753BC	Jonah (780), Amos (755)
		Zechariah	753BC	
		Shallum	753-752BC	
Jotham	750-735BC	Menahem	752-742BC	Hosea (750-722)
		Pekahiah	742-740BC	Micah (735)
Ahaz	735-715BC	Pekah	752-732BC	Isaiah (740-680BC)
Hezekiah	715-686BC	Hoshea	732-722BC	
Manasseh	697-642BC			
Amon	642-640BC			
Josiah	640-609BC			Zephaniah (630), Nahum (620)
Jehoahaz	609BC			Jeremiah (627-585BC)
Jehoakim	609-598BC			Habakkuk (610)
Jehoachin	598-597BC			
Zedekiah	597-586BC			Ezekiel (593-573BC)
				Obadiah (585)

## Historical and Political Background

By the end of David's 40-year reign, he had established through warfare and conquest an empire that included the united kingdom of Israel and many vassal states (client kingdoms) like Edom, Moab, Syria, Philistia and Ammon (2 Sam 8; 12:26-31). After David's death, his son Solomon rode on the coat-tails of his father's success; he strengthened the political and spiritual unity of his kingdom by building a permanent central place of worship for all Israel; he also made political alliances (e.g. 1 Kings 3) with neighbouring nations to ensure peace and stability for the kingdom. With peaceful trade, wealth and prosperity grew. However, Solomon's many marriage alliances led him into idolatry and his covetous materialism compromised his faith in the Lord (1 Kings 11; Dt 17:17).

By divine providence a coup broke out splitting the kingdom in two after Solomon's death. Through the self-interest of the usurper king Jeroboam, the northern kingdom became independent, and Jeroboam established a new national pagan religion similar to the ones he may have seen in Egypt (1 Kings 11:40; 12:28; cf Ex 32), along with parallel holidays and feast days. Meanwhile, Rehoboam son of Solomon was king of Judah, and he sought to reunify the kingdoms by civil war until a prophet spoke against his plans and he submitted. In form, the southern kingdom kept the religious worship and ritual of the temple, but in heart they too were idolatrous as they also worshipped pagan idols.

For the next 60 years until about 870BC there was civil war between the kingdoms. With the spiritual decadence and political instability, this gave opportunity for the rising powers of Egypt and Syria (Aram) to invade and take treasure or land. In the ninth century BC Syria was a major political player and a threat to the economy of the northern kingdom. War, famine and drought were all prevalent at this time. Vassal states formerly giving tribute to Israel rebelled and became independent (2 Kings 3; 2 Chr 21:8). By the turn of the century, Syria was defeated giving half a century of peace and prosperity. With the increase of wealth and greed came social injustice and superficial religion (see Amos). As brutal coups continued unchecked the knowledge of God was lost with almost no one left to teach the true faith. Their marriage to pagan idolatry and Jeroboam's sins remained steadfast for 200 years until the exile (see Hosea). The kingdom of Assyria (911-612BC) was used by God from the mid eighth century to take territory from the north and eventually deport Israelites to Assyria (2 Kings 15 and 17). The Babylonian kingdom soon eclipsed Assyria (612BC; see Nahum) and its conquest was to stretch as far as Egypt and Lebanon.

With the exception of a few kings like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, the southern kingdom was also led unfaithfully. They lost their security in God, and put their security in temple worship, which became an empty ritual. Political security was sought via other nations (e.g. Egypt) against the rising threats (Assyria, Babylon), and above all pagan worship was followed. Many prophets warned the kings to repent of these corporate sins and renew the covenant of God. Other prophets (Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk) pronounced inevitable judgement for their stubbornness, which finally came in a three-stage exile into Babylon.

## Reading Old Testament Narrative

Unlike Hosea, Hebrews, Deuteronomy and 2 Corinthians which we have studied in previous years, Kings belongs to the literary genre called *historical narrative*. Other books of this genre are Genesis, 1 & 2 Samuel and Acts. You don't read your mobile phone contract the way you read poetry, and your approach to the Evening Standard is different again. In the same way, you should adjust the way you approach the Bible when switching between law, poetry, prophecy, narrative and apocalyptic genres.

This is not just theory: if you confuse narrative and law, you might infer from the last supper (narrative) that Christians should always meet in an upstairs room (law). Don't laugh – there is a branch of the Church of Christ which does exactly this, and calls our ground-floor meetings “unbiblical”! In fact many false practices and false teachings arise from wrong interpretation of scripture due to a basic failure to understand how to read the Bible.

One does not primarily look for doctrine in narrative passages. Narrative usually records events, actions and speech of the characters involved, with neither a comment of approval nor of disapproval from God. The actions reflect the culture of the time and the choices made by individuals. Sometimes the narrator or God's prophets reveal whether the king or the people are deviating from God's covenant, but often they are silent. Where there is no direct evaluation of an action, we can sometimes ascertain from the law whether a human choice was in accord with God's will. But beware: this is what the Pharisees did with Jesus, and they got it terribly wrong (Mk 2:7,24; 3:2). Note also that even in the passages where God does express approval for actions, this does not mean that he would approve of us repeating the same actions today (e.g. invading Palestine).

In Kings, there is a repeating formula telling us whether a king did “what was right” or “what was evil” in the eyes of the Lord. Such a summary does not mean that every action and word of the king was right (respectively evil). So if you come to the books of Kings looking for role models, you're in the wrong place. David, one of the very few kings who was faithful to God at all, was guilty of murder and adultery, and had a totally dysfunctional family (comprising at least 8 wives and 19 sons, plus others not mentioned by name); his sons committed incest, killed each other and tried to usurp the throne. And he is held up as the best of the kings.

So are there no lessons to learn from Kings? Of course there are! But we do need to look in the right places. First we need to understand that the Bible is a book about God. Of course you already know this, but I don't think many of us (myself included) consistently read the Bible this way. Far too often I hear people focusing on what one of the people in a Bible passage did, said or (might have) thought, at the expense of the main character — God. God is the hero of the story; He is the reason why it all happened; His purposes give history its meaning. So when we read, we should first look for God's purpose rather than the author's or actor's.

Second, we need to understand that the Old Testament is *Christian* literature. It is Jewish scripture too, but there is a fundamental difference about the way we read it as Christians, as we are not under the same covenant of law (Rom 3:19; 6:14-15). If you believe that all scripture is inspired by God and useful (2 Tim 3:16; Rom 15:4), then you will be looking forward to what you can learn from Kings, not fearing that it won't be relevant. But just as the OT was misunderstood in Jesus' time on earth (Jn 5:39; 20:9; Mk 12:10,24), there is the danger that we miss the point too. Note that the point in these passages is that the OT is about Jesus! So as you are learning about kings, be on the lookout for what you can learn about the King of Kings!

Third, passages must be understood in context. The most important context is what is called *salvation history*, the way that God has been working from the beginning of time to redeem a people for Himself through Jesus. This is the big picture of the Bible, and we should always think about how each passage fits into God's story. Then there are also the cultural, historical, and legal situations, the fine details which help us understand the actions, interactions and language of the passages we read.

Human examples in the Bible are rarely positive, the main exception being Jesus. Sometimes the types (symbolic representatives) of Jesus (priest, prophet, king, wise man) appear in a positive light, but even then we don't need to look far before we are disappointed. Human failure reminds us of our need for Jesus. The New Testament gives us some pointers about interpreting OT examples: “Now these things [i.e. God's judgement] occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us” (1 Cor 10:6,11). Likewise we are warned in Heb 4:11 not to follow the Israelites'

example of disobedience. In both cases the examples are ones we should not follow. Rare references to positive examples are found in Jam 5:10 (the patience of the prophets) and Heb 6:12 (the faith and patience of those who inherit the promises).

As we read through and understand the basic themes that run through Kings we will pick up principles that have timeless application. As we make choices and decisions from day to day, we should not be waiting for God's discipline, a friend's rebuke, or a bad conscience to steer us. Many of the kings ran their lives and the affairs of the kingdom in similar ways often without seeking the counsel of the Lord. Ask God to guide you and reveal himself to you as you read about him in Kings.

Enjoy the study!

### **Further Reading**

- How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart)
- The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature (Sidney Greidanus, 1988)
- Preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Sidney Greidanus, 1999)
- Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture (Graham Goldsworthy, 2000)

## 1 Kings 1 — A Successor for David

Mon 6 Oct

The books of Kings are a direct continuation of the books of Samuel, which cover the history of the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. 1 Kings picks up at the end of David's life with two of his sons, Adonijah and Solomon, contending for the throne.

- When you read about the moral standards in the times of the kings (polygamy, concubinage, deceit, power-plays — and we are only in the first chapter!), how does that make you feel about reading further? Would you read the opening passage to your children?
- We will see repeatedly that Israel was just like the nations around her (Dt 17:14; 1 Sam 8:5,20), instead of being God's holy people (Dt 28:9). But rather than being depressed by Israel's failure, we should be inspired by the one "hero" or "good guy" throughout the story — who do you think that is? (Clue: He is the same in all the books of the Bible!)
- How is God working in this passage? What promise is he fulfilling? (See v48; 1 Chr 22:5-6; 2 Sam 7:12-13; but note that another "Son of David" would finally fulfil this promise.)
- Despite David's successes, people were looking for a greater king (v37). In some sense, Solomon fulfilled their expectations, but we will see that his failings were also greater than David's. Only much later would a truly greater king come (Mt 12:42).
- Does the procession with Solomon riding on a donkey to his coronation (v38) remind you of any other Biblical event? (See Zech 9:9; Jn 12:14-15.)

### Further Notes

One of the features of Biblical narrative is that the actions or sayings of the people involved are usually not evaluated. That is, we are normally not told whether the individual decisions or choices are good or bad. Some actions are obviously sinful, based on God's standards that we know from other scripture passages, but we will see many examples of questionable practices, where we could waste a lot of time worrying about whether they are right or wrong, and miss the point of the passage, how God is working behind the scenes.

All of David's legitimate sons were potential heirs to the throne, but it seems that Adonijah, born fourth, was next in line for the throne. We read of the deaths of his first and third sons, Amnon and Absalom, 2 Sam 13 and 18; presumably the second son Kileab is also dead. God had revealed to David that Solomon would be king (1 Chr 22:9-10; 28:5-6), but it is not clear how well he communicated this to the rest of his family, or whether they accepted this choice.

Although David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14) and a great soldier and leader of Israel, his family life left a lot to be desired. He accepted the standards of his culture instead of God's standards, such as monogamous marriage (Gen 2:24; reinforced for the king in Dt 17:17). He passed on his patterns of sin to his children, who were guilty of lust, incest, rape, murder and rebellion. David seems to have lacked the conviction to address their sin (v6; cf Amnon, 2 Sam 13:21; Absalom, 2 Sam 14:24; 18:5), perhaps because he was still haunted by his own personal sin.

Joab was one of David's nephews and his commander in chief over his army. Although he served David for almost 40 years, Joab secured his own interests at any cost, even disobeying a direct order to spare David's son Absalom's life (2 Sam 18:14). He also killed Saul's commander in chief as well as his own cousin in peacetime (2 Sam 3:27; 20:10), who were potential threats to his position as army leader. It is probably due to selfish motives that he changed his allegiance to Adonijah. Abiathar and Zadok were both priests who had been loyal to King David throughout his reign. Nathan was a true prophet of God who had integrity and was not afraid to address David's sin. Benaiah was a renowned warrior who was the head of David's special bodyguard. All these people would have known about David's choice of heir.

Note the practice of crowning the new king before the present one died; this ensured a smooth transition for the new king and gave no chance to rivals to seize the throne. Such a period where father and son ruled together is called a co-regency, and explains why the years that each king reigned don't necessarily add up to the total number of years of their reigns.

## 1 Kings 2 — Solomon Established as King

Tue 7 Oct

- What was the first and most important advice that David gave Solomon? Do you think David and Solomon understood God's requirements?
- In David's last days he tried to ensure peace in Solomon's reign by removing potential opponents to his reign (Joab, Shemei). Do you think David was being overprotective of his son? These people had opposed David's leadership, but David had put his trust in God to protect him, rather than using force to suppress the opposition. Do you think there is a danger when parents try to give their children a "smooth ride" in life, that the children don't learn to depend on God?
- Why did David make a point of rewarding those who were loyal to him in hard times (v7)? How do you respond to the loyalty of friends? Are you loyal to people when they go through tough times, e.g. in their relationship with God?
- What was wrong with Adonijah's request (v17)? Do you think Dt 22:30 applies here, although Abishag was not legally a wife of the king? (See also 2 Sam 16:21.) Do you think Solomon was justified in his reaction (v22-24)?
- Although the human actions are questionable, can you see how God was working through various situations to fulfil his promises (v46b and 2 Sam 7:12; also v27 and 1 Sam 1:27ff)?

### Further Notes

Verses 3 and 4 set the scene for the whole of Kings: only if the king kept the law of Moses would he receive God's blessing and protection. Unlike other nations, the king of Israel was under the law and not the law-giver (Dt 17:18-20).

Abner was king Saul's cousin and commander of his army. After Saul's death Abner had sought to reconcile Saul's kingdom with that of David's, to unify the kingdom under David. Joab disliked Abner, and killed him in peace time against David's wishes (2 Sam 3:27). Likewise he killed David's son Absalom (2 Sam 18:11-14) against David's command when Absalom rebelled against David. Then when David appointed Joab's cousin Amasa to take over leadership of the army, Joab killed him too (2 Sam 20:9-10). Finally, Joab failed to support David's choice of successor, choosing instead to back Adonijah's coup. Although he was a great and successful warrior, Joab showed no respect for authority. What do you think his attitude to God was like?

We don't know whether David was right to order the execution of Joab and Shimei (v5-9). They were certainly guilty of crimes deserving death (murder, Ex 20:13, and cursing the king, Ex 22:28). David, as king, had the responsibility of dealing with them according to the law, and probably should have done so earlier (Ecc 8:11). At the same time, revenge on enemies was forbidden (Lev 19:18; Dt 32:35), which may have been why David delayed acting.

Adonijah was Solomon's older brother, and by birth was first in line for the throne. As we saw in chapter 1, he didn't accept David's announcement that Solomon would be king (1 Chr 22:5, 8-10). He knew he was guilty of a crime worthy of death (1 Ki 1:51), but after receiving mercy, he seems to be making one final bid for the throne, asking to marry one of David's royal wives (v15-17).

Shemei was a tribal relative and loyalist of the former king Saul (2 Sam 16:5-8). He considered David a rebel against Saul, and he cursed David and assaulted him with stones. David held back from two opportunities to punish Shimei (2 Sam 16:9-10; 19:21-23), but then charged Solomon to punish the crime. It appears that Solomon tested Shimei's repentance by seeing whether he would keep to a promise he made before God, a test which Shimei failed.

Solomon wished for a kingdom that would last forever (v33,45), but Israel and Judah were destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians, as we will see later in Kings. The promise of an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:13) was only fulfilled in Jesus.

## 1 Kings 3 — Solomon's Wisdom

Wed 8 Oct

Solomon is remembered for three things: building the temple, his wisdom and his wealth. The next 8 chapters focus on Solomon's reign, the "golden years" of Israel (970-931BC). But even in these most glorious times, the historian reveals the sin which led to Israel's demise – unfaithfulness to God's covenant.

- Why did Solomon marry Pharaoh's daughter? Do you think he trusted God's promise in 1 Chr 22:9?
- Do you think the lack of a temple was a reasonable excuse for worshipping God at pagan sites? Why do you think the people compromised God's law (Dt 12:2-3) in this way? What practices of people around you influence your worship of God or your lifestyle? (Remember that your lifestyle is your worship, Rom 12:1-2).
- Why do you think did God give Solomon the opportunity to ask for whatever he wanted? Was this a test? If you were Solomon what would you have asked for? What does God's promise to give us if we ask him?
- In v28, why did the people fear the king when this judgment was given? God can also see through our hearts and motives. Do you fear his judgement?

### Further Notes

Marriage alliances were common ways of ensuring peace and secure trading between nations. However Solomon had already been promised peace with the surrounding nations (1 Chr 22:7-9). He should have sought God *before* seeking the hand of the pharaoh's daughter. Here he seems to be seeking political security and prosperity by human effort. Note that only marriage with Canaanites was explicitly forbidden (Dt 7:3-4), but here we see the beginning of a pattern (1 Ki 11:1-4; compare Dt 17:17) which led to his downfall.

High places (v2-3) were open-air sanctuaries used in Canaanite worship such as fertility rites. Worshipping God at these places was strictly forbidden (Dt 7:5; 12:2-3), but the people continually mixed local practices with their worship of God (this is called syncretism), and there were only a few short periods in Kings when they broke free from this sin. Even at the beginning of Solomon's reign, both king and people were involved. The tabernacle built by Moses was now in one of these high places, Gibeon, while the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem in a tent until the temple was built.

In Solomon's dream (v5-15), he humbly asks for God's help to fulfil the task God gave him of leading His people. God responds generously, giving Solomon the wisdom he asked for, plus prosperity that he did not ask for. Remember that God promises to answer our prayers (Mt 21:22; Jn 14:13-14), particularly if we ask for wisdom (Jam 1:5), and He gives more than we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). But note also that we are tested by what we ask for (Jam 4:3).

Biblical wisdom involves both spiritual decision-making, so that we can live a moral and ethical life in the fear of God (Pr 1:1-7; Job 28:28), and secular skills such as administering justice (1 Ki 3:28), management (1 Ki 5:11), technical skills (Ex 28:3), and intellectual knowledge and understanding (1 Ki 4:33). The word "discerning" (v9) is literally "hearing", that is, one who listens for and hears God's input. In the New Testament, wisdom is listed as a spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:8) and a quality expected of leaders (Ac 6:3). Godly wisdom is not the same as revelation; it involves human thought. Solomon's wisdom was expressed in proverbs and songs (4:32; Pr 1:1; 25:1), and was the greatest until Jesus (Lk 11:31).

We see here a shadow of the coming of God's kingdom, when an ideal king rules over God's people according to God's covenant and with wisdom, bringing blessing to all nations (1 Ki 4:34). Later, God promised to raise up a wise king from the descendants of David (Is 11:1-4; Jer 23:5). This promise is fulfilled by Jesus (Lk 2:52; 1 Cor 1:24,30; also compare Pr 8:22-31 and Col 1:15-17).

Prostitution would not have been uncommon in Solomon's day since it was an inherent part of Canaanite culture and religion. Although prostitution was prohibited by God (Lev 19:29; 21:9; Dt 23:17-18), Israel blended in with the practices of the nations around her. Nevertheless, the community would have looked down on these two women, so they were quite courageous in approaching the king for justice.

## 1 Kings 4–5 — Solomon’s Government

Thu 9 Oct

- How would you describe the mood in Israel during Solomon’s reign (4:20,25)? Would this have drawn people closer to God or distracted them from seeking Him? Do you turn to God more when life is going well or when you face problems?
- Do you like paying taxes? What do you think of conscription or forced labour? How do you think the people of Israel felt as they started to feel the consequences of their choice to have a king? (See 1 Sam 8:11-20; 1 Ki 12:4.) Can you think of anything that you have desired (e.g. a better-paying job, a larger house) that has ended up enslaving you?
- Do you think Solomon’s accumulation of wealth at taxpayers’ expense (4:26-28) was God’s blessing (consider Dt 17:16)? How can we differentiate between God’s blessing of wealth and our materialism or greed?
- Dignitaries came to Solomon from all nations to hear his wisdom. Why did they do this? How much effort do you make to seek out God’s wisdom and get answers to difficult issues that you face?

### Further Notes

In less than 100 years, Israel had been transformed from a loose band of tribes under God’s rule to a nation “like all the other nations” (1 Sam 8:20; Dt 17:14). This is what the people wanted, but they had been warned of the consequences (1 Sam 8:11-20). The surrounding Canaanite culture was religiously dedicated to economic efficiency and material affluence (does this sound familiar?), and Solomon copied this. Solomon appointed royal officials to run his administration, and divided the nation geographically (not by tribes) into 12 districts, with a governor for each district. Each month, a different district was taxed with supplying provisions for the king and his government, in fulfilment of Samuel’s prophecy. Solomon lived in luxury (4:22-23) while some of the people were subjected to forced labour (4:6), both gentiles (9:20-22) and also Israelites (5:13), even though this was forbidden by the law (Lev 25:39-46). This made Solomon unpopular (1 Ki 12:4), and was one of the factors leading to the division of the kingdom after Solomon’s death.

Despite Israel’s flaws, God granted them peace and prosperity as he had promised. Solomon reigned over all Israel, but his influence was much wider. Many of the surrounding nations were subject to Solomon and brought him tribute and revenue, and Solomon grew in wealth and power. In modern terms, it would be like Israel controlling Jordan, Lebanon, the Gaza strip, Syria and parts of Iraq as an empire. The language of Kings recalls the promises to Abraham (compare 1 Ki 4:20 with Gen 22:17) and to Moses (compare 1 Ki 4:25; 5:4 with Dt 12:10). The people enjoyed this rest for a short time; it wasn’t long before they turned away from God entirely and suffered the consequences (1 Ki 11; see also Heb 4:1-11).

After Solomon had become king, disposed of his rivals, received wisdom, and set up his administration, he was ready for his greatest act: building a temple (“house”) for God. David had originally desired to build the temple (5:3; 2 Sam 7:1-16), but God did not allow David to do so, because he was a warrior who had shed much blood (1 Ch 22:8; 28:2-3). Note the double meaning of the word “house”, which can be a building or a dynasty. So David wanted to build a house (building) for God, but God replied that He will build a house (dynasty) for David (2 Sam 7:11). David was told that his son would build the house that God really wanted, which we now understand to be a line of kings leading to the Messiah. Later prophecies (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-4) build on this promise (see Mt 1:1; Lk 1:32 for their fulfilment).

The temple would be a place for God’s name (5:5; Dt 12:5; Ex 20:24), not for God himself, as God doesn’t need a place to live (2 Sam 7:6-7; Acts 7:48). Unlike the high places of the Canaanites, the temple would be unique to Yahweh, the one true God. The temple represented God’s presence, where He could be summoned and would respond (see 1 Ki 8:28-49). Under the new covenant, God’s presence is more personal: we are individually (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19) and collectively (Eph 2:21) God’s temple.

# 1 Kings 6–7 — Bulding the Temple

Fri 10 Oct

- Why do you think the author included the date the temple building project began (6:1)?
- Can you imagine an active building site being quiet (6:7)? Why do you think they built like this? Do you think people would have sensed something special about it?
- Temples and churches are some of the most impressive buildings in the world. Why is so much effort and cost expended on them? Do impressive buildings help people draw near to God?
- How did the temple dedicated to God compare with Solomon’s own home which he built later?
- During the building, God spoke to Solomon reminding him and his people of the covenant of obedience (6:12-13). Is God more interested in our great achievements for Him or faithfulness?
- What did the temple symbolise? (See Ex 29:44-46 on the tabernacle.) Would the physical temple guarantee God’s presence among his people without covenant faithfulness? When it comes to church, what false securities can we have individually or corporately in believing in God’s presence among us if we are not in fact close to God?

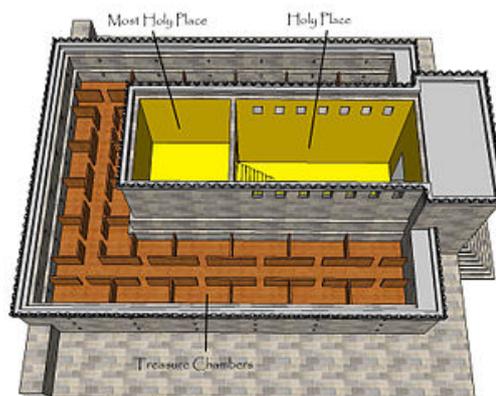
## Further Notes

Though it was Solomon’s father, David, who originally had the desire to build God’s temple, God promised that his son would carry out that task (2 Sam 7:1-5, 12-13). David did not just sit back and do nothing, but was actively faithful to God’s promise. He prepared raw materials for the building process, as well as recruiting foreign labour and commanding Israel’s leaders to help in the task. The preparations were accomplished at personal expense to David and through charitable donations from the nation (1 Chr 22 and 29).

Clearly the temple was immensely more glorious than the temporary tent used since the Exodus, as it was much larger and was made of the most costly building materials (see table below). It shared many features with the tabernacle (outer and inner sanctuaries, basins for washing, lampstand(s), table(s), altars for offerings and incense, the ark of the covenant), but on a larger scale. As for the tabernacle, God gave instructions for its design, so that He would not be misrepresented. This was important as the temple itself had no spiritual value, except to represent spiritual realities, i.e. to teach people about God (see Heb 8:5; 9:11-12; 23-24). Although the plan for the temple was revealed by God to David (1 Chr 28:11-12,19), it shared the style and character of Phoenician temples, due to the influence of the foreign labourers.

	Tabernacle of Moses	Temple of Solomon
Founded	1445BC	966BC
Time taken to build	10 months	7 years
Location	Initially Sinai (Horeb); portable	Jerusalem (permanent)
Raw materials	Goat hair, ram skin, acacia wood	Cedar wood, precious stones, gold
Size (without complex)	45x14 feet	90x30 feet
Furnishings	1 laver (wash basin) 1 lampstand 1 table for showbread	11 lavers (5 each side, 1 at front) 10 lampstands (5 each side) 10 tables (5 each side)
Cost	Freewill offerings of personal jewellery, linen, goats hair and animal skins	3750 tons of gold, 37500 tons of silver, limitless bronze, iron and stone, given by the king and leaders

Artist’s Representation of the Temple



## 1 Kings 8–9 — Temple Dedication and Covenant Renewal Mon 13 Oct

With the completion of the temple structure, the priests transferred the ark of the covenant containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments from David's tent in Jerusalem to the most holy place of the temple. The existing tabernacle was also brought up from Gibeon, but its contents were apparently not used in the temple since new objects were made. (They may have been stored in the treasuries along with the other items dedicated by David, 1 Ki 7:51.) As soon as the priests vacated the temple, a cloud, the "glory of the Lord" filled the temple. The celebration lasted two weeks — the biggest barbecue in Israel's history (8:5,63-65)!

- Why do you think the glory of the Lord (the *Shekinah*) filled the temple? How does this compare with the event when Moses consecrated the tabernacle in Sinai (Ex 40:34-38)?
- Did God's symbolic dwelling among his people show His approval of them? What was the relationship between the people's obedience and God's dwelling among them?
- When you celebrate, is it God's blessings or your own achievements that you celebrate?

Solomon praised God for the legacy of his father David and how God used him to fulfil God's sovereign plans to build a dwelling for God's name.

- Think of some great men or women who have left a positive legacy in the world — how many of these had successors to actively continue their legacy or vision as Solomon did? Why?

Solomon's prayer showed humility regarding his building achievements (8:27). It sounds prophetic concerning God's future judgement on Israel for their unfaithfulness and God's subsequent mercy and forgiveness at their repentance, but the blessings and curses mentioned here had already been established in the law, which Solomon as king was expected to know. (Each king was supposed to write out his own copy of the law and read it, meditate on it and observe it every day, Dt 17:18-19.)

- It is also significant that Solomon did not pray in his bedroom; his prayer was very public and deliberate. Why? Did you learn anything about prayer from this passage?
- After Solomon's prayer, God appeared to Solomon a second time, acknowledging the prayer and confirming His promise to David and his descendants, an everlasting promise. What was that promise? Was this promise unconditional? How was God going to treat His people if they were disloyal?
- Are you comfortable with church life, seeing the mercy, grace, love and forgiveness of God, but ignoring his judgement, thinking that judgement is reserved only for non-Christians? Do you forget that judgement begins with the church (1 Pet 4:17)? Do you feel secure in your salvation because of your association with church or fellowship, or by hearing right teaching, or by a faithful relationship with God? Without covenant loyalty, obedience and just religion, even the whole church can be rejected by God (see Rev 2:5; 1:20).

Solomon further exploited slave labour in the rebuilding and fortifications of key cities like Gezer and Megiddo in order to defend trade routes. Also for military protection he fortified cities like Hazor to guard against his Syrian and Mesopotamian neighbours. He built fortified store cities to store food provisions and his many chariots for war.

- Why would Solomon do this if God had promised him rest and peace from all sides? Do you think that with increasing wealth he became self-reliant? Was he just protecting his own interests?

Solomon was not content with his wealth; he built ships to allow further imports of gold (over 15 tons — the weight of about 15 average cars). In chapter 10 the writer is more specific about Solomon's revenue and his accumulation of chariots.

- Even though God promised him riches and wisdom, what do you think God felt about Solomon's attitude to his riches (Dt 17:16-17)? Do you have a godly attitude towards your possessions?

# 1 Kings 10 — The World Seeks Solomon’s Wisdom

Tue 14 Oct

In chapter four we saw that Solomon was blessed with unrivalled wisdom and understanding, and this attracted the attention of the local world. God had established peace for Solomon’s kingdom, and through political alliances and treaties, Solomon ruled over the surrounding kingdoms (4:21). Part of a *suzerain-vassal* treaty was that various tributes, gifts and tax revenues were regularly given by the vassal state to the suzerain kingdom in return for military, sovereign and economic protection (2 Ki 16:7-9; 17:3; 18:14-16). The wealth and prosperity of Solomon was indeed a blessing of God but it came through the national and international contributions of others.

- Though Solomon’s wealth and wisdom were gifts from God do you think he used it wisely? How do you use what God gives you?
- Apart from Solomon, his royal officials and his personal servants, did his wealth have any direct benefit for others in Israel (see 1 Ki 12:4)?
- The queen travelled from Sheba, probably in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, without the comfort of modern transportation. Why did she go in person to see Solomon? When she witnessed Solomon’s intellectual and practical wisdom, what was her response?
- Many others like this queen sought an audience with Solomon and gave tribute (10:23-24). Were these dignitaries Jews or Gentiles? In using Solomon, what do you think God’s plan was for all the nations? Were Solomon’s God-given gifts for his personal indulgence only? How does this compare with the purpose of gifts among NT saints (1 Cor 12:4-7)?
- Why does Jesus refer to the queen of Sheba as an illustration to his audience (Mt 12:42; Lk 11:31)? If we follow the one who is greater than Solomon, how should our reaction to Him compare with the queen’s response to Solomon? Does the queen’s comment in v8 describe you?
- Before looking at the table below, how many ways can you think of that Solomon foreshadows Jesus? What differences can you think of?

	Solomon	Jesus
Descendant of David	Yes	Yes
Anointed one (messiah)	Yes	Yes
Filled with wisdom	Yes	Yes
Executed justice	Yes	Yes
Kingdom of peace	Yes	Yes
Fame draws the world	Yes (1 Ki 10:24)	Yes (Mt 4:24-25)
Kingdom	Political	Spiritual
Built God’s temple	Yes (physical building); 1 Kings 6	Yes (spiritual, the church); see 1 Cor 3:10-11,16; Eph 2:19-21

Although Solomon was the son of David, king of Israel, and a wise and just ruler of God’s people, the prophets after him promised another king who would fulfil these roles in a greater way. It is clear that Jesus fulfils the messianic prophecies referring to the “Branch of David” who would be filled with wisdom (Lk 2:40) and understanding, and who would rule with justice, righteousness and peace (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-2; 42:2-6; Jer 23:5-6).

Many Gentiles acknowledged Solomon’s greatness and gave glory to Solomon’s God for his gift.

- Did Solomon lose sight of this purpose?
- How does this relate to us?

## 1 Kings 11 — Solomon's Final Legacy: Unfaithfulness

Wed 15 Oct

- If you had to summarise Solomon's life, what outstanding highlights come to mind?
- By the end of Solomon's life how would his people have remembered him?
- What was Solomon's sin? What was the difference between Solomon and his father David (1 Sam 13:14)?

God knew that foreign wives who did not share faith in the true God would lead the king and subsequently the whole nation astray with devotion to pagan gods and their rituals (Dt 17:17). Marriage alliances were not uncommon in Solomon's day, and not every marriage was one of romantic or emotional intimacy. Solomon sought to secure peaceful political alliances and treaties with his neighbouring nations, who were mostly Canaanite in origin.

- What did God have to say about this, centuries in advance (Dt 7:1-4)?
- God had already promised that Solomon would have peace from surrounding nations. Did Solomon trust in God's promise or was he insecure, trying to ensure security by human effort?
- How many of the instructions to kings in the law of Moses (Dt 17:16-20) did Solomon break? Based on his lifestyle and choices, do you think he was reading God's law daily, as commanded in Dt 17:19? Why is regular reading of God's word important?
- The irony of Solomon was despite his great wisdom he became the biggest fool by the end of his life. Did he take his own advice (Pr 1:7; Ecc 12:13)?

### Further Notes

Solomon married a Sidonian and later started to worship their goddess Ashtoreth; this false worship then plagued Israel for over 300 years. Ashtoreth was a Sidonian fertility goddess and a consort of Baal. The people believed that they could invoke the goddess by sexual rituals and offerings so that the crops, livestock and childbearing would be healthy and prosperous. What about Molech (Milcom)? He was a fire god and a god of war. Centuries before, God had forewarned Israel not to share in the Canaanite practices of Molech which included burning newborn babies in sacrifice to ensure fertility, prosperity, and victory in war (Lev 18:21; 20:2). Chemosh was a war god of Moab similar to Molech. Solomon built shrines for these three gods on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, which survived as a legacy for Israel until the day of King Josiah (640-609BC) of Judah who finally destroyed them (2 Ki 23:13). Solomon's unrepented sin of apostasy had devastating consequences for the future generations of Israel, politically, economically and spiritually.

God told Solomon that ten tribes would be torn from his kingdom in the time of his son. Under God's sovereign control, this prophecy was fulfilled via political instability and rebellion. This developed (v27) with the building of a fortress structure in the wall of Jerusalem. Solomon imposed forced labour and taxation even on the Israelites to build and maintain expensive structures, which wore down the people's loyalty to the king. When Ahijah the prophet met and spoke to Jeroboam who was in charge of the forced labour, he announced God's plan to give Jeroboam leadership of ten tribes, with the opportunity to build a lasting dynasty if he was loyal to God's covenant. Jeroboam used the people's dissatisfaction with Solomon's rule to split the kingdom, and we shall see the political and spiritual consequences for the whole nation of Israel in the next chapters.

## 1 Kings 12:1-24 — “Small Sin”, Big Consequences

Thu 16 Oct

Here we read of the events that led up to the division of Israel. It explains that this event was from the Lord and marks the start of the northern kingdom of Israel turning away from the Lord and into apostasy.

- Why do you think Rehoboam rejected the advice that the elders gave him?
- Does it appear that God made Rehoboam choose the advice of the young men? If so can God hold Rehoboam responsible for the “bad” choice he made?
- What do you think Rehoboam thought he would gain by taking the advice of the young men?
- When you make important decisions, what is your approach?
- How can you ensure that you seek God’s will when making decisions?
- How can you guard against simply seeking endorsement?
- Who do you have in your life that you trust will give you good advice?
- If you are leading in any capacity, what are some good ways to be in tune with those you oversee?

### Further Notes

It appears that in order for Solomon to build such an impressive nation, heavy taxation and labour were forced on the people. This ultimately resulted in a wave of discontent. In 1 Sam 8:10-19, before Israel had its first king, God explained that having a king ruling over Israel would have unpleasant downsides. The people chose nevertheless to be led by a king (Solomon in this case) who demanded a lot from them. The romantic picture they had of being led by a king was quickly overtaken by the reality of the conditions imposed on them. Rehoboam inherited this discontent and consequently was confronted with an important decision early in his reign as king. The outcome was division amongst the nation of Israel and ultimately apostasy. The text says that this turn of events was from the Lord and raises the age old question of how God’s sovereignty works together with man’s will. Is God sovereign? Yes. Do we have free will? Yes. How do these work together? I am not sure we will ever fully know.

Nevertheless there is the issue of seeking advice. There is no doubt that seeking advice is encouraged by God. This is in recognition that even with good intentions, the word of God and prayer, our judgement can be significantly influenced by other factors such as (a) our past experiences; (b) our sin – selfishness, pride, etc.; (c) our level of faith. Seeking advice from wise people who know us can help clear the mist on many of our decisions. Rehoboam favours the advice from the young men which results in Israel being divided into two; those in the region of Judah led by Rehoboam and those in the north (Israel) led by Jeroboam. Rehoboam shows a disconnect with the people following his decision and this is demonstrated with the backlash that results when he sends out Adoniram. If you are leading in any capacity it is important to be in tune with those you lead. This applies to parents, church leaders, leaders of groups, leaders at work, etc. Pray to connect with people you influence so that your decisions will be beneficial to them. Credit goes to Rehoboam for taking the advice from God not to go to war against the brothers in the north.

## 1 Kings 12:25-33 — The God of Convenience

Fri 17 Oct

This section describes the early days of the northern kingdom of Israel and the formation of state worship with the absence of Jerusalem as the centre of worship. It describes how man is inclined to alter God's commands for the sake of convenience.

- What were Jeroboam's real fears?
- How does fear influence your decision making?
- How did Jeroboam deal with his fears as expressed to the nation of Israel?
- Think about how you communicate; do you put a spin that hides your real concerns?
- In consideration of how God had instructed the people to worship him, in what ways did Jeroboam's reforms differ?
- In v28 Jeroboam uses the phrase "It is too much", referring to God's expectations on us. What areas of your Christian life do you see as God asking too much of you?
- In what ways do you blend in with society in a way that goes against God's word?
- Consider how you might be tempted to create a form of worship acceptable to you. Can you think of ways that you worship God that are different to those in the Bible?

### Further Notes

Jeroboam was afraid that if the people of Israel went down to Jerusalem to worship God and take part in the religious festivals as commanded by God, that they may be influenced by and be won back to Rehoboam as king, resulting in his execution. This fear drove Jeroboam to introduce an alternative way of worshipping God with the headline of convenience. Why did he create 2 golden calves? Probably he was influenced during his stay in Egypt where bull worship was prominent. Also the surrounding nations worshipped bulls and calves. Dan and Bethel were chosen probably due to their strategic locations, Dan in the far north and Bethel on route to Jerusalem in the south. Jeroboam was a practitioner of syncretism – blending of traditions, beliefs and elements from other religions with God's true religion, which God strictly forbids (Dt 12:29-31). Some aspects of Jeroboam's religion resembled what God had commanded: priests, religious festivals, places of worship; however Jeroboam violated God's commands by changing the place and dates of worship, rejecting the Levitical priesthood and setting up idols. In 2 Ch 11:13-17 it is recorded that the faithful Levites migrated to Judah as a result of Jeroboam's reforms.

Although Jeroboam declares "here are your gods", it is unlikely that the 2 calves represent 2 different gods. The Hebrew Elohim can be translated as either God or gods. Jeroboam did not rush wholesale into apostasy, the worship of a foreign god. Instead he merely "made things a little easier" for Israel to "worship the God of Abraham." Such gradual change is typically the pattern of apostasy – and we must always be on guard against it. This is not to say that we should never change or grow in understanding as God makes biblical truth clearer to us. We absolutely must. But we must be extremely careful to "test all things" according to God's Word and "hold fast" what we recognise to be His clearly revealed truth and will (1 Th 5:21).

Jeroboam's legacy was a terrible one. He is regularly referenced as the one "who made Israel sin" (2 Kings 10:31; 13:6; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24). In 2 Kings 17:21 it is said of Jeroboam that he "enticed Israel away from following the Lord". What a terrible thing to be remembered for and labelled with – contributing to and in fact calling people to leave the Lord. This was done by deliberately initiating a counterfeit religion. This calls us to question our own speech, behaviour and example. Is any part of our lives leading others away from God? Jesus put it this way in Matt 18:6 "If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Please pray and explore this area of your life and be determined to avoid this terrible danger.

## 1 Kings 13 — Being Clear about Authority

Mon 20 Oct

God tries to get Jeroboam's attention regarding the sins he has committed. The word of the Lord is the significant theme with a very vivid example of how easy it is to follow the word of man.

- Why do you think Jeroboam was offended by the prophecy (v1-3)?
- Why do you think the man of God helped the king by healing his hand?
- Why do you think the older prophet lied to the younger prophet?
- Why do you think the younger prophet went back to eat with the older prophet?
- How difficult is it to discern truth from falsehood? Do you hold to your convictions on matters of faith even if an older Christian contradicts you?
- Why do you think the judgement on the younger prophet was so strong?
- In v33, why do you think that Jeroboam did not change his ways?
- Jeroboam did not respond to the word of God. What hinders our obedience to the word of God?
- When a preacher or Bible teacher expresses an expectation of you, are you confident enough in your knowledge of the Bible to “test everything” (1 Th 5:21) and ensure that you are following the words of God and not men?
- How can you be sure that your understanding of what the Bible is saying is correct?
- How do you test what is spoken, not choosing an interpretation that suits you?

### Further Notes

It is interesting that God used a prophet from Judah to confront Jeroboam and the altar at Bethel and not a prophet in Israel (Bethel is just north of the border between Israel and Judah). The unnamed prophet interrupted Jeroboam's church service crying out against the altar saying that the leaders of that church would be burnt on the altar, with no timeframe as to when this would happen. Not a very positive prophecy. But why? It was a direct warning for Jeroboam to repent. God was trying to tell Jeroboam that He was not happy with the altar and also not happy with the priests who served at the altar (see notes on chapter 12). This prophecy was fulfilled 340 years later (2 Kings 23:15).

To help Jeroboam see the truth in the long term prophecy he introduced a short-term prophecy to confirm it, by splitting the altar etc., which happened in the presence of Jeroboam. When the prophet announced judgement, Jeroboam's response was “sieve him” or “arrest him”; in other words: ignore the message and silence the messenger. The supernatural withering of Jeroboam's arm and its subsequent healing was quite a dramatic event and should have served as a warning to Jeroboam leading him to repentance. Jeroboam did not repent. Unfortunately dramatic demonstrations by God don't change everyone's heart.

The prophet on his way home encounters an older prophet from Israel who lies to him. The prophet from Judah believes the lie. Maybe the following contributed to this: age – the instruction came from an older person; status – the older man was also a prophet; miraculous experience – the older prophet said “an angel spoke to him”; language – the older prophet claimed it was the word of the Lord. How easy is it for us to be misled by similar experiences? Gal 1:8 warns us: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!” Sadly, even after these events Jeroboam did not repent (v33).

## 1 Kings 14:1-20 — Early Warnings of Israel's Exile

Tue 21 Oct

In this section Jeroboam tries to find out the future regarding his sick son. Instead he receives a prophecy that his dynasty will end and that his son will die, and finally that Israel will be taken away into exile.

- Why do you think Jeroboam himself did not go and enquire of Ahijah?
- Why did his wife disguise herself?
- Why do we avoid certain people when seeking advice?
- What “good” do you think God saw in Jeroboam's son?
- Consider ways in which you pretend to be what you are not, depending on your audience. Why do we pretend to be someone other than ourselves?
- How does God see through our pretences?

### Further Notes

Jeroboam's son was critically ill. And like many of us, his dire circumstances led him to seek the Lord. Hopefully Jeroboam had a parental concern for his son, but also undoubtedly he would also be thinking of an heir. Jeroboam did not want Ahijah to recognise that the request presented to him was coming from Jeroboam because he probably thought that if Ahijah knew this, he might confront Jeroboam on his sin or maybe give an unfavourable answer regarding his son. However, Ahijah had been forewarned by the Lord that Jeroboam's wife would be visiting. This brings up a very powerful point for many of us, that God cannot be fooled. Whatever disguise we put on, whatever image we try to present, whatever way we want people or God to see us, is wasted on a God who knows what we are really like. There should be no difference in how you present yourself and how you really are. As painful as the death of a child is, God here says that in this particular case, God found goodness in the boy. A short life is not necessarily a sign of God's displeasure.

God has some very strong words for Ahijah:

v7b-8a: I have been good to you, I have been gracious to you

v8b-9: nevertheless you have rejected me and have done evil

v10-11a: pronouncement of judgement

v12: confirmation statement – God has spoken

This in many ways is how God speaks to us. Firstly He calls us to see how blessed we are. This is very important as when we fail to appreciate His blessings we look elsewhere and reject God in our hearts. God is therefore kind again by warning us of his judgement, basically an appeal to repent. Ahijah then makes some big statements: Your son will die; Your dynasty will end; All Israel will be exiled. The goal again is for Jeroboam to repent, but unfortunately there is no sign of this in the scriptures.

This section introduces Asa the reformer. He is described as a lamp in Jerusalem – a breath of fresh air in such a troubled time.

- Why do you think the people of Judah engaged in the practices of the surrounding nations?
- What makes it difficult for us to foresee the potential impact of ungodly decisions?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to make righteous judgements concerning family? Are you comfortable confronting the sin of your spouse, parents, close family, etc.?
- Consider ways in which you can be a lamp in such a troubled world.

**Further Notes**

The camera now moves to the southern kingdom. There is a very painful truth emerging, how very subtle compromises in our faith can grow into very big problems. The term is “creep” – the effect of accumulated apparently minor compromises. Here, the impact of Solomon marrying Naamah the Ammonite begins to show its damaging effect. The Ammonites were enemies of the Israelites yet Solomon married an Ammonite against the word of God. The Ammonites were a pagan people who worshiped Molech. God commanded the Israelites not to marry these pagans, because intermarriage would lead the Israelites to worship false gods. Solomon disobeyed and married Naamah the Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21), and, as God had warned, he was drawn into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-8). Naamah was the mother of Rehoboam. Under Rehoboam’s leadership Judah committed idolatry, state prostitution and imitating the nations around them. High places were alternative shrines, stone pillars symbolised the male deity in Caananite fertility worship, and Asherah poles likely represented the female mother goddess, the spouse of El or Baal.

Chapter 15 introduces Abijah. 2 Ch 13 gives another account of Abijah, and presents him as a king who followed God. Although Abijah’s heart was not fully devoted to the Lord, God used Abijah to raise up a righteous son Asa (a “lamp” in Jerusalem). Asa did many commendable things in his early years as king. In 2 Ch 14, he is shown to be a faithful king relying on God in his defeat of the Cushites. He took a stand against what the nation had started to treat as acceptable. It is often very difficult and takes great courage to speak up and make God-centred decisions when people around you do not see what you see, or are fear-driven and fail to stand up against evil. He expelled the male shrine prostitutes, he got rid of all idols and he confronted close family in relation to their sin. Asa is described as a lamp; we also are called to be like a lamp (Mt 5:14-16) bringing light to everyone in the house. In his later years however, Asa’s faith and trust in God seemed to take a downward turn as he sought an alliance with Ben Hadad king of Aram when faced with war against Baasha king of Israel. In the Chronicles account (2 Ch 16:7-10) the prophet Hanani described this act as foolish, and Asa reacted angrily and threw him in jail. In addition, when faced with severe illness (2 Ch 16:12-13) Asa did not turn to God but only to the physicians, again indicating that his faith in God in his later years was not as strong as in his early years as king. Let us strive to grow in our faith over the years and fight the tendency to see our faith decline.

## 1 Kings 15:25-16:34 — Enter King Ahab

Thu 23 Oct

Here we see the kingdom of Israel in chaos: kings are murdered, civil war erupts and the kings become increasingly godless. Finally King Ahab enters the scene with his wife Jezebel. Ahab was one of the most evil kings of Israel.

- What are your various thoughts as you read this section of scripture?
- Why do you think there is such a political and moral breakdown in the nation of Israel?
- What do you think led Zimri to take his own life?
- How aware are you of your threshold or sensitivity to recognising sin in your life? (You might want to read the notes below before answering this question.)

### Further Notes

This section of scripture focuses on the northern kingdom of Israel, looking at all the kings who reign there during the reign of Asa, king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Nadab son of Jeroboam becomes king. Baasha kills Nadab and becomes king. Elah son of Baasha becomes king. Zimri murders Elah and becomes king. When the Israelites find out how Zimri became king they reject his kingship and proclaim Omri king. Zimri then commits suicide, burning down the palace in the process. One commentator suggests that Zimri burnt the palace so that his successor would not enjoy such delights. Omri's son Ahab then becomes king. Ahab sent Israel further down the path of apostasy. His personal sin is highlighted and he is described as doing more evil in the eyes of the Lord than those before him. His threshold regarding his sensitivity to sin was higher than those before him. This is important for many of us as often we can harden our hearts in certain areas to the point that we do not recognise some aspects of sin in our lives. This is why it is key to involve other Christians who can be honest with us. Also he marries Jezebel a Phoenician, probably as a political move to combat the rise of Syria. This is not a bad choice in marriage but a terrible one. Was Ahab not aware of Jezebel's true character and religious tendencies? Why bind yourself in marriage to such a woman, who would have such a devastating influence on the nation?

Joshua pronounced a curse (Josh 6:26) "Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." Nevertheless, Hiel under the leadership of Ahab felt he could challenge or test this prophecy by building Jericho whilst avoiding the curse. As a result Hiel's first son and his youngest son die. What a reckless act and huge price to pay, particularly when the word of God has warned of the consequences! How seriously do you read God's word? How seriously do you take the consequences of rejecting God's word? For example we know how God will treat us if we do not forgive a brother or sister from the heart (Mt 18:35). Also we know that God will disown us if we disown him (Mt 10:33), and so on. Please do not think that you are a special case and that these verses do not apply to you.

## 1 Kings 17 — Miracles Small and Great

Fri 24 Oct

It is approximately 870BC. Ahab is ruler of the northern kingdom; enter one of the major characters in the Bible, Elijah the prophet of fire! It was Moses and Elijah who spoke with Jesus during the miracle of the transfiguration; such are the credentials of this particular prophet. The backdrop to his biography is that Ahab, probably the most evil of the kings of Israel, is now in power. He actively encouraged idol (particularly Baal) worship in Israel, no doubt influenced by Jezebel, his domineering wife from the Phoenician region where Baal worship was thriving. Israel had wandered far from the path of true worship.

In v1, God's first recorded job for Elijah was to tell Ahab there will be no rain for several years until he said so. This would challenge Baal worshippers who considered Baal to have dominion over the weather. There were several denominations in this religion, many also worshipped Baal as the God of storms and he was often depicted holding a bolt of lightning. So straight away God is setting up Elijah against the king and his prophets. The road to victory was not without danger, so the next instruction God gives the prophet is to hide.

In v6, Elijah is in danger so God preserves his life and demonstrates his rule over nature by commanding ravens to feed him meat. Have you ever wondered where the birds got this meat from? Was it stolen from the tables of diners in nearby towns? Whilst the rest of the region thirsted in drought, Elijah was quenched with the waters of the Kerith ravine, where he remained until they dried up.

In v9, he then goes to the gentile town of Zarephath where he meets a widow and seeks shelter under her roof. Two points here. Firstly God uses an unclean bird to feed his prophet, then he uses an unclean person, (true Israelites did not associate with gentiles), to shelter him. What does this teach us about God? It is an old cliché that "God works in mysterious ways." Consider that God can use ungodly people to help Christians. What situations can you think of where an ungodly person has helped you? This was a sign of things to come, when Jesus would open up salvation to the gentiles with a new covenant.

The circumstances when Elijah met the unnamed widow were dire. Such was the grip of famine that she was gathering some wood to burn for a last meal before accepting her fate, starvation. Next we read about a wonderful little miracle. The widow is so impoverished that she only has a tiny amount of flour and a little oil in a jar. When Elijah asks her for some bread she is exasperated and exclaims words to the effect "I have so little; I am going to cook, eat, and wait to die." Did it make any sense for the widow to feed Elijah when she had so little? However she acts in faith, or at least generosity, as Elijah shares with her the word of God, and the flour and oil are not used up until rain comes, sustaining the widow, her son and Elijah. Note that the blessings came after she made the decision to give to the prophet of God. Elisha his understudy later mimicked this miracle with the widow's oil and the jars (2 Kings 4). The prophets brought blessing and salvation to her house. How can we as Christians bring blessings to those we come into contact with? I remember our family group bringing bags of shopping to a family that had fallen on hard times. When we left their cupboards were full. Why not plan to bless someone this week?

The wonderful little miracle of the self-replenishing flour and oil is immediately followed by one of the mega-miracles in the Bible. In v17, the widow's son dies after an illness. Elijah through prayer and God's power brings life back into him. Two strands of thought worth reflecting on are:

- Elijah's level of faith – when he prayed for life to return he expected his life to return. He stretched himself out on the boy three times (v21). That means the first two times had a negative result. How persistent are you with the big requests?
- Nothing is beyond God's grasp. Do you limit God by only expecting things that will happen anyway, or do you ask for the impossible?

## 1 Kings 18 — God of Fire!

Mon 27 Oct

After a few years and a relatively quiet life it is time for a showdown! In v1, the Lord tells Elijah to go and find Ahab. On route (v7) Elijah meets Obadiah who is a devout follower of the Lord, and who heroically sheltered 100 faithful followers when Ahab was on a bloodletting campaign to wipe out God's prophets. It is Obadiah who is tasked in trepidation with announcing Elijah's arrival to the king, who wastes no time in seeking him out. Ahab unjustly calls Elijah a "troubler of Israel" (v17) but Elijah hits back and announces to the king that he is the problem because he has abandoned God and followed Baal. The Hebrew noun translated troubler is also used to describe a snake or viper. Ahab is insulting Elijah calling him a snake in the grass.

It then gets even better: Elijah commands the king to summon 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah (a female deity, a fertility goddess worshipped in the surrounding nations and adopted by many Israelites) to a confrontation at Mount Carmel (see image below). Once at the meeting point at Mount Carmel, Elijah, in front of the gathered people, challenges the false Baal prophets to a fire dual (v22-24). Which god will produce fire? The actual spectacle (v26-29) of the false prophets imploring Baal from morning to evening does have some comic value, especially when weighed against a bored Elijah shouting out sarcastic taunts. Once the Lord had proved himself to be God (v38) by sending such intense fire that it dried up the trenches of water that Elijah had channelled around the Lord's sacrifice, Elijah initiated the slaughter of all the false prophets (v40). Then after God has proved himself by sending fire, he confirms his word by sending rain (v45).

The amazing account of Elijah's faith in taking on and defeating 850 false prophets should inspire us. Before God sent the consuming fire, Elijah prayed. It is important to note that the focus of Elijah's prayer was that the people will know that "you Lord are God and that you are turning their hearts back again". Elijah's desire was that people should know the true God and that God can help turn hearts back to him. We can learn from this. Are your prayers about people repenting, people opening their hearts to God?

The lesson from Elijah's life is that he walked in the power of God. When a man walks in God's power he feels unstoppable. We can be under pressure at work but know we are in the will of God. We can be struggling to find a better job, but know we are in the will of God. We can have a formidable adversary (enemy, character flaw, fear, debt, health, unemployment) but know that we are in the will of God. It is never an equation of:

problem vs you = defeat,

it is always:

problem vs you+God = God's will.

That changes the odds. Think about it:

850 vs Elijah+God = No contest!

Today reflect on God's power to bring victory on life's battlefields as we fight against sin, temptation and life's troubles.



Mount Carmel (summit 1740ft)

Have you ever had a great victory in your life and then come crashing down to earth with a bump? Elijah did! Even after such a monumental victory on Mount Carmel! Often overlooked in scripture with all that is going on is the fact that Elijah then outran Ahab's chariot and reached Jezreel ahead of him! However Jezebel, upon hearing of Elijah's exploits (far from standing in awe of God and repenting), sent a message promising to end his life within 24 hours (v2). In depression the mighty prophet ran for his life and threw in the towel. "It is enough." Elijah felt he had reached his limit in serving God. Do you sometimes feel that way? Also he said, "Take my life, I am no better than my ancestors" (v4). This is remarkable. The mighty prophet of consuming fire thought he was a failure. Amen. There is hope for us all! In depression Elijah did what many people do when they feel sorry for themselves: he had a pity party then fell asleep. Enter a tender God. Firstly he sent an angel who prepared food for him (v5). So deep was Elijah's depression that the angel had to go to him twice. Then God spoke to Elijah, not harshly or in judgment but simply asking a question (v9): "What are you doing here?" At this time Elijah was in a cave; metaphorically speaking this is where Christian men go when depressed. God lured Elijah out of the cave by passing by, not in the drama of an incredible tornado type wind (v11), not in the fury of an earthquake, but in the gentleness of a breeze. It is the gentle breeze that lured Elijah out of his cave (v13). A leadership lesson for us all. Sometimes patience and understanding of what is required is far more effective than directness and straight talking (Prov 15:1).

God then did two things. He told Elijah he still has work for him to do, the anointing of new workers. He then showed Elijah the big picture: "You are not alone; I have 7000 who still have not bent their knee to Baal." God did not force the issue any further and on God's command Elijah called his replacement Elisha into service (v19). Elisha is introduced to the reader in v19; by v20 we have already learned two significant things about him and a major clue as to why God chose Elisha to replace the burnt out Elijah. Firstly, he was loyal and responsible and went to say farewell to his family. Secondly, he was decisive, and once the decision was made, he slaughtered his valuable oxen to feed the people (they were still in the grip of a three-year drought), and then burnt his equipment (v21). For Elisha there would be no going back.

- What lessons can we learn from Elijah about the cost of great spiritual victories?
- How can we maintain our zeal for God in the long term?
- What do we learn from the chapter about God's character? Is he impatient?
- How have you imitated Elisha's attitude in the past, or how might you in the future?

## 1 Kings 20 — Israel vs Aram

Wed 29 Oct

Ben-Hadad, king of Aram (Syria), constructs a large army and advances, threatening to invade Samaria. He negotiates an extremely harsh tribute payment from Israel which is tantamount to complete plunder of the city. Ahab, who initially meekly agrees terms, later shows some fight when Ben-Hadad attempts to turn the screw and get more value from his campaign. When Ben-Hadad threatens to bring the city to ruins Ahab effectively says (v11): “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch!” It’s interesting that it is the threat of losing items of value rather than losing family that brings such fighting talk out of Ahab. What does this tell you about his character?

In v13, Ahab receives some good news from an unnamed prophet, promising military victory, although Ahab had not been seeking the Lord’s help. What does this tell you about Ahab’s heart after the sign of fire at Mount Carmel? What does it tell you about God? Read the last line of v13 again. After defeating the Aramean army the Lord graciously sends his prophet again and gives Ahab an early warning that the enemy will return next year so he could prepare for it (v22). On the advice of his own superstitious prophets Ben-Hadad rebuilds his decimated army to wage a military campaign on the plains to avoid the God of the Hills (v25). Again God reaches out to Ahab promising to deliver this new army into Ahab’s hands (v28). Again Ben-Hadad is comprehensively defeated and ended up acknowledging his inferiority in diplomatic language “your servant”, sending his men to Ahab in sackcloth pleading for mercy (v32).

- We may be tempted to pour scorn on such superstition, however is the idea of a god restricted to hilly regions much different from a faith where God only has impact in certain compartments of our lives?
- Ahab is remarkably gracious to Ben-Hadad considering he has been such a thorn in the flesh of Israel: he is merciful and makes a treaty with him, a decision which invites God’s punishment on Ahab (v43). Why do you think Ahab acted this way?
- When we are proud, God will actively oppose us. What areas are there in your life that may at best distance you from God or at worst cause him to oppose you to get your attention? (See Obad 1:4; 1 Pet 5:5.)
- God shows remarkable grace to Ahab in bringing these victories to the errant king. Why not spend a moment reflecting on God’s grace in your life and thank Him in prayer.

## 1 Kings 21 — Naboth's Vineyard

Thu 30 Oct

Lev 25:23-28 taught that all the land belonged to God and was allocated to both king and commoner alike as his tenants. (Interestingly, we have a similar concept of real estate in England and Wales, although few of us consider our rights in this way. In this country the Crown is ultimate owner of all land and owner-occupiers hold a lesser estate in land known as either freehold or leasehold.)

In Israel, as in England, land could be bought and sold and such practice was commonplace. However, such a sale was not supposed to be permanent (Lev 25:23), and this is probably the reason for Naboth's negative response. (The law suggests that such a sale should only occur if the seller experienced financial hardship, and that the near family members should have the first right to buy the land. Further, the seller retained the right to purchase the land back, and in any case would retrieve his land in the year of jubilee.) Naboth's response suggests that he felt it would be dishonourable for him to sell his land, but this would have been combined with an emotional response to the pressure that he felt from the king to sell his land against his will. Perhaps Naboth was sensitive to the request because he had in mind the warning given by Samuel that if the Israelites were to appoint a king he "would take the best of your fields and vineyards" (1 Sam 8:14).

Jezebel, whose name has become a byword for wickedness and evil, is first introduced in 1 Kings 16:31 as the Phoenician wife of Ahab who introduced Ahab to Baal worship and killed the Lord's prophets. In 1 Kings 21 we get an insight into her character. Jezebel schemed on Ahab's behalf in order to get the result that they both wanted. She led the elders and nobles of the city into sin by asking them to carry out the duplicitous request of the King. Her actions were particularly despicable because Naboth was a respected individual and those she led astray were leaders of the people. Naboth was accused of the capital (punishable by death) offence of cursing God and the King (Ex 22:28).

Jezebel turned public legal proceedings to her own ends and by doing so brought the law into disrepute. She manipulated the Deuteronomic law by having two witnesses in a case involving a capital offence and by demanding the prescribed death sentence for blasphemy (Dt 17:5-6). However, Jezebel abused the spirit of the law by arranging for people to lie and murder, while she put on a pretense of following the letter of the law. Jezebel showed her lack of respect for the individual, the leadership of the town and ultimately God and God's law. She manipulated everyone and everything to suit her own desires. Unlike Ahab, there is no evidence that Jezebel showed any remorse. Ahab showed genuine repentance and by this delayed the execution of judgement on his family, but Jezebel remained as hard-hearted as ever.

- Are we transparent and childlike as the Bible encourages us to be or are there times when we manipulate a situation to get what we want?
- Perhaps we create a certain impression to avoid being asked a certain question?
- Or are there questions that we won't answer?
- Does Naboth remind you of any New Testament character? (See Mt 26:60-61; Lk 20:9-16.)

## 1 Kings 22 — Israel, Judah and the Prophets

Fri 31 Oct

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was Ahab's son in law, which is one reason why he was so eager to support Israel in battle. Ramoth Gilead should have been returned to Israel following the treaty of Aphek in 1 Kings 20:34 but the Aramean king had failed to comply with the treaty and Ahab sought Jehoshaphat's help to enforce the treaty.

It was customary to seek the counsel of the national deity before going to war. This was necessary if it was to be a "holy war". Jehoshaphat's clear stance as a non-Baal worshipper was to seek the counsel of the Lord, as opposed to seeking support from foreign deities. This passage illustrates the cost of being a true prophet of the Lord. The true prophet speaks only what the Lord says while the false prophet, like any other diviner, aims only to please the enquirer. Micaiah was heavily outnumbered. There were 400 prophets who were originally asked and all prophesied victory, but none were prophets of the true God. These prophets were uncritically loyal to the king and based their prediction of victory on the success of previous campaigns rather than any insight from God. They aimed to please the king rather than proclaim the truth (compare with Amos 7:10-13).

Micaiah was hated by the king for always prophesying doom and gloom. The reason for his negative messages was of course that the king was refusing to listen to God's word. There was a clash between Judah and Israel over the nature of true prophecy. (See Jeremiah chapters 27 and 29 for further passages on this.) The King tried to silence the word of the Lord by imprisoning Micaiah. This is a common human reaction when the word of the Lord decrees judgement (see also Jer 36:26; 38:6).

- Are we surprised when our beliefs place us in the minority?
- Are we willing to speak the truth in love even when it is uncomfortable?
- Do we try and gloss over problems or do we confront them head on?
- Are we living like a true prophet of the Lord?

### Further Notes

Is the use of a lying spirit to deceive the king contrary to God's moral nature? It is clear from this passage that the Lord decrees not only good but evil for those who have chosen to reject him. The prediction of Ahab's end had already been made by Elijah (1 Kings 21:21-22) and this use of false prophecy emphasises that God controls everything, even final judgement on unbelief.

## 2 Kings 1-2 — Ahaziah and Elijah

Mon 3 Nov

These chapters continue the accounts of the kings of Israel and King Ahaziah during the ministry of Elijah. Chapter 1 briefly covers the reign of King Ahaziah, which was summarised in 1 Kings 22:51-53. Chapter 2 shows how Elijah passed on his ministry to Elisha.

Read chapter 1.

- Who does Ahaziah consult when he falls ill? Why?
- Why do the soldiers sent to fetch Elijah perish?
- What does God want us to learn from the example of Ahaziah when we are in times of crisis?

Read chapter 2.

The account shifts to Elijah and his protégé Elisha. God told Elijah in 1 Kings 19 to choose Elisha as his successor. Elijah moves to various locations with Elisha close by his side, not willing to miss anything.

- Why did Elisha ask for a ‘double portion’ of Elijah’s spirit? What does that mean?
- What benefit would the miracles Elisha performs have for Elisha’s validity as God’s prophet?
- What can you learn about following Jesus from Elisha’s example with his “master”?

### Further Notes

2 Kings 1:2-8 - Baal-Zebub: means ‘Lord of the Flies’ and was the God of Ekron, a Philistine city about 25 miles west of Jerusalem. Though Ahaziah seeks to consult Baal-Zebub, God intervenes through Elijah, resulting in another manhunt for Elijah.

2 Kings 1:9-14 - Why the fire from heaven we may ask? Fire is typically associated with God’s judgement and here we are shown that Ahaziah’s manhunt for Elijah is condemned by God. The third captain is wiser than the first two and treats Elijah with respect, thus escaping God’s judgement. However, the prophecy is fulfilled and Ahaziah dies.

2 Kings 2:1-6 - It seemed common knowledge that Elijah was to be taken to heaven that day, known by Elijah, Elisha and the prophets at Bethel and Jericho.

2 Kings 2:7-10 - Elisha refuses to leave his teacher’s side and sticks with him on his journey, meaning he gets the opportunity to ask for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. The text seems to suggest that Elisha only got this opportunity because he had remained committed to being with Elijah until his departure. The idea of ‘double portion’ alludes to the OT covenant stipulation that the firstborn inherit a double share of the estate (Dt 21:15-17), which in this case is not land but the ministry of Elijah. Elisha is requesting to continue the ministry of Elijah with the spiritual power needed. Elijah is then taken whilst walking and talking with Elisha, separated by the chariots and horses of fire and taken up in a whirlwind. The tearing of his clothes could be to signify mourning for the passing of Elijah or could be to symbolise the end of his old life in preparation for the new. He then takes up Elijah’s cloak and continues the ministry.

Elijah’s parting of the waters reminds us of Moses parting the Red Sea (Ex 14:15); Elisha is able to repeat Elijah’s miracle of parting the waters and become to Elijah what Joshua was to Moses. In fact, the two names are very similar: Joshua means ‘the Lord saves’ whereas Elisha means ‘God saves’.

The chapter finishes with 2 miracles showing that Elisha is now God’s prophet. First he cleanses the spring of water at Jericho, and then he curses some youths who had been mocking him. Bethel was the chief centre of calf worship and the youths made fun of God and his prophet. As the text says 42 youths were mauled, it’s possible Elisha was in danger from more than just silly names and feared he might be attacked. Elisha leaves the judgement of the mocking youths to God, who sends the bears that attack them.

## 2 Kings 3-4 — God Provides for His People

Tue 4 Nov

The narrative returns to Joram the king of Israel and his efforts with the kings of Judah and Edom to resist the king of Moab. Moab was situated south of Israel and east of Judah. Did you know that in the British Museum there's an ancient stone called the Mesha Stele (discovered in 1868) that describes the events of 2 Kings 3 (though written from a Moabite viewpoint)? Read 2 Kings 3.

- Why might Joram have 'clung to the sins of Jeroboam', even though he got rid of the Baal worship stone?
- Why did God grant the three kings success in their battle, even though spiritually none of the three regions (Israel, Judah and Edom) was really following God?

The narrative now considers the ministry of Elisha, and describes 4 miracles. Read 2 Kings 4.

- In 2 Kings 4:1-7, Elisha is challenged to help a widow who has ended up in a situation where creditors could legitimately take her sons as payment for her debts. Would it be fair if the widow lost her sons? What is God's attitude to the vulnerable?
- How does Elisha find a solution that also requires the widow to act in faith?
- How can you imitate Elisha next time someone shares about a problem or challenge they are facing? How can you help that person act in faith?
- In 2 Kings 4:8-37, we read of a parent whose son dies at a young age. How do you think Elisha felt when the woman spoke to him in v28?
- What can we learn from the mother's attitude to getting a solution?
- In 2 Kings 4:38-44, Elisha uses God's power to feed two different groups. In what sense does Elisha take responsibility in these two situations?
- What can we learn about God from these four accounts, about His willingness to help people with difficult problems? How are you reminded of Jesus?

### Further Notes

2 Kings 3:1-3 - Joram's parents were Ahab and Jezebel, two of the worst monarch's in Israel's history. Even though he was not like them, he was still described as doing 'evil in the eyes of the Lord'.

2 Kings 3:6-8 - Jehoshaphat was a godly king of Judah (the son of Asa, 1 Kings 15:9-15), but whereas Asa fought Israel, Jehoshaphat made peace with them. Together they decided it was in their common interest to fight against Moab. Jehoshaphat also had control of Edom (1 Kings 22:47), which meant they could march through Edom and attack Moab from the south, also drawing on Edom's troops.

2 Kings 3:10-11 - Jehoram and Jehoshaphat interpret the drought differently: Jehoram sees it as God's judgement, whereas Jehoshaphat has faith that guidance and help can be sought from God.

2 Kings 3:13-15 - Elisha continues in the same vein as Elijah in speaking plainly to the king of Israel. He is not bothered that he might offend a king. Yet he is willing to cooperate due to the presence of Jehoshaphat King of Judah. The request for a harpist suggests that music helped Elisha pray or otherwise connect with God sufficiently to be able to receive God's direction (see 1 Sam 10:5-11 for another example of music and prophecy).

2 Kings 3:16-20 - God promises a miraculous solution to their need for water as well as victory in their conflict with Moab. The expression 'Make this valley full of ditches' may be an instruction to the kings or may be a part of the prophecy, i.e. that God will make the valley full of pools of water.

2 Kings 3:21-27 - God uses the water to help the armies and also to confuse the Moabites. This enables the three kings to attack Moab and inflict significant damage. It is ended when the desperate Moabite king sacrifices his own son, at which point the three kings leave Moab and retreat.

2 Kings 4:1-7 - Under Mosaic law the creditor was within his rights to take the widow's children until the Year of Jubilee in order to work off a debt.

2 Kings 4:27 - Elisha, though a prophet, could not see everything. He didn't know that the boy would die and had to follow God's leading after the boy's death.

## 2 Kings 5 — Naaman the Syrian

Wed 5 Nov

Elisha's ministry continues with the unexpected story of Naaman the Syrian – unexpected because Naaman is a high ranking enemy soldier who is healed by Elisha.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-19.

- What evidence is there that Naaman was eager to get healed?
- What evidence is there that Naaman struggled with pride?
- Why didn't Elisha want to accept any gift from Naaman?
- What do you think of Naaman's request in v18? Is this a reasonable concession or a poor compromise?

Read 2 Kings 5:20-27.

- Why didn't Gehazi tell Elisha that he disagreed with Elisha's refusal of Naaman's offer of a gift?
- Do you think Gehazi felt justified in approaching Naaman for the gift?
- Naaman actually offered Gehazi two talents of silver even though Gehazi only asked for one – could Gehazi have interpreted this as God's blessing?
- What can we learn from Gehazi's experience: he disagreed with Elisha, he didn't express his view but instead acted independently, he lied to Naaman and later to Elishah, he hid the silver and clothing when he got home, and he ended up with leprosy?
- What can you learn about pride and humility from Naaman, his servants, Elisha and Gehazi?
- Why are chapters 4 and 5 so focused on Elisha and his ministry, instead of the ruling kings? Did Elisha indeed get the 'double portion of spirit' that he asked for?

### Further Notes

2 Kings 5:1 - Aram (Syria) was a persistent enemy of both Israel and Judah, defeating Israel in 1 Kings 22:35-36. However, there was sufficient peace between the two for Naaman to approach Israel with gifts to help get healing. The 'leprosy' mentioned could be any kind of skin disease, not just leprosy, but what was important to the Jewish readers was that according to Lev 13-14, skin disease meant one was ceremonially unclean.

2 Kings 5:4-6 - Assuming silver is worth £0.42/g and gold £27.50/g, Naaman took more than £2 million with him. Clearly Naaman was serious about getting cured.

2 Kings 5:10 - Elisha instructed Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan; in Leviticus 13 and 14 the number seven is used for the number of days an infected person must be in isolation and also for the number of times a healed person is sprinkled with blood.

2 Kings 5:17-19 - Elisha is at pains to distance himself from the cleansing and so direct Naaman's attention to God, so refusing any monetary gift. Naaman wishes to take Israelite earth, presumably so he can build his own altar to the Lord. Naaman is now convinced that the Lord is the true God and realises the futility of worshipping the Syrian god Rimmon.

## 2 Kings 6-8 — Israel and Aram

Thu 6 Nov

After showing another of Elisha's miracles, the account turns back to the greater political tensions between Aram and Israel. During these 3 chapters Joram is king of Israel, whereas the kings of Judah are successively Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, then Ahaziah.

Read 2 Kings 6:1-24.

- In v15, how did Elisha's servant feel when he went out? Why didn't Elisha feel the same way?
- What NT passages describe the 'invisible yet real' spiritual world? What does this mean for us? How can your day be different knowing that there are spiritual forces on your side?

Read 2 Kings 6:24-7:20.

- Why did the king of Israel blame Elisha for the siege and famine? (See chapter 5.)
- What lesson are we to learn from the account of the king's officer in 7:2 and 7:17?
- The 4 lepers who discover that the Arameans have fled: what could have stopped them from returning to the city to tell the good news? In what ways are you like the lepers? What impact might you have if you imitate them today?

Read 2 Kings 8.

- What are some of the spiritual qualities of the Shunammite woman (see also 2 Kings 4)?
- How does Elisha feel when God reveals to him the future of Hazael? As a Christian, we in one sense know the future of those who are not in a right relationship with God – are we numb, blasé, indifferent to that future? Although God wants us to be joyful because we know Him, we must also retain a heart of compassion for those who don't (e.g. see Jesus' emotion for Jerusalem in Lk 13:34-36, knowing that Jerusalem would be invaded and the temple sacked).
- Who did Jehoram King of Judah marry? How did this affect him spiritually?

### Further Notes

2 Kings 6:9 - God helps the king of Israel through Elishah, although there is no evidence that the king has repented; this help is simply an example of God's grace.

2 Kings 6:17 - The spiritual army is the same one that Elisha saw in 2 Kings 2:11 when Elijah was taken. Passages such as Eph 6 and Heb 1 show that we live with an unseen spiritual world around us, unseen yet very much real. The challenge for us is to be always aware of this truth. Note also that it was God who opened the servant's eyes, not Elisha – sometimes we can feel frustrated that our friends do not see the truth. We must pray that God open their eyes.

2 Kings 6:22-23 - The king shows humility and follows Elisha's advice in not killing the Arameans, resulting in a period of peace.

2 Kings 6:30 - The sackcloth worn by the king was a sign of humility before God when faced with the disaster of the siege and famine.

2 Kings 8:1-6 - The Shunammite woman forfeited her lands when she left to avoid the famine. She boldly attempted to get them back when she returned, God blessing her faith through the conversation of Gehazi and the king.

2 Kings 8:7-15 - Despite earlier hostility from the king of Aram to Elisha, the king now seeks Elisha's advice when he is very ill. Elisha foresees that the king will recover yet be murdered soon after. He also sees the coming judgement (of God) on Israel that will be enacted through Hazael and the suffering this will cause. Despite the foresight, Elisha is powerless to prevent this judgement (Hazael fights against Israel in v28).

2 Kings 8:16-29 - The history of the kings of Judah paused in 1 Kings 22:50 and now resumes with Jehoram (or Joram), not to be confused with the king of Israel with the same name. Jehoram is an evil king, likened to the kings of Israel and married to Ahab's daughter. Perhaps he believed that marrying into Israel's royal family would strengthen his kingdom, whereas it did the opposite. Jehoram reigns just 8 years and is succeeded by his son Ahaziah, another evil king, who only rules for 1 year.

## 2 Kings 9-10 — King Jehu of Israel

Fri 7 Nov

These two chapters are full of bloodshed. The promised retribution for the house of Ahab is now fulfilled through the new king of Israel, Jehu. Ahab and his wife Jezebel were particularly evil and back in the time of Elijah, God stated that Ahab's family would be wiped out as punishment for their sins (1 Kings 19:15-18; 21:21-29). It was also prophesied that Hazael of Aram would play a part in their destruction.

Read 2 Kings 9.

- Why did Elisha send a prophet to anoint Jehu?
- Where do Jehu, Joram King of Israel and Ahaziah King of Judah meet? What is significant about that place (see 1 Kings 21)?
- Why did God allow Ahaziah King of Judah to die there too?
- In this chapter, God metes out justice to evil kings. Do you feel God is just, too harsh or too soft? In your own life, do you find it a struggle to accept the justice of God?

Read 2 Kings 10.

- Why did Jehu befriend Jehonadab (see Jeremiah 35)?
- God is pleased with Jehu in verse 30; yet how does Jehu respond?

### Further Notes

2 Kings 9:1 - On the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (King of Assyria), in the British Museum, are 2 inscriptions about Jehu King of Israel. This allows very accurate dating of these events to 841BC.

2 Kings 9:4-10 - The anointing of Jehu completes the instruction originally given in 1 Kings 19 to Elijah, and it gave Jehu a mandate from God to take the crown.

2 Kings 9:21 - The land where they meet is a plot owned by Naboth, possibly the same plot where Naboth was killed by Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21. The deaths of Ahab's family line were prophesied by Elijah as retribution for Naboth and his family's deaths.

2 Kings 9:27 - Ahaziah is also killed, as he had married into Ahab's family.

2 Kings 9:30 - Jezebel is wearing the attire of a prostitute, unrepentant even at the end of her life. She taunts Jehu, comparing his reign to that of the short-lived Zimri (1 Kings 16:8-20) who also rebelled against the king of Israel, reigning however just 7 days.

2 Kings 9:36-37 - Jezebel dies in accordance with Elijah's prophecy of 1 Kings 21:23, the dogs devouring her body before she can be buried.

2 Kings 10:9-10 - Jehu explains that though he had killed the king, someone else had killed the other seventy descendants of Ahab – that in effect, this was God working out His will, not just a coup by Jehu.

2 Kings 10:15 - Jehonadab is the founder of the Recabites, a reform movement protesting against the impure, ungodly lives of the people at that time. In Jeremiah 35, Jeremiah meets descendants of the group Jehonadab founded and God uses them as an example of obedience and faithfulness, showing that it is possible to live righteously despite the unrighteousness of those around them.

2 Kings 10:15 - Jehu's question to Jehonadab "Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?" could also be translated "is your heart right?" The theme here and throughout this chapter is "are you right with God and his justice".

2 Kings 10:18-28 - Jehu continues to implement the judgement initiated against Baal-worship when Elijah had faced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).

2 Kings 10:29-36 - God rewards Jehu for carrying out His commands, yet Jehu is not fully committed to God and continues to worship idols (see Hos 1:4, where God condemns Jehu). Jehu received God's blessing yet eventually rejects God – another example of God blessing someone who nevertheless chooses to follow their own path away from Him. Consequently, Israel's territory is further reduced (v32), so that the lands east of the Jordan, held for nearly 600 years, are now lost to Hazael.

## 2 Kings 11-12 — Saving David's Line

Mon 10 Nov

- What does Joash's survival of Athaliah's reign tell you about God's promises to David? How does this shed light on God's faithfulness to us today as Christians?
- Considering that Athaliah was Jezebel's daughter and likewise a Baal worshiper, and also considering the influence she eventually had on Judah, and the turn of events that nearly led to the line of David being extinguished, what are your thoughts on alliances or partnerships with people who are not God-centred?
- Jehosheba and Jehoiada were notably faithful and passionate in reaching out to save Joash and hide him for 6 or 7 years. They also risked their lives to support him as king against the reigning queen. As a Christian, in what areas can you grow in faith and passion? What risks can you take for God?

### Further Notes

After King Ahaziah was killed (see chapter 9), his mother Athaliah, a Baal worshiper, usurped the throne of Judah by killing the king's children. Only one, Joash, a very young child, escaped massacre, with the help of his aunt, Jehosheba. Although Jehosheba was sister of the deceased King Ahaziah, she was probably only a half-sister, i.e. not a daughter of Athaliah but of another wife of King Joram. Otherwise she would probably not have been given in marriage to God's High Priest, Jehoiada. Joash was hidden in the temple (probably one of the buildings adjoined to the temple and part of the temple compound) and eventually deposed Athaliah with help of Jehoiada and other supporters. All in all, this looked like a close call, as the line of David was nearly extinguished by Athaliah, but even at such a time God was in control and His promise to David of a continuing dynasty prevailed.

Joash is reported in the book of Kings as doing right in the eyes of the Lord, and indeed he did much to restore temple worship and destroy the main centres of Baal worship in the nation. However, according to the parallel account of 2 Chr 24, in the latter years of his reign, after the death of Jehoiada, Joash was influenced by leaders in his government, and began to worship idols. God sent prophets to warn him, but he even went as far as killing the prophet Zechariah, who condemned his actions. It is puzzling how Joash would be portrayed in a positive light given his later actions. Perhaps an explanation could be that the book of Kings takes into account that his aggregate impact on Judah as a nation was positive given that the nation went from predominant Baal worship to predominant Jehovah worship.

## 2 Kings 13; 14:23-29; 15:8-31 — Eight Kings of Israel

Tue 11 Nov

This collection of passages focuses on various kings of Israel, namely Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekaniah and Pekah. All of the kings in these passages are reported as doing evil in God's eyes. King Jehoahaz and the people suffered greatly under the opposition of the king of Aram, leading him to seek God. God's compassion was aroused in response (2 Ki 13:4; 14:26-27) and He gave relief through a series of deliverers. This deliverance came in Jehoahaz's lifetime (13:5) and then in the victories over Aram of his son Jehoash (13:25) as prophesied by Elisha (13:19) and later through his grandson Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:25,28). The change of heart in Jehoahaz was perhaps also the fruit of Elijah and Elisha's ministry in Israel. We can also see in Jehoash some regard for Elisha. However, it seems that there was no significant repentance in these kings and the people; they continued the idolatrous worship that Jeroboam I had established. So all the blessings were purely due to God's grace and love toward Israel.

The monarchy of Israel became increasingly unstable. The dynasty that started with king Jehu ended after four generations with king Zechariah. From his death onward, except for from Menahem to Pekaniah, we see reigns resulting from usurpations through assassinations and not through the bloodline. Because some of these reigns were short-lived, this was a time of much political instability for Israel. In the reign of King Pekah, the Assyrian king made incursions into Israel and we see a partial exile of Israel. The kingdom of Israel was slipping toward its final fate, as the prophets from Moses onward had warned them.

- Considering the continued unfaithfulness of the kings of Israel and the people (13:6) and God's response in 13:14 and 14:26-27, how does this affect your view of God's compassion and grace? Are blessings given only to those who are in a right relationship with God? Why?
- Elisha's reproach of Jehoash for hitting the ground only 3 times revealed a lack of wholeheartedness which denied the king complete victory over Aram. Is there an area you lack wholeheartedness toward God? Spiritually how has this affected you?

## **2 Ki 14:1-22; 15:1-7; 15:32-16:20 — Four Kings of Judah      Wed 12 Nov**

This collection of passages focuses on four Kings of Judah, namely Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham and Ahaz. The first three of these kings are reported as doing right but not completely eradicating the high places. Of these kings, it seems that at least some of them had issues with pride and idolatry. For example, Amaziah in the final years of his life became idolatrous (see parallel passage 2 Chr 25:14-28) and was, as a consequence, eventually assassinated by some of his own people. Also, God reprimanded Azariah with leprosy for trying to offer up incense in the Lord's temple, a role defined for priest alone (see parallel passage in 2 Chr 26:16-21 – note he is called Uzziah here). Nevertheless, these kings were reported as doing good, perhaps because in some sense, their influence did more good than harm and promoted the nation's faithfulness to God, despite their shortcomings.

Ahaz however is the one that is stated as bringing about great unfaithfulness of the nation of Judah with his encouragement of worship of heathen gods (2 Ki 16:2-4), which went as far as sacrificing his children to Molech – a first among Judean kings. 2 Chr 28:19 sums it up by stating that Ahaz “promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the Lord” (NIV). Historically, Ahaz's reign came about after the economically prosperous reigns of Azariah and Jotham where the people (and notably the upper class) became more unrighteous and forgot God. Under Ahaz, this culminated in apostasy.

This brought about the judgement of God in the form of invasion by Rezin king of Aram and Pekah of Israel. Rather than repenting, Ahaz chose to rely on an alliance with the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser. Also Ahaz felt free to change the configuration of altars, the order of worship and the artifacts around the temple, which were provided by God through David (see 1 Chr 28:19). Ahaz effectively adapted temple worship to his own flavour of worship and to satisfy the whims of his ally the Assyrian king. In the later years of his reign Ahaz went as far as closing down the temple (2 Chr 28:24-25) undermining corporate Jehovah worship for Judah and promoting idol worship.

- Like Judah in the days of these kings, does comfort, success, or prosperity lead you to be less passionate and dependent on God? Do you find yourself forgetting Him? How can you draw closer to God and embrace his will, without being distracted by these blessings from Him?
- Ahaz adapted temple worship based on his own view of Jehovah worship and outside influence e.g. his desire to please his Assyrian ally. Reflect on how society and your perceptions may inhibit a correct view of God. Is there anything in your worship of God that is influenced by the world or your desire to please others?

At this point, in the reign of king Hoshea, the full extent of judgement is carried out upon Israel as the northern kingdom is sent into exile. As Assyria continues its campaign, it eventually conquers and exiles the northern kingdom and repopulates the land with colonists from other parts of the Assyrian Empire who bring with them their various religions.

These passages bring to conclusion the covenant curses God spoke out in Lev 26:14-45 and Dt 28:15-68. This chapter stands as a sobering summary of the unfaithfulness of the northern kingdom over centuries. The summary starts by recalling God's initial kindness towards the Hebrew nation. The writer makes it very clear that God had remained faithful while His people continually rejected the covenant and the warnings of the prophets, and thus the disaster that had come was God's judgement and fully under God's control. Note that, although this summary is addressed to Israel, Judah is included in this summary (v19) as a foreboding of what is to come later.

- As the Kingdom of Israel comes to an end, what has characterised the reign of the last 4 kings of Israel?
- Consider the very slow drift from faithfulness to God to complete unfaithfulness and eventual rejection. What strengthens your resolve to recognise and revert any drift in your relationship with God?
- Consider the tension that Christians have to address today, "being in the world but not of this world." Are you faithful to God's covenant with you?
- Considering God's covenant blessings and curses in Leviticus 26, and the timing in which Israel was eventually exiled, what does this state about God's patience, long-suffering and love? How should this influence our behaviour?

### **Further Notes**

Shalmaneser, King of Assyria continues the campaign of his predecessor Tiglath-Pileser. He starts off making King Hoshea subject by having him pay tribute but eventually discovers Hoshea's ploy to rebel by securing help from Egypt, and he brings Hoshea's reign to an abrupt end. It is quite probable that the Assyrian king who brought in the colonists to re-populate Samaria is a king after Shalmaneser, as indicated by Ezra 4:2. This would have meant that the land was allowed to lie abandoned and uncultivated for a long period of time, in line with Lev 26:34-35.

The colonists of v24, in response to the ongoing lion attacks, requested that they be taught the religion of the land. This led to the re-introduction of Jehovah worship (v28), but it was mixed with worship of calf idols, as it came through an exiled priest from Samaria who settled in Bethel, one of the capitals where calf worship was based prior to the exile. As before, a tolerance of other gods was allowed along with Jehovah worship. Eventually the descendants of these colonists adopted monotheism and became the people known as Samaritans in the days of Jesus.

## 2 Kings 18 — The Good King Hezekiah

Fri 14 Nov

- Hezekiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (v3), “trusted in the Lord” (v5) and “the Lord was with him” (v7). What did he ‘do right’? In what way did he ‘trust in the Lord’? In what way was ‘the Lord with him’?
- Hezekiah heeded Isaiah’s warnings the first time around and didn’t rebel but instead made careful preparations and improvements throughout Judah in case a more opportune time presented itself in the future. Was this wise? Was this being faithful?
- Hezekiah didn’t listen to Isaiah the second time around. Was he quick in recognising his sin? Did he make every effort to make amends?

### Further Notes

Assyrian Kings during this period		Kings of Judah during this period	
Shalmaneser V	727-723 BC	Ahaz	735-715 BC
Sargon II	722-705 BC	Hezekiah	715-687 BC
Sennacherib	705-681 BC	Manasseh	687-642 BC
Esarhaddon	681-669 BC	Amon	642-640 BC
Ashurbanipal	668-627 BC	Josiah	640-609 BC

The northern kingdom of Israel is no more. Shalmaneser V (727-723 BC) has taken many away captive to be scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. King Hezekiah of Judah comes to the throne during the reign of the following King of Assyria, Sargon II (722-705 BC). Sargon is preoccupied with securing his borders to the north and east of the empire and so Egypt and several Philistine kings approach Hezekiah to join their rebellion from Assyria during this time of perceived instability. Isaiah, however, warns against this course of action (Is 14:28-32; 20:1-6). Hezekiah, God-fearing man that he is, takes heed of Isaiah’s warning and declines the invitation to rebel but instead begins sweeping change and preparations for a future independent Judah. Hezekiah initiates religious reform (2 Chr 29-32; 2 Ki 18:3-7a), re-organises the army and civil services (2 Chr 32:5-6, 27-29) and builds a water supply in Jerusalem in case of siege (2 Ki 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30; Is 22:9-11).

Hezekiah’s chance for an independent Judah comes with the death of Sargon II in 705 BC. Both Egypt and Babylon invite Hezekiah to join in rebellion. Isaiah again warns against this (Is 30:1-7; 31:1-3), but this time Hezekiah does not listen. Hezekiah defeats Padi the Philistine King of Ekron (2 Kings 18:8), the only Philistine king to disagree with the rebellion. The new Assyrian King Sennacherib records this describing, “the officials, the politicians and the people of Ekron had thrown Padi their king into fetters and handed him over to Hezekiah the Jew”.

Sennacherib (705-681) acts swiftly; he razes most of Judah and has Jerusalem placed under siege (2 Kings 18:14-16). Hezekiah tries to avert disaster by paying tribute to Assyria, but this is either rejected or is too little too late, for the siege continued. Sennacherib sends officials to intimidate the people of Jerusalem and they publicly mock God and anyone trusting in Him — a bad move, as we will see in the next chapter.

## 2 Kings 19 — Hezekiah: Humble and Prayerful

Mon 17 Nov

Hezekiah had rebelled against Sennacherib (705-681) despite Isaiah's warning (Is 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Now Sennacherib's army has razed Judah and besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah confesses his sin (2 Kings 18:14) and tries to make amends by offering tribute to Assyria but to no avail.

- When have you approached God so humbly and seen your sin so clearly as Hezekiah in v1-4? How did this improve your relationship with God?
- Are you concerned when people speak blasphemy against God?
- How does God respond to Hezekiah via Isaiah in v6-7? Have you experienced God's grace in a similar way, e.g. in your health or finances?
- Assyria was the superpower of its day. Hezekiah asking for deliverance from Assyria in v14-19 is like Wales asking for help against invasion from China. When was the last time you asked God for the impossible?
- Do you believe that God is over "all the kingdoms of the earth" (v15), and that God gave the Assyrians their victories (v25), although they were arrogant and raged against Him (v27-28)? Do you believe God has a purpose in the current unrest around the world?
- In v20-37, God responds to Hezekiah's prayer in a powerful and miraculous way. How is God working powerfully and miraculously in your life? Have you been asking him to?

## 2 Kings 20-21 — Hezekiah and Manasseh

Tue 18 Nov

Hezekiah is terminally ill. Isaiah delivers God's message to him that "you will not recover" (v1). On his deathbed he reflects on his relationship with God, turns his face to the wall and pleads in prayer to the God who had answered his impossible prayers before and sent an angel to save Jerusalem from an Assyrian army (2 Ki 19:35-37).

- Why did Hezekiah beg for healing? (For one possible reason, see 2 Ki 21:1 and think about when his son was born.)
- Why do you think God reversed his decision and gave Hezekiah another 15 years?
- Would you want another 15 years of life? Why or why not?
- As you read this, you are dying. It's terminal I'm afraid. Nothing will save you, there is no cure for life. Life ends in death. But God has revealed to you through scripture that His Son Jesus has died for your sins so that you might have eternal life in heaven after this short one here! How will you spend this precious time you have left here?

Hezekiah receives messengers and a get well gift from Babylon and extends his hospitality even to the point of showing them all the treasures of the palace. So hospitable, so trusting, and as it turns out, so naive. Isaiah turns up, questions Hezekiah about the visit then delivers some bad news as a consequence of Hezekiah's actions (2 Ki 20:18-19).

- How does Hezekiah respond? Is he repentant? Surrendered? Ambivalent?

After Hezekiah's death he is succeeded by his son Manasseh (687-642). There followed 55 years of evil, detestable practices, idolatry and innocent blood by the will and hand of good King Hezekiah's own son. After Manasseh's death his son Amon (642-640) succeeded him but reigned with an evil heart for only 2 years before he was assassinated and replaced by his son Josiah.

- The warnings of judgement (21:11-15) contain some very strong language concerning the nature of the punishment as well as the reason for it. How would you respond if someone said this about you? Why do you think Manasseh failed to respond?

## 2 Kings 22 — The Last Good King of Judah

Wed 19 Nov

The Assyrian King Sennacherib had been murdered in 681 BC. His successor was Esarhaddon (681-669 BC), who was to be one of Assyria's most powerful rulers. When he died the empire was divided between his two sons, Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) who reigned in Nineveh, and Shamash-Shanakin at Babylon. Before long, there was feuding between the brothers. This precipitated the Egyptians regaining their independence, attacks on the borders from Lydia in the North-west, the Medes in the East and hordes of Scythians from the North.

A few years after Ashurbanipal's death the once mighty Assyrians found themselves fighting for survival against the Babylonians and the Medes. This weakening of Assyria provided an opportunity for Josiah to strive for an independent Judah. And indeed archaeological evidence shows that he had considerable success in extending his territory. He had already begun remedial work on the Temple of the Lord when the Book of the Law was found. This find inspired Josiah to push for sweeping religious change calling the people back to the standards of worship and lifestyle as reflected in the Word.

- Reflect on a time when the Word had such a profound impact on you. What did you change and how has it affected your Christian walk?
- How do you respond to God's word now?

## 2 Kings 23 — Judah No More

Thu 20 Nov

Despite the message from the prophetess Huldah in regards to God's judgement on Judah, Josiah demonstrated his determination to do the right thing. He aggressively removed paganism from Judah and called the people to hear the Book of the Law read out, and he renewed the covenant with the Lord (v1-3). It was a powerful time of corporate repentance on a national scale! Passover was celebrated for the first time since the days of the Judges. Judah was on a spiritual high for the first time in a long time. And all this Josiah did tirelessly after being told that Judah was doomed!

- Knowing he was unlikely to succeed in saving Judah from God's wrath, did Josiah hold anything back (v25)? What do you think motivated Josiah? How do you think he viewed God and His mercy?
- If you know you're going to lose, would you still fight the good fight for the Lord?
- If the person you're reaching out to isn't open, will you still give your heart?
- If your finances are dire, will you still give God his tithe?
- If your marriage isn't great, will you still love him or her as Christ would?
- Are you giving your whole heart, or holding something back?
- What motivates you? Do you only give your best when you can see that your efforts will be rewarded on earth? Or do you believe that God's rewards beyond this life will be even better (Eph 1:18; Heb 11:6,13-16,26,35-40; Rev 22:20)?

### Further Notes

In verses 29-30 Josiah died in battle against Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt (610-595 BC) who was on his way to help the Assyrians against the Babylonians, who had by that time become more powerful than either of them. There seems to be no reason for Josiah to have been involved in that battle. Why he was is unknown.

His son Jehoaahaz who succeeded him was deposed after 3 months by the Egyptians, who placed one of his brothers on the throne and imposed a heavy burden of tribute payments on the land.

## 2 Kings 24-25 — Judah in Exile

Fri 21 Nov

Chapters 24 and 25 cover a succession of kings of Judah who all did evil in the eyes of the Lord, drawing the kingdom of Judah to a close with the taking of Jerusalem in 597 BC by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC).

- Considering that God had been warning Israel and Judah through the prophets for centuries, are you surprised when God finally carried out his judgement?
- Does the severity of the judgement shock you (21:12)?
- What did you learn about God's character from these chapters?
- What did you learn about God from the whole two books of Kings?
- You might not feel inspired or filled with hope when you consider the 400 years of history of God's people covered by Kings. Reading about church history can be equally depressing. People are sinful. Reflect on Israel's history and read Jer 17:5-8. Where does your hope come from? Where do you look for inspiration?

### Further Notes

As bleak as these 2 last chapters are, it does not end there. God has kept his promises (covenant blessings and curses) and will continue to keep them, even in exile (see Dt 30:1-10).

1 & 2 Kings has shown how wayward man is. Yet God has preserved the line of David (as promised) through Jehoiachin and God still favours his people – they are not cast away forever. We get a glimpse of hope from the treatment of Jehoiachin in 25:27-30. This reminds us of God's promise to David, in particular God's bigger plan of redemptive history, through which we are blessed as Christians.