



I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience™

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.

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——— *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.

DAY 1

A Fresh Start

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 3-4)

Through the leadership of Moses, God has brought his people to the edge of the Promised Land. God is working to restore all things in his creation to his original intention. The nation of Israel has been born, and God has rescued them from slavery and oppression. He has revealed his instructions to them. Through this nation, God is going to bring blessing to all nations. He wants Israel to be a light to the world, showing all people what it looks like when God is King. As we jump back into the story, Joshua is being commissioned as Israel's new leader to bring the nation into a new land, so they can fulfill their special role in God's great restoration project.



After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, "Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you—from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

"Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. This is my command—be strong and courageous!

Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua then commanded the officers of Israel, "Go through the camp and tell the people to get their provisions ready. In three days you will cross the Jordan River and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Then Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He told them, "Remember what Moses, the servant of the LORD, commanded you: 'The LORD your God is giving you a place of rest. He has given you this land.' Your wives, children, and livestock may remain here in the land Moses assigned to you on the east side of the Jordan River. But your strong warriors, fully armed, must lead the other tribes across the Jordan to help them conquer their territory. Stay with them until the LORD gives them rest, as he has given you rest, and until they, too, possess the land the LORD your God is giving them. Only then may you return and settle here on the east side of the Jordan River in the land that Moses, the servant of the LORD, assigned to you."

They answered Joshua, "We will do whatever you command us, and we will go wherever you send us. We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses. And may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your orders and does not obey your words and everything you command will be put to death. So be strong and courageous!"

—*from the book of Joshua*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever started something brand new in your life? Maybe moving to a new school, starting a new friendship, or working on a major project? We are usually both excited and nervous as we approach new beginnings. There's a chance for wonderful things to happen, but also for things to go wrong. This is exactly how it was for Israel as they entered their new homeland. But God promised them right from the start that they weren't alone in this. God was going to be with them every step of the way.

DAY 2

Going with God

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 5-6)

Under Joshua's leadership and God's direction, the people are ready to move forward. God has given them a sign of his presence to be right there with them as they begin. The Ark of the Covenant was covered by two great angels, made from pure gold. Inside the Ark, there were two copies of the great covenant that God had made with Israel. As the people stood on the banks of the Jordan River, they knew that once they crossed it there would be no turning back. They would be in God's new land for them, which was symbolic of the new world that God was promising for all the peoples on earth.



Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, move out from your positions and follow them. Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about half a mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don’t come any closer.”

Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do great wonders among you.”

In the morning Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river.” And so they started out and went ahead of the people.

The LORD told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.’”

So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the LORD your God says. Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites,

Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you. Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the LORD of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. The priests will carry the Ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.”

So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho.

Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, “Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Tell them, ‘Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.’”

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel. He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ Then you can tell them, ‘They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant went across.’ These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever.”

—*from the book of Joshua*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Having ways to remember and talk about key moments in our lives is very important. Looking at photographs is one way families recall their own history together. What are some of the key moments of your

story with God? What are some ways you could make creative memorials of these moments or those of your whole family? What can you do to help you remember all the ways God has been with you on your journey?

DAY 3

New People, Same Story

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 13, 15, 18-19)

Gaining possession of the Promised Land was crucial for God’s plan for the world to move forward. He was establishing a place on earth where he would rule as King, teaching the people his ways so they could live for and worship him. Again and again we will see God and Israel’s leaders renewing the signs of the covenant with the people of Israel. Originally the covenant promises were made with Israel’s ancestors—including Abraham and Moses—but God wants the people to know that they themselves are part of the same covenant, the same story. Through them, God wants to make a new community in the world that can show the way forward with God to all nations.



Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal. He followed the commands that Moses the LORD’s servant had written in the Book of Instruction: “Make me an altar from stones that are uncut and have not been shaped with iron tools.” Then on the altar they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. And as the Israelites watched, Joshua copied onto the stones of the altar the instructions Moses had given them.

Then all the Israelites—foreigners and native-born alike—along with the elders, officers, and judges, were divided into two groups. One group stood in front of Mount Gerizim, the other in front of Mount Ebal. Each group faced the other, and between them stood the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant. This was all done according to the commands that Moses, the servant of the LORD, had previously given for blessing the people of Israel.

Joshua then read to them all the blessings and curses Moses had written

in the Book of Instruction. Every word of every command that Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly of Israel, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among them. . . .



Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua had captured and completely destroyed Ai and killed its king, just as he had destroyed the town of Jericho and killed its king. He also learned that the Gibeonites had made peace with Israel and were now their allies. He and his people became very afraid when they heard all this because Gibeon was a large town—as large as the royal cities and larger than Ai. And the Gibeonite men were strong warriors.

So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent messengers to several other kings: Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon. “Come and help me destroy Gibeon,” he urged them, “for they have made peace with Joshua and the people of Israel.” So these five Amorite kings combined their armies for a united attack. They moved all their troops into place and attacked Gibeon.

The men of Gibeon quickly sent messengers to Joshua at his camp in Gilgal. “Don’t abandon your servants now!” they pleaded. “Come at once! Save us! Help us! For all the Amorite kings who live in the hill country have joined forces to attack us.”

So Joshua and his entire army, including his best warriors, left Gilgal and set out for Gibeon. “Do not be afraid of them,” the LORD said to Joshua, “for I have given you victory over them. Not a single one of them will be able to stand up to you.” . . .

So Joshua conquered the entire region—the hill country, the entire Negev, the whole area around the town of Goshen, the western foothills, the Jordan Valley, the mountains of Israel, and the Galilean foothills. The Israelite territory now extended all the way from Mount Halak, which leads up to Seir in the south, as far north as Baal-gad at the foot of Mount Hermon in the valley of Lebanon. Joshua killed all the kings of those territories, waging war for a long time to accomplish this. No one in this region made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites of Gibeon. All the others were defeated.

—from the book of Joshua

TALKING TOGETHER:

It took a long time for God’s people to take possession of the Promised Land. God was helping them along the way, but it was more of a process than a one-time event. It is important for us to know that God can work in lots of different ways—not only in sudden, dramatic interventions but also more slowly through people and processes. The point is that we can count on God to be present with us and to be working in and through us. How have you seen God working in your life and in the life of your family or church?

DAY 4**It’s All in the Details**

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 23, 28)

The book of Joshua goes into a lot of detail about the twelve tribes of Israel, including individual clans and families, and about who inherited which part of the land. It even covers how they had to fight for and then settle in different areas. God showed that he cares for specific people and gives them specific places to live in and care for. God was beginning to reshape the world, one family—even one person—at a time.



A delegation from the tribe of Judah, led by Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, came to Joshua at Gilgal. Caleb said to Joshua, “Remember what the LORD said to Moses, the man of God, about you and me when we were at Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the LORD, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land of Canaan. I returned and gave an honest report, but my brothers who went with me frightened the people from entering the Promised Land. For my part, I wholeheartedly followed the LORD my God. So that day Moses solemnly promised me, ‘The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your grant of land and that of your descendants forever, because you wholeheartedly followed the LORD my God.’

“Now, as you can see, the LORD has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old.

I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. So give me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said.”

So Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave Hebron to him as his portion of land. Hebron still belongs to the descendants of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he wholeheartedly followed the LORD, the God of Israel. (Previously Hebron had been called Kiriath-arba. It had been named after Arba, a great hero of the descendants of Anak.)

And the land had rest from war. . . .



Now that the land was under Israelite control, the entire community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tabernacle. But there remained seven tribes who had not yet been allotted their grants of land.

Then Joshua asked them, “How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you? Select three men from each tribe, and I will send them out to explore the land and map it out. They will then return to me with a written report of their proposed divisions of their new homeland. Let them divide the land into seven sections, excluding Judah’s territory in the south and Joseph’s territory in the north. And when you record the seven divisions of the land and bring them to me, I will cast sacred lots in the presence of the LORD our God to assign land to each tribe.

“The Levites, however, will not receive any allotment of land. Their role as priests of the LORD is their allotment. And the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh won’t receive any more land, for they have already received their grant of land, which Moses, the servant of the LORD, gave them on the east side of the Jordan River.”

As the men started on their way to map out the land, Joshua commanded them, “Go and explore the land and write a description of it. Then return to me, and I will assign the land to the tribes by casting sacred lots here in the presence of the LORD at Shiloh.” The men did as they were told and mapped the entire territory into seven sections, listing the towns in each section. They made a written record and then returned to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh. And there at Shiloh, Joshua cast sacred lots in the presence of the LORD to determine which tribe should have each section.

—*from the book of Joshua*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Details matter. In this story we learn that God was very specific about how he was keeping his promises to his people. This is important not only for the people of Israel (who needed to know where they were going to live!) but also for us. God is the Creator, the Maker of all things. He knows that our lives are shaped by the details of where we live and how. Where do you live? Is there plenty of room around you, or do you live in a city with lots of people nearby? Do you live near water? What is the weather like? Part of living well as God’s people means paying attention to the details of our own unique place and how to care for it well.

DAY 5**The True Test: Loyalty**

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 34, 37-39)

When God created the world, what he wanted was for people to be loyal to him—to love him, obey him, trust him, and worship him. He knew that if people did that, things would go well for them. God wanted people to thrive in the world—to live good lives and to care for each other and the rest of God’s creation. This is why God started making covenants with people after humanity had rebelled against him. He was slowly going to win back the human race. The Bible is the story of that effort—God working to save and restore his people and his world. So the call to the people of Israel, newly settled in their land, was to renew their commitment of loyalty and service to God.



So the LORD gave to Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had solemnly promised their ancestors. None of their enemies could stand against them, for the LORD helped them conquer all their enemies. Not a single one of all the good promises the LORD had given to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; everything he had spoken came true. . . .

+ + +

Then Joshua summoned all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, including their elders, leaders, judges, and officers. So they came and presented themselves to God.

Joshua said to the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River, and they worshiped other gods. But I took your ancestor Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him into the land of Canaan. I gave him many descendants through his son Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir, while Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.

“Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I brought terrible plagues on Egypt; and afterward I brought you out as a free people. But when your ancestors arrived at the Red Sea, the Egyptians chased after you with chariots and charioteers. When your ancestors cried out to the LORD, I put darkness between you and the Egyptians. I brought the sea crashing down on the Egyptians, drowning them. With your very own eyes you saw what I did. Then you lived in the wilderness for many years.

“Finally, I brought you into the land of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I destroyed them before you. I gave you victory over them, and you took possession of their land. Then Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, started a war against Israel. He summoned Balaam son of Beor to curse you, but I would not listen to him. Instead, I made Balaam bless you, and so I rescued you from Balak.

“When you crossed the Jordan River and came to Jericho, the men of Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I gave you victory over them. And I sent terror ahead of you to drive out the two kings of the Amorites. It was not your swords or bows that brought you victory. I gave you land you had not worked on, and I gave you towns you did not build—the towns where you are now living. I gave you vineyards and olive groves for food, though you did not plant them.

“So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”

The people replied, “We would never abandon the LORD and serve other gods. For the LORD our God is the one who rescued us and our

ancestors from slavery in the land of Egypt. He performed mighty miracles before our very eyes. As we traveled through the wilderness among our enemies, he preserved us. It was the LORD who drove out the Amorites and the other nations living here in the land. So we, too, will serve the LORD, for he alone is our God.”

Then Joshua warned the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy and jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you abandon the LORD and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you.”

But the people answered Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!”

“You are a witness to your own decision,” Joshua said. “You have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes,” they replied, “we are witnesses to what we have said.”

“All right then,” Joshua said, “destroy the idols among you, and turn your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

The people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God. We will obey him alone.”

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day at Shechem, committing them to follow the decrees and regulations of the LORD. Joshua recorded these things in the Book of God’s Instructions. As a reminder of their agreement, he took a huge stone and rolled it beneath the terebinth tree beside the Tabernacle of the LORD.

Joshua said to all the people, “This stone has heard everything the LORD said to us. It will be a witness to testify against you if you go back on your word to God.”

Then Joshua sent all the people away to their own homelands.

—*from the book of Joshua*

TALKING TOGETHER:

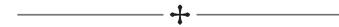
The Bible’s story repeatedly shows us that God is faithful to his promises and his plans. God is always working to bring about his purposes for us and our world. He has worked throughout history. He is working with us now. The same choice that the people of Israel were given is given to us: Whom will we serve? How can we show in our lives that we have committed to following and serving the one true God?

DAY 6

Falling Away, Coming Back, Falling Away . . .

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 45-47)

The King of all kings had chosen the people of Israel to be his light to the world. He made his covenant with them and placed them in the land, a place where they could follow God’s ways. If they would live as his faithful covenant people, then he would bless them in their land. The book of Judges, however, tells us that Israel struggled to remain loyal to God. Especially as the generations passed and new generations—who had never seen God’s mighty works for Israel in the past—grew up. When the people’s loyalty failed, God allowed them to be conquered by other nations. But when they repented, God would raise up a new leader to rescue them from suffering and oppression. The cycle would then start over as Israel would fail again.



After Joshua sent the people away, each of the tribes left to take possession of the land allotted to them. And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him—those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110. They buried him in the land he had been allocated, at Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

The Israelites did evil in the LORD’s sight and served the images of Baal. They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD. They abandoned the LORD to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth. This made the LORD burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. Every time Israel went out to

battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.

Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers. Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by worshiping other gods. How quickly they turned away from the path of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands.

Whenever the LORD raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the LORD took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering. But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

So the LORD burned with anger against Israel. He said, "Because these people have violated my covenant, which I made with their ancestors, and have ignored my commands, I will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died. I did this to test Israel—to see whether or not they would follow the ways of the LORD as their ancestors did." That is why the LORD left those nations in place. He did not quickly drive them out or allow Joshua to conquer them all. . . .

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The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight. They forgot about the LORD their God, and they served the images of Baal and the Asherah poles. Then the LORD burned with anger against Israel, and he turned them over to King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim. And the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim for eight years.

But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, the LORD raised up a rescuer to save them. His name was Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother, Kenaz. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he became Israel's judge. He went to war against King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram, and the LORD gave Othniel victory over him. So there was peace in the land for forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

—*from the book of Judges*

TALKING TOGETHER:

It all started going wrong when the people of Israel forgot the most important things: Who is God? What has he done for us? Israel lost track of their history with God, and so the nation turned away from

him. And then, as always happens when people turn away from God, they started trusting in other powers and pagan gods instead. We are tempted to do the same thing. What other gods and powers are we tempted to rely on today? What can we do to remind ourselves of who God is and what he's done for us?

DAY 7

What Kind of Fight Is This?

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 52-56)

The LORD's history with his people is one of ongoing struggle. (Even the name Israel means "to struggle with God.") God has promised to work with humans to bring his plans for salvation and restoration into the world. This means he is committed to his people even though they are imperfect. God's history with ancient Israel confirms his ongoing faithfulness to the covenant and his willingness to keep forgiving.

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The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight. So the LORD handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help.

When they cried out to the LORD because of Midian, the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt. I rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land. I told you, 'I am the LORD your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me."

Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!”

“Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The LORD brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!” . . .

So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. Therefore, tell the people, ‘Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.’” So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.

But the LORD told Gideon, “There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the LORD told him, “Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream.” Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

The LORD told Gideon, “With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.” So Gideon collected the provisions and rams’ horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him. . . .

Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted, “Get up! For the LORD has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!” He divided the 300 men into three groups and gave each man a ram’s horn and a clay jar with a torch in it.

Then he said to them, “Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do. As soon as I and those with me blow the rams’ horns, blow your horns, too, all around the entire camp, and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon!’”

It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the rams’ horns and broke their clay jars. Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”

Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape. When the 300 Israelites blew their rams’ horns, the LORD caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. Those who were not killed fled to places as far away as Beth-shittah near Zererah and to the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath.

—*from the book of Judges*

TALKING TOGETHER:

We think we know how the world works. We expect that whoever is bigger, stronger, or smarter will always get ahead. We tend to believe that greater strength or better technology will prevail. But the Bible teaches us something different. Again and again we see God winning victories for his people in unlikely and unexpected ways. God was teaching his people to trust him above all, not the usual things like the size of their army or the kinds of weapons they had. Do you think God still works this way for his people today? What can we do to show we trust in God’s strength more than anything else?

DAY 8

Hidden Strength

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 70-72)

Once again Israel fell under the rule of their enemies, this time the Philistines. So God sent a deliverer named Samson to rescue them. Samson was a Nazirite—someone dedicated to God from birth who had to follow special rules. If he lived this way, then the Spirit of God would come on him with great power when he needed it. But he did not have this strength just by himself—it always depended on his obedience to the LORD.



Some time later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “Entice Samson to tell you what makes him so strong and how he can be overpowered and tied up securely. Then each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me what makes you so strong and what it would take to tie you up securely.”

Samson replied, “If I were tied up with seven new bowstrings that have not yet been dried, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

So the Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven new bowstrings, and she tied Samson up with them. She had hidden some men in one of the inner rooms of her house, and she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But Samson snapped the bowstrings as a piece of string snaps when it is burned by a fire. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

Afterward Delilah said to him, “You’ve been making fun of me and telling me lies! Now please tell me how you can be tied up securely.”

Samson replied, “If I were tied up with brand-new ropes that had never been used, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

So Delilah took new ropes and tied him up with them. The men were hiding in the inner room as before, and again Delilah cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But again Samson snapped the ropes from his arms as if they were thread.

Then Delilah said, “You’ve been making fun of me and telling me lies! Now tell me how you can be tied up securely.”

Samson replied, “If you were to weave the seven braids of my hair into the fabric on your loom and tighten it with the loom shuttle, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

So while he slept, Delilah wove the seven braids of his hair into the fabric. Then she tightened it with the loom shuttle. Again she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But Samson woke up, pulled back the loom shuttle, and yanked his hair away from the loom and the fabric.

Then Delilah pouted, “How can you tell me, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t share your secrets with me? You’ve made fun of me three times now, and you still haven’t told me what makes you so strong!” She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it.

Finally, Samson shared his secret with her. “My hair has never been cut,” he confessed, “for I was dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. If my

head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as anyone else.”

Delilah realized he had finally told her the truth, so she sent for the Philistine rulers. “Come back one more time,” she said, “for he has finally told me his secret.” So the Philistine rulers returned with the money in their hands. Delilah lulled Samson to sleep with his head in her lap, and then she called in a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. In this way she began to bring him down, and his strength left him.

Then she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!”

When he woke up, he thought, “I will do as before and shake myself free.” But he didn’t realize the LORD had left him.

So the Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes. They took him to Gaza, where he was bound with bronze chains and forced to grind grain in the prison.

But before long, his hair began to grow back.

The Philistine rulers held a great festival, offering sacrifices and praising their god, Dagon. They said, “Our god has given us victory over our enemy Samson!”

When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, “Our god has delivered our enemy to us! The one who killed so many of us is now in our power!”

Half drunk by now, the people demanded, “Bring out Samson so he can amuse us!” So he was brought from the prison to amuse them, and they had him stand between the pillars supporting the roof.

Samson said to the young servant who was leading him by the hand, “Place my hands against the pillars that hold up the temple. I want to rest against them.” Now the temple was completely filled with people. All the Philistine rulers were there, and there were about 3,000 men and women on the roof who were watching as Samson amused them.

Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “Sovereign LORD, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me just one more time. With one blow let me pay back the Philistines for the loss of my two eyes.” Then Samson put his hands on the two center pillars that held up the temple. Pushing against them with both hands, he prayed, “Let me die with the Philistines.” And the temple crashed down on the Philistine rulers and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.

Later his brothers and other relatives went down to get his body. They took him back home and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, where his father, Manoah, was buried. Samson had judged Israel for twenty years.

—from the book of Judges

TALKING TOGETHER:

Samson did not keep his vows as a person specially dedicated to God. He did not follow God's instructions for living a good life in the community of God's people. He went his own way, and it eventually cost him his life. It is important to note, however, that in the end he did turn back to God and ask God to help him fulfill his life's purpose. Even as he was dying, Samson was able to help rescue Israel. Our commitment to God and the way we live matters. This has a lot to do with how our own life goes and also the lives of those around us. But in the end, God is bigger than our successes or failures. He can bring good out of bad situations. Talk together about how important it is to ultimately rely on God, not on ourselves.

DAY 9**Who's in Charge Here?**

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 72-74)

The book of Judges is about life in Israel before the time when the nation had kings. It is clear from Israel's covenant with God that he is supposed to be Israel's Great King. But even without kings, good leadership matters. Judges shows us what happens when leadership is lacking and chaos takes over. For example, God told his people how to worship him, and they weren't supposed to make images or idols of him. But Israel ignored God's instructions and simply did things their own way.



In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

One day a young Levite, who had been living in Bethlehem in Judah, arrived in that area. He had left Bethlehem in search of another place to live, and as he traveled, he came to the hill country of Ephraim. He happened to stop at Micah's house as he was traveling through. "Where are you from?" Micah asked him.

He replied, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am looking for a place to live."

"Stay here with me," Micah said, "and you can be a father and priest to me. I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, plus a change of clothes and your food." The Levite agreed to this, and the young man became like one of Micah's sons.

So Micah installed the Levite as his personal priest, and he lived in Micah's house. "I know the LORD will bless me now," Micah said, "because I have a Levite serving as my priest."

Now in those days Israel had no king. And the tribe of Dan was trying to find a place where they could settle, for they had not yet moved into the land assigned to them when the land was divided among the tribes of Israel. So the men of Dan chose from their clans five capable warriors from the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol to scout out a land for them to settle in.

When these warriors arrived in the hill country of Ephraim, they came to Micah's house and spent the night there. While at Micah's house, they recognized the young Levite's accent, so they went over and asked him, "Who brought you here, and what are you doing in this place? Why are you here?" He told them about his agreement with Micah and that he had been hired as Micah's personal priest.

Then they said, "Ask God whether or not our journey will be successful." "Go in peace," the priest replied. "For the LORD is watching over your journey."

So the five men went on to the town of Laish, where they noticed the people living carefree lives, like the Sidonians; they were peaceful and secure. The people were also wealthy because their land was very fertile. And they lived a great distance from Sidon and had no allies nearby.

When the men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked them, "What did you find?"

The men replied, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen the land, and it is very good. What are you waiting for? Don't hesitate to go and take possession of it. When you get there, you will find the people living carefree lives. God has given us a spacious and fertile land, lacking in nothing!"

So 600 men from the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. They camped at a place west of Kiriath-jearim in Judah, which is called Mahaneh-dan to this day. Then they went on from there into the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

The five men who had scouted out the land around Laish explained to the others, "These buildings contain a sacred ephod, as well as some household idols, a carved image, and a cast idol. What do you think you

should do?” Then the five men turned off the road and went over to Micah’s house, where the young Levite lived, and greeted him kindly. As the 600 armed warriors from the tribe of Dan stood at the entrance of the gate, the five scouts entered the shrine and removed the carved image, the sacred ephod, the household idols, and the cast idol. Meanwhile, the priest was standing at the gate with the 600 armed warriors.

When the priest saw the men carrying all the sacred objects out of Micah’s shrine, he said, “What are you doing?”

“Be quiet and come with us,” they said. “Be a father and priest to all of us. Isn’t it better to be a priest for an entire tribe and clan of Israel than for the household of just one man?”

The young priest was quite happy to go with them, so he took along the sacred ephod, the household idols, and the carved image. They turned and started on their way again, placing their children, livestock, and possessions in front of them.

When the people from the tribe of Dan were quite a distance from Micah’s house, the people who lived near Micah came chasing after them. They were shouting as they caught up with them. The men of Dan turned around and said to Micah, “What’s the matter? Why have you called these men together and chased after us like this?”

“What do you mean, ‘What’s the matter?’” Micah replied. “You’ve taken away all the gods I have made, and my priest, and I have nothing left!”

The men of Dan said, “Watch what you say! There are some short-tempered men around here who might get angry and kill you and your family.” So the men of Dan continued on their way. When Micah saw that there were too many of them for him to attack, he turned around and went home.

Then, with Micah’s idols and his priest, the men of Dan came to the town of Laish, whose people were peaceful and secure. They attacked with swords and burned the town to the ground. There was no one to rescue the people, for they lived a great distance from Sidon and had no allies nearby. This happened in the valley near Beth-rehob.

Then the people of the tribe of Dan rebuilt the town and lived there. They renamed the town Dan after their ancestor, Israel’s son, but it had originally been called Laish.

Then they set up the carved image, and they appointed Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses, as their priest. This family continued as priests for the tribe of Dan until the Exile. So Micah’s carved image was worshiped by the tribe of Dan as long as the Tabernacle of God remained at Shiloh.

—from the book of Judges

TALKING TOGETHER:

We believe that God truly is the Great King. He is the Creator of all things and the Ruler of all things. In the stories about Jesus in the New Testament, we are told that Jesus came to bring God’s rule to earth. God’s Kingdom is coming—and it’s already here! What happens in our own lives when we don’t follow God as our King? What happens in the world when people refuse to recognize that God is King?

DAY 10

Can Outsiders Become Insiders?

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 83-87)

God chose the descendants of Abraham as the special family he would work through to bring his blessing to the whole world. This family then grew into a nation with a strong sense of identity. Abraham’s descendants knew they were different from all the other nations. So what happens when someone from another country—an outsider—tries to join God’s people? Should that person be accepted?



In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.

Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

Then Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back to your mothers’ homes. And may the LORD reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the LORD bless you with the security of another marriage.” Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

“No,” they said. “We want to go with you to your people.”

But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents’ homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has raised his fist against me.”

And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. “Is it really Naomi?” the women asked.

“Don’t call me Naomi,” she responded. “Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the LORD has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?”

So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest. . . .

One day Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, it’s time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for. Boaz is a close relative of ours, and he’s been very kind by letting you gather grain with his young women. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Now do as I tell you—take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don’t let Boaz see you until he has finished eating and drinking. Be sure to notice where he

lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do.”

“I will do everything you say,” Ruth replied. So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law.

After Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he lay down at the far end of the pile of grain and went to sleep. Then Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Around midnight Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet! “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she replied. “Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer.”

“The LORD bless you, my daughter!” Boaz exclaimed. “You are showing even more family loyalty now than you did before, for you have not gone after a younger man, whether rich or poor. Now don’t worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are a virtuous woman. But while it’s true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, very well. Let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will redeem you myself! Now lie down here until morning.” . . .

Then Boaz said to the elders and to the crowd standing around, “You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elim-elech, Kilion, and Mahlon. And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today.”

Then the elders and all the people standing in the gate replied, “We are witnesses! May the LORD make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. And may the LORD give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.”

So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the LORD enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women of the town said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!”

Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own. The neighbor women said, “Now at last Naomi has a son again!” And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

—*from the book of Ruth*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The Bible is a book full of God’s surprises. Here in the short book of Ruth we learn that even an outsider—a foreigner—can join with God’s people. Not only that, God had a special part for Ruth to play in his bigger plan. She became part of the family line of the famous King David, who became the ancestor of the Messiah. God can surprise us still today. We live in this same story of the wonderfully unexpected. Do we live with a sense of suspense and expectation about what God might do? How can we keep this feeling alive?

DAY 11

The God Who Rescues Us

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 91-93)

God’s plan was to set the world in order, and he intended to work through Israel to make this happen. But within this big Story there were the smaller stories of individual lives. There were people who loved and served the LORD but still had big problems and difficulties. Hannah was one of these people. In ancient cultures, people gave more value to women who had children, especially if they had baby boys. But Hannah didn’t have any children, and because of this, she suffered. But the Lord of all life has the power to change things.



There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the region of Zuph in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, of Ephraim. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not.

Each year Elkanah would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the

LORD of Heaven’s Armies at the Tabernacle. The priests of the LORD at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas. On the days Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to Peninnah and each of her children. And though he loved Hannah, he would give her only one choice portion because the LORD had given her no children. So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the LORD had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

“Why are you crying, Hannah?” Elkanah would ask. “Why aren’t you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn’t that better than having ten sons?”

Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. And she made this vow: “O LORD of Heaven’s Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut.”

As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. “Must you come here drunk?” he demanded. “Throw away your wine!”

“Oh no, sir!” she replied. “I haven’t been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.”

“In that case,” Eli said, “go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!” she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the LORD once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the LORD remembered her plea, and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I asked the LORD for him.”

The next year Elkanah and his family went on their annual trip to offer a sacrifice to the LORD and to keep his vow. But Hannah did not go. She told her husband, “Wait until the boy is weaned. Then I will take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there with the LORD permanently.”

“Whatever you think is best,” Elkanah agreed. “Stay here for now, and may the LORD help you keep your promise.” So she stayed home and nursed the boy until he was weaned.

When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and a basket of flour and some wine. After sacrificing the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. “Sir, do you remember me?” Hannah asked. “I am the very woman who stood here several years ago praying to the LORD. I asked the LORD to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life.” And they worshiped the LORD there.

Then Hannah prayed:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD!

The LORD has made me strong.

Now I have an answer for my enemies;

I rejoice because you rescued me.

No one is holy like the LORD!

There is no one besides you;

there is no Rock like our God.

“Stop acting so proud and haughty!

Don’t speak with such arrogance!

For the LORD is a God who knows what you have done;

he will judge your actions.

The bow of the mighty is now broken,

and those who stumbled are now strong.

Those who were well fed are now starving,

and those who were starving are now full.

“The childless woman now has seven children,

and the woman with many children wastes away.

The LORD gives both death and life;

he brings some down to the grave but raises others up.

The LORD makes some poor and others rich;

he brings some down and lifts others up.

He lifts the poor from the dust

and the needy from the garbage dump.

He sets them among princes,

placing them in seats of honor.

For all the earth is the LORD’s,

and he has set the world in order.

“He will protect his faithful ones,

but the wicked will disappear in darkness.

No one will succeed by strength alone.

Those who fight against the LORD will be shattered.
He thunders against them from heaven;
the LORD judges throughout the earth.
He gives power to his king;
he increases the strength of his anointed one.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The thanksgiving prayer of Hannah is one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. It’s very similar to the song Mary would later sing after hearing about the promised coming of Jesus. (We can read this near the beginning of Luke–Acts.) Songs are powerful ways of expressing the most important things we experience. The Bible uses songs the same way—to communicate not only the great joy but also the hard pain of people in God’s story. What are your favorite songs? How do they make you feel? How important are songs for God’s people today?

DAY 12

The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 96-97)

God made a covenant with the people of Israel when he freed them from slavery and oppression in Egypt. At that time, he told the Israelites to build a wooden box, covered with gold, to be a sign of the LORD’s presence with his people. The two copies of the covenant (the Ten Commandments) were kept inside the Ark, and there were two gold angels on top of the Ark. The Ark of the Covenant was normally kept inside the Tabernacle (the big moveable tent that served as God’s home among his people).



At that time Israel was at war with the Philistines. The Israelite army was camped near Ebenezer, and the Philistines were at Aphek. The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing 4,000 men. After the battle was over, the troops retreated to their camp, and the elders of Israel asked,

“Why did the LORD allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?” Then they said, “Let’s bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies.”

So they sent men to Shiloh to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were also there with the Ark of the Covenant of God. When all the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud it made the ground shake!

“What’s going on?” the Philistines asked. “What’s all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?” When they were told it was because the Ark of the LORD had arrived, they panicked. “The gods have come into their camp!” they cried. “This is a disaster! We have never had to face anything like this before! Help! Who can save us from these mighty gods of Israel? They are the same gods who destroyed the Egyptians with plagues when Israel was in the wilderness. Fight as never before, Philistines! If you don’t, we will become the Hebrews’ slaves just as they have been ours! Stand up like men and fight!”

So the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; 30,000 Israelite soldiers died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed.

A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day. He had torn his clothes and put dust on his head to show his grief. Eli was waiting beside the road to hear the news of the battle, for his heart trembled for the safety of the Ark of God. When the messenger arrived and told what had happened, an outcry resounded throughout the town.

“What is all the noise about?” Eli asked.

The messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, “I have just come from the battlefield—I was there this very day.”

“What happened, my son?” Eli demanded.

“Israel has been defeated by the Philistines,” the messenger replied. “The people have been slaughtered, and your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also killed. And the Ark of God has been captured.”

When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and overweight. He had been Israel’s judge for forty years.

Eli’s daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time of delivery. When she heard that the Ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, she went into labor and

gave birth. She died in childbirth, but before she passed away the midwives tried to encourage her. “Don’t be afraid,” they said. “You have a baby boy!” But she did not answer or pay attention to them.

She named the child Ichabod (which means “Where is the glory?”), for she said, “Israel’s glory is gone.” She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured and because her father-in-law and husband were dead. Then she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Things were not looking good for Israel at this point. God allowed Israel to be defeated over and over again on the battlefield. Eli the priest had served for a long time as Israel’s judge (or leader), but now he had died. The Ark that symbolized the LORD’s covenant and presence with Israel had even been captured by the Philistines. Do you ever have times when it seems like everything is going wrong? What do you do when you feel like this?

DAY 13

Israel Finds Its First King

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 103-106)

Samuel has now grown up and, like Eli, is both a priest and judge. But the people of Israel want something different; they want a king just like all the other nations have. The most crucial thing, though, is not whether Israel has a human king but that they honor and serve the LORD above all. Kings and leaders come and go, but God is always the highest Ruler.



Later Samuel called all the people of Israel to meet before the LORD at Mizpah. And he said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, has declared: I brought you from Egypt and rescued you from the Egyptians and from all of the nations that were oppressing you. But though I have rescued

you from your misery and distress, you have rejected your God today and have said, ‘No, we want a king instead!’ Now, therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by tribes and clans.”

So Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel before the LORD, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen by lot. Then he brought each family of the tribe of Benjamin before the LORD, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. And finally Saul son of Kish was chosen from among them. But when they looked for him, he had disappeared! So they asked the LORD, “Where is he?”

And the LORD replied, “He is hiding among the baggage.” So they found him and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else.

Then Samuel said to all the people, “This is the man the LORD has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!”

And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

Then Samuel told the people what the rights and duties of a king were. He wrote them down on a scroll and placed it before the LORD. Then Samuel sent the people home again.

When Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, a group of men whose hearts God had touched went with him. But there were some scoundrels who complained, “How can this man save us?” And they scorned him and refused to bring him gifts. But Saul ignored them. . . .

Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us all go to Gilgal to renew the kingdom.” So they all went to Gilgal, and in a solemn ceremony before the LORD they made Saul king. Then they offered peace offerings to the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites were filled with joy.

Then Samuel addressed all Israel: “I have done as you asked and given you a king. Your king is now your leader. I stand here before you—an old, gray-haired man—and my sons serve you. I have served as your leader from the time I was a boy to this very day. Now testify against me in the presence of the LORD and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong.”

“No,” they replied, “you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe.”

“The LORD and his anointed one are my witnesses today,” Samuel declared, “that my hands are clean.”

“Yes, he is a witness,” they replied.

“It was the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron,” Samuel continued. “He brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. Now stand here

quietly before the LORD as I remind you of all the great things the LORD has done for you and your ancestors.

“When the Israelites were in Egypt and cried out to the LORD, he sent Moses and Aaron to rescue them from Egypt and to bring them into this land. But the people soon forgot about the LORD their God, so he handed them over to Sisera, the commander of Hazor’s army, and also to the Philistines and to the king of Moab, who fought against them.

“Then they cried to the LORD again and confessed, ‘We have sinned by turning away from the LORD and worshiping the images of Baal and Ash-toreth. But we will worship you and you alone if you will rescue us from our enemies.’ Then the LORD sent Gideon, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel to save you, and you lived in safety.

“But when you were afraid of Nahash, the king of Ammon, you came to me and said that you wanted a king to reign over you, even though the LORD your God was already your king. All right, here is the king you have chosen. You asked for him, and the LORD has granted your request.

“Now if you fear and worship the LORD and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the LORD’s commands, then both you and your king will show that you recognize the LORD as your God. But if you rebel against the LORD’s commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors.

“Now stand here and see the great thing the LORD is about to do. You know that it does not rain at this time of the year during the wheat harvest. I will ask the LORD to send thunder and rain today. Then you will realize how wicked you have been in asking the LORD for a king!”

So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day. And all the people were terrified of the LORD and of Samuel. “Pray to the LORD your God for us, or we will die!” they all said to Samuel. “For now we have added to our sins by asking for a king.”

“Don’t be afraid,” Samuel reassured them. “You have certainly done wrong, but make sure now that you worship the LORD with all your heart, and don’t turn your back on him. Don’t go back to worshiping worthless idols that cannot help or rescue you—they are totally useless! The LORD will not abandon his people, because that would dishonor his great name. For it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.

“As for me, I will certainly not sin against the LORD by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and faithfully serve him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you. But if you continue to sin, you and your king will be swept away.”

—from the book of Samuel–Kings

TALKING TOGETHER:

There are times when we make mistakes—when we do less than what God hopes or expects from us. What happens then? How does God keep the story of our lives on track? When this happened with Israel, God didn't reject them. He didn't stop working through Israel for his bigger plans for the world. God adjusted to the new situation (Israel demanding a king) and from this point on he will work with this. How does knowing that God is like this help us in our own journey with him?

DAY 14**The King Falters**

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 106-107, 113)

So Israel had their new king, and Saul was an impressive figure. But the Philistines were impressive too! They had better weapons and a bigger army than Israel did. Saul's job was to free Israel from Philistine oppression, but this was not an easy thing to do. Saul found it difficult to wait and trust God deeply to protect Israel. The same was true for most of the Israelites.



Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years.

Saul selected 3,000 special troops from the army of Israel and sent the rest of the men home. He took 2,000 of the chosen men with him to Micmash and the hill country of Bethel. The other 1,000 went with Saul's son Jonathan to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin.

Soon after this, Jonathan attacked and defeated the garrison of Philistines at Geba. The news spread quickly among the Philistines. So Saul blew the ram's horn throughout the land, saying, "Hebrews, hear this! Rise up in revolt!" All Israel heard the news that Saul had destroyed the Philistine garrison at Geba and that the Philistines now hated the Israelites more than ever. So the entire Israelite army was summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines mustered a mighty army of 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and as many warriors as the grains of sand on the seashore! They

camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns. Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead.

Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn't come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, "What is this you have done?"

Saul replied, "I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, 'The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven't even asked for the LORD's help!' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came."

"How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart. The LORD has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." . . .



Now the LORD said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king."

But Samuel asked, "How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me."

"Take a heifer with you," the LORD replied, "and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to anoint for me."

So Samuel did as the LORD instructed. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town came trembling to meet him. "What's wrong?" they asked. "Do you come in peace?"

"Yes," Samuel replied. "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice, too.

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the LORD’s anointed!”

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “This is not the one the LORD has chosen.” Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, “Neither is this the one the LORD has chosen.” In the same way all seven of Jesse’s sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” Then Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied. “But he’s out in the fields watching the sheep and goats.”

“Send for him at once,” Samuel said. “We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

So Jesse sent for him. He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes.

And the LORD said, “This is the one; anoint him.”

So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

We live in the world and are part of its ongoing story. God has created us and given us important roles to play alongside him in bringing his rule to earth. But only God is God. He alone sees the big picture, and sometimes he makes big moves to bring his purposes to life in the world. God chose David to be Israel’s new king, and God alone knew what would come from this choice. It’s important for us to be active in working for God’s Kingdom. But it’s also important for us to trust God for the bigger picture and for the longer term. Pray that God will help you do all of this.

DAY 15

David’s Surprising Victory

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 114-117)

Saul is still king, but God has already shown that Saul’s family will not inherit the kingdom. Instead, it will pass to someone else, and a new royal dynasty will be established in another family. The LORD has looked in David’s heart and chosen him to be Israel’s king after Saul. David, however, is still young and unproven. What will he do when he faces a big challenge? What will God do for him?



The Philistines now mustered their army for battle and camped between Socoh in Judah and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. Saul countered by gathering his Israelite troops near the valley of Elah. So the Philistines and Israelites faced each other on opposite hills, with the valley between them.

Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet, and his bronze coat of mail weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leg armor, and he carried a bronze javelin on his shoulder. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver’s beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed 15 pounds. His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a shield.

Goliath stood and shouted a taunt across to the Israelites. “Why are you all coming out to fight?” he called. “I am the Philistine champion, but you are only the servants of Saul. Choose one man to come down here and fight me! If he kills me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will be our slaves! I defy the armies of Israel today! Send me a man who will fight me!” When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.

Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons. Jesse’s three oldest sons—Eliab, Abinadab, and Shimea—had already joined Saul’s army to fight the Philistines. David was the youngest son. David’s three oldest brothers stayed with Saul’s army, but David went back and forth so he could help his father with the sheep in Bethlehem.

For forty days, every morning and evening, the Philistine champion strutted in front of the Israelite army.

One day Jesse said to David, “Take this basket of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread, and carry them quickly to your brothers. And give these ten cuts of cheese to their captain. See how your brothers are getting along, and bring back a report on how they are doing.” David’s brothers were with Saul and the Israelite army at the valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.

So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts, as Jesse had directed him. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came out from the Philistine ranks. Then David heard him shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel.

As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright. “Have you seen the giant?” the men asked. “He comes out each day to defy Israel. The king has offered a huge reward to anyone who kills him. He will give that man one of his daughters for a wife, and the man’s entire family will be exempted from paying taxes!”

David asked the soldiers standing nearby, “What will a man get for killing this Philistine and ending his defiance of Israel? Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?”

And these men gave David the same reply. They said, “Yes, that is the reward for killing him.”

But when David’s oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. “What are you doing around here anyway?” he demanded. “What about those few sheep you’re supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and deceit. You just want to see the battle!”

“What have I done now?” David replied. “I was only asking a question!” He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer. Then David’s question was reported to King Saul, and the king sent for him.

“Don’t worry about this Philistine,” David told Saul. “I’ll go fight him!”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Saul replied. “There’s no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You’re only a boy, and he’s been a man of war since his youth.”

But David persisted. “I have been taking care of my father’s sheep and goats,” he said. “When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to

both lions and bears, and I’ll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!”

Saul finally consented. “All right, go ahead,” he said. “And may the LORD be with you!”

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before.

“I can’t go in these,” he protested to Saul. “I’m not used to them.” So David took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd’s bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd’s staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.

Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. “Am I a dog,” he roared at David, “that you come at me with a stick?” And he cursed David by the names of his gods. “Come over here, and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!” Goliath yelled.

David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD’s battle, and he will give you to us!”

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd’s bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it with his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with only a sling and a stone, for he had no sword. Then David ran over and pulled Goliath’s sword from its sheath. David used it to kill him and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah gave a great shout of triumph and rushed after the Philistines, chasing them as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. The bodies of the dead and wounded Philistines were strewn all along the road from Shaaraim, as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelite army returned and plundered the deserted Philistine camp. (David took the Philistine’s head to Jerusalem, but he stored the man’s armor in his own tent.)

As Saul watched David go out to fight the Philistine, he asked Abner, the commander of his army, “Abner, whose son is this young man?”

“I really don’t know,” Abner declared.

“Well, find out who he is!” the king told him.

As soon as David returned from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul with the Philistine’s head still in his hand. “Tell me about your father, young man,” Saul said.

And David replied, “His name is Jesse, and we live in Bethlehem.”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

At the start, it looked like David had no chance in this battle. But David didn’t use the usual weapons of war, and he spoke about his faith in God. Again and again in the Bible we see God helping his people even when they are smaller, weaker, or outnumbered. In many ways the Bible is the story about God’s surprising ways of transforming the world. Believing in God means to actually trust him, especially when things look hopeless. How does it help you to know that God is active in the world in ways we can’t even see or understand?

DAY 16

In the Wild Places, a Struggle for Leadership

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 122-125)

After David’s great victory over Goliath, Saul made him a member of his royal court and a commander in his army. The LORD gave David great success. But King Saul was jealous because David was getting more attention than he was. Eventually the king became so angry he decided to kill David. From that time on, Saul chased David in order to destroy him. But God was with David and protected him because he was destined to be king in Israel.



So David escaped from Saul and went to King Achish of Gath. But the officers of Achish were unhappy about his being there. “Isn’t this David,

the king of the land?” they asked. “Isn’t he the one the people honor with dances, singing,

‘Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?’”

David heard these comments and was very afraid of what King Achish of Gath might do to him. So he pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard.

Finally, King Achish said to his men, “Must you bring me a madman? We already have enough of them around here! Why should I let someone like this be my guest?”

So David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. Soon his brothers and all his other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until David was the captain of about 400 men.

Later David went to Mizpeh in Moab, where he asked the king, “Please allow my father and mother to live here with you until I know what God is going to do for me.” So David’s parents stayed in Moab with the king during the entire time David was living in his stronghold.

One day the prophet Gad told David, “Leave the stronghold and return to the land of Judah.” So David went to the forest of Hereth.

The news of his arrival in Judah soon reached Saul. At the time, the king was sitting beneath the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, holding his spear and surrounded by his officers.

“Listen here, you men of Benjamin!” Saul shouted to his officers when he heard the news. “Has that son of Jesse promised every one of your fields and vineyards? Has he promised to make you all generals and captains in his army? Is that why you have conspired against me? For not one of you told me when my own son made a solemn pact with the son of Jesse. You’re not even sorry for me. Think of it! My own son—encouraging him to kill me, as he is trying to do this very day!”

Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul’s men, spoke up. “When I was at Nob,” he said, “I saw the son of Jesse talking to the priest, Ahimelech son of Ahitub. Ahimelech consulted the LORD for him. Then he gave him food and the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

King Saul immediately sent for Ahimelech and all his family, who served as priests at Nob. When they arrived, Saul shouted at him, “Listen to me, you son of Ahitub!”

“What is it, my king?” Ahimelech asked.

“Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me?” Saul demanded. “Why did you give him food and a sword? Why have you

consulted God for him? Why have you encouraged him to kill me, as he is trying to do this very day?”

“But sir,” Ahimelech replied, “is anyone among all your servants as faithful as David, your son-in-law? Why, he is the captain of your bodyguard and a highly honored member of your household! This was certainly not the first time I had consulted God for him! May the king not accuse me and my family in this matter, for I knew nothing at all of any plot against you.”

“You will surely die, Ahimelech, along with your entire family!” the king shouted. And he ordered his bodyguards, “Kill these priests of the LORD, for they are allies and conspirators with David! They knew he was running away from me, but they didn’t tell me!” But Saul’s men refused to kill the LORD’s priests.

Then the king said to Doeg, “You do it.” So Doeg the Edomite turned on them and killed them that day, eighty-five priests in all, still wearing their priestly garments. Then he went to Nob, the town of the priests, and killed the priests’ families—men and women, children and babies—and all the cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats.

Only Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, escaped and fled to David. When he told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD, David exclaimed, “I knew it! When I saw Doeg the Edomite there that day, I knew he was sure to tell Saul. Now I have caused the death of all your father’s family. Stay here with me, and don’t be afraid. I will protect you with my own life, for the same person wants to kill us both.” . . .

David now stayed in the strongholds of the wilderness and in the hill country of Ziph. Saul hunted him day after day, but God didn’t let Saul find him.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

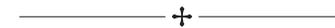
David was told that he would be Israel’s king, and he had already been anointed by God’s prophet. But he still had to wait many years for this promise to come true. God’s people must be patient. Often, the things that are wrong or broken in our world seem to go on and on. A big part of our relationship with God is knowing that he will do his work of setting all things right but waiting with trust and hope in the meantime. It can be hard and frustrating to do this. No doubt it was hard for David. Is it hard for you?

DAY 17

Doing Right When It Would Be Easy to Do Wrong

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 129-130)

Saul continues his pursuit of David, determined to find and kill him.



Now some men from Ziph came to Saul at Gibeah to tell him, “David is hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which overlooks Jeshimon.”

So Saul took 3,000 of Israel’s elite troops and went to hunt him down in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul camped along the road beside the hill of Hakilah, near Jeshimon, where David was hiding. When David learned that Saul had come after him into the wilderness, he sent out spies to verify the report of Saul’s arrival.

David slipped over to Saul’s camp one night to look around. Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of his army, were sleeping inside a ring formed by the slumbering warriors. “Who will volunteer to go in there with me?” David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother.

“I’ll go with you,” Abishai replied. So David and Abishai went right into Saul’s camp and found him asleep, with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying asleep around him.

“God has surely handed your enemy over to you this time!” Abishai whispered to David. “Let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won’t need to strike twice!”

“No!” David said. “Don’t kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the LORD’s anointed one? Surely the LORD will strike Saul down someday, or he will die of old age or in battle. The LORD forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed! But take his spear and that jug of water beside his head, and then let’s get out of here!”

So David took the spear and jug of water that were near Saul’s head. Then he and Abishai got away without anyone seeing them or even waking up, because the LORD had put Saul’s men into a deep sleep.

David climbed the hill opposite the camp until he was at a safe distance. Then he shouted down to the soldiers and to Abner son of Ner, “Wake up, Abner!”

“Who is it?” Abner demanded.

“Well, Abner, you’re a great man, aren’t you?” David taunted. “Where in all Israel is there anyone as mighty? So why haven’t you guarded your master the king when someone came to kill him? This isn’t good at all! I swear by the LORD that you and your men deserve to die, because you failed to protect your master, the LORD’s anointed! Look around! Where are the king’s spear and the jug of water that were beside his head?”

Saul recognized David’s voice and called out, “Is that you, my son David?”

And David replied, “Yes, my lord the king. Why are you chasing me? What have I done? What is my crime? But now let my lord the king listen to his servant. If the LORD has stirred you up against me, then let him accept my offering. But if this is simply a human scheme, then may those involved be cursed by the LORD. For they have driven me from my home, so I can no longer live among the LORD’s people, and they have said, ‘Go, worship pagan gods.’ Must I die on foreign soil, far from the presence of the LORD? Why has the king of Israel come out to search for a single flea? Why does he hunt me down like a partridge on the mountains?”

Then Saul confessed, “I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong.”

“Here is your spear, O king,” David replied. “Let one of your young men come over and get it. The LORD gives his own reward for doing good and for being loyal, and I refused to kill you even when the LORD placed you in my power, for you are the LORD’s anointed one. Now may the LORD value my life, even as I have valued yours today. May he rescue me from all my troubles.”

And Saul said to David, “Blessings on you, my son David. You will do many heroic deeds, and you will surely succeed.” Then David went away, and Saul returned home.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

The struggle between Saul and David continues, but take note that David is determined to honor King Saul even though he has become an enemy. David still trusts God to protect him and won’t take matters into his own hands. This is doing what’s right, even when it’s hard. Have you faced situations in which it would be easy to do something wrong? What can we do to strengthen our determination to follow God’s ways when it’s tempting not to?

DAY 18

The King Is Dead. Long Live the King!

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 135-138, 142)

David was patient. God had promised him he would be king, and David remained loyal to God and trusted him. Saul had pretty much gone astray, always doing things his own way. Finally, it all caught up to him. The Philistines were as strong as ever, and now they pressed against Saul and his army.



Now the Philistines attacked Israel, and the men of Israel fled before them. Many were slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely.

Saul groaned to his armor bearer, “Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines come to run me through and taunt and torture me.”

But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died beside the king. So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

When the Israelites on the other side of the Jezreel Valley and beyond the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and fled. So the Philistines moved in and occupied their towns.

The next day, when the Philistines went out to strip the dead, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off Saul’s head and stripped off his armor. Then they proclaimed the good news of Saul’s death in their pagan temple and to the people throughout the land of Philistia. They placed his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of the city of Beth-shan.

But when the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their mighty warriors traveled through the night to Beth-shan and took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall. They brought them to Jabesh, where they burned the bodies. Then they took

their bones and buried them beneath the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days. . . .

Then David composed a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan, and he commanded that it be taught to the people of Judah. It is known as the Song of the Bow, and it is recorded in *The Book of Jashar*.

Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills!

Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!

Don't announce the news in Gath,

don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon,
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice
and the pagans will laugh in triumph.

O mountains of Gilboa,

let there be no dew or rain upon you,

nor fruitful fields producing offerings of grain.

For there the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled;

the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil.

The bow of Jonathan was powerful,

and the sword of Saul did its mighty work.

They shed the blood of their enemies

and pierced the bodies of mighty heroes.

How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan!

They were together in life and in death.

They were swifter than eagles,

stronger than lions.

O women of Israel, weep for Saul,

for he dressed you in luxurious scarlet clothing,

in garments decorated with gold.

Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle!

Jonathan lies dead on the hills.

How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan!

Oh, how much I loved you!

And your love for me was deep,

deeper than the love of women!

Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!

Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.

After this, David asked the LORD, "Should I move back to one of the towns of Judah?"

"Yes," the LORD replied.

Then David asked, "Which town should I go to?"

"To Hebron," the LORD answered.

David's two wives were Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. So David and his wives and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled in the villages near Hebron. Then the men of Judah came to David and anointed him king over the people of Judah.

When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, he sent them this message: "May the LORD bless you for being so loyal to your master Saul and giving him a decent burial. May the LORD be loyal to you in return and reward you with his unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done. Now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and loyal subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king."

But Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had already gone to Mahanaim with Saul's son Ishbosheth. There he proclaimed Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel.

+ + +

Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he became king, and he ruled from Mahanaim for two years. Meanwhile, the people of Judah remained loyal to David. David made Hebron his capital, and he ruled as king of Judah for seven and a half years. . . .

Then all the tribes of Israel went to David at Hebron and told him, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, when Saul was our king, you were the one who really led the forces of Israel. And the LORD told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be Israel's leader.'"

So there at Hebron, King David made a covenant before the LORD with all the elders of Israel. And they anointed him king of Israel.

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Patience is rewarded. God will always do what he promised to do. This does not always happen when we want it to, but it will happen. God is faithful and will keep his word. David was loyal to God, and God rewarded that loyalty. And God will do the same for us when he asks us to trust him. How does reading the stories in the Bible help you believe in the promises of God?

DAY 19

A Throne, a House, a Kingdom, a Future

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 143, 145-147)

God remembered his promise to David, and he made him king over all Israel. But God was not just thinking about David. God was thinking about a new king for Israel and what that could mean for Israel's future. He was still thinking about how Israel would bring blessing to all the nations of the world. God was still working for his long-term goal of bringing restoration and healing to his creation. And now, we learn that all of this will have something to do with the family of King David.



David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in all. He had reigned over Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and from Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

David then led his men to Jerusalem to fight against the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of the land who were living there. The Jebusites taunted David, saying, “You’ll never get in here! Even the blind and lame could keep you out!” For the Jebusites thought they were safe. But David captured the fortress of Zion, which is now called the City of David.

On the day of the attack, David said to his troops, “I hate those ‘lame’ and ‘blind’ Jebusites. Whoever attacks them should strike by going into the city through the water tunnel.” That is the origin of the saying, “The blind and the lame may not enter the house.”

So David made the fortress his home, and he called it the City of David. He extended the city, starting at the supporting terraces and working inward. And David became more and more powerful, because the LORD God of Heaven’s Armies was with him.

Then King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar timber and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built David a palace. And David realized that the LORD had confirmed him as king over Israel and had blessed his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. . . .



When King David was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies, the king summoned Nathan the prophet. “Look,” David said, “I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!”

Nathan replied to the king, “Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.”

But that same night the LORD said to Nathan,

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel’s tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, ‘Why haven’t you built me a beautiful cedar house?’”

“Now go and say to my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won’t oppress them as they’ve done in the past, starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

“Furthermore, the LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings! For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will correct and discipline him with the rod, like any father would do. But my favor will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from your sight. Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.”

So Nathan went back to David and told him everything the LORD had said in this vision.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and prayed,

“Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And now, Sovereign LORD, in addition to everything else, you speak of giving your servant a lasting dynasty! Do you deal with everyone this way, O Sovereign LORD?”

“What more can I say to you? You know what your servant is really like, Sovereign LORD. Because of your promise and according to your will, you have done all these great things and have made them known to your servant.

“How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you. We have never even heard of another God like you! What other nation on earth is like your people Israel? What other nation, O God, have you redeemed from slavery to be your own people? You made a great name for yourself when you redeemed your people from Egypt. You performed awesome miracles and drove out the nations and gods that stood in their way. You made Israel your very own people forever, and you, O LORD, became their God.

“And now, O LORD God, I am your servant; do as you have promised concerning me and my family. Confirm it as a promise that will last forever. And may your name be honored forever so that everyone will say, ‘The LORD of Heaven’s Armies is God over Israel!’ And may the house of your servant David continue before you forever.

“O LORD of Heaven’s Armies, God of Israel, I have been bold enough to pray this prayer to you because you have revealed all this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you—a dynasty of kings!’ For you are God, O Sovereign LORD. Your words are truth, and you have promised these good things to your servant. And now, may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you have spoken, and when you grant a blessing to your servant, O Sovereign LORD, it is an eternal blessing!”

—*from the book of Samuel–Kings*

TALKING TOGETHER:

Here God reveals a major part of his plan: God’s rule over his people Israel will be tied to David’s family line. We know from the beginning of the Bible that the story of the whole world turns on what happens with God’s people, Israel. Now we learn that the story of Israel will turn on the story of King David and his descendants. God is working, and he is working through the centuries to bring his plan to completion. Even today God is still busy and laboring in the world through the followers of King Jesus, the descendant of King David. How does it feel to know that we are part of this same story?

DAY 20

A Flawed King

(from *Kingdoms*, pages 150-152)

God’s plan for King David had been revealed, and God’s future for Israel and the world had been promised. But King David, like all of us, was far from perfect. He, too, was able to be turned aside, to lose his way, to fall down. The struggle between good and evil is never simply between us and them. It’s not as simple as “good guys” and “bad guys.” The struggle between good and evil runs right through our own hearts.



In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, “I’m pregnant.”

Then David sent word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent him to David. When Uriah arrived, David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. Then he told Uriah, “Go on home and relax.” David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace. But Uriah didn’t go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance with the king’s palace guard.

When David heard that Uriah had not gone home, he summoned him and asked, “What’s the matter? Why didn’t you go home last night after being away for so long?”

Uriah replied, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master’s men are camping in the open fields. How

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?

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

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

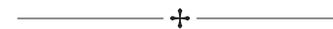
their roles. It's important to remember both sides of this: We must do all we can to bring more goodness and life into our world, and we must also pray and watch for what God is doing. What would be the danger of focusing on only one side of this—our part or God's part—and neglecting the other?

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

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?

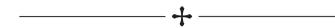
DAY 25

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.

DAY 26

What It Takes to Run a Kingdom

(from *Kings*, 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**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

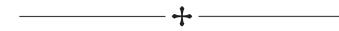
world as the promised King from David’s family, he claimed that he himself was the new Temple, the place of God’s presence. As followers of Jesus today, the Bible says we are now God’s temple. God has made his home within us! Say a prayer of thanks and praise for God’s great love for us.

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. . . .

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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?

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

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.

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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?

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.

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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. . . .

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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?

DAY 32

Great Power—for Good or Evil?

(from *Kings*, 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

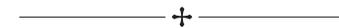
the world is to overcome injustice and wrongdoing. He is working to restore and renew the creation he made. He is working to bring justice and healing to all people. What things do you see that are wrong or unfair in our world today? What would it look like if these things were changed?

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

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.” . . .

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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?

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.

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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 spattered 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

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.

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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?

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.

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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

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

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:

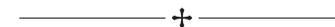
King Manasseh led his people into serving the darkness, while his grandson Josiah worked to return them to the light. But it was too late for the kingdom of Judah. Overall, these people called by God had broken their covenant with him and had therefore lost their purpose. So far, we can see in the story 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

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.

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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?