



I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience™

May 31 - June 27, 2026
Pages 153-271 (Week 5-8)

KINGDOMS

FAMILY GUIDE

*Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant, we pray,
that we might be grounded and settled
in your truth
by the coming of your Holy Spirit
into our hearts.*

*What we do not know,
reveal to us;
what is lacking within us,
make complete;
that which we do know,
confirm in us;
and keep us blameless in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

Immerse: Kingdoms Family Guide copyright © 2018 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Features and Bible helps copyright © 2018 by the Institute for Bible Reading. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Company Bell. Illustrations copyright © Rachael Van Dyke. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

TYNDALE, *New Living Translation*, *NLT*, and the New Living Translation logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Immerse, *Immerse: The Reading Bible*, and *Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience* are trademarks of the Institute for Bible Reading.

—— Welcome to ——

I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience

Leading a family is arguably one of the most challenging tasks a person can undertake. And since families are the core unit in the church, their growth and development directly impacts the health of the communities where they serve. The *Immerse: Kingdoms Family Reading Guide* is a resource designed to assist parents, guardians, and other family leaders to guide their families in the transformative Immerse experience.

Planning Your Family Experience

This family guide is essentially an abridged version of *Immerse: Kingdoms*. So it's an excellent way for young readers in your family to participate in the Immerse experience without becoming overwhelmed. The readings are shorter than the readings in *Immerse: Kingdoms* and are always drawn from within a single day's reading. This helps everyone in the family to stay together, whether reading from the family guide or the complete *Kingdoms* volume.

Each daily Bible reading in the family guide is introduced by a short paragraph to orient young readers to what they are about to read. This paragraph will also help to connect the individual daily Scripture passages to the big story revealed in the whole Bible. (This is an excellent tool for helping you guide your family discussions.)

The family guide readings end with a feature called Talking Together, created especially for young readers. These provide reflective statements and questions to help them think more deeply about the Scriptures they have read. (Talking Together is also useful for guiding your family discussions.)

The readings in the family guide are intended primarily for children in grades 4 to 8. Older children may be better suited for reading the full text of *Immerse: Kingdoms*. (These age suggestions are only provided as a guideline. You know what is most appropriate for your children.)

Sometimes the best way to get everyone on the same page is to read something together aloud. If your family enjoys reading aloud together on a regular basis, that may be the most natural way for you to use the family reading guide. For families that haven't tried this, you may want to experiment with it by reading from this guide. Begin each daily reading with the introductory paragraph to give context, followed immediately by the daily Scripture passage. Then the Talking Together feature can help you lead a family discussion.

And don't forget about the audio and video resources available at ImmerseBible.com. These small group tools could be just what your family needs to stay engaged in the Immerse experience.

Enjoy your journey into Scripture with your family. We hope and pray that this family resource will help you and your family to experience God's word together.

- **St. Luke Note:** Since our IMMERSE campaign covers the second half of the *Kingdoms*, you'll notice that this family guide also starts in the second half - starting at Day 21 and ending with Day 40. Each lesson has been marked with the corresponding St. Luke campaign days for ease of reference, but you can pace them however you'd like for your own family use!

could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing.”

“Well, stay here today,” David told him, “and tomorrow you may return to the army.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then he couldn’t get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance with the king’s palace guard.

So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, “Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed.” So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy’s strongest men were fighting. And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

Then Joab sent a battle report to David. He told his messenger, “Report all the news of the battle to the king. But he might get angry and ask, ‘Why did the troops go so close to the city? Didn’t they know there would be shooting from the walls? Wasn’t Abimelech son of Gideon killed at Thebez by a woman who threw a millstone down on him from the wall? Why would you get so close to the wall?’ Then tell him, ‘Uriah the Hittite was killed, too.’”

So the messenger went to Jerusalem and gave a complete report to David. “The enemy came out against us in the open fields,” he said. “And as we chased them back to the city gate, the archers on the wall shot arrows at us. Some of the king’s men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite.”

“Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged,” David said. “The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow! Fight harder next time, and conquer the city!”

When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the LORD was displeased with what David had done.

So the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: “There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man’s own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man’s lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest.”

David was furious. “As surely as the LORD lives,” he vowed, “any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are that man! The LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own.

“This is what the LORD says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel.”

Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Nathan replied, “Yes, but the LORD has forgiven you, and you won’t die for this sin. Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the word of the LORD by doing this, your child will die.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

So what happens when good people do bad things? Are there consequences? How does God respond? Does this ruin God’s plan to do something good through David’s life? What about us, today, when we fall into wrongdoing?

May 31–June 6

DAY 21

Rebellion in the Kingdom

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 156–158)

Strife had now entered King David’s household. One of David’s sons, Amnon, had raped his half sister Tamar. This ruined Tamar’s life and led Tamar’s brother Absalom to hate Amnon so much that he plotted to

kill him. David never punished Amnon for his great wrongdoing against Tamar. Two years later, Absalom killed Amnon and then ran away to another country. Eventually, David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem, the city of the King. But all was not well.



Now Absalom was praised as the most handsome man in all Israel. He was flawless from head to foot. He cut his hair only once a year, and then only because it was so heavy. When he weighed it out, it came to five pounds! He had three sons and one daughter. His daughter's name was Tamar, and she was very beautiful.

Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years, but he never got to see the king. Then Absalom sent for Joab to ask him to intercede for him, but Joab refused to come. Absalom sent for him a second time, but again Joab refused to come. So Absalom said to his servants, "Go and set fire to Joab's barley field, the field next to mine." So they set his field on fire, as Absalom had commanded.

Then Joab came to Absalom at his house and demanded, "Why did your servants set my field on fire?"

And Absalom replied, "Because I wanted you to ask the king why he brought me back from Geshur if he didn't intend to see me. I might as well have stayed there. Let me see the king; if he finds me guilty of anything, then let him kill me."

So Joab told the king what Absalom had said. Then at last David summoned Absalom, who came and bowed low before the king, and the king kissed him.

After this, Absalom bought a chariot and horses, and he hired fifty bodyguards to run ahead of him. He got up early every morning and went out to the gate of the city. When people brought a case to the king for judgment, Absalom would ask where in Israel they were from, and they would tell him their tribe. Then Absalom would say, "You've really got a strong case here! It's too bad the king doesn't have anyone to hear it. I wish I were the judge. Then everyone could bring their cases to me for judgment, and I would give them justice!"

When people tried to bow before him, Absalom wouldn't let them. Instead, he took them by the hand and kissed them. Absalom did this with everyone who came to the king for judgment, and so he stole the hearts of all the people of Israel.

After four years, Absalom said to the king, "Let me go to Hebron to offer a sacrifice to the Lord and fulfill a vow I made to him. For while your

servant was at Geshur in Aram, I promised to sacrifice to the LORD in Hebron if he would bring me back to Jerusalem."

"All right," the king told him. "Go and fulfill your vow."

So Absalom went to Hebron. But while he was there, he sent secret messengers to all the tribes of Israel to stir up a rebellion against the king. "As soon as you hear the ram's horn," his message read, "you are to say, 'Absalom has been crowned king in Hebron.'" He took 200 men from Jerusalem with him as guests, but they knew nothing of his intentions. While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, one of David's counselors who lived in Giloh. Soon many others also joined Absalom, and the conspiracy gained momentum.

A messenger soon arrived in Jerusalem to tell David, "All Israel has joined Absalom in a conspiracy against you!"

"Then we must flee at once, or it will be too late!" David urged his men. "Hurry! If we get out of the city before Absalom arrives, both we and the city of Jerusalem will be spared from disaster."

"We are with you," his advisers replied. "Do what you think is best."

So the king and all his household set out at once. He left no one behind except ten of his concubines to look after the palace. The king and all his people set out on foot, pausing at the last house to let all the king's men move past to lead the way. There were 600 men from Gath who had come with David, along with the king's bodyguard.

Then the king turned and said to Ittai, a leader of the men from Gath, "Why are you coming with us? Go on back to King Absalom, for you are a guest in Israel, a foreigner in exile. You arrived only recently, and should I force you today to wander with us? I don't even know where we will go. Go on back and take your kinsmen with you, and may the LORD show you his unfailing love and faithfulness."

But Ittai said to the king, "I vow by the LORD and by your own life that I will go wherever my lord the king goes, no matter what happens—whether it means life or death."

David replied, "All right, come with us." So Ittai and all his men and their families went along.

Everyone cried loudly as the king and his followers passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley and then went out toward the wilderness.

Zadok and all the Levites also came along, carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until everyone had passed out of the city.

Then the king instructed Zadok to take the Ark of God back into the city. "If the LORD sees fit," David said, "he will bring me back to see the

Ark and the Tabernacle again. But if he is through with me, then let him do what seems best to him.”

The king also told Zadok the priest, “Look, here is my plan. You and Abiathar should return quietly to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan. I will stop at the shallows of the Jordan River and wait there for a report from you.” So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to the city and stayed there.

David walked up the road to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning. And the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they climbed the hill.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever had someone close to you turn against you? If you’ve ever been betrayed, you know it is a painful feeling. This is how David felt when his own son turned against him. David had failed to take care of a big problem in his family, and this was one of the consequences. God had made promises and would keep them for David and his descendants, but David still had to deal with the results of his own wrongdoing. Do you think this is true for us, too? Is God faithful to us? Do we still have to deal with the consequences of what we do?

DAY 22

May 31–June 6

The Fate of the Rebellion

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 160–163)

David’s friend and advisor Hushai remained loyal and stayed with David when he fled Jerusalem. But David sent him back, hoping he might be able to give Absalom bad advice. The question is whether Absalom would accept Hushai and follow his advice.



Meanwhile, Absalom and all the army of Israel arrived at Jerusalem, accompanied by Ahithophel. When David’s friend Hushai the Arkite arrived,

he went immediately to see Absalom. “Long live the king!” he exclaimed. “Long live the king!”

“Is this the way you treat your friend David?” Absalom asked him. “Why aren’t you with him?”

“I’m here because I belong to the man who is chosen by the LORD and by all the men of Israel,” Hushai replied. “And anyway, why shouldn’t I serve you? Just as I was your father’s adviser, now I will be your adviser!”

Then Absalom turned to Ahithophel and asked him, “What should I do next?”

Ahithophel told him, “Go and sleep with your father’s concubines, for he has left them here to look after the palace. Then all Israel will know that you have insulted your father beyond hope of reconciliation, and they will throw their support to you.” So they set up a tent on the palace roof where everyone could see it, and Absalom went in and had sex with his father’s concubines.

Absalom followed Ahithophel’s advice, just as David had done. For every word Ahithophel spoke seemed as wise as though it had come directly from the mouth of God.

Now Ahithophel urged Absalom, “Let me choose 12,000 men to start out after David tonight. I will catch up with him while he is weary and discouraged. He and his troops will panic, and everyone will run away. Then I will kill only the king, and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride returns to her husband. After all, it is only one man’s life that you seek. Then you will be at peace with all the people.” This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

But then Absalom said, “Bring in Hushai the Arkite. Let’s see what he thinks about this.” When Hushai arrived, Absalom told him what Ahithophel had said. Then he asked, “What is your opinion? Should we follow Ahithophel’s advice? If not, what do you suggest?”

“Well,” Hushai replied to Absalom, “this time Ahithophel has made a mistake. You know your father and his men; they are mighty warriors. Right now they are as enraged as a mother bear who has been robbed of her cubs. And remember that your father is an experienced man of war. He won’t be spending the night among the troops. He has probably already hidden in some pit or cave. And when he comes out and attacks and a few of your men fall, there will be panic among your troops, and the word will spread that Absalom’s men are being slaughtered. Then even the bravest soldiers, though they have the heart of a lion, will be paralyzed with fear. For all Israel knows what a mighty warrior your father is and how courageous his men are.

“I recommend that you mobilize the entire army of Israel, bringing them from as far away as Dan in the north and Beersheba in the south. That

way you will have an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore. And I advise that you personally lead the troops. When we find David, we'll fall on him like dew that falls on the ground. Then neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. And if David were to escape into some town, you will have all Israel there at your command. Then we can take ropes and drag the walls of the town into the nearest valley until every stone is torn down."

Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "Hushai's advice is better than Ahithophel's." For the LORD had determined to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, which really was the better plan, so that he could bring disaster on Absalom! . . .

During the battle, Absalom happened to come upon some of David's men. He tried to escape on his mule, but as he rode beneath the thick branches of a great tree, his hair got caught in the tree. His mule kept going and left him dangling in the air. One of David's men saw what had happened and told Joab, "I saw Absalom dangling from a great tree."

"What?" Joab demanded. "You saw him there and didn't kill him? I would have rewarded you with ten pieces of silver and a hero's belt!"

"I would not kill the king's son for even a thousand pieces of silver," the man replied to Joab. "We all heard the king say to you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake, please spare young Absalom.' And if I had betrayed the king by killing his son—and the king would certainly find out who did it—you yourself would be the first to abandon me."

"Enough of this nonsense," Joab said. Then he took three daggers and plunged them into Absalom's heart as he dangled, still alive, in the great tree. Ten of Joab's young armor bearers then surrounded Absalom and killed him.

Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and his men returned from chasing the army of Israel. They threw Absalom's body into a deep pit in the forest and piled a great heap of stones over it. And all Israel fled to their homes.

—from the book of Samuel–Kings

TALKING TOGETHER:

The story of history is the story of a very human drama. We are the ones who make decisions and plans and try to make them work. We interact with other people, and it goes well or badly—or sometimes both. Beautiful things happen, but terrible things also happen. Either way, history is our story. But history is also God's story. God is involved, working to ultimately make his own intentions a reality in our world. This is part of the mystery of the Bible—God and people are both playing

their roles. It's important to remember both sides of this: We must do all we can to bring more goodness and life into our world, and we must also pray and watch for what God is doing. What would be the danger of focusing on only one side of this—our part or God's part—and neglecting the other?

May 31–June 6

DAY 23

Remembering David, His Men, and His God

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 169–173)

David was the greatest king in ancient Israel—warrior, leader, true worshiper of God, even singer and musician. But no one accomplishes these things all alone. David was surrounded by others who loyally served him and made his kingdom possible. And over it all, and constantly working in and through everything, is David's God. So David sings a song to the LORD, acknowledging that in the end it was God who saved David, saved Israel, and will save the world.



Once again the Philistines were at war with Israel. And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted. Ishbi-benob was a descendant of the giants; his bronze spearhead weighed more than seven pounds, and he was armed with a new sword. He had cornered David and was about to kill him. But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue and killed the Philistine. Then David's men declared, "You are not going out to battle with us again! Why risk snuffing out the light of Israel?"

After this, there was another battle against the Philistines at Gob. As they fought, Sibbecai from Hushah killed Saph, another descendant of the giants.

During another battle at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair from Bethlehem killed the brother of Goliath of Gath. The handle of his spear was as thick as a weaver's beam!

In another battle with the Philistines at Gath, they encountered a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four

in all, who was also a descendant of the giants. But when he defied and taunted Israel, he was killed by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea.

These four Philistines were descendants of the giants of Gath, but David and his warriors killed them.

David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. He sang:

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
 my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
 He is my shield, the power that saves me,
 and my place of safety.
 He is my refuge, my savior,
 the one who saves me from violence.
 I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
 and he saved me from my enemies.

“The waves of death overwhelmed me;
 floods of destruction swept over me.
 The grave wrapped its ropes around me;
 death laid a trap in my path.
 But in my distress I cried out to the LORD;
 yes, I cried to my God for help.
 He heard me from his sanctuary;
 my cry reached his ears.

“Then the earth quaked and trembled.
 The foundations of the heavens shook;
 they quaked because of his anger.
 Smoke poured from his nostrils;
 fierce flames leaped from his mouth.
 Glowing coals blazed forth from him.
 He opened the heavens and came down;
 dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.
 Mounted on a mighty angelic being, he flew,
 soaring on the wings of the wind.
 He shrouded himself in darkness,
 veiling his approach with dense rain clouds.
 A great brightness shone around him,
 and burning coals blazed forth.
 The LORD thundered from heaven;
 the voice of the Most High resounded.
 He shot arrows and scattered his enemies;
 his lightning flashed, and they were confused.

Then at the command of the LORD,
 at the blast of his breath,
 the bottom of the sea could be seen,
 and the foundations of the earth were laid bare.

“He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
 he drew me out of deep waters.
 He rescued me from my powerful enemies,
 from those who hated me and were too strong for me.
 They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress,
 but the LORD supported me.
 He led me to a place of safety;
 he rescued me because he delights in me.
 The LORD rewarded me for doing right;
 he restored me because of my innocence.
 For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
 I have not turned from my God to follow evil.
 I have followed all his regulations;
 I have never abandoned his decrees.
 I am blameless before God;
 I have kept myself from sin.
 The LORD rewarded me for doing right.
 He has seen my innocence.” . . .

These are the last words of David:

“David, the son of Jesse, speaks—
 David, the man who was raised up so high,
 David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob,
 David, the sweet psalmist of Israel.

“The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me;
 his words are upon my tongue.
 The God of Israel spoke.
 The Rock of Israel said to me:
 ‘The one who rules righteously,
 who rules in the fear of God,
 is like the light of morning at sunrise,
 like a morning without clouds,
 like the gleaming of the sun
 on new grass after rain.’”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever written a song? If you wrote the lyrics for a song about God, what would it say?

DAY 24*May 31-June 6***The Kingdom Goes from Father to Son***(from Kingdoms, pages 177-180)*

In the ancient world, it was common for rivalries to rise up between brothers. It was a world that favored men over women, and it was a father's sons who would inherit his property. When the father was a king, this rivalry was even stronger, since the chance of becoming the next king was at stake. Ancient kings typically had many wives, so there was a lot of competition! David's oldest son, Amnon, had been killed by another son, Absalom. Absalom himself had died in the rebellion against his father. Now we enter a story about two more of David's sons, Adonijah and Solomon, both of whom wanted to be king after David.



Nathan went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and asked her, "Haven't you heard that Haggith's son, Adonijah, has made himself king, and our lord David doesn't even know about it? If you want to save your own life and the life of your son Solomon, follow my advice. Go at once to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, didn't you make a vow and say to me, 'Your son Solomon will surely be the next king and will sit on my throne'? Why then has Adonijah become king?' And while you are still talking with him, I will come and confirm everything you have said."

So Bathsheba went into the king's bedroom. (He was very old now, and Abishag was taking care of him.) Bathsheba bowed down before the king.

"What can I do for you?" he asked her.

She replied, "My lord, you made a vow before the LORD your God when you said to me, 'Your son Solomon will surely be the next king and will sit on my throne.' But instead, Adonijah has made himself king, and my lord the king does not even know about it. He has sacrificed many cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons to attend the celebration. He also invited Abiathar the priest and Joab, the commander

of the army. But he did not invite your servant Solomon. And now, my lord the king, all Israel is waiting for you to announce who will become king after you. If you do not act, my son Solomon and I will be treated as criminals as soon as my lord the king has died."

While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. The king's officials told him, "Nathan the prophet is here to see you."

Nathan went in and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. Nathan asked, "My lord the king, have you decided that Adonijah will be the next king and that he will sit on your throne? Today he has sacrificed many cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons to attend the celebration. He also invited the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. They are feasting and drinking with him and shouting, 'Long live King Adonijah!' But he did not invite me or Zadok the priest or Benaiah or your servant Solomon. Has my lord the king really done this without letting any of his officials know who should be the next king?"

King David responded, "Call Bathsheba!" So she came back in and stood before the king. And the king repeated his vow: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has rescued me from every danger, your son Solomon will be the next king and will sit on my throne this very day, just as I vowed to you before the LORD, the God of Israel."

Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground before the king and exclaimed, "May my lord King David live forever!"

Then King David ordered, "Call Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada." When they came into the king's presence, the king said to them, "Take Solomon and my officials down to Gihon Spring. Solomon is to ride on my own mule. There Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet are to anoint him king over Israel. Blow the ram's horn and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then escort him back here, and he will sit on my throne. He will succeed me as king, for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah."

"Amen!" Benaiah son of Jehoiada replied. "May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, decree that it happen. And may the LORD be with Solomon as he has been with you, my lord the king, and may he make Solomon's reign even greater than yours!"

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the king's bodyguard took Solomon down to Gihon Spring, with Solomon riding on King David's own mule. There Zadok the priest took the flask of olive oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon with the oil. Then they sounded the ram's horn and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people followed Solomon into Jerusalem, playing

flutes and shouting for joy. The celebration was so joyous and noisy that the earth shook with the sound.

Adonijah and his guests heard the celebrating and shouting just as they were finishing their banquet. When Joab heard the sound of the ram's horn, he asked, "What's going on? Why is the city in such an uproar?"

And while he was still speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. "Come in," Adonijah said to him, "for you are a good man. You must have good news."

"Not at all!" Jonathan replied. "Our lord King David has just declared Solomon king! The king sent him down to Gihon Spring with Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, protected by the king's bodyguard. They had him ride on the king's own mule, and Zadok and Nathan have anointed him at Gihon Spring as the new king. They have just returned, and the whole city is celebrating and rejoicing. That's what all the noise is about. What's more, Solomon is now sitting on the royal throne as king. And all the royal officials have gone to King David and congratulated him, saying, 'May your God make Solomon's fame even greater than your own, and may Solomon's reign be even greater than yours!' Then the king bowed his head in worship as he lay in his bed, and he said, 'Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who today has chosen a successor to sit on my throne while I am still alive to see it.'"

Then all of Adonijah's guests jumped up in panic from the banquet table and quickly scattered. Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, so he rushed to the sacred tent and grabbed on to the horns of the altar. Word soon reached Solomon that Adonijah had seized the horns of the altar in fear, and that he was pleading, "Let King Solomon swear today that he will not kill me!"

Solomon replied, "If he proves himself to be loyal, not a hair on his head will be touched. But if he makes trouble, he will die." So King Solomon summoned Adonijah, and they brought him down from the altar. He came and bowed respectfully before King Solomon, who dismissed him, saying, "Go on home."

As the time of King David's death approached, he gave this charge to his son Solomon:

"I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the LORD your God, and follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go. If you do this, then the LORD will keep the promise he made to me. He told me, 'If your descendants live as they should and follow me faithfully with all their heart and soul, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.'" . . .

Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. David had reigned over Israel for forty years, seven of them in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

King David had been chosen by God to play a very special role in the story of his people, Israel. Now David's time was done, and the story will move forward with other people. David was great in many ways, but as we know, he was also imperfect. We do our work for the LORD also knowing that we are not all that we should or could be. But God still uses us and people like us. This is part of how God shows his love and grace to us, his people. How does knowing this give us confidence to do our part in God's story?

May 31–June 6

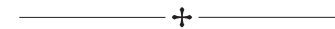
DAY 25

The New King Asks for a Gift

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 180, 182–183)

We turn from David's chapter in God's Story to the chapters about those who would follow. David had loved God and faithfully served him. What would happen with David's son?

Solomon became king and sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established. . . .



Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and married one of his daughters. He brought her to live in the City of David until he could finish building his palace and the Temple of the LORD and the wall around the city. At that time the people of Israel sacrificed their offerings at local places of worship, for a temple honoring the name of the LORD had not yet been built.

Solomon loved the LORD and followed all the decrees of his father, David, except that Solomon, too, offered sacrifices and burned incense at

the local places of worship. The most important of these places of worship was at Gibeon, so the king went there and sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings. That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!”

Solomon replied, “You showed great and faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued to show this great and faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne.

“Now, O LORD my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn’t know his way around. And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?”

The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. So God replied, “Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life.”

Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant, where he sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then he invited all his officials to a great banquet.

Some time later two prostitutes came to the king to have an argument settled. “Please, my lord,” one of them began, “this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was with me in the house. Three days later this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there were only two of us in the house.

“But her baby died during the night when she rolled over on it. Then she got up in the night and took my son from beside me while I was asleep. She laid her dead child in my arms and took mine to sleep beside her. And in the morning when I tried to nurse my son, he was dead! But when I looked more closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t my son at all.”

Then the other woman interrupted, “It certainly was your son, and the living child is mine.”

“No,” the first woman said, “the living child is mine, and the dead one is yours.” And so they argued back and forth before the king.

Then the king said, “Let’s get the facts straight. Both of you claim the living child is yours, and each says that the dead one belongs to the other. All right, bring me a sword.” So a sword was brought to the king.

Then he said, “Cut the living child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other!”

Then the woman who was the real mother of the living child, and who loved him very much, cried out, “Oh no, my lord! Give her the child—please do not kill him!”

But the other woman said, “All right, he will be neither yours nor mine; divide him between us!”

Then the king said, “Do not kill the child, but give him to the woman who wants him to live, for she is his mother!”

When all Israel heard the king’s decision, the people were in awe of the king, for they saw the wisdom God had given him for rendering justice.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

It takes many gifts and abilities to be a good leader. Many leaders have some of these gifts but not others. Leaders can be especially tempted to use their high position for their own advantage, to make themselves rich and comfortable and even more powerful. Solomon shows remarkable character by asking for the wisdom to help him rule his kingdom well—for the sake of his people. Take a moment to pray for our own leaders—in our homes, schools, cities, and nations—for this kind of selfless wisdom.

June 7-13

DAY 26

What It Takes to Run a Kingdom

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 184-186)

Solomon’s kingdom was even more prosperous than David’s, since he benefited from all the lands and nations that David had already conquered. Solomon asked for wisdom, but he also became very wealthy, powerful, and famous. Solomon also had big building plans.



The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They were very contented, with plenty to eat and drink. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River in the north to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt in the south. The conquered peoples of those lands sent tribute money to Solomon and continued to serve him throughout his lifetime.

The daily food requirements for Solomon's palace were 150 bushels of choice flour and 300 bushels of meal; also 10 oxen from the fattening pens, 20 pasture-fed cattle, 100 sheep or goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roe deer, and choice poultry.

Solomon's dominion extended over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphseh to Gaza. And there was peace on all his borders. During the lifetime of Solomon, all of Judah and Israel lived in peace and safety. And from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, each family had its own home and garden.

Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his chariot horses, and he had 12,000 horses.

The district governors faithfully provided food for King Solomon and his court; each made sure nothing was lacking during the month assigned to him. They also brought the necessary barley and straw for the royal horses in the stables.

God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore. In fact, his wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite and the sons of Mahol—Heman, Calcol, and Darda. His fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. He composed some 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs. He could speak with authority about all kinds of plants, from the great cedar of Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows from cracks in a wall. He could also speak about animals, birds, small creatures, and fish. And kings from every nation sent their ambassadors to listen to the wisdom of Solomon.

King Hiram of Tyre had always been a loyal friend of David. When Hiram learned that David's son Solomon was the new king of Israel, he sent ambassadors to congratulate him.

Then Solomon sent this message back to Hiram:

“You know that my father, David, was not able to build a Temple to honor the name of the LORD his God because of the many wars waged against him by surrounding nations. He could not build until the LORD gave him victory over all his enemies. But now the LORD

my God has given me peace on every side; I have no enemies, and all is well. So I am planning to build a Temple to honor the name of the LORD my God, just as he had instructed my father, David. For the LORD told him, ‘Your son, whom I will place on your throne, will build the Temple to honor my name.’

“Therefore, please command that cedars from Lebanon be cut for me. Let my men work alongside yours, and I will pay your men whatever wages you ask. As you know, there is no one among us who can cut timber like you Sidonians!”

When Hiram received Solomon's message, he was very pleased and said, “Praise the LORD today for giving David a wise son to be king of the great nation of Israel.” Then he sent this reply to Solomon:

“I have received your message, and I will supply all the cedar and cypress timber you need. My servants will bring the logs from the Lebanon mountains to the Mediterranean Sea and make them into rafts and float them along the coast to whatever place you choose. Then we will break the rafts apart so you can carry the logs away. You can pay me by supplying me with food for my household.”

So Hiram supplied as much cedar and cypress timber as Solomon desired. In return, Solomon sent him an annual payment of 100,000 bushels of wheat for his household and 110,000 gallons of pure olive oil. So the LORD gave wisdom to Solomon, just as he had promised. And Hiram and Solomon made a formal alliance of peace.

Then King Solomon conscripted a labor force of 30,000 men from all Israel. He sent them to Lebanon in shifts, 10,000 every month, so that each man would be one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of this labor force. Solomon also had 70,000 common laborers, 80,000 quarry workers in the hill country, and 3,600 foremen to supervise the work. At the king's command, they quarried large blocks of high-quality stone and shaped them to make the foundation of the Temple. Men from the city of Gebal helped Solomon's and Hiram's builders prepare the timber and stone for the Temple.



It was in midspring, in the month of Ziv, during the fourth year of Solomon's reign, that he began to construct the Temple of the LORD. This was 480 years after the people of Israel were rescued from their slavery in the land of Egypt.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

God brought Solomon peace on all sides. This was very different from the time of David, who was always fighting. Solomon began his time as king very well, and his people were prosperous and clearly blessed by God. This period of time gives us a picture of what God wants for his creation: no wars or fighting, everything at peace, and everyone experiencing God's care. What did Solomon decide to build now that the kingdom of Israel was firmly his? Why was this important?

DAY 27*June 7-13***God Living with His People***(from Kingdoms, pages 191-194)*

Solomon worked for seven years to complete the Temple of the LORD. The Temple itself was filled with images of the creation—land, sea, and sky—including carvings of palm trees, water lilies, gourds, and pomegranates, plus oxen, lions, and mighty cherubim. The Temple was built to be God's home right in the midst of his people. The carvings of plants and animals within the Temple showed that God's ultimate intention is to return and live with us in this world. He will make his home with us here, and the entire creation will be his Temple.



So King Solomon finished all his work on the Temple of the LORD. Then he brought all the gifts his father, David, had dedicated—the silver, the gold, and the various articles—and he stored them in the treasuries of the LORD's Temple.



Solomon then summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes—the leaders of the ancestral families of the Israelites. They were to bring the Ark of the LORD's Covenant to the Temple from its location in the City of David, also known as Zion. So all the men of Israel assembled before King Solomon at the annual Festival of Shelters, which is held in early autumn in the month of Ethanim.

When all the elders of Israel arrived, the priests picked up the Ark. The

priests and Levites brought up the Ark of the LORD along with the special tent and all the sacred items that had been in it. There, before the Ark, King Solomon and the entire community of Israel sacrificed so many sheep, goats, and cattle that no one could keep count!

Then the priests carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant into the inner sanctuary of the Temple—the Most Holy Place—and placed it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the Ark, forming a canopy over the Ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place, which is in front of the Most Holy Place, but not from the outside. They are still there to this day. Nothing was in the Ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Mount Sinai, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel when they left the land of Egypt.

When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a thick cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple of the LORD.

Then Solomon prayed, "O LORD, you have said that you would live in a thick cloud of darkness. Now I have built a glorious Temple for you, a place where you can live forever!"

Then the king turned around to the entire community of Israel standing before him and gave this blessing: "Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who has kept the promise he made to my father, David. For he told my father, 'From the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have never chosen a city among any of the tribes of Israel as the place where a Temple should be built to honor my name. But I have chosen David to be king over my people Israel.'"

Then Solomon said, "My father, David, wanted to build this Temple to honor the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD told him, 'You wanted to build the Temple to honor my name. Your intention is good, but you are not the one to do it. One of your own sons will build the Temple to honor me.'

"And now the LORD has fulfilled the promise he made, for I have become king in my father's place, and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised. I have built this Temple to honor the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have prepared a place there for the Ark, which contains the covenant that the LORD made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt."

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire community of Israel. He lifted his hands toward heaven, and he prayed,

“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in all of heaven above or on the earth below. You keep your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion. You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. You made that promise with your own mouth, and with your own hands you have fulfilled it today.

“And now, O LORD, God of Israel, carry out the additional promise you made to your servant David, my father. For you said to him, ‘If your descendants guard their behavior and faithfully follow me as you have done, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.’ Now, O God of Israel, fulfill this promise to your servant David, my father.

“But will God really live on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built! Nevertheless, listen to my prayer and my plea, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is making to you today. May you watch over this Temple night and day, this place where you have said, ‘My name will be there.’ May you always hear the prayers I make toward this place. May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive. . . .

“In the future, foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel will hear of you. They will come from distant lands because of your name, for they will hear of your great name and your strong hand and your powerful arm. And when they pray toward this Temple, then hear from heaven where you live, and grant what they ask of you. In this way, all the people of the earth will come to know and fear you, just as your own people Israel do. They, too, will know that this Temple I have built honors your name. . . .

“May your eyes be open to my requests and to the requests of your people Israel. May you hear and answer them whenever they cry out to you. For when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, O Sovereign LORD, you told your servant Moses that you had set Israel apart from all the nations of the earth to be your own special possession.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The existence of the Temple and the presence of God right there with his people was a sign to them of his love. God had made a covenant agreement with them, making Israel his special people to help him bring salvation and blessing to the world. When Jesus came into the

world as the promised King from David’s family, he claimed that he himself was the new Temple, the place of God’s presence. As followers of Jesus today, the Bible says we are now God’s temple. God has made his home within us! Say a prayer of thanks and praise for God’s great love for us.

June 7-13

DAY 28

The King, a Queen, and Signs of Trouble

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 196-197, 199-200)

King David had been a man of war and violence, so God had declared that he could not be the one to build God’s house, the Temple. Instead, that task went to his son Solomon, a man of peace. Solomon started his reign well, asking God for wisdom to serve his people as a good king. But that’s not the end of Solomon’s story. He ended up marrying many foreign women, even though God told the Israelites not to do this. So Solomon’s heart was turned, and he also began to worship the gods of his foreign wives. What would this mean for the kingdom of God’s people Israel?



When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s fame, which brought honor to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She arrived in Jerusalem with a large group of attendants and a great caravan of camels loaded with spices, large quantities of gold, and precious jewels. When she met with Solomon, she talked with him about everything she had on her mind. Solomon had answers for all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba realized how very wise Solomon was, and when she saw the palace he had built, she was overwhelmed. She was also amazed at the food on his tables, the organization of his officials and their splendid clothing, the cup-bearers, and the burnt offerings Solomon made at the Temple of the LORD.

She exclaimed to the king, “Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! I didn’t believe what was said until I arrived here and saw it with my own eyes. In fact, I had not heard the half

of it! Your wisdom and prosperity are far beyond what I was told. How happy your people must be! What a privilege for your officials to stand here day after day, listening to your wisdom! Praise the LORD your God, who delights in you and has placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king so you can rule with justice and righteousness."

Then she gave the king a gift of 9,000 pounds of gold, great quantities of spices, and precious jewels. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(In addition, Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir, and they also brought rich cargoes of red sandalwood and precious jewels. The king used the sandalwood to make railings for the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and to construct lyres and harps for the musicians. Never before or since has there been such a supply of sandalwood.)

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba whatever she asked for, besides all the customary gifts he had so generously given. Then she and all her attendants returned to their own land. . . .

+

Another rebel leader was Jeroboam son of Nebat, one of Solomon's own officials. He came from the town of Zeredah in Ephraim, and his mother was Zeruah, a widow.

This is the story behind his rebellion. Solomon was rebuilding the supporting terraces and repairing the walls of the city of his father, David. Jeroboam was a very capable young man, and when Solomon saw how industrious he was, he put him in charge of the labor force from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph.

One day as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh met him along the way. Ahijah was wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone in a field, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten of these pieces, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and I will give ten of the tribes to you! But I will leave him one tribe for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. For Solomon has abandoned me and worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians; Chemosh, the god of Moab; and Molech, the god of the Ammonites. He has not followed my ways and done what is pleasing in my sight. He has not obeyed my decrees and regulations as David his father did.

"But I will not take the entire kingdom from Solomon at this time. For

the sake of my servant David, the one whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees, I will keep Solomon as leader for the rest of his life. But I will take the kingdom away from his son and give ten of the tribes to you. His son will have one tribe so that the descendants of David my servant will continue to reign, shining like a lamp in Jerusalem, the city I have chosen to be the place for my name. And I will place you on the throne of Israel, and you will rule over all that your heart desires. If you listen to what I tell you and follow my ways and do whatever I consider to be right, and if you obey my decrees and commands, as my servant David did, then I will always be with you. I will establish an enduring dynasty for you as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you. Because of Solomon's sin I will punish the descendants of David—though not forever."

Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he fled to King Shishak of Egypt and stayed there until Solomon died.

The rest of the events in Solomon's reign, including all his deeds and his wisdom, are recorded in *The Book of the Acts of Solomon*. Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years. When he died, he was buried in the City of David, named for his father. Then his son Rehoboam became the next king.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The time of Solomon's reign began with promise and hope. But Solomon turned his attention and his loyalty away from God and started worshiping foreign gods. He failed in the most important test of his life: to love and follow God alone. This would end up tearing the kingdom of Israel apart. What had started with such great promise is already in danger just a single generation after King David. Have you ever seen something start well and then go badly?

June 7-13

DAY 29

Great Pride and the Kingdom Splits

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 200-202)

King Solomon's son Rehoboam followed his father and became Israel's king. He began with a chance to restore the true worship of God in the land and keep Israel united. He had the opportunity to accept his proper role in the story of Israel and move God's plans forward. But Rehoboam had his own ideas.



Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all Israel had gathered to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of this, he returned from Egypt, for he had fled to Egypt to escape from King Solomon. The leaders of Israel summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel went to speak with Rehoboam. “Your father was a hard master,” they said. “Lighten the harsh labor demands and heavy taxes that your father imposed on us. Then we will be your loyal subjects.”

Rehoboam replied, “Give me three days to think this over. Then come back for my answer.” So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam discussed the matter with the older men who had counseled his father, Solomon. “What is your advice?” he asked. “How should I answer these people?”

The older counselors replied, “If you are willing to be a servant to these people today and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your loyal subjects.”

But Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men and instead asked the opinion of the young men who had grown up with him and were now his advisers. “What is your advice?” he asked them. “How should I answer these people who want me to lighten the burdens imposed by my father?”

The young men replied, “This is what you should tell those complainers who want a lighter burden: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist! Yes, my father laid heavy burdens on you, but I’m going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!’”

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam’s decision, just as the king had ordered. But Rehoboam spoke

harshly to the people, for he rejected the advice of the older counselors and followed the counsel of his younger advisers. He told the people, “My father laid heavy burdens on you, but I’m going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!”

So the king paid no attention to the people. This turn of events was the will of the LORD, for it fulfilled the LORD’s message to Jeroboam son of Nebat through the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh.

When all Israel realized that the king had refused to listen to them, they responded,

“Down with the dynasty of David!

We have no interest in the son of Jesse.

Back to your homes, O Israel!

Look out for your own house, O David!”

So the people of Israel returned home. But Rehoboam continued to rule over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah.

King Rehoboam sent Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, to restore order, but the people of Israel stoned him to death. When this news reached King Rehoboam, he quickly jumped into his chariot and fled to Jerusalem. And to this day the northern tribes of Israel have refused to be ruled by a descendant of David.

When the people of Israel learned of Jeroboam’s return from Egypt, they called an assembly and made him king over all Israel. So only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the family of David.

When Rehoboam arrived at Jerusalem, he mobilized the men of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—180,000 select troops—to fight against the men of Israel and to restore the kingdom to himself.

But God said to Shemaiah, the man of God, “Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the people of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: Do not fight against your relatives, the Israelites. Go back home, for what has happened is my doing!’” So they obeyed the message of the LORD and went home, as the LORD had commanded.

Jeroboam then built up the city of Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and it became his capital. Later he went and built up the town of Peniel.

Jeroboam thought to himself, “Unless I am careful, the kingdom will return to the dynasty of David. When these people go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the Temple of the LORD, they will again give their allegiance to King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill me and make him their king instead.”

So on the advice of his counselors, the king made two gold calves. He

said to the people, “It is too much trouble for you to worship in Jerusalem. Look, Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!”

He placed these calf idols in Bethel and in Dan—at either end of his kingdom. But this became a great sin, for the people worshiped the idols, traveling as far north as Dan to worship the one there.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Rehoboam’s story is a sad one. If he had listened to his wise advisers, things might have gone differently. But there is a problem with the kings of Israel—it seems that they are incapable of loyally following and serving God. What do you think this could mean for God’s bigger plans for saving the world through Israel? Can God’s plan work if people are unable to be faithful to him?

DAY 30

June 7-13

A Long Story of Ups and Downs

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 205-207)

And so the history of the kings of Israel moves along. From this point on, the story of Israel is one of starts and stops, of good kings and bad kings. The Bible doesn’t tell us much about each king. These stories aren’t as long as those of Saul, David, and Solomon. Kings live, reign, and die. But through it all, God is still working.



Meanwhile, Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen from among all the tribes of Israel as the place to honor his name. Rehoboam’s mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman.

During Rehoboam’s reign, the people of Judah did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, provoking his anger with their sin, for it was even worse than that of their ancestors. For they also built for themselves pagan shrines and

set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree. There were even male and female shrine prostitutes throughout the land. The people imitated the detestable practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam’s reign, King Shishak of Egypt came up and attacked Jerusalem. He ransacked the treasuries of the LORD’s Temple and the royal palace; he stole everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. King Rehoboam later replaced them with bronze shields as substitutes, and he entrusted them to the care of the commanders of the guard who protected the entrance to the royal palace. Whenever the king went to the Temple of the LORD, the guards would also take the shields and then return them to the guardroom.

The rest of the events in Rehoboam’s reign and everything he did are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah*. There was constant war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. When Rehoboam died, he was buried among his ancestors in the City of David. His mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman. Then his son Abijam became the next king.

+ + +

Abijam began to rule over Judah in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam’s reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother was Maacah, the granddaughter of Absalom.

He committed the same sins as his father before him, and he was not faithful to the LORD his God, as his ancestor David had been. But for David’s sake, the LORD his God allowed his descendants to continue ruling, shining like a lamp, and he gave Abijam a son to rule after him in Jerusalem. For David had done what was pleasing in the LORD’s sight and had obeyed the LORD’s commands throughout his life, except in the affair concerning Uriah the Hitite.

There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam throughout Abijam’s reign.

The rest of the events in Abijam’s reign and everything he did are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah*. There was constant war between Abijam and Jeroboam. When Abijam died, he was buried in the City of David. Then his son Asa became the next king.

+ + +

Asa began to rule over Judah in the twentieth year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His grandmother was Maacah, the granddaughter of Absalom.

Asa did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, as his ancestor David had done. He banished the male and female shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made. He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother because she had made an obscene Asherah pole. He cut down her obscene pole and burned it in the Kidron Valley. Although the pagan shrines were not removed, Asa's heart remained completely faithful to the LORD throughout his life. He brought into the Temple of the LORD the silver and gold and the various items that he and his father had dedicated. . . .

The rest of the events in Asa's reign—the extent of his power, everything he did, and the names of the cities he built—are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah*. In his old age his feet became diseased. When Asa died, he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David.

Then Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became the next king.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

God is very patient. He is willing to wait a very long time for his plan to come to completion. And along the way, he keeps working with his people, even through all their failures, disloyalty, and wrongdoing. He has chosen them, and he won't give up on them. God is the same way with us. He wants our loyalty and service. He is the Creator of all things, the great King, so of course we owe him our allegiance. But he also knows we will fall. We are imperfect. We are not always faithful to Jesus, the Son of David. But when we fall, we can get up and follow Jesus again. How does it help you to know that God loves us and will forgive us?

June 14-20

DAY 31

Struggling for the Covenant

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 210, 212-215)

God's people were now divided into two nations: Israel and Judah. The Bible's focus is on the role of the kings of these two nations during this period. The story of God's people has become the story of the kings of God's people. God is in a great struggle with his people—a struggle for their hearts and for his covenant with them. Most of the kings of Israel and Judah do not follow God or help their people to worship him. So God sends his servants the prophets to enter the struggle and speak for God and for loyalty to the covenant.

————— † —————

Ahab son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twenty-two years. But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight, even more than any of the kings before him. And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal. First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him. . . .

+

So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The

god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!” And all the people agreed.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood.”

So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

About noontime Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”

So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

Then Elijah called to the people, “Come over here!” They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the LORD. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood.

Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood.”

After they had done this, he said, “Do the same thing again!” And when they were finished, he said, “Now do it a third time!” So they did as he said, and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”

Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, “The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!”

Then Elijah commanded, “Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don’t let a single one escape!” So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go get something to eat and drink, for I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!”

So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.

Then he said to his servant, “Go and look out toward the sea.”

The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, “I didn’t see anything.”

Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, “I saw a little cloud about the size of a man’s hand rising from the sea.”

Then Elijah shouted, “Hurry to Ahab and tell him, ‘Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don’t hurry, the rain will stop you!’”

And soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel. Then the LORD gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.”

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”

Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the LORD said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

“Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the LORD told him. And

as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied again, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

Then the LORD told him, “Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

After his tremendous victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah is exhausted. He has reached his physical limit and is also emotionally weary. Elijah has played his role in the drama, spending his strength and energy in the battle to bring God’s word to evil kings and queens and to call the people back to God. God tells him now that someone else will carry the story forward. Elisha will be the new prophet for the LORD, doing his work for the next generation. Even today we are still in the great struggle for God and for his word. Are we doing all we can? Are we giving our strength and our commitment to God while we can?

June 14-20

DAY 32

Great Power—for Good or Evil?

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 218-220)

Kings, of course, are powerful people. Back in the time of Samuel, God’s people started demanding a human king. God said this was because they were rejecting him as their King. But God adapted to what was happening and allowed Israel to be ruled by kings. At their best, these kings are a channel for God’s own rule over his people. At their worst, they serve only themselves and use their power to gain advantages over other people.



Now there was a man named Naboth, from Jezreel, who owned a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. One day Ahab said to Naboth, “Since your vineyard is so convenient to my palace, I would like to buy it to use as a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or if you prefer, I will pay you for it.”

But Naboth replied, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance that was passed down by my ancestors.”

So Ahab went home angry and sullen because of Naboth’s answer. The king went to bed with his face to the wall and refused to eat!

“What’s the matter?” his wife Jezebel asked him. “What’s made you so upset that you’re not eating?”

“I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard or trade it, but he refused!” Ahab told her.

“Are you the king of Israel or not?” Jezebel demanded. “Get up and eat something, and don’t worry about it. I’ll get you Naboth’s vineyard!”

So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the elders and other leaders of the town where Naboth lived. In her letters she commanded: “Call the citizens together for a time of fasting, and give Naboth a place of honor. And then seat two scoundrels across from him who will accuse him of cursing God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.”

So the elders and other town leaders followed the instructions Jezebel had written in the letters. They called for a fast and put Naboth at a prominent place before the people. Then the two scoundrels came and sat down

across from him. And they accused Naboth before all the people, saying, “He cursed God and the king.” So he was dragged outside the town and stoned to death. The town leaders then sent word to Jezebel, “Naboth has been stoned to death.”

When Jezebel heard the news, she said to Ahab, “You know the vineyard Naboth wouldn’t sell you? Well, you can have it now! He’s dead!” So Ahab immediately went down to the vineyard of Naboth to claim it.

But the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He will be at Naboth’s vineyard in Jezreel, claiming it for himself. Give him this message: ‘This is what the LORD says: Wasn’t it enough that you killed Naboth? Must you rob him, too? Because you have done this, dogs will lick your blood at the very place where they licked the blood of Naboth!’”

“So, my enemy, you have found me!” Ahab exclaimed to Elijah.

“Yes,” Elijah answered, “I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the LORD’s sight. So now the LORD says, ‘I will bring disaster on you and consume you. I will destroy every one of your male descendants, slave and free alike, anywhere in Israel! I am going to destroy your family as I did the family of Jeroboam son of Nebat and the family of Baasha son of Ahijah, for you have made me very angry and have led Israel into sin.’

“And regarding Jezebel, the LORD says, ‘Dogs will eat Jezebel’s body at the plot of land in Jezreel.’

“The members of Ahab’s family who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the field will be eaten by vultures.”

(No one else so completely sold himself to what was evil in the LORD’s sight as Ahab did under the influence of his wife Jezebel. His worst outrage was worshiping idols just as the Amorites had done—the people whom the LORD had driven out from the land ahead of the Israelites.)

But when Ahab heard this message, he tore his clothing, dressed in burlap, and fasted. He even slept in burlap and went about in deep mourning.

Then another message from the LORD came to Elijah: “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has done this, I will not do what I promised during his lifetime. It will happen to his sons; I will destroy his dynasty.”

—from the book of Samuel–Kings

TALKING TOGETHER:

When God sees the great evil and injustice that Ahab and Jezebel have done to Naboth, he intervenes to judge them. God’s great mission in

the world is to overcome injustice and wrongdoing. He is working to restore and renew the creation he made. He is working to bring justice and healing to all people. What things do you see that are wrong or unfair in our world today? What would it look like if these things were changed?

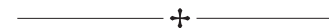
June 14-20

DAY 33

Old Prophet, New Prophet

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 224-226)

Elijah had been a mighty prophet in Israel. While the kings of God’s people were failing, God used his prophets—especially Elijah—to proclaim his word and speak his truth. Again and again in the Bible we see God working through key leaders at key times—Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and King David. Now Elijah’s time was done. Elisha, the new prophet, was coming onto the scene, and he’s given signs from God that he will also be a powerful leader in Israel’s story.



When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Bethel.”

But Elisha replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!” So they went down together to Bethel.

The group of prophets from Bethel came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Jericho.”

But Elisha replied again, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together to Jericho.

Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to the Jordan River.”

But again Elisha replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together.

Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.”

And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.”

“You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!” And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress.

Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak, which had fallen when he was taken up. Then Elisha returned to the bank of the Jordan River. He struck the water with Elijah’s cloak and cried out, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” Then the river divided, and Elisha went across.

When the group of prophets from Jericho saw from a distance what happened, they exclaimed, “Elijah’s spirit rests upon Elisha!” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. “Sir,” they said, “just say the word and fifty of our strongest men will search the wilderness for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has left him on some mountain or in some valley.”

“No,” Elisha said, “don’t send them.” But they kept urging him until they shamed him into agreeing, and he finally said, “All right, send them.” So fifty men searched for three days but did not find Elijah. Elisha was still at Jericho when they returned. “Didn’t I tell you not to go?” he asked.

One day the leaders of the town of Jericho visited Elisha. “We have a problem, my lord,” they told him. “This town is located in pleasant surroundings, as you can see. But the water is bad, and the land is unproductive.”

Elisha said, “Bring me a new bowl with salt in it.” So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring that supplied the town with water and threw the salt into it. And he said, “This is what the LORD says: I have purified this water. It will no longer cause death or infertility.” And the water has remained pure ever since, just as Elisha said.

—from the book of Samuel–Kings

TALKING TOGETHER:

Elijah and Elisha walked together from town to town in the settled part of the land. They knew it was time for Elijah to be taken away. And then God tells them to go across the Jordan River, back into the wilderness that Israel first traveled through with Moses. It was here, out in the wild places, that Elijah was taken away and Elisha was commissioned to take up the work of God. Sometimes God does his most important work when we are alone, out in the wild places, away from other people and other distractions. Have you ever been alone with God out in the wild places?

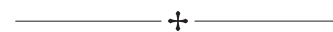
DAY 34

June 14-20

Eyes to See

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 228, 232-233)

The ministry of Elisha is powerful, just like Elijah’s was. He is used by God to bring surprising change into Israel at surprising times. Such times are signs to us, showing us what God’s plan is for us and for our entire world.



One day the widow of a member of the group of prophets came to Elisha and cried out, “My husband who served you is dead, and you know how he feared the LORD. But now a creditor has come, threatening to take my two sons as slaves.”

“What can I do to help you?” Elisha asked. “Tell me, what do you have in the house?”

“Nothing at all, except a flask of olive oil,” she replied.

And Elisha said, “Borrow as many empty jars as you can from your friends and neighbors. Then go into your house with your sons and shut the door behind you. Pour olive oil from your flask into the jars, setting each one aside when it is filled.”

So she did as she was told. Her sons kept bringing jars to her, and she filled one after another. Soon every container was full to the brim!

“Bring me another jar,” she said to one of her sons.

“There aren’t any more!” he told her. And then the olive oil stopped flowing.

When she told the man of God what had happened, he said to her, “Now sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on what is left over.” . . .

+

When the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he would confer with his officers and say, “We will mobilize our forces at such and such a place.”

But immediately Elisha, the man of God, would warn the king of Israel, “Do not go near that place, for the Arameans are planning to mobilize their troops there.” So the king of Israel would send word to the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he would be on the alert there.

The king of Aram became very upset over this. He called his officers together and demanded, “Which of you is the traitor? Who has been informing the king of Israel of my plans?”

“It’s not us, my lord the king,” one of the officers replied. “Elisha, the prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in the privacy of your bedroom!”

“Go and find out where he is,” the king commanded, “so I can send troops to seize him.”

And the report came back: “Elisha is at Dothan.” So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city.

When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. “Oh, sir, what will we do now?” the young man cried to Elisha.

“Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!” The LORD opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

As the Aramean army advanced toward him, Elisha prayed, “O LORD, please make them blind.” So the LORD struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked.

Then Elisha went out and told them, “You have come the wrong way! This isn’t the right city! Follow me, and I will take you to the man you are looking for.” And he led them to the city of Samaria.

As soon as they had entered Samaria, Elisha prayed, “O LORD, now open their eyes and let them see.” So the LORD opened their eyes, and they discovered that they were in the middle of Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he shouted to Elisha, “My father, should I kill them? Should I kill them?”

“Of course not!” Elisha replied. “Do we kill prisoners of war? Give them food and drink and send them home again to their master.”

So the king made a great feast for them and then sent them home to their master. After that, the Aramean raiders stayed away from the land of Israel.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

God works, but his ways are mysterious to us. God is directly involved in our stories and our history. He is active and powerful, yet the Bible doesn’t usually tell us how exactly he makes things happen. Elisha’s servant had to have his eyes opened by God to be able to see what was really happening. God and his power were there all along! Knowing these stories of God’s mighty acts in the past can help us, too. Are you ever tempted to think that some situations are hopeless?

June 14-20

DAY 35

Living (and Dying) by Violent Power

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 238-240)

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel ruled together over Israel for twenty-two years. After Ahab died, his son Joram became king, and Jezebel continued her evil and corrupt ways. Ahab and his family had lived in luxury, stealing from people to get whatever they wanted and building an ivory palace for themselves. But those who live by oppressive power often suffer the consequences. Those who inflict violence on others will, in turn, face violence.

+

Elisha the prophet had summoned a member of the group of prophets. “Get ready to travel,” he told him, “and take this flask of olive oil with you. Go to Ramoth-gilead, and find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Call him into a private room away from his friends, and pour the oil over his head. Say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: I anoint you to be the king over Israel.’ Then open the door and run for your life!”

So the young prophet did as he was told and went to Ramoth-gilead. When he arrived there, he found Jehu sitting around with the other army officers. “I have a message for you, Commander,” he said.

“For which one of us?” Jehu asked.

“For you, Commander,” he replied.

So Jehu left the others and went into the house. Then the young prophet poured the oil over Jehu’s head and said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anoint you king over the LORD’s people, Israel. You are to destroy the family of Ahab, your master. In this way, I will avenge the murder of my prophets and all the LORD’s servants who were killed by Jezebel. The entire family of Ahab must be wiped out. I will destroy every one of his male descendants, slave and free alike, anywhere in Israel. I will destroy the family of Ahab as I destroyed the families of Jeroboam son of Nebat and of Baasha son of Ahijah. Dogs will eat Ahab’s wife Jezebel at the plot of land in Jezreel, and no one will bury her.” Then the young prophet opened the door and ran.

Jehu went back to his fellow officers, and one of them asked him, “What did that madman want? Is everything all right?”

“You know how a man like that babbles on,” Jehu replied.

“You’re hiding something,” they said. “Tell us.”

So Jehu told them, “He said to me, ‘This is what the LORD says: I have anointed you to be king over Israel.’”

Then they quickly spread out their cloaks on the bare steps and blew the ram’s horn, shouting, “Jehu is king!”

So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi, led a conspiracy against King Joram. (Now Joram had been with the army at Ramoth-gilead, defending Israel against the forces of King Hazael of Aram. But King Joram was wounded in the fighting and returned to Jezreel to recover from his wounds.) So Jehu told the men with him, “If you want me to be king, don’t let anyone leave town and go to Jezreel to report what we have done.”

Then Jehu got into a chariot and rode to Jezreel to find King Joram, who was lying there wounded. King Ahaziah of Judah was there, too, for he had gone to visit him. The watchman on the tower of Jezreel saw Jehu and his company approaching, so he shouted to Joram, “I see a company of troops coming!”

“Send out a rider to ask if they are coming in peace,” King Joram ordered.

So a horseman went out to meet Jehu and said, “The king wants to know if you are coming in peace.”

Jehu replied, “What do you know about peace? Fall in behind me!”

The watchman called out to the king, “The messenger has met them, but he’s not returning.”

So the king sent out a second horseman. He rode up to them and said, “The king wants to know if you come in peace.”

Again Jehu answered, “What do you know about peace? Fall in behind me!”

The watchman exclaimed, “The messenger has met them, but he isn’t returning either! It must be Jehu son of Nimshi, for he’s driving like a madman.”

“Quick! Get my chariot ready!” King Joram commanded.

Then King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah rode out in their chariots to meet Jehu. They met him at the plot of land that had belonged to Naboth of Jezreel. King Joram demanded, “Do you come in peace, Jehu?”

Jehu replied, “How can there be peace as long as the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother, Jezebel, are all around us?”

Then King Joram turned the horses around and fled, shouting to King Ahaziah, “Treason, Ahaziah!” But Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart, and he sank down dead in his chariot.

Jehu said to Bidkar, his officer, “Throw him into the plot of land that belonged to Naboth of Jezreel. Do you remember when you and I were riding along behind his father, Ahab? The LORD pronounced this message against him: ‘I solemnly swear that I will repay him here on this plot of land, says the LORD, for the murder of Naboth and his sons that I saw yesterday.’ So throw him out on Naboth’s property, just as the LORD said.”

When King Ahaziah of Judah saw what was happening, he fled along the road to Beth-haggan. Jehu rode after him, shouting, “Shoot him, too!” So they shot Ahaziah in his chariot at the Ascent of Gur, near Ibleam. He was able to go on as far as Megiddo, but he died there. His servants took him by chariot to Jerusalem, where they buried him with his ancestors in the City of David. Ahaziah had become king over Judah in the eleventh year of the reign of Joram son of Ahab.

When Jezebel, the queen mother, heard that Jehu had come to Jezreel, she painted her eyelids and fixed her hair and sat at a window. When Jehu entered the gate of the palace, she shouted at him, “Have you come in peace, you murderer? You’re just like Zimri, who murdered his master!”

Jehu looked up and saw her at the window and shouted, “Who is on my side?” And two or three eunuchs looked out at him. “Throw her down!” Jehu yelled. So they threw her out the window, and her blood splattered against the wall and on the horses. And Jehu trampled her body under his horses’ hooves.

Then Jehu went into the palace and ate and drank. Afterward he said, “Someone go and bury this cursed woman, for she is the daughter of a king.” But when they went out to bury her, they found only her skull, her feet, and her hands.

When they returned and told Jehu, he stated, “This fulfills the message from the LORD, which he spoke through his servant Elijah from Tishbe:

‘At the plot of land in Jezreel, dogs will eat Jezebel’s body. Her remains will be scattered like dung on the plot of land in Jezreel, so that no one will be able to recognize her.’”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Life in the ancient world was tough. Violence ruled the land, and relationships between people were usually governed by power and control. The grace of God came into this hard world and this difficult story. It is important for us to know that God didn’t come and fix everything at once. But the story will move ahead, and God will keep working. Over time, he will bring his own saving, healing power more and more into the world. We still see many people living by the law of violence and control, and it isn’t always easy to believe that love is the stronger power. Do you believe that God’s love will triumph over evil? Is it hard to believe this sometimes?

DAY 36

June 14-20

The Secret King

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 242-244)

These were brutal times in Israel and Judah. People in both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were using violence to gain power. However, some people in the southern kingdom retain a strong commitment to protect the family line of King David and the true worship of God. But Athaliah, the mother and grandmother of kings, seems committed to supporting the worship of the false god Baal.



When Athaliah, the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, learned that her son was dead, she began to destroy the rest of the royal family. But Ahaziah’s sister Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, took Ahaziah’s infant son, Joash, and stole him away from among the rest of the king’s children, who were about to be killed. She put Joash and his nurse in a bedroom, and they

hid him from Athaliah, so the child was not murdered. Joash remained hidden in the Temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled over the land.

In the seventh year of Athaliah’s reign, Jehoiada the priest summoned the commanders, the Carite mercenaries, and the palace guards to come to the Temple of the LORD. He made a solemn pact with them and made them swear an oath of loyalty there in the LORD’s Temple; then he showed them the king’s son.

Jehoiada told them, “This is what you must do. A third of you who are on duty on the Sabbath are to guard the royal palace itself. Another third of you are to stand guard at the Sur Gate. And the final third must stand guard behind the palace guard. These three groups will all guard the palace. The other two units who are off duty on the Sabbath must stand guard for the king at the LORD’s Temple. Form a bodyguard around the king and keep your weapons in hand. Kill anyone who tries to break through. Stay with the king wherever he goes.”

So the commanders did everything as Jehoiada the priest ordered. The commanders took charge of the men reporting for duty that Sabbath, as well as those who were going off duty. They brought them all to Jehoiada the priest, and he supplied them with the spears and small shields that had once belonged to King David and were stored in the Temple of the LORD. The palace guards stationed themselves around the king, with their weapons ready. They formed a line from the south side of the Temple around to the north side and all around the altar.

Then Jehoiada brought out Joash, the king’s son, placed the crown on his head, and presented him with a copy of God’s laws. They anointed him and proclaimed him king, and everyone clapped their hands and shouted, “Long live the king!”

When Athaliah heard the noise made by the palace guards and the people, she hurried to the LORD’s Temple to see what was happening. When she arrived, she saw the newly crowned king standing in his place of authority by the pillar, as was the custom at times of coronation. The commanders and trumpeters were surrounding him, and people from all over the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. When Athaliah saw all this, she tore her clothes in despair and shouted, “Treason! Treason!”

Then Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders who were in charge of the troops, “Take her to the soldiers in front of the Temple, and kill anyone who tries to rescue her.” For the priest had said, “She must not be killed in the Temple of the LORD.” So they seized her and led her out to the gate where horses enter the palace grounds, and she was killed there.

Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people that they would be the LORD’s people. He also made a covenant

between the king and the people. And all the people of the land went over to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They demolished the altars and smashed the idols to pieces, and they killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.

Jehoiada the priest stationed guards at the Temple of the LORD. Then the commanders, the Carite mercenaries, the palace guards, and all the people of the land escorted the king from the Temple of the LORD. They went through the gate of the guards and into the palace, and the king took his seat on the royal throne. So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was peaceful because Athaliah had been killed at the king's palace.

+ + +

Joash was seven years old when he became king.

Joash began to rule over Judah in the seventh year of King Jehu's reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother was Zibiah from Beersheba. All his life Joash did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight because Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Yet even so, he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Jehoiada the priest secretly protected the boy king from when he was only an infant up until the time he was publicly announced as king at age seven. From that time on Jehoiada became an instructor of King Joash, teaching him regularly about the ways of the LORD. God regularly uses older people to help younger people serve and worship him. In this way, loyalty and allegiance to God is passed on from generation to generation. Who has helped you learn and grow in your love for God?

June 21-27

DAY 37

The Northern Kingdom Is No More

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 252-254)

After the reign of King Solomon, David's son, the kingdom of God's people had been split in two. The northern kingdom of ten tribes, called Israel, had mostly turned away from God and embraced evil. They broke their covenant with God and embraced the worship of false gods and idols. This destroyed the reason God had brought them into the Promised Land in the first place. Israel was created to be a light to the nations, showing them the truth about God and how to worship and follow him.

+

Hoshea son of Elah began to rule over Israel in the twelfth year of King Ahaz's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria nine years. He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, but not to the same extent as the kings of Israel who ruled before him.

King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked King Hoshea, so Hoshea was forced to pay heavy tribute to Assyria. But Hoshea stopped paying the annual tribute and conspired against the king of Assyria by asking King So of Egypt to help him shake free of Assyria's power. When the king of Assyria discovered this treachery, he seized Hoshea and put him in prison.

Then the king of Assyria invaded the entire land, and for three years he besieged the city of Samaria. Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

This disaster came upon the people of Israel because they worshiped other gods. They sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them safely out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. They had followed the practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them, as well as the practices the kings of Israel had introduced. The people of Israel had also secretly done many things that were not pleasing to the LORD their God. They

built pagan shrines for themselves in all their towns, from the smallest outpost to the largest walled city. They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles at the top of every hill and under every green tree. They offered sacrifices on all the hilltops, just like the nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them. So the people of Israel had done many evil things, arousing the LORD's anger. Yes, they worshiped idols, despite the LORD's specific and repeated warnings.

Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: "Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets."

But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the LORD's command not to imitate them.

They rejected all the commands of the LORD their God and made two calves from metal. They set up an Asherah pole and worshiped Baal and all the forces of heaven. They even sacrificed their own sons and daughters in the fire. They consulted fortune-tellers and practiced sorcery and sold themselves to evil, arousing the LORD's anger.

Because the LORD was very angry with Israel, he swept them away from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained in the land. But even the people of Judah refused to obey the commands of the LORD their God, for they followed the evil practices that Israel had introduced. The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel. He punished them by handing them over to their attackers until he had banished Israel from his presence.

For when the LORD tore Israel away from the kingdom of David, they chose Jeroboam son of Nebat as their king. But Jeroboam drew Israel away from following the LORD and made them commit a great sin. And the people of Israel persisted in all the evil ways of Jeroboam. They did not turn from these sins until the LORD finally swept them away from his presence, just as all his prophets had warned. So Israel was exiled from their land to Assyria, where they remain to this day.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The defeat and exile of the ten northern tribes of God's people was a devastating blow to God's plans. God had promised to bring blessing

back to all the nations on earth *through Israel*. This is how God was going to bring his salvation to all peoples. Everything now depends on the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) staying faithful to the covenant with God. What do you think will happen? Will they do it?

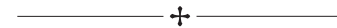
DAY 38

June 21-27

Faithful Trust in the One True God

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 255-256, 258-260)

In the gathering darkness surrounding the kings of God's people, some bright lights still remain. King Hezekiah is one of those lights, committed to helping his people remain loyal to God. But as always with those who follow and obey the LORD, that faith will be tested.



Hezekiah son of Ahaz began to rule over Judah in the third year of King Hoshea's reign in Israel. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had been offering sacrifices to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan.

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the LORD in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the LORD had given Moses. So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did. He revolted against the king of Assyria and refused to pay him tribute. He also conquered the Philistines as far distant as Gaza and its territory, from their smallest outpost to their largest walled city.

During the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea's reign in Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked the city of Samaria and began a siege against it. Three years later, during the sixth year of King Hezekiah's reign and the ninth year of King Hoshea's

reign in Israel, Samaria fell. At that time the king of Assyria exiled the Israelites to Assyria and placed them in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For they refused to listen to the LORD their God and obey him. Instead, they violated his covenant—all the laws that Moses the LORD’s servant had commanded them to obey.

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, King Sennacherib of Assyria came to attack the fortified towns of Judah and conquered them. King Hezekiah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: “I have done wrong. I will pay whatever tribute money you demand if you will only withdraw.” The king of Assyria then demanded a settlement of more than eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold. To gather this amount, King Hezekiah used all the silver stored in the Temple of the LORD and in the palace treasury. Hezekiah even stripped the gold from the doors of the LORD’s Temple and from the doorposts he had overlaid with gold, and he gave it all to the Assyrian king.

Nevertheless, the king of Assyria sent his commander in chief, his field commander, and his chief of staff from Lachish with a huge army to confront King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. . . .

Soon afterward King Sennacherib received word that King Tirhakah of Ethiopia was leading an army to fight against him. Before leaving to meet the attack, he sent messengers back to Hezekiah in Jerusalem with this message:

“This message is for King Hezekiah of Judah. Don’t let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria. You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different? Have the gods of other nations rescued them—such nations as Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Tel-assar? My predecessors destroyed them all! What happened to the king of Hamath and the king of Arpad? What happened to the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?”

After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the LORD’s Temple and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the LORD: “O LORD, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. Bend

down, O LORD, and listen! Open your eyes, O LORD, and see! Listen to Sennacherib’s words of defiance against the living God.

“It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. Now, O LORD our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O LORD, are God.” . . .

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, . . . “And this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:

“His armies will not enter Jerusalem.
They will not even shoot an arrow at it.
They will not march outside its gates with their shields
nor build banks of earth against its walls.
The king will return to his own country
by the same road on which he came.
He will not enter this city,
says the LORD.
For my own honor and for the sake of my servant David,
I will defend this city and protect it.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

From the standpoint of common sense, Assyria was obviously greater and stronger than Judah. And like all mighty empires, Assyria was filled with pride and self-confidence, threatening their neighbors and bringing death and destruction wherever they went. Hezekiah is fully aware of Assyria’s power, but he goes straight to God and pleads with him for help. He trusts that the one true God can save him. At the end of the day, God is the one we call on to show up and show the world that he really is the Mighty One. Pray that God will do that in our time too.

DAY 39

June 21-27

Darkness or Light?

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 262-265)

The struggle in the story of the Bible is the struggle between those who trust in God alone and those who trust in the other powers in the world. Those other powers lead, however, to death. The Lord of creation wants to bring life and blessing to his world. The God of all the earth wants to heal all the nations. Some of Judah's kings serve the darkness, and some serve God's light. The question is: Which power will be greater in the end?



Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother was Hephzibah. He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, following the detestable practices of the pagan nations that the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He rebuilt the pagan shrines his father, Hezekiah, had destroyed. He constructed altars for Baal and set up an Asherah pole, just as King Ahab of Israel had done. He also bowed before all the powers of the heavens and worshiped them.

He built pagan altars in the Temple of the LORD, the place where the LORD had said, "My name will remain in Jerusalem forever." He built these altars for all the powers of the heavens in both courtyards of the LORD's Temple. Manasseh also sacrificed his own son in the fire. He practiced sorcery and divination, and he consulted with mediums and psychics. He did much that was evil in the LORD's sight, arousing his anger.

Manasseh even made a carved image of Asherah and set it up in the Temple, the very place where the LORD had told David and his son Solomon: "My name will be honored forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem—the city I have chosen from among all the tribes of Israel. If the Israelites will be careful to obey my commands—all the laws my servant Moses gave them—I will not send them into exile from this land that I gave their ancestors." But the people refused to listen, and Manasseh led them to do even more evil than the pagan nations that the LORD had destroyed when the people of Israel entered the land.

Then the LORD said through his servants the prophets: "King Manasseh of Judah has done many detestable things. He is even more wicked than the Amorites, who lived in this land before Israel. He has caused the people of Judah to sin with his idols. So this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I will bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of those who hear about it will tingle with horror. I will judge Jerusalem by the same standard I used for Samaria and the same measure I used for the family of Ahab. I will wipe away the people of Jerusalem as one wipes a dish and turns it upside down. Then I will reject even the remnant of my own people who are left, and I will hand them over as plunder for their enemies. For they have done great evil in my sight and have angered me ever since their ancestors came out of Egypt."

Manasseh also murdered many innocent people until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood. This was in addition to the sin that he caused the people of Judah to commit, leading them to do evil in the LORD's sight.

The rest of the events in Manasseh's reign and everything he did, including the sins he committed, are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah*. When Manasseh died, he was buried in the palace garden, the garden of Uzza. Then his son Amon became the next king. . . .



Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and grandson of Meshullam, the court secretary, to the Temple of the LORD. He told him, "Go to Hilkiah the high priest and have him count the money the gatekeepers have collected from the people at the LORD's Temple. Entrust this money to the men assigned to supervise the restoration of the LORD's Temple. Then they can use it to pay workers to repair the Temple. They will need to hire carpenters, builders, and masons. Also have them buy the timber and the finished stone needed to repair the Temple. But don't require the construction supervisors to keep account of the money they receive, for they are honest and trustworthy men."

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have

found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!" Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it.

Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your officials have turned over the money collected at the Temple of the LORD to the workers and supervisors at the Temple." Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king.

When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. Then he gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and Asaiah the king's personal adviser: "Go to the Temple and speak to the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah. Inquire about the words written in this scroll that has been found. For the LORD's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do."

So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe.

She said to them, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken! Go back and tell the man who sent you, 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the words written in the scroll that the king of Judah has read will come true. For my people have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to pagan gods, and I am very angry with them for everything they have done. My anger will burn against this place, and it will not be quenched.'

"But go to the king of Judah who sent you to seek the LORD and tell him: 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the message you have just heard: You were sorry and humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I said against this city and its people—that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the LORD. So I will not send the promised disaster until after you have died and been buried in peace. You will not see the disaster I am going to bring on this city.'"

So they took her message back to the king.

Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the Temple of the LORD with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. There the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the LORD's Temple. The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the LORD's presence. He pledged to obey the LORD by keeping all his

commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. In this way, he confirmed all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll, and all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

King Manasseh led his people into serving the darkness, while his grandson Josiah worked to return them to the light. But it was too late for the kingdom of Judah. Overall, these people called by God had broken their covenant with him and had therefore lost their purpose. So far, we can see in the story that people are having a hard time holding up their end of the covenant with God. He is longing for his people to be faithful, as he is faithful, but they seem unable. If the goal of this story is going to be rescued, it looks like God is the one who will have to somehow save it. God has promised that he will work in the world through human beings. How do you think he does this, since we struggle to serve him consistently? How does God overcome our unsteady hearts?

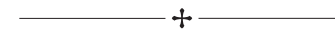
DAY 40

June 21-27

The Southern Kingdom Is No More

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 268-270)

Our individual chapters in the great story of God and the world eventually come to a close. Now it looks for all the world that the story of Abraham's descendants—the twelve tribes of Israel—is coming to a close. The new power in the region, the Babylonians, are right at Jerusalem's gate, threatening the city, the Temple, the kings of Judah, and all of God's people.



Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem. Jehoiachin did what was evil in the LORD's sight, just as his father had done.

During Jehoiachin's reign, the officers of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up against Jerusalem and besieged it. Nebuchadnezzar himself arrived at the city during the siege. Then King Jehoiachin, along with the queen mother, his advisers, his commanders, and his officials, surrendered to the Babylonians.

In the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the LORD had said beforehand, Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures from the LORD's Temple and the royal palace. He stripped away all the gold objects that King Solomon of Israel had placed in the Temple. King Nebuchadnezzar took all of Jerusalem captive, including all the commanders and the best of the soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans—10,000 in all. Only the poorest people were left in the land.

Nebuchadnezzar led King Jehoiachin away as a captive to Babylon, along with the queen mother, his wives and officials, and all Jerusalem's elite. He also exiled 7,000 of the best troops and 1,000 craftsmen and artisans, all of whom were strong and fit for war. Then the king of Babylon installed Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as the next king, and he changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah.

+ + +

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. But Zedekiah did what was evil in the LORD's sight, just as Jehoiakim had done. These things happened because of the LORD's anger against the people of Jerusalem and Judah, until he finally banished them from his presence and sent them into exile.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

So on January 15, during the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon led his entire army against Jerusalem. They surrounded the city and built siege ramps against its walls. Jerusalem was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah's reign.

By July 18 in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, the famine in the city had become very severe, and the last of the food was entirely gone. Then a section of the city wall was broken down. Since the city was surrounded by the Babylonians, the soldiers waited for nightfall and escaped through the gate between the two walls behind the king's garden. Then they headed toward the Jordan Valley.

But the Babylonian troops chased the king and overtook him on the plains of Jericho, for his men had all deserted him and scattered. They captured the king and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where

they pronounced judgment upon Zedekiah. They made Zedekiah watch as they slaughtered his sons. Then they gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon.

On August 14 of that year, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard and an official of the Babylonian king, arrived in Jerusalem. He burned down the Temple of the LORD, the royal palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He destroyed all the important buildings in the city. Then he supervised the entire Babylonian army as they tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took as exiles the rest of the people who remained in the city, the defectors who had declared their allegiance to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the population. But the captain of the guard allowed some of the poorest people to stay behind to care for the vineyards and fields.

The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars in front of the LORD's Temple, the bronze water carts, and the great bronze basin called the Sea, and they carried all the bronze away to Babylon. They also took all the ash buckets, shovels, lamp snuffers, ladles, and all the other bronze articles used for making sacrifices at the Temple. The captain of the guard also took the incense burners and basins, and all the other articles made of pure gold or silver.

The weight of the bronze from the two pillars, the Sea, and the water carts was too great to be measured. These things had been made for the LORD's Temple in the days of Solomon. Each of the pillars was 27 feet tall. The bronze capital on top of each pillar was 7-1/2 feet high and was decorated with a network of bronze pomegranates all the way around.

Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took with him as prisoners Seraiah the high priest, Zephaniah the priest of the second rank, and the three chief gatekeepers. And from among the people still hiding in the city, he took an officer who had been in charge of the Judean army; five of the king's personal advisers; the army commander's chief secretary, who was in charge of recruitment; and sixty other citizens. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took them all to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And there at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king of Babylon had them all put to death. So the people of Judah were sent into exile from their land.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Remember when God came down and rescued his people from slavery in Egypt? Remember how he personally led them through the wilderness

to their promised homeland? Remember the glory and beauty that was revealed when God came down and his presence filled the Temple? The sense of God's presence with his people is gone now. The Temple is burned to the ground. God's people are no longer in God's land. What now? Will God start over with some other nation? What about all those hopes and promises—to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and King David? Where is this story going? Can God still save his people Israel? Can God still save the world?