

A black and white photograph of a chair. The chair has a dark wooden frame. A large cushion with a white background and a black line-art pattern of leaves is draped over the seat. Above it, a plain white cushion is visible. The lighting is soft, creating a calm and serene atmosphere.

I KINGS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

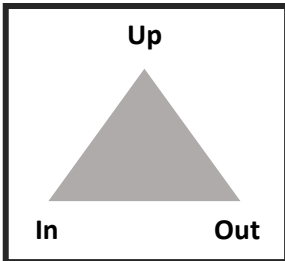
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 KINGS

1 and 2 Kings were originally joined in one book. We don't know who the human author was. Jewish tradition says it was Jeremiah, and it may very well be so. Wiseman gives a good summary of the books of 1 and 2 Kings: *"The narrative covers almost five hundred years from the initiation to the eclipse of their kingship. It is the story of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of high promise and abject failure, of tragedy and yet of hope."*

It is quite sad that 1 Kings begins with the twilight of a glorious reign. The book opens with the great King David now so old that he can't even keep himself warm, much less rule the nation. This scene of David's diminished ability raises the question of David's successor. We have recorded the reign of the wisest person in all the earth next to Jesus, King Solomon. And yet, his finish was far from godly and healthy, leading into an unholy mess of selfish leadership and downright evil. After David, it was mostly a mess. It's a great time today to think of your own legacy. What are you leaving behind you?

Grab your Bible, journal, pen, and a cuppa, and off we go.

I hope you enjoy.

Phil

Read

1 Kings 1

Live

We start into this great book with David declining in his health and Adonijah setting his beady eyes on the kingdom. We also have the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba trying to secure the succession for Solomon. It's a big family mumble jumble and a reaching for power in today's reading. If you were to jump back a chapter to 2 Samuel 24, you would read how David had, by the great mercy of God, escaped the sword of the destroying angel sent because of David's great sin. Someone once said that if a candle can't be blown out, it will burn out on its own. And so, we have the once glorious warrior king, David, creaking and cold in his old age.

While David was an incredible king, it would seem that his parenting skills lacked purpose and direction. Children that are undisciplined and spoiled learn to be proud and ambitious which is the ruin of a great many young people. While David's son Adonijah had one idea about who should be king, Bathsheba and Nathan had another. They got David to quickly respond to Adonijah's false claims and make Solomon the new king. The people were delighted and expressed their great joy and satisfaction in the elevation of Solomon, surrounding him with their hosannas of *"God, save King Solomon!"* and with music and shouts of joy.

I find the verses from 49 to the end amusing. The old saying, 'Be sure your sin will find you out' is so true. I had a giggle at Adonijah's guests' reactions; when they realised what was going on, they jumped up in a panic and scattered. Adonijah was no fool either; he ran to the place of mercy and grabbed the horns of the altar, declaring he wouldn't let go until Solomon promised not to kill him. I love the last three words of forgiveness from the new king, Solomon, when Adonijah bowed before him: *"Go on home."*

Pray

Father, today I am left wondering how David got so old so quickly. It was probably more mileage than years with him and I am left thinking of how I abuse my body. Help me today to remember I am bought with a price as I give myself afresh to You today. I'm giving my body as a living sacrifice to You, Lord. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

1 Kings 2

Live

David, son of Jesse and Israel's greatest earthly king, recognised that he was but a man and shared the common destiny of all the earth. Knowing he would soon pass from this life David gave a final charge to Solomon; the NIV puts it so well: *"Take courage and be a man."* Verses 3 and 4 are such beautiful wisdom to be passed from an ageing and dying father to a son. David, for all his faults, knew that Solomon would have to make God the centre of not only his government but also his own personal life if he was ever going to succeed in establishing the kingdom. David also knew that Solomon could not be strong or courageous without obedient fellowship with God. In this place of obedient fellowship, he would prosper in all that he did. Remember, David had a specific promise from God, a rich and powerful promise that as long as his sons walked in obedience, they would keep the throne of Israel. No matter what the Assyrians or the Egyptians or the Babylonians did, as long as David's sons were obedient and followed God with all their heart and all their soul, God would establish their kingdom.

We see today that good old Adonijah hasn't lost his sneaky skills. He uses his father's nursemaid as a bargaining chip to try to fight for the throne. Solomon saw through this and strengthened his grip on the throne. This chapter is a chapter of power struggles and manipulations. It makes me more thankful for the lavish love of God on rebels, fools, and idolaters like myself. Think today of all the promises we have in Christ – salvation, acceptance, restoration, love, peace, deliverance from our enemies, etc. Amazing. The One who never sinned became sin for us that we might freely receive the very righteousness of God. By His crushing, we are now cherished. By His death on the cross, we have citizenship in God's heart. Pretty cool!

Pray

Father, I want to esteem You above everything and everyone else. You will never love me more. You made me for Yourself, and my heart is restless until it rests in You. By Your grace, Jesus, and by the power of Your resurrection, refresh, renew, and intensify my love for You. I want to love You so much more. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In a chapter all about wisdom, we see the beginning of Solomon's folly. Marriage to fellow royalty was a common political strategy in the ancient world, not only because royalty wanted to marry other royalty, but also because conflict between nations was avoided for the sake of family ties. Solomon's multiple marriages and marriages to foreign women caused great disaster in his life. Habits always start small and unassuming, so all of us need to beware.

When asked what he wanted, Solomon could have asked for wealth and power but instead he asked for wisdom and an understanding heart in order to lead well and make the proper decisions. You have got to give credit where credit is due, and I definitely think this choice is huge in Solomon's life. We can see that it impressed God as well because God added to him wealth and power. The truth of Matthew 6:33 is seen right here, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His right ways and all these things will be added on."* We see in the latter part of the chapter how Solomon put this wisdom into action. We must do the same. God will not come and do the needful for us; we must apply the wisdom He has given to us.

Always remember that God has given us a mind and a body to keep pure and healthy for His service and our benefit and blessing. May He forgive us for our unfaithfulness in this great responsibility, for every mean use we have made of His gifts in our thoughts, words or deeds. We often need to cry out like David of old, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me a steadfast will that I may be a strength to others around me.' May I remind you that the words of Hebrews 2:3, *"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"* were written to the *believer*.

Pray

Father, inspire me with such love for the ideals for which Jesus lived and died that all my passions and energies will be caught up into the enthusiasm of His service and that evil things will lose their power. May my body be the servant of my soul, and may both body and soul be Your servants. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Solomon's incredible wisdom flows over from the last chapter into this chapter, seen in the wise way he selected, trained, empowered, and supervised leaders. No wise leader does it all themselves. They know how to delegate responsibility and authority to get the job done. Solomon's great wisdom enabled him to see the need to get, train, and employ the right people. His government was structured much like governments in modern nations today. He had officials who served as ministers or secretaries over specific areas of responsibility. He knew that God is a God of design and organisation and that things operate better and more efficiently when organised. He had eleven high-powered officials with twelve governors over various districts and a person in charge of them all. Solomon's organisational skills beg the question today, is there an area in our life that could do with re-order and fresh organisation?

Just because God had granted Solomon's prayer for wisdom didn't mean he couldn't make mistakes. He was still human and frail and when he went on his own without enquiring of God, it usually went pear-shaped. Always remember that it is God and Him alone who is the fount of all knowledge. It is Him who has the lead, Him who inspired and encouraged many generations of believers. Our cry today should be to ask Him to lead, inspire, and encourage our generation and the ones following. May we all be as generous, committed, and open as the people we read about in Scripture, like Solomon. May we diligently serve our local people and give inspiration and leadership in our town or city as we help repair and re-order the places where we live.

I love how we have reference in verse 32 to the many words Solomon spoke, some 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. Some of these are recorded for us in a few special books in our Bible – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Solomon also wrote Psalms 72 and 127. What a wise boy he was!

Pray

Father, as I tackle the challenges of my generation, I ask for grace and hope. I ask for courage and determination. I trust You to enable me to work worthy of the place where I worship and serve You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

You may remember that David had a desire to build the temple but was disallowed by God (2 Samuel 7), the reason being he was a bloody king. David was chosen to be king not because he could dance and make music (both of which he could do); he was chosen because he could fight. Now that the temple was going to be built, God needed clean hands. This chapter deals with Solomon's work in obtaining the materials to build the temple. David was so invested in this work that he had already gathered many of the supplies (see 2 Chronicles 22:4).

Commentator and pastor Russell Dilday said this, *"The skill of the Sidonians was expressed in their ability to pick the most suitable trees, know the right time to cut them, fell them with care, and then properly treat the logs."*

Ginzberg relates some of the legends surrounding the building of the temple. Although it's in a history book and not actually in the Scripture, I really liked this: *"During the seven years it took to build the Temple, not a single workman died who was employed about it, nor even did a single one fall sick. And as the workmen were sound and robust from first to last, so the perfection of their tools remained unimpaired until the building stood complete. Thus, the work suffered no sort of interruption."*

I love how Solomon had a care for the workers and chose three times the number of men needed so that family life didn't suffer with long times away from home. Makes me give thanks today for the places of corporate worship, for the calling God has given us to gather to make merry and worship Him for every good thing we have in Christ. May the truth of the gospel capture our minds. May the beauty of Jesus fill our hearts, and the power of the Spirit energise our praise. We were created to live by the strength of His joy with His reign of grace freeing us from our fear and gloom.

Pray

Father, it's Your great delight in me that liberates me to find my greatest delight in You. There is no God like You – abounding in compassion, generous in mercy, and overflowing with love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The tabernacle served the nation well for more than 400 years. The building of the temple was prompted more by the direction and will of God than by absolute necessity. The writer of 1 Kings doesn't tell us exactly where the temple was built, but 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that it was built on Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac. Commentators suggest that on another part of the same hill our King Jesus was sacrificed.

Verse 7 reminds us that there was not even the sound of a hammer at the temple site. The stones were only assembled there; they were cut and prepared at another site. This is symbolic of the way God wants His work done. The temple had to be built with human labour which speaks of how God works in and through His people. Often the greatest work in the Kingdom of God happens quietly. And yet, the building site of the temple was only quiet because there was a lot of noise and diligent work at the quarry. I love the finished work of the cross. We can rest in peace in the work finished for us at another site, Calvary. How beautiful is that thought!

It is important to remember that, whether overtly or covertly, Satan is always seeking to steal the affections of our heart away from God. And when he is successful, everything else in our life shifts out of balance. We start thinking of ourselves either too highly or too lowly, and certainly too often. We take criticism too personally and we feed on compliments like chocolate and crisps. When we get distracted from our main calling and the privilege of communing with our heavenly Father, we medicate our pain in unhealthy ways and get busy with things that don't really matter. We get irritated quicker and repent slower. We become more susceptible to fears and more likely to sin. All of these things rob us and others of grace, but worse, they rob God of His glory. May God continue to rescue us from whisperings and lies, seductions and condemnations of Satan.

Pray

Father, may Your love for me be the most enthralling, liberating, and compelling force in my life until the day You return and I am made perfect in Your love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Verse 38 in the previous chapter told us that Solomon spent 7 years building the temple; here, we learn that he spent 13 years building his own house. The temple was glorious, but it seems that Solomon wanted a house that was even more glorious. In Campbell Morgan's exposition of the whole Bible he says this, *"It does show the place which his own personal comfort and luxurious tastes had come to occupy in the life of Solomon. It is often by such simple, and unexpected tests, that the deepest facts of a human life are revealed."* At the end of the magnificent, detailed description of Solomon's palace, the writer mentions that some of the great architectural features of the palace were also used in the house of the Lord. We are left with the idea that as great as the temple was, the project of Solomon's palace was better.

Often when I'm about church and see or hear something, I ask myself, would I tolerate that at my home? It has allowed me to place value on the house of the Lord. Old fashioned? I don't think so. Just like Solomon, we are never saner than when we are worshipping God and acknowledging His total sovereignty. I am so very thankful that He is God and we are not. May God forgive us when we think less of Him and more of ourselves. It is always better when God does as He pleases and not as we often beg Him to do. Perhaps you are like me and have lived long enough to praise God for some of the "No's" we've received to prayers for which we desperately wanted a "Yes". God does all things well, not easy. But in time, He will make all things beautiful and we all need grace to wait for that day.

I love how Solomon chose only the best for the house of the Lord and in verse 14 we are told he picked a guy named Hiram who was highly skilled in the work of bronze. Today, our worshipful images have changed but the purpose of worship should never change; in Christ alone my hope is found!

Pray

Father, help me to trust Your heart when I cannot see Your hand at work. Forgive me when I doubt Your faithfulness and grant me grace when I struggle with Your ways. And for the times I think more of my house than Your house, forgive me please. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love this chapter because it reminds me of the importance of my dedication to the Lord. Solomon was dedicating not only the house of the Lord but also himself to the Lord's service. The tabernacle had served the Israelites well as they wandered in the wilderness. However, now a more permanent place was required, the temple of the Lord. I particularly love verse 10, *"The thick cloud filled the house of the LORD"*. This was the cloud of glory, seen often in the Old and New Testaments and sometimes called the cloud of Shekinah glory. It is hard to define the glory of God; we could describe it as the radiant outshining of His character and presence.

Here is a little study for you as you allow yourself to be consumed in the cloud of His presence today. This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). This is the cloud of glory that God spoke from to Israel (Exodus 16:10). This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (Exodus 19:9, 24:15-18, Numbers 11:25, 12:5, 16:42). This is the cloud that stood by the door of the tabernacle (Exodus 33:9-10). This is the cloud from which God appeared to the high priest in the Holy Place (Leviticus 16:2). This is the cloud of Ezekiel's vision, filling the temple of God with the brightness of His glory (Ezekiel 10:4). This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:34-35). This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at His ascension (Acts 1:9). This is the cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth (Luke 21:27, Revelation 1:7).

We see God's beauty in Jesus. Jesus expressed this when asked by His disciples to show them the Father, *"He that has seen Me, has seen the Father."* Oh, for fresh glimpses of Him today, in His Word and in His people!

Pray

Father, thank You for Your incredible presence. I see Your beauty in people if I take time to look. Continue to heal my vision of people. Though we are all broken, yet as Your image bearers each of us reveals glimmers and glimpses of Your loveliness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We have now travelled about twenty-four years from the first two chapters when Solomon came to the throne. The temple and the palace work at Jerusalem are finished. Now Solomon has to deal with life after completing his greatest achievement. It would seem that the most dangerous time in life is just after accomplishment and victory. Here is a wise nugget from commentator Campbell Morgan: *"It was the hour when the accomplishment of work means the relaxation of effort. That is always a perilous hour, and the greater the work done the graver the peril. A life which has been full of activity, when that activity ceases, demands some new interest, and will find it, either high or low, noble or ignoble."*

I also love this wisdom from C.H. Spurgeon, *"Brethren, we want renewed appearances, fresh manifestations, new visitations from on high; and I commend to those of you who are getting on in life, that while you thank God for the past, and look back with joy to his visits to you in your early days, you now seek and ask for a second visitation of the Most High."* Keep looking for those new visitations, as in verse two. There is always a fresh word from heaven. When we grow stale, heaven never does. If we stay in the Word, it will keep us safe and fresh. The psalmist called it a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. The lamp displays where you are standing and the light displays the way ahead. God in Christ has perfectly fulfilled the law for us. His commands are no longer a burden to us; by them we understand how to love others as He loves us; how to live at the pace of grace, instead of the race for more; how to steward our freedom, instead of squandering our moments. It's great to know we are not under the weight and condemnation of the law, we're in Christ and under grace. We have been set free from performance-based living for a life of whole-heart loving. May we rise further and further up into the ways and means of grace.

Pray

Father, may the pleasure I find in obeying You be second only to the pleasure I have in being loved by You. Help me to be always listening for a fresh word from You, the God of all grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Almost everyone, whether Christian or not, seems to know about the Queen of Sheba. Sheba was where modern-day Yemen is today in Southern Arabia. We know from geography that this was a wealthy kingdom with much gold, spices, and precious woods. History also tells us that this nation was known to have queens as well as kings. From Sheba/Yemen to Israel is a long trip today, but for the queen in Solomon's day to travel around 1,500 miles, it makes one realise that she was highly motivated to see Solomon and his kingdom. The great prosperity and splendour of Solomon's kingdom were internationally famous. This kingdom was famous not only for its material prosperity, but also for Solomon's great wisdom. The Queen of Sheba had great and seemingly difficult questions, but this chapter tells us that Solomon answered them all. Some commentators say her questions were not only to see how wise he was, but also to see how trustworthy he was to trade with. Israel was no longer some little insignificant nation. Solomon's wealth and fame were spreading around the world with kings and queens travelling to see and hear for themselves.

If there is one word to define the end of the chapter today, it would be *slippage*! It is easy to see in the reading that Solomon's heart is slipping ever so swiftly away from the true source, God Himself. Maybe he began to take for granted all that God had given him and with pride and dependence on his wealth, God became secondary. What a word of warning to us all today when we begin to lean on our own understanding. May we keep our eyes and our hearts fixed on Christ, the true lover of our souls. May we never forget that the same One who gave all this to Solomon is our Abba Father, One to whom we are heirs and joint heirs with His beautiful Son, Jesus. How cool is that!

Pray

Father, You are the One in whom I have all things. I am rich beyond measure when I have You in my life. I am richer than Solomon with all his wealth and splendour because You are my Abba Father. May I hoist my sails afresh to the wind of Your Holy Spirit. Help me leave the harbour and do what this ship was made to do, sail. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter opens with seven sobering words, “*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women*”. When it says “*many*”, it definitely means *many*; there were 1,000! There are two obvious problems here. The first problem glaring at us is that he loved foreign women who worshipped other gods and brought pagan influences to Israel. The second problem in loving many women was in rejecting God's plan for one man and one woman to become one flesh in marriage (Genesis 2:23-24). For all Solomon's great wisdom, he did not have the wisdom to apply this simple command to his own life. His weakness began to show and his lustful desires got the better of him.

Before we condemn him, Solomon did what many of us do. He somehow thought that he would be the exception, that he would ‘get away’ with this sin, despite seeing how it affected others. I’m sure he thought he could handle this, but it came home to bite him, as it always does. Solomon learned, or should have learned, that he was not the exception to the rule, nor are we. The slippery slope downwards was now past the point of return as we see the great man of God worshipping his heathen wives’ gods. Instead of this kingdom getting stronger, by the time we reach verse 11 it is crumbling with God telling him He would tear the kingdom away from him. His life ends in sin. In verse 41 we have the statement that Solomon’s wisdom is recorded in “*the book of the acts of Solomon*”, but no one seems to have ever found this book or know what it is. A sad end to a great king!

It is so easy to have our heart turned to other things and people, whether morally or otherwise. Remember, please, that there are not many people who fall suddenly. It is more often a slippage, little things that begin to lead us off course. Habits form and can even lead us into addictions that are desperately hard to break. So, take care, walk wisely, keep faith, and trust in One who is well able to keep us, Jesus!

Pray

Father, there are times I run to other things, just like Solomon. Forgive me, please, as I should know better. Turn my whines into worship and my frets into faith. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this new section of the book following Solomon's sin and his death, we will see the once glorious nation divide into two kingdoms. Solomon is remembered as a great king of Israel, yet he is also remembered as the king who wasted his God-given potential by failing to keep his priorities straight. He started the nation on a downhill slide from which it would never fully recover. Solomon's son Rehoboam inherited the throne from his father and, sadly, followed in his dad's footsteps. Rehoboam grew up in Solomon's royal court. Because God had blessed Solomon, Rehoboam never knew scarcity, strife or war. He grew to be king without the personal struggle and triumph that forges character, maturity, and spiritual growth.

The other person in this story is Jeroboam. He had overseen Solomon's building projects in the northern part of his kingdom. We see in verse 20 that ten of the tribes followed Jeroboam; this northern kingdom became known as Israel. Two tribes stayed loyal to the dynasty of Rehoboam and became known as Judah. Both were evil kings who thought only about themselves.

Rehoboam was the only son of Solomon that we know by name. We saw in the last chapter that Solomon had 1,000 wives and concubines, yet we read of only one son to carry on his name, and he was a fool. This demonstrates that sin is a bad way of building up a family. God warned Israel about this in 1 Samuel 8:10-19 when He spoke through Samuel of what a king would *take* from Israel. After the warning, the people still wanted a king, and now they knew what it was like to be ruled by a *taking* king. Sadly, the elders of Israel made no spiritual demand or request of Rehoboam. Seemingly, the gross idolatry of Solomon didn't bother them at all. Someone once said, "Evil only prevails when good people do nothing." This new king took the advice of his foolish peers instead of the older and wiser elders, and carnage followed.

Pray

Father, grant me wisdom to know what loving mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly with You looks like in my community. Replace my worry and fears with faith and trust, my anger and wrath with patience and courage. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Apparently, there were no qualified messengers within the northern kingdom of Israel, a sad commentary on the spiritual state of Jeroboam's kingdom.

This anonymous "*man of God*" was used in an important way demonstrating that one does not need to be famous to be significantly used by God. This is a remarkable prophecy that would be precisely fulfilled 340 years later. 2 Kings 23:15 documents the fulfillment of it in the days of Josiah, king of Judah.

Strangely enough, the man of God allowed himself to be seduced away from God. No matter how compelling this enticement was, it was his duty to resist it. He had a word from God to guide his actions and should receive *no other word* except through direct confirmation by God's Spirit. His failure at this point ended his usefulness as a man of God. It begs the question is anyone exempt from obedience to God's Word? All through the ages there have been people claiming to be a prophet who seem to think they are exempt from keeping God's Word, but they are not; no one is.

What is particularly noteworthy in this passage today is the function of miraculous signs and how they are intended to convey a message greater than the signs themselves. Leaders ought to be more accountable than everyone else when it comes to personal obedience to God's Word. We dare not dismiss the message for our own personal lives.

When we have received a direct word from the Lord, we must act on it and not be swayed by a different suggestion from anyone else. Whenever we are tempted to wonder about our value to God, all we have to do is consider the astonishing sacrifice He made for us. By Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension we are clothed with the very righteousness of God and have been given a steady diet of bread from heaven. Let's run to God, confident of His welcome, His embrace, His compassion, and His matchless grace.

Pray

Father, forgive me for the times I have allowed others to deter me from what I was sure You had told me to do. Jesus, I will trust You – not horses, chariots, other voices or my devices. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Even though Jeroboam was a king, he shared the problem common to all mankind; he was annoyed because his son was sick. This prompted him to seek the help of a prophet. This was a familiar pattern for Jeroboam, and for a lot of people even today. In his time of need, he turned to the true God and to the men of God knowing in his heart that idols could not help him in a crisis. Yet he also knew that he had rejected God and His prophets, and so he told his wife to wear a disguise. This turned out to be a silly idea as the old prophet, while failing in eyesight, was really switched on in the Spirit. It ends up brutal with this prophet giving one of the most scathing prophetic words you will ever read. For instance, he said the child will die and be buried, but he will be the only one to receive such an honour; the rest of them will be eaten by dogs or devoured by vultures. Pretty harsh stuff. It shows how one should never play fast and loose with God.

That's Jeroboam in the northern kingdom but Rehoboam in the southern kingdom wasn't any better. From verse 21 we see how Judah, the southern kingdom, falls into total decline. Just five years after Solomon had died foreign invaders came and ransacked the very temple. I think verse 22 is quite sad really: *"And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins."* These sins provoked the Lord to jealousy because they were sins of idolatry. Israel turned their back on the God who loved and redeemed them, and, like an unfaithful spouse, pursued spiritual adultery with idols. We all probably need to be challenged about idolatry in our own lives. All we need to do is ask ourselves the question, what have you become dependent on besides God? Remember, He is a jealous God and hates it when we run after other gods that are no gods at all.

Pray

Father, today I turn my gaze to You and You alone. I could live without many of the things I have but I could never live without You. May Your love and provision liberate me to think about You more and myself less. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

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Live

In Abijam, we see a picture of what will become a pattern for Judah's wicked kings. Abijam walks in the sins of his father, Rehoboam, rather than obeying Yahweh with a whole heart as David had done. Just as *all* of Israel's kings dragged the northern ten tribes down toward their eventual exile to Assyria, so kings like Rehoboam and Abijam paved the way for Judah's exile to Babylon. I love, though, how in Asa we find hope that God can raise up another king after His own heart.

Understanding the theology of the books of Kings comes in verses 4 and 5, *"Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."* Justice would have required God to wipe out Judah at the first sign of kings like Rehoboam and Abijam, but He remembers the covenant He had promised David, and so remains faithful to His people for the sake of David, His servant. Scripture records of Abijam that *"his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David."* This was the real problem with Abijam's reign, his lack of a personal relationship with God. David sinned during his reign, but his heart stayed loyal to his God.

Asa, the great-grandson of Solomon, took the throne of Judah at the end of Jeroboam's reign in Israel. All in all, Asa was a good man, yet he did not finish well. The last years of his life were marked by unbelief, hardness against God, oppression against his people, and disease. Age and time do not necessarily make us better; they only do if we continue to follow God in faith. Oh, how I long to finish well. So often we see in Scripture kings and leaders who got sloppy in their old age.

Pray

Father, thank You for giving me the important gift of Your amazing grace. I've learned the hard way that I make a mess when I try to run this race alone. I can do with a lot less in life but I can't do without You. I need You more than ever, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love this boy, Jehu, a prophet who was also the son of a prophet. He is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 20:34 as being the author of a history which was *"inserted into the book of the kings of Israel"*. This fact should be stressed. The sacred author of Kings, living long after some of the events recorded, had no need to rely upon his imagination, nor upon the biased report of some other writer. There were authentic, inspired records by true prophets of God such as Jehu and his father. No editor, compiler, or any other person would have dared contradict anything that such prophets said; the whole tradition of the people of Israel was set against such a thing. Jehu later moved to Jerusalem (told in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10) where he prophesied under Jehoshaphat, whom he rebuked on one occasion. He must have lived to some age, for he outlived Jehoshaphat and even wrote about his life in 2 Chronicles 20:34.

I think I should comment on Zimri as he is one of the few suicides in the Bible, along with Samson, Saul, and Judas. The Bible never approves of suicide yet it is prevalent in our day. Let's not judge people too quickly as the mind is a very powerful thing and mental illness is a reality. The old enemy loves it when one would give in to the lie of life not being worth living. His only purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Don't allow the devil to steal, kill or destroy anything in you.

Our chapter closes with King wishy-washy Ahab. He annoys me more than most. He was the husband of the wicked Jezebel. Jezebel worshipped Baal and Ahab built a temple to Baal to appease her. It's really unbelievable how far the people of God had strayed from Him. They are now barely recognisable as the chosen nation of God. It is so sad that we can lose so much so quickly by not following hard after God.

Pray

Father, Your faithfulness isn't just tied to the timing of the Second Coming, but to everything else You've promised as well. Even though it's hard to imagine why You haven't answered certain prayers I've offered with a quick "Yes", nevertheless, You do all things well. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

The most powerful of the prophets arrives on the scene today. He arrives like Melchizedek without any mention of his father or mother. He is like a man dropped in out of the clouds, raised by God's special providence as a witness for Himself in this most desperate of times. Elijah, with his zeal, courage, and miracles, seems to have been of a naturally wild spirit. Wild spirits are called to wild services in the wildest of times. Elijah's name signifies, 'my God Jehovah is He; He that sends me, and will own me, and bear me out'.

I love the fact that when it was Israel's darkest hour and all hope seemed gone, this chapter bursts on the scene with a hero who has no genealogy mentioned. It would seem that God has His right people ready for the right time and in the right place. I love how God through this prophet brought hope to Israel as a nation but also to a widow. This lady thought she was cooking her last meal before she would die, yet a simple act of faith brought provision and life. She teaches us that when we give our first fruits to the Lord, He is no one's debtor. You can never out-give God. There are so many great lessons in this chapter today. Elijah is the first in a long line of prophets. He marks the beginning of a period of around three hundred years of God encouraging Israel to repent and turn back to Him.

We may not be facing the threat of looking at our final affordable meal, for which we should be thankful. More often our biggest battles are within our own heart. God tells us of His great love for us in Jesus. I'm sure we all really believe in this great love, yet too often we look to people to validate us, as though God's delight in us is not enough. May we all be set free from our love of the approval of mankind. May we be like an Elijah, whose singlemindedness and tenacity of spirit speaking the word of the Lord in boldness to everyone is a challenge to us all.

Pray

Father, help me to extend Your welcoming heart, Your acceptance, and Your grace. You've always been faithful, generous, and present. I choose stillness and trust over fear and worry. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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I love how God tells Elijah, *“Go, present yourself to Ahab.”* This chapter records one of the greatest showdowns in all the Bible. Elijah in the blue corner and 450 prophets of Baal plus 400 prophets of Asherah in the red corner. Doesn’t sound like a fair match, but the moral of the story is this: one plus God is always a majority. Earlier, God had told Elijah to *hide* himself but now it was time to *present* himself. There is a time to hide and be alone with God, and there is a time to present ourselves to the world. Some people wish to always remain hidden when they should step up and present themselves. Jesus is the perfect example of balance; He had intimacy with the Father whilst also having involvement in the world.

King wishy-washy Ahab was spineless. He was ordered around by Jezebel and followed her agenda. On his first meeting with Elijah, Ahab said to him, *“Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”* He blamed Elijah for the drought which had lasted three and a half years. There was nothing growing in the land, and the king and his servant Obadiah were out looking for grass to keep the livestock alive. Ahab thought this drought was all Elijah’s fault! Ahab had no consciousness of his own sin, his own contribution to what was happening in the nation of Israel. He blamed Elijah.

Today we see again that Elijah has no fear and has absolute confidence in his God. May God grant us all greater freedom from the fear of man. Some people have way more power over our hearts than they deserve. Their criticism and rejection can devastate us, and their praise and admiration can make us. Read this amazing contest and marvel at the wonder and power of our God. Yes, OUR God, the same yesterday, today, and forever. If He can defeat 850 false prophets in a flash of lightning, do you not think He could deal with your issue today?

Pray

Father, You have the hearts of all the kings in Your hand, not to mention my days, wounds, longings, and burdens. Continue to free me to trust You implicitly and explicitly, with all things at all times. In Your strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

An angry woman is something to behold but an angry Jezebel with all her money, control, and power is another level. She is not just angry; she is in a rage. When she heard from King wishy-washy Ahab about all that Elijah had done, the great confrontation at Mount Carmel, her response was not to say, 'Oh dear, the silence of Baal and the fire from Yahweh proves that I am wrong and Yahweh is God.' Oh no. Instead, she responded with a vow to kill, within 24 hours, the man who exposed the lie of Baal worship and displayed the glory of Yahweh. Poor Elijah is busted and fatigued and when he hears Jezebel's threat, he falls to pieces.

One of my little observations of this prophet is that he always works solo, which is not a great thing to do, in my books. I love how Spurgeon writes on this, *"Elijah failed in the very point at which he was strongest, and that is where most men fail. In Scripture, it is the wisest man who proves himself to be the greatest fool; just as the meekest man, Moses, spoke hasty and bitter words. Abraham failed in his faith, and Job in his patience; so, he who was the most courageous of all men, fled from an angry woman."*

God's response to such discouragement in Elijah was not like ours, 'Pull yourself together, man, and get going!' No. God let him rest and even fed him, allowing him to renew his strength. This is where we have the beautiful whisper of the Almighty. His voice is not heard in all the dramatics (where we might expect it) but rather in stillness and rest comes the word of the Lord.

Whatever God gave Elijah to eat was pretty good for he was able to go in the strength of it for 40 days. May God's grace have even greater effect in us and through us. May it free us to love His glory over our reputation, His story of reconciliation and redemption over our default of discouragement and moaning.

Pray

Father, because I am confident You will accomplish Your purpose for me and because I am certain of Your steadfast love, I want the rest of my days to be marked by freedom from all anxiety and stress. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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As we tailed out of chapter 19, we saw Elisha the new prodigy of Elijah being called and commissioned. Word came by a prophet that Israel would defeat the Syrian army. I love Ahab's response in verse 14, *"Who will do this?"* Ahab looked around at his army and military leaders and naturally wondered how God could bring a victory with them against such a mighty enemy. Ahab wondered who would lead the battle and God told him, "You". I find it incredibly amazing that God would choose a wicked king like Ahab to get His work done. The victories recorded in this chapter brought no glory whatsoever to Ahab. The victories were dramatically the victories of God, not the victories of Ahab. Both Ahab and Jezebel should have discerned how useless their pagan god Baal was to provide any effective help for Israel. How wonderful was the mercy and forbearance of God that further opportunities to accept the truth were provided for this brutally wicked royal couple!

God wanted to win this victory by working through the unlikely people Ahab already had around him. Whenever a work for God is to be done, we often ask Ahab's question, *"Who will do this?"* When people ask God that question, they expect God will answer by bringing someone new to them, a leader or champion who can do the work, or at least help with it. However, God's normal way of working is to use the people already there, even if they seem to be a very unlikely army. God wants to use people like you and me, and I love that. So, may God flood our hearts with insight into the hope that He has secured for us as His children, a living hope, a hope of glory, an anchor of certainty in a world of ebbing and flowing chaos. As surely as He has called us to Himself, He has called us to hope. He will bring to completion the good work He has begun in us, that's for sure.

Pray

Father, this I know and this gives me goose bumps ... You have chosen me to be Your inheritance. I am beloved, treasured, and secure. As I contemplate our future together, You are my peace and You fill me with joy. And that is enough for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Unlike a vegetable garden, which can be planted in one place this year and in another place next year, a vineyard is a long-term proposition. It takes time for vines to grow sturdy enough to produce grapes and it takes careful nurture to get good grapes. A person who has planted and nurtured a vineyard to maturity is like an entrepreneur who started a business and brought it to maturity; the vineyard is his 'baby', the fulfilment of his vision. A person who inherits a vineyard receives not only land and vines but also the dreams and sweat and toil of his parents, and their parents, and so on, back to the beginning. A vineyard is a heritage. It also represents the family's future. Commentator Campbell Morgan puts it this way, "*Ahab never possessed the vineyard of Naboth. He held it, but that very fact became to him a torment. However fine the vintage, for him the grapes were acrid, poisonous. That which is gained by fraud is never possessed.*"

According to verse 25, "*There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols.*" This shows us the character of God's mercy; it is given to the undeserving because, by nature, the innocent do not need mercy. Ahab was a great sinner, but he won great mercy (in this life) through humble repentance. The worst sinner should not disqualify himself from receiving God's mercy if that sinner will approach God in humble repentance. Remember, God is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. We can trust Jesus as our substitute even before we own Him as our example. Jesus fulfilled the demands of the law for us, and now He is fulfilling the beauty of the law in us. Because God has hidden our life in Jesus, He cannot love us more than He does today, and He'll never love us less, that's for sure. Christ in us is our guarantee of redemption and is our hope of glory. How beautiful is that!

Pray

Father, sealed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I know You as Abba, Father – who has adopted me and loves me. Nothing can separate me from the love of God. I pray in Your strong and mighty name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

The book of 1 Kings ends on a low note. It began with the twilight of Israel's greatest king, David, and it ends with the sad reign of one of the most wicked kings over a divided nation. Ahab reigned 22 years, but his son only reigned two years. Even though his repentance was shallow, when Ahab repented after an announcement of judgment, God relented from the immediate judgment and promised to bring judgment in the days of Ahab's son instead. The story of Ahab reminds me of Hebrews 10:31 *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

I need to make a few comments about the end of this chapter where it seems a lying or deceiving spirit is sent from God. We are told repeatedly in Scripture that God is a God of truth, a God who cannot lie, so how can we explain this lying spirit? The short answer is this, God gives sinners over to their sin and hardened hearts. The case of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus is a clear example of this. In Romans chapter 1, Paul discusses sinners being 'given over' by God. A sovereign God can use secondary means to achieve His purposes, including confirming sinners in their rebellion and sin. It reminds me that one can't play fast and loose with God.

Nothing carries more potential for hope and harm, building up and tearing down, giving life and bringing death than our words. Therefore, we should all choose to take responsibility for them. And since our lips will speak of the preoccupation of our hearts, we need to be sure of setting our mind, heart and affection on things above, where Jesus is sitting at the right hand of His Father. As we close out this book, I'm sure you, like me, are glad that Jesus is our guarantee of complete forgiveness, perfect righteousness, and citizenship in heaven. No matter whatever else is going on in our world, in Christ, God has given us riches beyond measure, peace beyond understanding, and life abundant.

Pray

Father, may this good news win the day, seize my heart, and shape my words. May the words of my mouth, born out of the meditation of my heart, reflect and reveal Jesus. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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