

ROAD TRIP 2



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

**RON
JONES**



The Ultimate
Road Trip Through
the Bible

ROAD TRIP 2
The Old Testament
Historical Books

RON JONES





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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Table of Contents

ROAD TRIP 2

The Old Testament Historical Books

Introduction

- 6 | **Joshua:** Possessing the Promised Land
- 7 | **Judges:** Anarchy and Apostasy
- 8 | **Ruth:** Romance and Redemption
- 9 | **1 Samuel:** Which Way Will You Turn?
- 10 | **2 Samuel:** My Heart Like God's
- 11 | **1 Kings:** United or Divided?
- 12 | **2 Kings:** The Decline and Captivity of a Nation
- 13 | **1 Chronicles:** Return to Your Spiritual Roots
- 14 | **2 Chronicles:** If My People
- 15 | **Ezra:** Return from Exile
- 16 | **Nehemiah:** Building a Better Life
- 17 | **Esther:** For Such a Time as This

Small Group Discussion Questions

About the Author



Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up the best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this first road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our redeemer.

For a book that was written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. It is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of his Son, Jesus.

Introduction

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, even the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain how so many people over a long period of time could write about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet do so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. . . . There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

Introduction

The Old Testament Historical Books

Our second road trip along the biblical Route 66 focuses on twelve Old Testament Historical Books, which include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. In a 1948 speech to the House of Commons, Winston Churchill paraphrased George Santayana when he said, “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” The adage certainly applies to Israel’s spiritual history recorded in the Old Testament for our learning. Like the Books of the Law, these ancient writings have also stood the test of time because they are God’s holy word.

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Are you ready to begin traveling on Route 66? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

February 2021

Joshua

POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND

Imagine the Joint Chiefs of the Pentagon briefing the President of the United States on a complex military operation designed to overtake a strategic city. “Mr. President, we plan to march our troops around the city once per day for seven days. On the seventh day, we will march around the target municipality seven times. After the seventh time around the city on the seventh day, we will blow a trumpet loudly. Then we anticipate the wall of the city will fall down. At that time, we will enter and capture the city and its citizens.” I can imagine the President staring at his top military commanders with a look on his face that says, “Are you kidding me?”

I did not make up the imaginary briefing out of thin air. I found it in the Old Testament book of Joshua, where God instructed Joshua with His plan to overtake the city of Jericho (6:1-25). Joshua learned that God’s ways were not always his way. Sometimes the God of Israel employed unconventional means that required supernatural intervention.

Five sobering words begin the book of Joshua: “Moses my servant is dead.” They remind us that nobody is indispensable, including a great leader like Moses. Leaders come and go, but God’s



plan always marches forward. Although Joshua had trained under Moses for nearly forty years, he felt anxious about filling Moses's big sandals. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, but Joshua would take them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. The Lord reassured Joshua several times by saying, "Be strong and courageous" (1:1-9).

Who is Joshua?

Before we get too far down the road on this portion of the ultimate road trip through the Bible, who is Joshua, the namesake of the book? We first learn of Joshua when Moses appointed him to command the Israelite forces against the Amalekites at Rephidim (Exodus 17:8-16). He was well-qualified for the position. Joshua had fought valiantly in the valley while Moses stood atop the mountain with Aaron and Hur holding up his outstretched arms. Where did Joshua receive his military training? Given that Joshua was born and raised in Egypt, he might have served in Pharaoh's army in his early years.

During the year at Mount Sinai, Joshua served as Moses's personal assistant (Exodus 24:13). He also represented the tribe of Ephraim when Moses enlisted twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, to spy out Canaan and bring back a report. Joshua and Caleb opposed the majority and returned with a positive report. The dynamic duo encouraged the Israelites to go and take possession of the Promised Land (Numbers 14:6-9). Before Moses

CHRIST CONNECTION

The name Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation," the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name Jesus (*Yeshua*).

BIG IDEA

The obedience of faith is the victory that overcomes the world and opens up the windows of heaven to pour out a blessing.

MEMORY VERSE

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

JOSHUA 1:8

AUTHOR and DATE

Joshua
1400-1370



died, he appointed Joshua as his successor to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River (Numbers 27:18-23).

Joshua was a brilliant military strategist and a strong leader worth following. However, by simply doing what the Lord God told him to do, Joshua guaranteed his own success. The Lord said to Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (1:8). Given Joshua’s successful campaign to enter (1-5), conquer (6-13:7), and occupy (13:8-24) the Promised Land over several decades, he clearly led the Israelites with spiritual integrity.

The connection between Joshua and Jesus is also worth noting. Joshua is an Old Testament type of Christ. For starters, the name Joshua means “Yahweh is salvation” and is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name Jesus (*Yeshua*). Furthermore, just as Joshua served as the leader of the Israeli army, Jesus is our Commander in Chief who fights our spiritual battles and wins the victory for us (1 Corinthians 15:57).

There is more to the Christ connection in Joshua. Before the battle of Jericho, a mysterious figure appeared to Joshua and identified himself as “the commander of the army of the Lord” (5:14). He must have been impressive because the Bible says that Joshua immediately fell on his face to the earth in reverence to the man. “And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so” (Joshua 5:13-15). Who was this extraordinary commander?

Perhaps the commander was a theophany, a visible appearance of God Himself because the scene reminds us of Moses’s encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). If the commander was



God Himself, then he was most likely a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. However, because the Bible says nobody can see the Lord and live (Exodus 33:20), others suggest the commander was an angel of the Lord. Regardless of the commander's real identity, the Lord gave Joshua every reason to attack the city of Jericho with confidence, knowing that God was for him and not against him (Romans 8:38).

A Picture of the Christian Life

Like the Pentateuch, Joshua is chock-full of typology. The many Christ connections are powerful.¹ However, through Joshua's many military campaigns, the book also shows us how to successfully live the Christian life. The way Israel crossed the Jordan River, entered and conquered Canaan, and settled into the Promised Land is worth careful examination by every believer in Jesus Christ.

The typology of Canaan is especially important to grasp as it relates to the Christian life. The lyrics in some beloved Christian hymns leave us with the impression that Canaan is a portrayal of heaven and that crossing the Jordan River depicts the way believers die and pass from this life to the next. Is this a correct view of Beulah Land?

Consider that if Canaan is a picture of heaven, Moses is not there, not to mention the entire generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt, which we already established as a clear picture of our salvation experience. And yet, Moses appears with both the prophet Elijah and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). The writer of Hebrews lauds Moses and places him in the hall of faith next to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (Hebrews 11:23-28). Based on this evidence, it is safe to say that Moses is in heaven, even though he did not make it to the Promised Land.²



Canaan cannot be a picture of heaven for another reason. The Israelites take the Promised Land by military conquest. After pointing this out, J. Sidlow Baxter asks, “How then can Canaan typify the calm restfulness of the ultimate inheritance in heaven?”³ Instead, Baxter argues, the military conflict in Canaan best pictures the intense spiritual warfare that all believers in Jesus Christ face who aspire to the victorious Christian life on earth (Ephesians 6:10-20).⁴

The Abundant Christian Life

Now that we have a clearer understanding of what Canaan typifies, let’s travel deeper into Joshua. Three words capture the essence of theological meaning and Christian practice from this marvelous book of Old Testament history: Abundance, victory, and rest. We can state Joshua’s big idea this way: The obedience of faith is the victory that overcomes the world and opens up the windows of heaven from which pour the abundant blessings of God.

Abundance is the first blessing in the Promised Land. Canaan is known as the land “flowing with milk and honey.” The phrase appears eighteen times in the Old Testament in reference to the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants. Deuteronomy 33:28 also describes Canaan as a “land of grain and wine, whose heavens drop down dew.” Who would not want to live in a place like that?

Joshua was among the twelve spies that Moses appointed to check out the Promised Land and bring back an intelligence report. After forty days of reconnaissance, the spies returned with actual physical evidence of the land’s fruitful abundance, pictured in a single cluster of grapes that was so large it took two men to carry it on a pole (Numbers 13:23). I have never seen grapes that big at the



Piggly Wiggly, have you? So impressive was the abundance of fruit they found in the Promised Land that they named the place Eschol, which means “cluster.”

This giant cluster of grapes is a picture of the abundant Christian life. Some call it the normal Christian life because abundance should be the normal experience for all believers in Jesus Christ. An abundance of what? Start with an abundance of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This list of nine Christ-like characteristics found in Paul’s New Testament letter to the Galatians is known as the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit wants to produce an abundance of godly character in you.

Jesus might have had a large cluster of grapes in mind when He said, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). I am certain that He was thinking of grapes when He said to His disciples in the Upper Room. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Are you abiding in Jesus? Are you experiencing the abundant Christian life?

The Victorious Christian Life

Victory is the second blessing in the Promised Land. Canaan was full of Israel’s enemies who already occupied the land. According to Deuteronomy 7:1, they included seven nations more numerous and mightier than Israel: the Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

To experience the full blessings of the Promised Land, Israel had to remove the inhabitants of these nations who practiced the corrupt and brutal Canaanite religion. According to the Ras Shamra



Tablets, the Canaanite cultic practices included prostitution and infant sacrifice. The Canaanites also tolerated religious pluralism.

The many military campaigns that Joshua led against the Canaanites were brutal. Some people stumble over these bloody biblical stories in the Old Testament. However, they picture the level of intolerance that followers of Jesus should possess toward sin in their lives. Evil cannot coexist with holiness. We must mortify the flesh that entices us to sin, bringing it under brute submission to the will of Jesus, who said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Instead of the seven Canaanite nations mightier than Israel, think of the seven deadly sins first presented by Pope Gregory in the 1600s. They include pride, anger, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy, and greed. These Canaanite-like practices and character flaws keep followers of Jesus from experiencing the victorious Christian life.

Many of the problems Israel experienced in the future was because they did not completely destroy the Canaanites. Some Israelites kept the Canaanites around as slaves. In time, God’s chosen people got cozy with the Canaanites, married their daughters, and worshipped their gods. Joshua and the Israelites learned the hard way that if you do not destroy the Canaanites, the Canaanites will eventually destroy you.

Joshua also learned that disobedience always yields defeat. As expected, Joshua piled up one military victory after another, and his trophy room was impressive. However, right after he led the Israelites to victory over the city of Jericho, he experienced an embarrassing defeat at Ai, a much smaller city. After falling on his face in distress, Joshua learned that a man named Achan took some of the devoted things (silver, gold, etc.) from Jericho and buried them in his tent. His sin brought defeat to the entire army of Israelites (7:1-26).



Spiritual Rest in the Christian Life

Rest is the third and final blessing in the Promised Land. Joshua 11:23 says, “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.”

In the New Testament, Jesus is our sabbath rest, and He, as Lord of the Sabbath, declared something new about the sabbath (Matthew 12:8). Jesus also said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). Rest from what? Rest from the weariness of religion and trying harder to please God.

The Lord told Joshua, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses” (1:3). Did you notice the Lord’s use of the past tense? The same is true of our salvation and sanctification. We take possession of both by grace and through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we do, we enter His divine rest.

The book ends with Joshua challenging the Israelites to put away the gods that their fathers served in Egypt. “Choose this day whom you will serve,” he retorts. “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (24:14-15).

OUTLINE	1-5	6 - 13:7	13:8-24
FOCUS	Entering (Abundance)	Conquering (Victory)	Occupying (Rest)
LOCATION	East of Jordan	Canaan	East and West of Jordan
KEY VERSE	1:8	11:23	24:15



Judges

ANARCHY AND APOSTASY

In 1969, country music legends Buck Owens and Roy Clark debuted a successful television variety show called *Hee Haw*, featuring cornbread humor, the Hee Haw Honeys, and the Buckaroos (Buck Owens's band). With the help of syndication and reruns, fans enjoyed watching *Hee Haw* for nearly thirty years until 1997. One of the most popular recurring musical sketches featured Roy Clark and three of his hillbilly buddies sittin' on their front porch, sippin' on moonshine, and singin' about their miserable lives.

Gloom, despair, and agony on me

Deep, dark depression, excessive misery

If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all

Gloom, despair, and agony on me

Those sad hillbilly lyrics provide a good description of life in Israel during the time of the judges. For approximately three hundred and fifty years following Joshua's death, the children of Israel engaged in anarchy and apostasy. Some call it Israel's Dark Ages when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25).



Judges

ANARCHY AND APOSTASY

Sound familiar? The lawlessness and loosening of our spiritual moorings in America make me wonder if we might be heading into a dark time similar to Israel. Certainly, Israel's disobedience brought gloom, despair, and agony upon the people of God for many years.

After Joshua's Death

Judges begins with these words, "After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'" (1:1). Though Joshua had led the children of Israel to conquer and occupy most of the Promised Land, some Canaanite territories remained untaken. These strongholds proved more difficult to overthrow. Therefore, the Israelites did not completely destroy them. Instead, satisfied with living among their enemies, they subjugated them.

As a result, Israel declined morally (Judges 1:1-3:4). It did not help that the generation who entered the Promised Land failed to pass their faith to the next generation, and so on. The generations that followed "abandoned the Lord." God was angry with His chosen people and "gave them over to plunderers" (2:10-15).

Reading the book of Judges makes me want to press the rewind button, go back to the book of Joshua, and embrace the generation who faithfully obeyed the commandments of the Lord. However, in Judges, hope rises out of the ashes of history like

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is our Savior and Judge who delivers us from the power of sin and rules His kingdom in righteousness.

BIG IDEA

Moral compromise always leads to failure.

MEMORY VERSE

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

JUDGES 21:25

AUTHOR and DATE

Anonymous
(Perhaps Samuel)
1050-1000 B.C.



a phoenix when God delivers the Israelites from their powerful enemies by appointing judges. During these dark decades, God demonstrated His grace and proved Himself faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham and his descendants.

Judges 3:5-16:31, the book's main body, describes the battles fought by the Israelites against the Canaanites, Midianites, Philistines, and more. In all, Judges records the efforts of twelve judges, more if you include those who led Israel until the reign of King Saul.

Who were the judges? Generally, they were savior-like rulers who delivered divine justice. Some, like Othniel and Gideon, were also warriors. Eli was a priest, and Samuel was a prophet. In the many ways the judges served, they foreshadowed the ministry of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. However, the judges did not reign as kings. Instead, God raised them up for a specific purpose and time, which is why some of their timelines overlap.

Following a lengthy prologue (1:1-3:4), the anonymous author⁵ of Judges presents Israel's cyclical history over more than three centuries, seven cycles in all. Dr. Charles Ryrie identifies what happened in a single cycle this way: (1) Israel serves the Lord, (2) Israel falls into sin and idolatry, (3) Israel is enslaved, (4) Israel cries out to the Lord, (5) God raises up a judge, and (6) Israel is delivered.⁶

Though historical, Judges is less concerned about chronology than it is about reflecting upon the moral and theological lessons learned from the people and the leaders who defined the times. Thus, under the Holy Spirit's editorial direction, the author presents certain profiles in character and courage. Overall, we learn this from a study of Judges: *Moral compromise always leads to failure*. The big takeaway is that we will never fully enjoy the Promised Land—abundance, victory, and rest—if we tolerate what is unholy and evil in the eyes of God.



After a deep reflection on Judges, J. Sidlow Baxter writes, “If we make league with questionable things because they seem harmless, we shall soon find ourselves wedded to the desires of the flesh again, and down from the heights to which God had lifted us.”⁷ Baxter also says that Judges is a book of high calling and low living! We must decide which will define our lives. Judges is a sober reminder that if you do not destroy the Canaanites, the Canaanites will eventually destroy you.⁸

Dark Ages and Sick Hearts

The repetition of the historical cycles in Judges also points to the wickedness and devolution of the human heart. Each generation wanders far from God and falls into sin and idolatry. Elsewhere, the Bible explains, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick, who can understand it” (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander” (Matthew 15:19). If it is left unredeemed, the human heart devolves more. Left unguarded by the redeemed, the human will, which the heart governs, falls out of alignment with God’s will and into gross depravity.

To that point, the epilogue of Judges (17:1-21:25) records some of the most utterly heinous acts of evil found lurking in the human heart, including idolatry, superstition, homosexuality, rape, and murder. I hesitate to provide a gruesome example, but the word of God never conceals human depravity. In fact, stories like the one I am about to summarize illustrate our need for redemption in Jesus Christ, which is what *The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible* is all about.

Get ready. Strap on your safety belt. According to Judges 19, a certain Levite took a knife and cut up the body of his sexually



abused concubine in a Jeffrey Dahmer-like manner. He then sent twelve pieces of her mangled flesh throughout all the territory, one piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. He had offered his virgin daughters to a group of homosexual men who demanded to have sexual relations with his male house guest. Ironically, the Levite told them their desires were too wicked. When they refused his virgin daughters, he tossed them his concubine and closed his front door. They abused her sexually all night long and then dumped her body on the Levite's doorstep, where he found her in the morning.

No, I am not making this up. Nor did I retrieve the story from yesterday's Cable news cycle. This anecdote comes from the Bible. It shocks my soul, too! Judges 19:30 says, "And all who saw it said, 'Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak.'"

Why does God include such an evil story in His holy book? He does so for the same reason a jeweler places a black, velvet cloth beneath a handful of sparkling diamonds. Stories like this put God's offer of redemption and forgiveness on brilliant display. During the dark eons of time recorded in Judges, God allowed Israel's enemies to discipline His chosen children with servitude. Undoubtedly, He did not tolerate their evil. But as quickly as He punished His kids, and they cried out to Him, God graciously sent them deliverers.

Here Come the Judges

While the book's prologue (1:1-3:4) explains how moral gloom, despair, and agony fell upon Israel and the epilogue (17:1-21:25) illustrates their excessive misery, the main body (3:5-16:31) presents the deliverances brought about by twelve judges. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah (with Barak), Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah,



Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson appear like champions on a stage in a great hall of faith. While some received more editorial space than others, each deliverer played an important role in God's story. And, despite their imperfections, God used the judges to accomplish His holy purposes.

Let's take a brief look at three of them, starting with a prophetess named Deborah (4:1-5:31). Deborah is a "wow" woman, a woman of wisdom. She stands out as the only female judge at a time when it was rare for women to assume leadership roles. She is a reminder that God has always been pro-women.⁹

Because the Israelites "did evil in the sight of the Lord," they endured heavy oppression under the Canaanites for twenty years (4:1). Deborah was judging Israel at that time and used her considerable influence to raise up an army. Rhetorically, she poked Barak in the chest and told him to gather ten thousand men to fight against Sisera, the commander of the Canaanites. Barak would not go up and fight unless Deborah fought with him. She agreed to accompany him and his huge army of men, but she rebuked Barak by saying, "Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (4:9). It was Deborah's way of calling Barak a wimp.

That day, the Lord handed the Israelites a victory over the Canaanites, and there was rest in the land for the next forty years. Deborah and Barak wrote a song together and became rock stars in Israel (5:1-31).

Another judge named Gideon was a man of valor (6:1-8:35). The Midianites had been beating up Israel and her economy for seven years. That is when the angel of the Lord called upon Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor" (6:12). At that time, Gideon was neither mighty nor courageous. In fact, the angel found him hiding wheat from the Midianites in the winepress.



Judges

ANARCHY AND APOSTASY

He expressed his deep insecurities to the Lord's messenger. Gideon reminds me of the lion in the Wizard of Oz movie who stuttered every time he said the word courage.

However, the Lord saw potential in Gideon. God never calls the qualified; He qualifies the called. In time, God used Gideon to defeat the Midianites with an army much smaller than Gideon wanted. Gideon learned to sing words like these, written by Bill Gaither, "I am a promise, I am a possibility. I am a promise with a capital P. I am a great big bundle of potentiality."

Samson is the final judge worth mentioning (13:1-16:31). Unlike Gideon, Samson was the picture of potential—a strong man with muscles popping in places most people did not know they had places. God set Samson apart prior to his birth to deliver His people from the Philistines who had been suppressing the Israelites for forty years.

But Samson was a "he" man with a "she" weakness. He had an eye for pretty women and fell deeply into sexual immorality. Samson kept feeding his lust until one day, he lay with a prostitute named Delilah. She coerced him to tell her the secret of his great strength, his long hair, which she shared with the Philistines. They attacked Samson while he was sleeping and shaved off the seven locks on his head.

When aroused from his sleep, Samson tried to draw upon his strength as he did before, but the Bible says, "He did not know that the Lord had left him" (16:20). Samson spent the rest of his life grinding mill for the Philistines. Ultimately, God used Samson to fulfill His divine purposes, but Samson never reached his full human potential.

During the time of the judges, "every man did what was right in his own eyes." However, it was also a time when God's grace shined brightly like diamonds on a black cloth. Romans 5:20 says, "Where



Judges

THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS

sin increased, the grace of God abounded all the more.” That, too, describes the time of the Judges. On balance, only one hundred of the three hundred and fifty years were full of gloom, despair, and agony. Intermittently, for two hundred and fifty years, the land had rest because God raised up a deliverer. In time, God sent the final deliverer. His name is Jesus.

OUTLINE	1:1 - 3:4	3:5 - 16:31	17:1 - 21:25
FOCUS	Gradual Decline Living with the Canaanites Prologue	Divine Justice Delivered from the Canaanites Main Body	Total Depravity Living like the Canaanites Epilogue
KEY VERSE	2:10	3:1	21:25



Ruth

ROMANCE AND REDEMPTION

Robert Silvers is an artist who combined digital technology and photography to create what he calls photomosaic art. A photomosaic is a large photograph that is actually made up of thousands of tiny photographs. The idea is to view the large picture from a distance, but upon closer examination, see the thousands of smaller pictures used to create the art image.

Silvers invented his unique technology while he was a student at the MIT Media Lab. He dazzled the art world, won numerous awards, and includes Mastercard, Disney, and *Life* magazine among his corporate clients. London's National Gallery selected Silvers' portrait of Bill Gates, former Microsoft Chairman, for their "Painting of the Year" exhibit, highlighting influential art in the twenty-first century.

What does photomosaic art have to do with the ultimate road trip through the Bible? Like a photomosaic, the Bible's book of Ruth is a little picture inside a much bigger picture, a small story about romance and redemption inside God's larger narrative about His redeeming love. The characters in this story remind us that our lives matter to God no matter how small and insignificant we think we are.



History, Romance, and Prophecy

Historical context matters when reading the book of Ruth. The human author of the short biblical treatise, probably the prophet Samuel, apparently agrees because he begins with these seven words, “In the days when the judges ruled ...” (1:1). Those words set the beautiful love story between Ruth, a poor heroine from Moab, and Boaz inside the larger moral and spiritual crisis happening in Israel during her dark ages. Ruth’s story is a reminder that good and evil, light and darkness, can and do coexist.

Ruth is history, romance, prophecy, and theology rolled into one. It is better than a once-upon-a-time fairy tale because it happened to real people in history. Ruth begins with a famine and ends with the birth of a baby, the promise of God, and hope for tomorrow.

After her husband Elimelech’s death, Naomi returns to Bethlehem, the home from which she wandered to a foreign land (1:1-5). But on the way home, she encourages her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, also widows, to remain in their homeland and find husbands. Orpah eventually heeds Naomi’s advice and stays in Moab. But Ruth declares her loyalty to her mother-in-law with some of the most beautiful words of commitment found in the Old Testament.

“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” Ruth 1:16-17

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is our kinsman redeemer.

BIG IDEA

Jesus is ready, willing, and able to redeem lost sinners.

MEMORY VERSE

“Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.”

RUTH 4:14

AUTHOR AND DATE

Uncertain
Around 1000 B.C.



These are good words for brides and grooms to recite at the wedding altar. In that way, Ruth is starting to sound better than a Hallmark movie or a Harlequin Romance novel. A beautiful, foreign girl becomes a widow when her husband dies unexpectedly. She moves to Bethlehem with her grieving mother-in-law, who is also a widow and bitter because of her recent losses.¹⁰ Together, they are poor and vulnerable. Life looks better for them in Bethlehem, but they face an uncertain future.

In response to Naomi's encouragement, Ruth goes to work. She begins gleaning in the fields to help put food on their table, which the Law of Moses allowed the poor and foreigners to do (Leviticus 19:9-10). In those days, gleaning was like standing in line for food stamps. The gleaners could take for themselves the portions left at the edges of the field by the harvesters.

Boaz, the owner of the field, notices Ruth. She impresses him with her ingenuity and industriousness. She works hard and is a virtuous woman. He is also her near kinsman, a relative. To her surprise, he protects her and provides generously for her. When Ruth brings home a bounty of gleanings, Naomi recognizes the unusual kindness Boaz extends to Ruth. She sees a budding romance and encourages Ruth to open her heart to Boaz (3:1-5).

Long before eHarmony and other dating services appeared online, Naomi plays matchmaker. She takes matters into her own hands by encouraging Ruth to offer herself to Boaz in marriage, but not before she bathes and splashes on some Moab Number 5 in order to smell good. Naomi certainly understood the power of attraction. Until then, Boaz had never seen Ruth in a pretty dress but only in her work clothes that made her smell like a field hand. Ruth needed to put her best foot forward to attract a man like Boaz and seal the romantic deal.

Naomi also sees an opportunity to secure Ruth's future and her



own. The future is what Naomi had in mind when she says, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?” (3:1) If Boaz chooses to marry Ruth, their union will also ensure her protection and prosperity in perpetuity.

It would be incorrect for us to read chapter 3 and import eroticism into the scene or to think of Ruth as acting sexually provocative when she appeared at the foot of Boaz’s bed in the middle of the night. The text requires a careful understanding of the cultural practices that Naomi clearly grasped and that Ruth followed when a woman makes herself available for redemption by her near kinsman according to the Mosaic Law.

At the same time, the book of Ruth does not disappoint as a romance novel. For single women in any generation, chapter 3 is worth gleaning for its dating and relationship principles. For example, like Ruth, take a calculated risk on love. Find your identity in Christ, not a man. Become the kind of woman that will attract the sort of man you desire. Rest in faith and wait patiently for the providence of God. Ruth illustrates all of these principles and more in the way she relates to Boaz. The book offers similar courtship advice to single men from Boaz’s godly example.

However, the book of Ruth is a must-stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. It has more to say about God’s redeeming love for us than it does Boaz’s love for Ruth and vice versa. To fully understand how this little love story points us to the larger story of God’s redeeming love, we must travel deeper into the cultural nuances of the beautiful literary mosaic we are reading.

Jesus: Our Kinsman Redeemer

In chapter 4, we learn that another relative was nearer to Ruth and legally possessed the first right to redeem her (4:1-6). The scene



flows seamlessly from one chapter to the next. It appears that Boaz wasted no time in confronting the nearer kinsman to determine his intentions with Ruth. Their negotiation happened before ten city elders who witnessed a complicated court case involving both real estate and relationship. When the nameless relative learned that Naomi was selling land that belonged to his brother Elimelech, he immediately said, “I will redeem it” (4:4).

However, when the nearer relative learned that marrying Ruth was also part of the redemption, he reversed his intention. He said that he could not put his family’s inheritance at risk (4:5-6). His inability or unwillingness to pay the full redemption price cleared the way for Boaz, who was in a better financial position, to buy the property and redeem Ruth. I am not the first to see the bigger idea at play in this part of the smaller story. The nearer relative is a picture of the Mosaic Law, which is unable to redeem us. The Law can reveal sin, but it cannot pay the price necessary to redeem the sinner (Romans 8:3).

The Christ connection in Ruth is breathtaking. Like Boaz is to Ruth, Jesus is our “kinsman redeemer” or *Goel*¹¹, which refers to one who redeems or buys back. The *Goel* must meet the following criteria: He must be related by blood to those he redeems, able to pay the redemption price, and willing to act as redeemer.

The Mosaic Law made provision for the poor person who was forced to sell part of himself or his property into slavery. His nearest kin could buy back what he was obligated to sell (Leviticus 25:47-55). More to the point of Ruth’s situation, if a family member died without an heir, as did Ruth’s husband, the kinsman gave his name to the widow by marrying her. Their children would bear his name and give her descendants a future.

Like Boaz, who was rich enough to redeem Ruth, Jesus has the power to redeem us from our spiritual poverty and make us rich



in Him. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Boaz also illustrates Jesus’s willingness to redeem us.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” giving voice to His redeeming love with a specific word that was commonly used in the marketplace. In New Testament times, merchants stamped invoices and other business documents with the word *tetelestai* to show that a bill had been paid in full.

“I Will Give You Rest”

Naomi sought rest for Ruth (3:1). The word “rest” should remind us of the words of Jesus, our kinsman redeemer, who said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). To whom do you look to find security and rest?

In the end, Boaz shows kindness to Ruth and Naomi by redeeming them from a life of hardship and poverty. Boaz and Ruth marry, and God gives them a child. “Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him’” (4:14-15).

Rewind that last phrase and reread it. The women sound as if they are talking about Boaz. We expect them to say of the redeemer, “Your daughter-in-law ... has married him.” Instead, they say she “has given birth to him.” They are talking about the baby born to Boaz and Ruth. How is this child a redeemer?

The story ends with an unexpected twist. Boaz and Ruth are



Ruth

ROMANCE AND REDEMPTION

like play actors in a much larger drama. They have a baby named Obed. Obed fathers Jesse and Jesse fathers David who becomes King of Israel. Get the picture? Are you starting to see the photomosaic more clearly?

A picture is worth a thousand words. A biblical photomosaic is worth even more. The child born to Ruth and Boaz provides an important link to King David, through whom the Messiah comes. In the end, the continuation of the Messianic line is what Ruth's story is primarily about. Ruth, a Moabitess, appears in the genealogical record of Jesus Christ as an unexpected detour on the ultimate road trip through the Bible (Matthew 1:1-17). Only God could paint history, romance, Messianic prophecy, and the theology of redemption into such a beautiful literary mosaic.

This magnificent Old Testament story reminds me of the lyrics to a hymn written by the blind American poetess, Fanny Jane Crosby.

*Redeemed—how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.*

Is redemption in Jesus Christ your testimony? Do you love to proclaim it?

OUTLINE	1-2	3-4
FOCUS	Bitterness and Blessing Naomi and Ruth	Romance and Redemption Ruth and Boaz
KEY VERSE	1:16-17	4:15-16



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

Bethany Christian Services, a prominent evangelical adoption agency, reached a turning point when it announced that it would begin offering its adoption services to L.G.B.T.Q. couples nationwide. The decision announced by Chris Palusky, the president and chief executive officer of the largest Protestant organization of its kind, came at a time when more cities and states required adoption agencies to accept applications from same-sex couples or risk losing government contracts.¹²

What does this mean for Christians? Ultimately, every single believer in Jesus Christ will have to decide where he or she stands in relation to demands made by moral revolutionaries. The same is true for churches, religious schools, denominations, Christian organizations, and adoption and foster care agencies. Who defines marriage and family, God and His holy word or culture? America and the church continually face turning points like these. Which way will the nation and its citizens turn?

While on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, a study of 1 Samuel is perfect for any nation or individual that is facing a turning point. First Samuel records a time in Israel's history when she faced her own moral and spiritual turning point. A turning point is a time



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

and place at which a significant change occurs. If the change is significant enough, some say there is no turning back.

Rejecting Divine Authority

In 1 Samuel, we witness the call of God upon a young boy (Samuel), the rise and fall of Israel's first king (Saul), and the anointing of Israel's greatest king (David). The book, compiled by Samuel, Gad and Nathan (1 Chronicles 29:29) begins with the birth of Samuel (1105 BC) and ends with the death of Saul (1011 BC). As Israel transitions from judges to prophets and kings, from a theocracy to a centralized monarchy, the calling and anointing of God fell upon His chosen leaders.

For three hundred and fifty years, Israel endured much turmoil as a nation of loosely affiliated tribes led by various judges who administered justice and delivered the people from her enemies. Though invisible, God always intended to be Israel's king. However, God's people grew weary and wanted to be like the other nations that had a visible king. Israel's desire displeased Samuel, and he took counsel with the Lord in prayer about it (8:4-9).

The Lord told Samuel to "obey the voice of the people" because "they have rejected me from being king over them" (8:7). When Israel chose God's second best, His permissive will, not His perfect will, marked a significant turning point. It illustrates how each of us can reach a point of such stubborn rebellion against God that He will let us go our own way to endure the consequences of our poor choices. Samuel did what

CHRIST CONNECTION

Like Samuel, Jesus Christ is a prophet, priest, and judge.

BIG IDEA

Choose God's best not His second best.

MEMORY VERSE

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

1 SAMUEL 8:7

AUTHOR AND DATE

Samuel, Gad, Nathan
930 B.C. and later



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

the Lord told him to do while delivering a solemn warning to the Israelites about the consequences of their decision (8:10-18). “But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel.” Following the Lord’s instruction and the people’s demands, Samuel put plans in place to anoint Israel’s first king (8:19-22).

There was nothing whimsical about the way Israel rejected God as her king. The idea did not rise from a rambunctious rabble. Rather, it came from the thoughtful deliberation of Israel’s elders who had gathered to consider the nation’s future. They used the fact that Samuel was getting old and that his sons did not follow in the Lord’s ways as an excuse to turn away from God (8:1-5). They reasoned that it was better for them to be like the other nations, to follow the crowd as it were.

It is always dangerous to follow the crowd. Even Jesus warned, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). Are you facing a turning point? Will you follow the crowd or Christ?

Other Turning Points

First Samuel marks a significant turning point in the whole of Israel as a nation. Throughout the book, however, smaller turning points emerge in the lives of Samuel, Saul, David, and others. For example, the sons of Eli, the high priest, reached their own turning point. Growing up in a ministry home and now officiating as priests at Shiloh, Hophni and Phinehas turned away from God and toward personal profit and pleasure (2:12-36). The brazenness of their immorality with women who came to worship earned them the title “worthless men” (2:12).

On a more positive note, Hannah, Samuel’s mother, turned to God in sorrow and begged Him to open her barren womb. In time,



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

God answered her prayer with a baby boy. Hannah dedicated her child to the Lord as she promised she would do and then wrote a beautiful song of praise (1:1-2:11). It is worth noting that Samuel grew up at Shiloh, the place of worship where Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's treacherous sons, sowed their wild oats. Thankfully, their poor example did not turn Samuel's young heart away from God. On the contrary, as a young boy, Samuel learned to discern God's voice and follow Him with his whole heart (3:1-21).

As Samuel grew, he became a towering figure in Israel's religious life. Little can be said about him that is negative. Clean of scandal, he served as the last judge and the first of the prophets, having built the first school of prophets in Israel. As a judge, Samuel defeated Israel's arch enemies, the Philistines, and retrieved the ark of the covenant after they had captured it (4:1-6:21). Following his great victory, Samuel raised a memorial stone between Mizpeh and Shen and called it Ebenezer ("stone of help") in memory of the God who helped Israel defeat her enemy.¹³

There is more to Samuel's significant ministry. Long before John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, mounted his horse to preach the gospel during the eighteenth century, the prophet Samuel was the first circuit clergy. The Bible says, "He went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all those places," afterward returning to his home in Ramah (7:16). God also used this man of God to anoint kings. Samuel, the kingmaker, reluctantly poured oil on Saul's head, the son of Kish (10:1), but later, he gleefully anointed David, a ruddy shepherd boy with Hollywood eyes who became the greatest king in Israel's history (16:1-13).

Though Samuel's death is not recorded until chapter 25, his farewell address to the children of Israel is worth reading in chapter 12. By then, he was an old man and experienced in the ways of God. Surrounded by his sons, he defended the integrity of his ministry (12:1-5), reviewed the righteous deeds the Lord had done for them (12:6-15), prayed (12:16-18), and then instructed the people in the



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

good and right way (12:19-25). “Far be it from me,” Samuel said, “that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you” (12:23).

The sin of prayerlessness is important for any pastor, shepherd, or minister leader in the church to avoid. It has been said that a man of God will rise in proportion to the time he spends on his knees. That appears to have been true about Samuel.

The Rise and Fall of a King

On the other hand, Saul was not known as a man of prayer or as a man after God’s own heart, which later described David (13:14). King Saul’s rise and fall describes one of the saddest tales about one of the most pathetic characters in the entire Old Testament. Saul was the people’s choice for a king not God’s. Externally, he possessed all the potential to be a great king. He even started well.

Saul was tall and handsome (9:2). When he walked into a room, heads turned. He was generous of heart and merciful (11:13), also modest and a bit reluctant to assume the highest position in the monarchy (9:21, 10:22). Those are good qualities to find in a man who was about to assume a king’s throne. The Spirit of God fell upon Saul (10:10), loyal men surrounded him (10:26), and Samuel was always available to him for counsel. What more could a king desire? Early on, Saul defeated the Ammonites and received a military hero’s welcome when he returned from battle (11:1-12).

But King Saul reminds me of the 2009 Denver Broncos, a football team that started the season by winning their first six games but then lost eight of their last ten games. At first, everyone thought the mile-high team was headed to the Super Bowl. However, by the end of the season, they did not even make it to the playoffs, finishing with eight wins and eight losses. Likewise, as quickly as Saul launched like a rocket to the moon, he fell like a meteor back to planet earth and to his shame.

What Saul lacked was a commitment to obey God in all things.



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

He feigned love for God when it was convenient for him, but he acted presumptuously and obeyed selectively.

On one occasion, Saul and his army of two hundred ten thousand men went up against the Amalekites. The Lord told Saul to eradicate them because they had opposed the Israelites when He brought them out of Egypt (15:1-3). Saul defeated the Amalekites handily. However, he spared King Agag and all of the best livestock.

The Lord was not pleased with Saul. His incomplete obedience marked a turning point in the Lord's relationship with the king. When the Lord informed Samuel of Saul's deplorable actions, the Bible says, "Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night long" (15:11). The next day, Samuel confronted Saul, who had erected a monument of himself at Carmel. "And Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?'" (15:14) Saul piled on the excuses, even blaming it on the people who took the best livestock. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Samuel lectured Saul. In so many words, the prophet told the king that he was dancing with the devil and that God had rejected him as king (15:22-23).

Saul pleaded for mercy, but it was too late. It was not the first time the king had chosen selective obedience (13:1-14). A pattern of presumption and willfulness had grown in Saul's heart. Perhaps it had been there all along, hidden by his charm and good looks. After Samuel "hacked Agag to pieces" with his sword, he departed (15:32-33). It was the last time Saul was in the presence of Samuel before he died. Then the Lord turned Samuel's attention to David.

A Man After God's Own Heart

The Spirit of the Lord departed Saul and rested upon David, a young shepherd boy who quickly rose to fame after defeating a Philistine giant named Goliath with a sling and a stone (17:1-58). "And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (18:8). In other words, “Yea for David and boo for Saul!” Hearing this lit Saul’s anger and jealousy. He spent the rest of his pathetic life trying to eliminate David and gain back his popularity.

Samuel anointed David, the youngest son of Jesse, as king of Israel (16:1-13). Approximately fifteen years passed before David sat on his throne. David waited patiently on God for the right time to act on his anointing, meanwhile soothing Saul’s tormented spirit by playing his harp whenever the king became agitated (16:14-23).

First Samuel 16-31 reads like an action-packed movie script with David keeping one step ahead of Saul’s jealous rage. Twice, David spared Saul’s life, once while Saul relieved himself in a cave where David hid (24:1-22, 26:1-25). David faced his own turning point. When his men tried to persuade David that the Lord had given his enemy into his hand, David “stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe” (24:4). Afterward, conviction pricked his heart. He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to put my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord’s anointed” (24:6). The word of God had already trained David’s conscience well.

Constantly on the run, David had no choice but to trust God with his future. He wrote many psalms during this time in his life while forging a loyal friendship with Jonathan (18:1-16), Saul’s son.¹⁴ At one point, David became so despondent that he said in his heart, “Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines” (27:1). Saul reached his lowest point when he turned and sought counsel from a witch in Endor (28:1-25).¹⁵

Chapter 31 records the tragic death of Saul and his three sons. While mortally injured during a battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, Saul fell on his sword. The next day, the Philistines cut off his head and stripped off his armor, which they carried to Beth-shan, where they fastened his body to the wall inside a pagan temple.



1 Samuel

WHICH WAY WILL YOU TURN?

Nations and individuals face turning points regularly. Which way will America turn? Which way will you turn? I said earlier that if the turning point is significant enough, some say there is no turning back. Actually, in this life, it is never too late to turn back to God. Thankfully, the Lord stands ready and willing to forgive us and welcome us home when we turn back to Him in genuine repentance.

OUTLINE	1-7	8-15	16-31
FOCUS	Samuel Last Judge Theocracy	Saul First King Monarchy	David Greatest King Monarchy
KEY VERSE	3:10	8:4-7	18:8



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

Walk the streets of Jerusalem today and ask anybody, “Who was Israel’s greatest king?” and most likely they will answer, “David, the man after God’s own heart.” Not surprisingly, the King David Jerusalem Hotel is one of the “Leading Hotels in the World” and is the universal choice of elite travelers who visit the holy city from all corners of the globe. Guests enjoy modern luxury along with the splendor of a bygone era. Naming the hotel after King David makes perfect sense; however, naming it after King Saul would have been a poor marketing decision.

David is a giant figure in Israel’s history for many reasons. His connection to Christ is most significant. Chronologically, David appears halfway between Abraham and Jesus. Genealogically, the Messiah is a descendant of David (Matthew 1:1-17). Theologically, King David is an Old Testament type of Christ who points us to Jesus, who is the King of kings.

Furthermore, the “Son of David” is among Jesus’s many titles.¹⁶ The angel Gabriel said to Mary, Jesus’s mother, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

(Luke 1:32-33). Prophetically, when He returns, Jesus Messiah will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule the earth for one thousand years.¹⁷

David was a man of many talents, interests, and proficiencies. Shepherd, soldier, king, musician, poet, fundraiser, administrator, and lover of God are some of his descriptions. Tragically, the words adulterer and murderer also apply. A study of the life of King David is both complex and immensely worthwhile.

Originally, the books of First and Second Samuel existed as one narrative. So, it is no surprise that Second Samuel begins seamlessly with David returning from a military victory over the Amalekites. On his way to establishing the Davidic dynasty, he continued to ride the wave of popularity following his defeat of the Philistine giant.

After defeating the Amalekites, David remained at Ziklag for two days, long enough for a messenger from Saul's camp to arrive with news of the king's tragic demise and the death of his sons, including Jonathan. "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen" (1:19). David grieved the loss of the Lord's anointed and his dearest friend. However, King Saul's death meant that David could finally assume the throne.

David's Righteous Reign

Second Samuel focuses solely on the forty-year reign of King David. It does not record everything the Bible says about David. His story actually begins in 1 Samuel 16 and ends in 1 Kings 2. However, some call Second Samuel "the book of David's forty years."

CHRIST CONNECTION

The reign of King David pictures the future earthly millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.

BIG IDEA

My heart is like God's when I obey Him and walk in integrity.

MEMORY VERSE

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

2 SAMUEL 12:13

AUTHOR AND DATE

Gad and Nathan
930 B.C. and later



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

He served as king of Judah in Hebron for seven years and six months (2:1-4:12) and as king of all Israel in Jerusalem for thirty-three years (5:1-24:25).¹⁸

At first, every tribe of Israel but Judah, the royal one, remained dutiful to Saul and his descendants. It took time for David to consolidate his power. In the meantime, loyalists to Saul made Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, king. He reigned only two years before he was murdered by two of his captains among the raiding bands (4:1-12).

Chapters 1-10 record the meteoric rise of David. Everything he touched yielded success because God was on David's side. Also, the young king always prayed and asked for the Lord's guidance in military matters (2:1, 5:19, 22-25).

Chapter 3 begins, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker" (3:1). The shepherd boy who became king defeated the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, and Hadadezer, the king of Zobah. David also defeated the Ammonites and the Syrians. Twice in chapter 8, the Bible says, "The Lord gave victory to David wherever he went" (8:6, 14).

Returning the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem was one of David's greatest achievements (6:1-23). As the ark of the covenant entered Jerusalem, King David was leaping and dancing in one of the most effusive displays of celebratory worship found in the Bible. Michal observed her husband from the palace window and despised David in her heart for acting "as one of the vulgar fellows" (6:20). David defended his actions as nothing less than pure, uninhibited worship before the Lord.

The Davidic Covenant

During David's rise to fame, God also made a covenant with David as He did with Abraham and his descendants (7:4-17). David



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

wanted to build a house for God; instead, the Lord built a house for David, securing his kingdom forever. The Lord told David, “Your throne shall be established forever” (7:11-16).

In prayer, David humbly received what the Lord said to him. “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” (7:18) David must have felt like the proverbial turtle on a fencepost in the middle of the farmer’s field. The only way that turtle got there is someone picked him up and put him there. David knew that God had placed him on the throne, and nobody could change that.

The covenant God made with David marks the fourth major development in Messianic prophecy since we began the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Adam received the first glimpse of God’s plan to send a Messiah to redeem us when he learned that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent with His heel (Genesis 3:15). God advanced the prophecy by making a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:5-6, 22:15-19) and then confirmed the covenant with Jacob, Abraham’s grandson (Genesis 28:13-15). These were unconditional covenants. In other words, God remains faithful to His promise even if His chosen people do not.

David’s Difficulties

Chapters 13-24 record the many difficulties that befell David and his family following his notorious tryst with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba (11:1-27). Tragically, the man after God’s own heart broke the seventh and tenth commandments concerning adultery and covetousness. David also broke the sixth commandment when he conspired with Joab to murder Bathsheba’s husband, making it look like he died in battle, a cover up worse than Richard Nixon’s during the Watergate scandal. David may have also broken the tenth commandment about bearing false witness when he lived a lie for twelve months before Nathan the prophet confronted him (12:1-15). How does all of this



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

add up to a man whose heart is famously like God's?

It is best to view King David's life as a whole. David was not perfect; however, he was a man after God's own heart because of his blamelessness and loyalty to God. David never fell into pagan idolatry as did many kings of Israel who followed after him. It may have taken one year before David admitted his grievous sin, and he did so only after Nathan the prophet confronted him, but Psalms 51 and 32 record the king's contrite confession before God and provide a model for penitent sinners. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," David penned as a shattered man, "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

God forgave David and restored their fellowship. But David, his family, and the nation suffered the consequences of his sin. The glory of the Davidic dynasty faded. The chastisement of God quickly fell upon David, and a sword remained in his household (13-24). For example, the baby born to David and Bathsheba died, Amnon raped his sister Tamar, and Absalom killed Amnon, reminiscent of the time that Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4). The ramifications of David's sin continued when Absalom, the king's son, led a revolt against the throne by stealing the hearts of the men of Israel (15:6). The disintegration of David's family is a sad tale.

Upon news of the rising rebellion, David fled Jerusalem and Absalom assumed his father's throne. God protected David from his son's pursuit until David had time to gather his forces. David's army defeated Absalom's. When Absalom was near death, Joab thrust three javelins into his heart. The next day, David learned of his victory and Absalom's death by two messengers who arrived moments apart. The Bible says, "The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (18:33).



My Heart Like God's

Modeling the grace of God is one of the main lessons we can learn from King David. Throughout Second Samuel, I am impressed with David's respectful grace toward his enemies, starting with Saul, who threatened his life for years. There is no hint of rejoicing in David's heart over Saul's death. Instead, when the messenger brought news of Saul's demise and told of his role in making it happen, "David took hold of his clothes and tore them" as a gesture of deep mourning (1:11). The messenger underestimated how David would respond to the news. David immediately called for the man's execution who had raised his hand against the Lord's anointed (1:11-16).

Even more impressive is David's kindness toward Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan. David learned about him by asking, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (9:1). To Mephibosheth, David restored all of Saul's land and provided food for him from the king's table. For the rest of his life, the king treated Saul's grandson like one of his own sons (9:1-13). Who does that but a man after God's own heart?

Even in war, David was gracious. Many criticize the barbaric wars of the Old Testament. But in David's treatment of the Moabites, he acted with leniency and advanced the humanitarianism of his day (8:2). War is never anything less than brutal. It was common in David's time to slay all of your enemies, including the women and children. If military commanders did not, they left open the possibility of retaliation by an enemy that regrouped. However, the Moabites experienced David's grace. After defeating them in war, the king divided the Moabites into three groups, with the third being the largest ("full line") and the one he spared. Instead of dying, they became servants to David.¹⁹

From the life of David, we also learn the importance of guarding our hearts. If a man after God's own heart can fall, anyone can fall.



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

First Corinthians 10:12 warns, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

David’s sinful mistake with Bathsheba became possible when he isolated himself. Second Samuel 11 begins, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem (11:1). David should have been with his army on the battlefield, but he stayed behind. His isolation led to idleness and idleness to inquiry about a beautiful woman that David saw bathing from the rooftop of his house.

Finally, David reminds us that we must lead with integrity. Asaph, the psalmist, describes David’s leadership of Israel this way: “So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands” (Psalm 78:72 NAS). Integrity without skill yields incompetence. Skill without integrity leads to disaster. But when a leader’s heart is right with God, and he or she is able to do the job well, that leader is worth following.

David’s leadership casts a long, Messianic shadow all the way to Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ is born, the Son of God and the Son of David. It continues to the end of the age when Jesus returns and fulfills the Messianic prophecy we read at Christmas, which says, “For unto us a child is born ... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore (Isaiah 9:6-7).

When Jesus returns to rule the earth from David’s throne, perhaps someone will change the hotel named after King David to the King Jesus Jerusalem Hotel.



2 Samuel

MY HEART LIKE GOD'S

OUTLINE	1-10	11-12	13-24
FOCUS	David's Success	David's Failure	David's Difficulties
KEY VERSE	5:10	12:13	24:25
LOCATION	Hebron	Jerusalem	
TIME	7 ½ years	33 years	



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

“United we stand, divided we fall” is a popular motto used to inspire unity and collaboration. The ancient Greek storyteller Aesop is perhaps the originator of the phrase in his fables “The Four Oxen and the Lion” and “The Bundle of Sticks.”

With unity on his mind in 1858, Abraham Lincoln delivered The House Divided Speech at the Illinois State Capital after he accepted the Republican Party’s nomination for United States Senator. He famously quoted Jesus by repeating, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

The Latin phrase *e pluribus unum*, meaning “out of many, one,” appears on the Great Seal of the United States of America. It reminds us that we are a unified coalition of people and states.

Ancient Israel might have benefitted from a motto like “united we stand” or a phrase like *e pluribus unum*. First Kings records the time when Israel fell into civil war and was divided into two kingdoms. The divide did not happen until after King Solomon’s reign, but his slide into immorality and idolatry contributed to it (11:6). In response to Solomon’s disobedience, the Lord said to him, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

and will give it to your servant” (11:11).

Let’s rewind history and take a closer look at King Solomon’s glorious reign over a United Monarchy, starting with a bird’s eye view of 1 Kings. The book’s twenty-two chapters fall into two categories. Chapters 1-11 detail the forty-year reign of King Solomon over a United Monarchy, which he inherited from his father, King David. Following the death of Solomon (11:43), chapters 12-22 record the reign of many kings over a nation that had divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Solomon was the last king to reign over a united Hebrew kingdom.

The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom existed as an independent state until the Assyrians took Israel captive in 731 B.C. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin made up the Southern Kingdom, which also operated independently until the Babylonians took them captive in 586 B.C. In both cases, the Lord sent the captors to punish Israel and Judah for turning from the one true God to serve idols.

First Kings begins near the end of David’s forty-year reign as Israel’s king when Adonijah tried to seize the throne. However, David anointed his son Solomon as his successor and rejoiced, saying, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it” (1:48).

After Solomon eliminated threats to his throne (2:13-46), the Lord spoke to him in a dream and invited him to ask for anything. Famously, the young king replied, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I

CHRIST CONNECTION

The reign of King Solomon in splendor pictures the future eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ.

BIG IDEA

Sin disrupts unity and divides people.

MEMORY VERSE

“And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’” 1 KINGS 9:4-5

AUTHOR AND DATE

Uncertain
Around 550 B.C.



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (3:9).

Solomon could have asked for long life, riches, or the life of his enemies. Instead, he requested wisdom from above to govern the people entrusted to his leadership. This pleased the Lord immensely. In response, God gave Solomon a discerning heart plus the riches, honor, and long life he did not request. “No other king shall compare with you, all your days” (3:13), the Lord told Solomon, and no other king did. The Davidic dynasty, under Solomon’s rule, became the envy of the world. As the “king of kings,” Solomon ruled over everything and everyone from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River and from the Red Sea to Lebanon (4:21-34).

Wise Guy

Immediately, Solomon put his newly acquired divine wisdom on display by adjudicating a dispute between two prostitutes who both claimed to be the mother of the same child. The situation confounded others, but not Solomon. The way he resolved the dispute and got the child’s real mother to reveal herself made all Israel stand in awe of the sage king (3:16-28).

It is no exaggeration to say that Solomon was the wisest guy in the room on any subject. First Kings 4:29-30 says, “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.” A man of extraordinary intellect and ability, Solomon’s wisdom ranged from theology to zoology, from architecture to horticulture, from poetry to philosophy.

In this way, Solomon is a type of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Like the boy Jesus who impressed the teachers in the temple with his questions and answers (Luke 2:41-52), Solomon raised people’s eyebrows when



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

he addressed any subject. Not surprisingly, of the five wisdom books in the Old Testament, Solomon penned three of them: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Solomon also turned his father's dream into reality by building and furnishing God's house (5:1-6:38, 7:13-51). Sparing no expense, Solomon built the glorious temple with cedars from Lebanon and overlaid it with much gold. The labor force required to build the worship facility neared two hundred thousand, including thirty-three hundred chief officers who managed the skilled workers. It took seven years to complete the temple project.²⁰ Chapter 8 records the celebration and dedication of the temple on opening day, including Solomon's prayer of dedication, which provides a glimpse into Solomon's spiritual depth at the time (8:22-66).

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Solomon's fame grew. News of all the Lord had done for the king and the nation he served reached the Queen of Sheba, ruler of the Sabaeans in the southern part of Arabia. All that she heard inspired her to make the long journey (1200 miles) on camelback to Jerusalem and see for herself if the stories of Solomon's wisdom, wealth, glory, and honor were true (10:1-13).

When the queen arrived, her eyes popped wide open. She said to Solomon, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard" (10:6-7). Out of respect for the king, the queen gave Solomon both gold and spices. In return, "King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon. So she turned and went back to her own land with her servants" (10:13).

Read verse thirteen carefully and imagine this. Solomon gave



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

the queen everything she asked. But he did not stop there. He also gave her what she desired, presumably what was in her heart but left unspoken. But even that was not all she received from the king. Like a cherry on top of an ice cream sundae, Solomon also gave her a portion of the king's bounty. In other words, Solomon lavished the queen with his wealth before she returned home.

Solomon's generosity to the Queen of Sheba reminds me of Paul's powerful words to the Ephesian church: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20).

Let's pause for another Christ connection. The Davidic dynasty is a foreshadowing of the future reign of Jesus Christ over His earthly (millennial) kingdom and then over His eternal kingdom. David's reign pictures the former and Solomon's the latter. Like Solomon, King Jesus will lavish us with His splendor. In fact, when he taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come," He meant for us to partly imagine the peace and rest, wisdom and knowledge, wealth and glory, fame and honor of the Davidic dynasty, which experienced its peak splendor during the reign of King Solomon. I hope that makes your eyes and your imagination pop wide open in anticipation of the kingdom of heaven we inherit in Christ, whose kingdom is now and not yet.²¹

Human imagination cannot conceive the majesty of life in the presence of our eternal King Jesus and must be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. I believe this is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to the church at Corinth, "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God'" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

Turning Away from God

Despite the Lord's blessing and all the splendor Solomon enjoyed, the king's heart turned away from God (11:1-43). Against the Lord's command and counsel, Solomon loved many foreign women who brought with them their foreign gods. To please his many wives and concubines (hundreds of them), Solomon built high places for their gods and participated in their worship. The irony of Solomon's life is that the wisest man who ever lived, with the exception of Jesus Christ, became the biggest fool in his old age. This evil angered the Lord, who then stripped the kingdom from the hands of Solomon's son (11:11).

After Solomon died, the kingdom spiraled into civil war under the failed leadership of Rehoboam, who assumed the throne. One kingdom became two. Chapters 12-22 begin the era of the Divided Monarchy with a series of kings who reigned separately over the Northern Kingdom (nineteen kings) and the Southern Kingdom (twenty kings) for nearly four hundred years. During that time, the king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord was rare.

Solomon levied heavy taxes upon the people to help pay for palace extravagancies. This led to a tax revolt after the king's death. Rehoboam tried to hold things together but received bad advice and ruled harshly. Eventually, ten tribes denounced their allegiance to David's house and made Jeroboam their king.

Jeroboam was an evil king who "made Israel sin" (22:42). To compete with Jerusalem, he built two new centers of worship in Dan and Bethel, each with a golden calf, and proclaimed to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (12:28). Jeroboam also instituted a feast in the same month as the Feast of Tabernacles and appointed a new order of priests who were not Levites. He was a shrewd leader who drew people away from Yahweh during his twenty-two-year reign. No king in the Northern Kingdom



1 Kings

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

ever led spiritual reforms that brought Israel back to God.

The word of the Lord came through His prophets during this time, starting with Elijah, who bursts onto the scene in the Northern Kingdom by predicting a drought (17:1-7).²² This courageous man of God spoke truth to power, starting with King Ahab and his wicked wife, Queen Jezebel.

Chapter 18 records Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Afterward, Elijah ran like a scared third grader when an angry Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him (19:1-3). The angel of the Lord found the weary, burned-out prophet hiding in a cave hundreds of miles away. The angel fed Elijah and encouraged him to get rest before the Lord, with a still, small voice, renewed his calling (19:4-18).

A Divided Kingdom

United we stand, divided we fall. It was a sad day when Israel divided into two kingdoms. Later in Israel's history, the Jews dispersed and did not come back together as a nation until 1948 under the leadership of a prime minister. No king will again reign in Israel on the throne of a United Kingdom until Jesus Messiah returns. Then Jesus will reign gloriously on David's earthly throne as the Son of God and the Son of David for one thousand years, and afterward for eternity in the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem (Revelation 20-21).

The larger lesson we learn from 1 Kings is that sin disrupts unity and divides people. For decades, I have witnessed this dynamic as a pastor in the local church. Whenever division erupts in a congregation, someone's sin is always at the root of the problem, quenching and grieving the sweet Holy Spirit.

The Bible says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is also true that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is unity (Ephesians 4:1-6). How do we maintain such unity?



1 Kings *UNITED OR DIVIDED?*

We must guard our hearts, keep short accounts with God and others by practicing confession and repentance, eagerly desire unity, walk in the Spirit, and remember the words of the psalmist, King David, who wrote. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

OUTLINE	1-11	12-22
FOCUS	United Kingdom Solomon 40 years	Divided Kingdom Many Kings 80 years
KEY VERSE	9:4-5	12:19



2 Kings

THE DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF A NATION

Years ago, an organization called Citizens Against Government Waste aired a thought-provoking television commercial with a futuristic theme. The year is 2030 A.D. The setting is a seminar in Beijing, China, with a speaker and a large crowd. The speaker begins,

Why do great nations fall? The Ancient Greeks, the Roman Empire, the British Empire, and the United States of America. They all make the same mistakes, turning their back on the principles that made them great. America tried to spend and tax itself out of a great recession. Enormous so-called “stimulus” spending, massive changes to healthcare, government takeover of private industries, and crushing debt. Of course, we own most of their debt, so they now work for us (audience laughter).

Whatever the reasons for the precipitous fall of powerful regimes in human history, one thing is true: No nation or empire lasts forever. Keep this in mind as we continue on the ultimate road trip through the Bible with a study of 2 Kings.

It is difficult to read the Old Testament book of 2 Kings without considering the words written by the apostle Paul centuries later. Galatians 6:7 warns, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for



2 Kings

THE DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF A NATION

whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” The sowing and reaping principle applies to nations as much as it does individuals. We should never confuse God’s patience and long-suffering with His indifference toward sin. Eventually, a nation will reap what it has sown. The wages of national sin are decline and captivity. Without repentance and turning back to God, there is a payday someday! History is replete with examples of this, including Old Testament Israel and Judah.

Despite the warnings of many prophets sent by God, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 731 B.C., and the Babylonians besieged the Southern Kingdom, Judah, in 586 B.C., ransacking Jerusalem and deporting the best Hebrew youths, including Daniel and his three friends. The Northern Kingdom never came back together or returned to power. However, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, a remnant of the Southern Kingdom returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem’s broken walls with reforms led by Ezra, the priest and Nehemiah, the builder. Despite the unfaithfulness of His chosen people, God remained faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even preserving the Messianic line through the Davidic dynasty.

However, there is much historical ground to cover before we get to the exiles brought on by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Overall, 1 and 2 Kings record nearly four hundred years of a divided kingdom led by mostly evil kings (930 B.C. to 586 B.C.).²³ In the annals of the kings, we witness the painful decline, division and captivity of a nation, but not before God sends His prophets to woo His people back.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The miracle-working ministry of Elisha points us to the same in Christ.

BIG IDEA

A nation will reap what it has sown.

MEMORY VERSE

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

GALATIANS 6:7

AUTHOR AND DATE

Uncertain
Around 550 B.C.



Elijah and Elisha

The prophet Elijah's ministry continues in 2 Kings until he "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2:11). Other than Enoch (Genesis 5:24), Elijah is the only person in the Bible who exited this world without experiencing death, perhaps because God was not finished with him. Later, Elijah appears with Moses on a mountaintop with Jesus when the Savior put His glory on display in front of Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1-13). A mysterious link also exists between Elijah and the ministry of John the Baptist.²⁴

Furthermore, Revelation 11:3-12 describes the ministry of two witnesses with miraculous powers who help accomplish God's work during a future time in Bible prophecy known as the Tribulation. The description of these men sounds a lot like Moses and Elijah, who both performed miracles while on earth. Finally, the New Testament lauds Elijah as an ordinary man ("with a nature like ours") through whom God did extraordinary things. According to James, the prayers of this righteous man accomplished much and should inspire us to pray likewise (James 5:16-18).

Before Elijah was taken up to heaven, his disciple, Elisha, asked for a double portion of his spirit.²⁵ Elijah replied, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so" (2:10). Elisha watched as chariots and horses of fire escorted his mentor to heaven.

Immediately, Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak that was left behind and struck the Jordan River with it. The water parted as before, and Elisha walked across dry ground, confirming the transfer of the prophetic office to Elisha. Men from the school of prophets witnessed the miracle and affirmed Elisha. Soon thereafter, Elisha performed two more miracles, turning bad water into clean water (2:19-22) and cursing a group of young boys who mocked his baldness (2:23-24).

All in all, Elisha performed twice as many miracles as Elijah did. Although neither Elijah nor Elisha ever wrote a book, others



2 Kings

THE DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF A NATION

collected, told, and retold their stirring stories. On one occasion, the King of Israel was talking with Gehazi, Elisha's servant, and said, "Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done" (8:4). We should be just as enthusiastic about studying this prophet's life.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible makes a direct link between the ministries of Elijah and John the Baptist; however, there is nothing in Scripture that overtly connects Elisha's ministry to Jesus Christ, but obvious parallels exist between their ministries. For example, the name Elisha means "God is salvation" and the name Jesus means "Yahweh saves." Elisha and Jesus both began their ministries at the Jordan River (2:14; Matthew 3:13). Furthermore, they both raised a woman's son from death to life (4:34; Luke 7:11-17), fed a multitude of people with a small quantity of food and had leftovers (4:43; Matthew 14:13-21), and healed the blind (6:20; John 9:1-9) and lepers (5:14; Luke 17:11-19).

There is more. Elisha multiplied a widow's oil (4:4), and Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Elisha made an iron axe head float in water (6:6), and Jesus walked on water; He also enabled Peter to walk on water (Matthew 14:22-33). Finally, and most compellingly, their deaths brought new life. After Elisha's death, raiders hastily tossed a dead man's body into Elisha's grave. When his body touched Elisha's bones, "he revived and stood on his feet" (13:20-21). They placed Jesus's dead body inside a rich man's tomb, and three days later, Christ rose from the dead (Mark 16:1-8). Because Jesus lives, eternal life belongs to us by faith.

Elijah's bold ministry foreshadowed John the Baptist's powerful preaching, which emphasized repentance and the judgment to come. John the Baptist lived in the wilderness, wore camel skins, and ate locusts and honey. Polished and sophisticated are not words anyone would use to describe John or the prophet who preceded him centuries earlier. Like Elijah, John was daring, resolute, and in your face. Elisha, on the other hand, was more like Jesus Christ, who was full of grace, truth, resurrection life, and hope. Elisha could deliver a



stern word when needed, just as Jesus could. But they both had a way of speaking the truth in love.

Jesus compared His generation to a group of children in the marketplace calling out to others. “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge for you, and you did not dance.” And then He compared the impact of His ministry and that of John the Baptist. “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds” (Matthew 11:17-19). A similar comparison can be made between the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Two different prophets with two different ministry styles yielded the same indifferent response from the nation.

The Assyrians are Coming!

With Elijah and Elisha, God aimed two powerful prophetic missiles toward Israel because morally, the Northern Kingdom was going downhill faster than a runaway train. With little lasting success, other prophets named Jonah, Amos, and Hosea brought the word of the Lord to Israel. Years earlier, King Jeroboam had set the standard for wickedness, and no ruler that followed him did any better, with the possible exception of Jehu. In time, God unleashed the ruthless Assyrians who administered the Lord’s justice and took captive the Israelites (17:22-23).

Chapters 1-17 mention eleven kings in the Northern Kingdom²⁶ who mostly did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.²⁷ Jehu, who reigned for twenty-eight years, was the king with the most promise (9:1-10:36). Wahoo for Jehu! Elisha sent a student from the school of prophets with a flask of oil to anoint Jehu and then instruct him to “strike the house of Ahab” (9:1-10). With great zeal, Jehu received his anointing and carried out his royal duties, including the brutal execution of the former queen, Jezebel, in fulfillment of Elijah’s



prophecy (1 Kings 19:17).

The Lord rewarded Jehu for his obedience by placing his sons on the throne in Israel for four more generations. Furthermore, Jehu gets credit for getting rid of Baal worship in Israel. However, his reforms did not go far enough. He left Jeroboam's golden calves in place at Bethel and Dan, keeping open a door to wickedness that proved troublesome for Israel. Eventually, the Lord's patience ran out, and He began handing Israel over to her enemies until the Assyrians assailed them in 731 B.C.

Southern Reforms

Nine separate royal dynasties rise and fall in Israel, each one securing power by killing off what remained of the former until the kingdom ends. The Southern Kingdom lasted for more than a century longer. Only one dynasty held power in Judah, each king descending from King David. It was God's way of preserving the Messianic line and a reminder that He is not limited by human failure. By dividing the once United Monarchy into two kingdoms, the Lord not only administered His holy justice, but He also protected the Davidic dynasty by isolating it in the south. Even so, only eight of David's twenty royal descendants did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Two of them, Hezekiah and Josiah, led noteworthy southern reforms that aroused national repentance for a season.

Six years before the overthrow of Israel's capital in Samaria, Hezekiah became king of Judah (18:1-20:21). Because of Hezekiah's faith-filled leadership, God spared Judah from the Assyrians and prospered the Southern Kingdom. However, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years, rejected his father's faith and returned the nation to her idolatrous past, which contributed to Judah's eventual downfall and captivity.

Two generations later, young King Josiah enacted his own spiritual reforms and reigned for thirty-one years (22:1-23:30).



His commitment to the rediscovered law of God is impressive. However, like a dog that returns to eat his own vomit, the four kings that followed Josiah licked up idolatry. Slightly more than a decade later, divine judgment falls upon Judah in the form of three Babylonian deportations, the final one coming in 586 B.C. when King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple (23:27).

The Gospel According to Naaman

Why do great nations fall? For example, why did the Roman Empire fall? Historians differ on their assessment. Was Rome invaded by Barbarian tribes? Did they overexpand and overspend? Did government corruption and political instability contribute to Rome's notorious decline? All of that is true and probably had something to do with what brought down the ancient empire. But from God's perspective, great nations crumble from within because they continue to do what is evil in His eyes.

The only hope for a nation in spiritual decline, then and now, is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why a good place to end a study of 2 Kings is with Naaman, the well-respected commander of the king of Syria's army who was also a leper. Read his story in 2 Kings 5:1-14 and remember this: Like Naaman, we are all spiritual lepers, afflicted with a soul-destroying disease called sin (Romans 3:23).

Naaman was successful, proud, and desperate for healing. The prophet Elisha sent word through his servant to Naaman. He should go down to the Jordan River and dip his body seven times in the water, "and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean" (5:10). Despite Naaman's angry objection to the simple and specific instruction given to him by the prophet, the highly favored military commander went down to the Jordan River and dipped his leprous body into the water seven times. After the seventh time, "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (5:14).



2 Kings

THE DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF A NATION

A nation in decline returns to God one desperate soul at a time. Some think God's simple plan for salvation is foolishness, but the cross of Jesus Christ powerfully saves us (1 Corinthians 1:18). Some believe there are many rivers that will save us, but only the river of blood that flows from Calvary's cross will wash us clean and, perhaps, keep a nation from falling (John 14:6).

OUTLINE	1-10	11-17	18-25
FOCUS	Israel (Northern) Elijah and Elisha	Israel and Judah Assyrian Captivity	Judah (Southern) Babylonian Captivity
KEY VERSE	2:15	17:22-23	23:27
TIMELINE	130 years		155 years



1 Chronicles

RETURN TO YOUR SPIRITUAL ROOTS

Author Alex Haley lit a cultural firestorm in 1976 when he published the story of Kunta Kinte and his descendants in a novel titled *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. The main character is an African man who was captured, sold into slavery, and transported to America in the 1800s. It turns out that he was also related to Haley, who thoroughly researched his personal family roots before writing the book. *Roots* spent forty-six weeks on the New York Times Best Seller List, including twenty-two weeks at number one. One year after publication, television producers adapted the book into a popular miniseries, inspiring millions of Americans to explore their personal ancestry.

Oddly, the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles begins with a series of genealogical records that encompass nearly one-third of the entire book (1-9). First Chronicles reads nothing like the page-turner that Alex Haley wrote about his ancestors; however, to the Jewish people, the importance of their family roots could not be overestimated.

The Jews were careful record keepers and composers of history, evidenced by the many documents from which the compiler of the Chronicles drew his divinely inspired material.²⁸ These meticulous



records connected the Jewish remnant to their spiritual roots, which helped them rebuild their broken lives after seventy years in exile. Chronology matters when reading the Chronicles, which focus exclusively on Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Knowing that the Chronicles were compiled after the Babylonian exile sheds critical light on why these books add value to the divine record, though they might seem tedious and repetitive.

The Chronicles were written to the repatriated Jews and their descendants who returned to Jerusalem around 535 B.C. to reestablish their lives. Because of their unique heritage as Yahweh's people, their first order of business, under the leadership of Ezra and Zerubbabel, was to rebuild the temple and establish the centrality of worship. This is noteworthy for anyone who is trying to rebuild his or her life or for a nation that is on the same path. The nation that God blesses puts Him first and the government second.²⁹ What is true at the national level is also true for individuals and families.

Throughout my pastoral ministry, I have met numerous people who have returned to God and the church for various reasons. For example, the birth of a child motivates some parents to find a church and become part of a faith community. For others, a broken marriage, business failure, or death of a loved one drives them to find hope and comfort in God. Many have discovered that living a prodigal life ultimately lacks meaning. Having landed in their own pig slop (Luke 15:11-32), they run in desperation back to the God they met during their childhood. For Judah, seventy years in Babylonian captivity was

CHRIST CONNECTION

The genealogies of 1 Chronicles serve as a preamble to the genealogies of Jesus Christ in Matthew and Luke.

BIG IDEA

Don't let anybody cancel your history!

MEMORY VERSE

"And David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and that his kingdom had been highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel."

1 CHRONICLES
14:2

AUTHOR AND DATE

Ezra
450-425 B.C.



enough to turn a remnant back to Yahweh.

First Chronicles begins with a record of the people's ancestry, specifically the royal lineage of Judah, the Southern Kingdom (1-9). Then the book reviews the reign of King David with a fresh historical look at the Lord's anointed (10-12), the ark of the covenant (13-16), the Lord's covenant with David (17-21), and the temple (22-29). First Chronicles covers the same period of time that Samuel and Kings cover, but from a different perspective and to a new generation. The chronicler's purpose and perspective led him to omit some details and expand others. This is what makes the Chronicles more than interesting.

Connecting to God's Story

First Chronicles begins with a series of genealogies (1-9), and according to 2 Timothy 3:16, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable," including the genealogies. Behind each name is a story that is connected to God's story.

Another powerful lesson we learn from the genealogies is this: Don't let anybody cancel your history! Canceling yesterday is no way to embrace today or tomorrow. Erasing your past, even the painful parts of it is like tearing chapters out of a novel and expecting the story to have the same impact. Every twist and turn in your life and in the history of a nation matters. The past is important to an understanding of the present and to the way one travels into the future.

With that in mind, take the time to read through the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9, and then consider your own ancestral roots. Were your parents or grandparents followers of Jesus? Can you find a taproot of faith in God among your ancestors? While you are at it, think about America's considerable spiritual heritage and how every historical remembrance, good and bad, is important to our future as a nation.³⁰



Almost as a teaser to read all nine chapters that begin 1 Chronicles, a brief jewel known as the prayer of Jabez appears in the genealogy of the descendants of Judah. You would not even know it is there if you skipped over these chapters.

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!" And God granted what he asked. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Nothing more is said about Jabez and his immediate family. We do not even know his dear mother's name, who "bore him in pain." However, Jabez's bold request for divine favor ("bless me") has inspired many to pray in the same manner. Those who dare pray this way have seen God enlarge their own territories, not because this prayer is a magical incantation. Nor is God like a genie who grants your three wishes. On the contrary, the God of the Bible is simply good, gracious, and generous by nature.

Jabez learned that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). This ancient descendant of Judah and his prayer teach us that it is okay to pray for God's favor and expect Him to grant it. And when your heavenly Father does, be sure to thank Him and acknowledge to others the Source of your blessing.

David's Mighty Men

Chapter 10 mentions Saul's death briefly before the chronicler moves on to King David's anointing and enthronement. The Bible states the reason for Saul's failure and death clearly. "So Saul died



for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance” (10:13).

The narrative quickly moves through David’s reign in Hebron. After seven years, he defeats the Jebusites to capture the city of Jerusalem and establish his royal throne in the holy city (11:1-9), all of which gets more attention in 1 Samuel. What’s new is a lengthy compilation of David’s “mighty men.” Who are David’s mighty men? They are the loyal leaders and brave warriors who supported the king during his forty-year reign, including Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, who “struck down two heroes of Moab.” He also “struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen,” plus an Egyptian who was five cubits tall.³¹ Benaiah was one tough dude, like a Navy Seal and an Army Ranger rolled into one. No wonder King David made him the head of his bodyguard (11:22-26).

Some of David’s mighty men helped him in war. They were skilled warriors who could shoot arrows and sling stones with either their right or left hand (12:2). According to the word of the Lord, tens of thousands of troops came to David in Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him. The former shepherd boy began his reign strengthened by the Lord, who surrounded him with people who made David their king with their whole heart. Humanly speaking, no leader ever survives without skilled people who commit to the person and the cause that mutually inspires them. This was certainly true of David, who was blessed by God with his mighty men (11:10-12:40).

The Priority of Worship

The remainder of the book establishes the centrality of worship for the returning remnant, starting with the retrieval of the ark of the covenant. Instinctively, David knew something that Saul failed to grasp in any real sense: The ark meant the presence of Jehovah, which was the secret to the nation’s success. Therefore, returning the nation



to the heart and priority of worship must be the first order of business.

Chapters 13-16 retell the story of how David rescued the ark from the Philistines and brought it home, with a slight setback before it actually arrived in Jerusalem. When the ark finally entered the holy city with David dancing and celebrating at the head of the parade, Michal, the daughter of Saul and David's wife, despised her husband for reasons left untold in Chronicles. Unique to 1 Chronicles is a psalm of thanksgiving that David wrote and handed to a worship leader named Asaph, who led the people in singing after David had offered the burnt offerings and the peace offerings. All in all, one of the highlights of David's reign was the day the ark returned to Jerusalem. On that glorious day, God's people rediscovered the heart of worship, but that was only the beginning.

Chapters 17-21 recall the covenant God made with David, who wanted to build a house for the Lord. The king shared his righteous desire with Nathan, the prophet, who encouraged him by saying, "Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you" (17:2). However, that night the Lord directed Nathan to inform David otherwise. Instead, the Lord would make David's name great and build a house for him that would last forever, an eternal throne upon which the future Messiah would reign. To implement the covenant and establish the dynasty, the Lord gave David victory over his enemies and great favor with the people, even though David displeased the Lord by numbering the people with a census.

Finally, chapters 22-29 provide much detail about the preparations David made for when his son Solomon would build the Lord's house, the glorious temple of Yahweh. It takes nearly one-third of the book to describe how David organized the Levites, priests, musicians, gatekeepers, treasurers, officials, military divisions, and leaders of the tribes to oversee the ministry of the temple. Not a single detail was left unattended.

David also raised the money for the temple project. He led the fundraising efforts by giving from his own treasury of gold, silver, and



precious stones and then invited others to follow his generous lead. He did not ask the people to sacrifice anything that he had not also given freely as an offering to the Lord. The Bible says, “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly” (29:9).

David assembled the people and stood before them to speak. He charged the people and then his son, Solomon, to follow the Lord with their whole heart. Then he prayed (29:10-22). David blessed the Lord for His greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty. His prayer also dripped with the language of sacred trust. On behalf of the people, the king acknowledged how all the wealth that they had given for the temple project came from the Lord’s hand.

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you” (29:14). When God’s people returned to their spiritual roots and to the heart of worship, it changed the way they viewed money and things. They saw themselves as stewards, not owners; they became givers, not takers.

When you explore your ancestral roots, you might not find Kunta Kinte, as Alex Haley did. But if you look hard enough, you will find the providential hand of God working in your past to bring you to Himself. That should encourage you to know that He is also working in your present and will continue doing so for generations to come.

OUTLINE	1-9	10-29
FOCUS	Ancestry Royal Lineage	History Reign of David
KEY VERSE	2:1	14:2



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

“What’s past is prologue” is a phrase found in Act 2, Scene 1 of William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. Characters in the play use the phrase to suggest that history sets the context for both the present and the future. Visit the National Archives Building in Washington D.C., and you will find the phrase engraved in stone on the base of a statue called, Future. As we learned from 1 Chronicles: Don’t let anybody cancel your history, especially as you look to the future.

The past as prologue to Israel’s future might have been on Ezra’s mind as he compiled the Chronicles for the Jewish remnant who were returning to Jerusalem after Babylonian captivity. He put into historical perspective what was about to happen—the rebuilding of the temple by proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia (36:22-23). More than seventy years earlier, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem, deported the best Jewish youths, and destroyed the glorious temple built by King Solomon. It was time for God’s people to rebuild their lives by returning to Jerusalem and prioritizing the worship of Yahweh.

Originally, the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were combined as one. Second Chronicles picks up historically where 1 Chronicles ends, with the death of King David and the rise of Solomon, David’s



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

son, to the throne in Israel. The first nine chapters of 2 Chronicles review Solomon's forty-year reign (971 to 931 B.C.). Chapters 10-36 span another four centuries of David's descendants reigning in Judah (931 to 538 B.C.). Ezra focuses his historical review on the Southern Kingdom and gives most of his attention to those kings who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Among them are Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

The temple takes center stage in 2 Chronicles and points us to Christ, who said, "Something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6). Jesus also compared himself to the temple when He predicted His own resurrection. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Jesus replaces the temple in the new heaven, according to the apostle John, who writes, "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple" (Revelation 21:22). Until then, the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, according to the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19). Ezra also emphasizes Solomon's glorious reign by retelling the story of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Jerusalem (9:1-28).

Heal Our Land

Second Chronicles is perhaps best known for the words the Lord spoke to Solomon in 7:14. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Patriotic Christian Americans often recite these powerful words

CHRIST CONNECTION

The temple points us to Christ who is greater than the temple.

BIG IDEA

Repentance brings personal and nation renewal.

MEMORY VERSE

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

AUTHOR AND DATE

Ezra
450-444 B.C.



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

on Independence Day and on the National Day of Prayer, begging the Lord to heal our land.

The basic truth found in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is something we should remember and respond to every day of the year. It is always good for us to confess our sins to God, practice repentance, and pray with humility. However, will such humble repentance yield national blessing and renewal for any nation in the same way God promised it would for Israel? The answer to that question must take into consideration the historical context of 2 Chronicles 7:14 plus the unique relationship Israel had with God in the Old Testament.³²

Deuteronomy 28 lays out the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience inside the covenant God made with Israel. No doubt, Solomon had this in mind when he prayed to dedicate the temple. Read 2 Chronicles 6:12-42 and pay attention to the many “if-then” constructions in Solomon’s prayer. After Solomon completed the Lord’s house and prayed, the Lord appeared to him at night and answered his prayer with the famous “if my people” response (7:12-15).

By reading 7:14 in its larger context, it is clear that the verse drips with the same “if-then” language construction found in the covenant God made with Israel. Thus, when Israel repented of her wicked ways, she did so nationally, and this yielded national blessing. It may sound like I am splitting theological hairs, but Old Testament covenant blessings and curses need to be understood historically for Israel and only applied principally to the church today.

The sad reality during this time in Israel’s history is that they did not follow the Lord with their whole heart. Ultimately, not even Solomon met the conditions of blessings. His immorality led to the nation splitting into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms during his son Rehoboam’s reign. Led by Jeroboam, the Northern Kingdom ran grossly into idolatry and never returned to Jehovah. The Southern Kingdom did better, but Judah experienced only brief seasons of reform under the leadership of the aforementioned good



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

kings. Each of these monarchs were zealous protectors of the Davidic dynasty.

Chronicles of the Good Kings

About seventy percent of the editorial content in chapters 10-36 focuses on the monarchs in the Southern Kingdom who did what was right in the eyes of God. Ezra wrote this way to inspire the returning Jews and their descendants to embrace their unique place in God's story and to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord.

When a king served Jehovah faithfully, God blessed the nation politically and economically. However, the reforms enacted by the good kings, all descendants of King David, were short-lived. Eventually, the Davidic dynasty crumbled when the Babylonians took Judah captive, but the Messianic promise through the Davidic line did not. Messianic hope rebounded when the nation returned to Jerusalem and Judah after captivity, led first by Zerubbabel and Ezra, the nation's spiritual leaders. Let's review the good kings, starting with King Asa.

King Asa rid the land of idolatrous worship and restored Yahweh's altar (14:2-4). With a much smaller army, he also conquered Ethiopian armed forces totaling one million men and three hundred chariots because he trusted the Lord to fight the battle for him. However, in his thirty-sixth year as king of Judah, Asa failed to trust God when Baasha, king of Israel, threatened to attack Judah. Instead, Asa took gold and silver from the temple treasury and bribed the king of Syria to join forces with him against Israel. However, the all-seeing eye of God was watching Asa.

Hannai, the seer, confronted Asa and told him, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars" (16:9). We learn from Asa that God sees everything we do. He is watching us.



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

Like radar, His eyes scan back and forth across the earth, looking for someone whose heart aligns with His. In the final year of his reign, Asa was not that person. Are you?

Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king of Judah after his father's death. Second Chronicles 17:3-6 says, "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his fathers, and not according to the practices of Israel ... And furthermore, he took the high places and the Asherah out of Judah."

Jehoshaphat enacted many good spiritual reforms in the Southern Kingdom and did what was right in the eyes of God. However, the people returned to the high places because their hearts had not changed, a reminder that external religion is not enough to transform a life (20:33). Jehoshaphat also formed poor alliances, starting with King Ahab in the Northern Kingdom (18:1-27). At the end of his twenty-five-year reign, Jehoshaphat also allied with Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, to build ships to go to Tarshish. However, the Lord was not pleased with the unholy alliance and destroyed the ships before they ever sailed (20:35-36).

Joash became king at age seven and reigned for forty years in Judah. He repaired the temple and restored the worship of God. When the money for repairs was slow to arrive, Joash built a chest, set it outside the Lord's house, and made a proclamation for people to bring the tax that Moses had established in the wilderness. Money flowed into the chest of Josah, and the temple was repaired.

As long as Jehoiada was high priest, King Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, perhaps because Jehoiada introduced Joash to his two wives. But when Jehoiada died, Joash quickly abandoned the house of the Lord and returned to idolatry. God's wrath fell upon Judah and Jerusalem. Zechariah, Jehoiada's son, confronted Joash and the people about breaking the commandments of God. But they did not listen to the high priest's son, and the king had him executed (24:20-22). It seems that Joash had a personal relationship with the



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

high priest while he was alive but not with God.

Both Uzziah (26:1-23) and Hezekiah (29-31) were also good kings who restored temple worship during their reigns. Hezekiah, for example, “did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. And every work that he undertook ... he did with all his heart, and prospered” (31:20-21).

However, Josiah was the best of the good kings. He assumed the throne at the age of eight and reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. When Josiah was a teenager, a servant rediscovered the law of God while cleaning up the temple. He brought the copy to Josiah and read it aloud in his presence. The young king’s heart was torn with conviction when he realized how far the nation had drifted away from its purpose as God’s chosen people. Josiah enacted stunning spiritual reforms during his reign. However, they did not last into the forthcoming generations. The next four kings of Judah were wicked and idolatrous, leading up to the time when God used the pagan Babylonians to take His chosen people captive (36:1-21).

Keeping Hope Alive

Second Chronicles covers four and a half centuries of Old Testament history with a unique focus on the Southern Kingdom and the Davidic dynasty. Ezra ends with the Babylonian captivity but adds the reason why Judah was held captive by her enemies for seventy years (36:20-21).

For four hundred and ninety years, God’s people had ignored the Sabbath laws, which required the people to give the land rest every seven years. It took faith in God not to plant or harvest in the seventh year of an agricultural cycle. Why seventy years of captivity? Do the math. Four hundred and ninety years divided by seven equals seventy. God said what He meant, and He meant what He said. Seventy years in Babylonian captivity was long enough to reclaim the lost Sabbath years.



2 Chronicles

IF MY PEOPLE

Second Chronicles ends with hope that comes from an unlikely source, Cyrus, king of Persia. By now, the Babylonians had fallen to the mighty Medo-Persian empire. Jerusalem was still in ruins. To fulfill a prophecy made by the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord stirred the heart of a pagan king to rebuild the Lord's temple. Cyrus proclaimed, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up" (36:23). King Cyrus is proof that God can and will use anybody to accomplish His purposes.

During Donald Trump's presidency, some people compared him to King Cyrus. Trump was not known for his faith in God, but he spoke robustly in favor of religious liberty and strongly upheld the Judea-Christian values upon which America was founded. He was also a great friend to Israel. For those reasons, I am glad that Donald Trump served as the forty-fifth president of the United States of America.

If America returns to God, Bible history gives us every reason to believe that the Lord Almighty will bless our nation. May revival in the church and spiritual awakening from sea to shining sea start with you and me.

OUTLINE	1-9	10-36
FOCUS	Reign of Solomon Temple Constructed 40 years	King Judah Temple Destroyed 393 years
KEY VERSE	7:14	36:23



Ezra

RETURN FROM EXILE

Robert Robinson and was a barber's apprentice when he first heard George Whitfield, an eighteenth-century revivalist preacher and the Billy Graham of his era. According to hymnologist Kenneth Osbeck, Robinson was living in London when he had "associated with a notorious gang of hoodlums and lived a debauched life."³³ After hearing Whitfield, Robinson returned to the Christian faith he learned from his mother, became a Baptist preacher, and wrote many hymns, including one with this famous lyric: "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love."

The God of Israel was truly a "fount of many blessings" to His chosen people. Still, they had wandered far from the expectations laid upon them by the covenant relationship the Lord made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David. Because the roots of Christianity run deep into Judaism, their story is the story of many New Testament believers. Christians are prone to leave the God we love, too.

The Way Back

Ezra, the next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, recalls how God's people returned to Him from disciplinary exile.



Ezra

RETURN FROM EXILE

This Old Testament historical book begins the same way 2 Chronicles ends, with a decree made by Cyrus, king of Persia, around 536 BC, which encouraged the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and restore the house of the Lord. God sent His chosen people into Babylonian captivity for seventy years as chastisement for breaking covenant with Him. It was now time for them to return to the holy city, rebuild the temple, reestablish their worship celebrations, and reconnect with their identity as the chosen people of God.

Surprisingly, only a small remnant of Jews actually returned to Jerusalem, about fifty thousand of them, while most remained in Babylon. One Bible scholar notes, “When the providential opportunity came for repatriation, the bulk of the nation, to their shame, preferred their tolerable and perhaps even lucrative life under Persian rule, to which they had now become quite accommodated.”³⁴ In other words, they liked their cozy but captive lives in Babylon. They did not consider themselves worse off for wandering away from God.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther must be read and understood together. Ezra and Nehemiah, once combined as a single narrative, address the Jewish remnant that returned to Jerusalem. Esther, on the other hand, recalls what happened to those Jews who remained in Babylon. The book of Ezra divides naturally into the ministries of two key figures, Zerubbabel (1-6) and Ezra (7-10), who led a two-stage return, separated by decades, during which time Esther’s story took place. Zerubbabel and Ezra were direct descendants of King David and Aaron, Moses’s brother, respectively, suggesting that it takes both a

CHRIST CONNECTION

Zerubbabel and Ezra foreshadow Jesus as king and priest.

BIG IDEA

The way back to God begins with turning away from your sin.

MEMORY VERSE

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

EZRA 7:10

AUTHOR AND DATE

Ezra
450-444 B.C.



Ezra

RETURN FROM EXILE

king and a priest to return to God and revive the soul of a nation. These two men foreshadow the ministry of Jesus as priest and king.

Though not the namesake of the book, Zerubbabel dominates the first half of Ezra. He is a child of the exile and the man God used to lead the first return in 536 BC after the breathtaking decree of Cyrus, king of Persia. Zerubbabel's accomplishments are worth noting because they provide a framework for understanding how one returns to God after wandering from Him. Zerubbabel led the return (1-2), built an altar to God (3:1-7), laid the foundation for the temple (3:8-13), and completed the rebuilding of the temple in the face of much opposition (4-5). Let's take a closer look.

Ezra 2:1-70 records a detailed list of the Jewish exiles who chose to return to the holy land. The names and numbers in chapter 2 remind us that God is a careful record keeper. He knows our name. He does not lose track of us, even among billions of people in the world. Is your name written in God's book of life? If it is, have you wandered from Him like a sheep who has lost her way? Are you a backslider, a prodigal that needs to come home?

If I made a list of the people who desired to return to fellowship with Jesus, would your name be on the list? For the Jewish exiles, their return to Jerusalem and Judea started with a turning away from pagan Babylon. This provides us with a powerful picture of the true biblical repentance God requires of those who return to Him.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, Zerubbabel and the people united to build the altar "as one man" (3:1). Amidst the ruins of the holy city, they set the altar in place and made daily burnt offerings to the Lord as prescribed in the Mosaic Law. They also kept the appointed feasts. The altar and the sacrifices remind us of how important consecration and offering are when returning to the Lord. In other words, make an acceptable offering of yourself to God as a living and holy sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). Yield yourself to Him wholeheartedly and without reservation.

Zerubbabel rebuilt the altar, "but the foundation of the temple



of the Lord was not yet laid” (3:6). The exiles still needed a physical place to gather for worship as the people of God. At that time, the physical temple served as the visible witness of God’s presence in the world, a spiritual house of praise and worship to the God of Israel. Of course, as New Testament believers, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9). That makes each of us a walking worship facility, giving witness to the living God who resides in us by faith in Jesus Christ. That spiritual reality should make all of us think twice about how we conduct ourselves wherever we are in this world.

Let’s review the steps Zerubbabel models for us on the way back. Repent and return. Consecrate and offer. Worship and witness. Finally, stand strong and finish well. Zerubbabel completed the rebuilding of the temple, but he did so in the face of much opposition. Two years after returning to Jerusalem, Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple, and everyone responded with exuberant joy, with the exception of a few old men who remembered Solomon’s glorious temple, which was bigger (3:11-12). However, the shouts of joy won the day, and then the dark clouds of opposition arrived (4:1-24).

Word travels fast, especially when God is on the move. Not surprisingly, the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin began their opposition with subtlety and friendly solicitude. “Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here” (4:2). Zerubbabel immediately saw through their fakery and returned a thanks-but-no-thanks response. “You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us” (4:3). Zerubbabel models how spiritual leaders must exercise discernment in all things and refuse even the kindest offer of worldly wisdom when doing God’s work.

Zerubbabel’s terse response did not satisfy the vision vandals. On the contrary, it stirred up their resolve to stop the rebuilding of the Lord’s house. They stepped up their efforts by discouraging



the exiles and by implementing a disinformation campaign, first by bribing those who were giving counsel to the project. Furthermore, they drafted an open letter to King Artaxerxes that was full of lies and falsehoods about the rebellious and seditious intentions of the returning exiles. None of this should come as a surprise. We would search in vain to find any moment in history where God's work did not face strong opposition. This was just the beginning.

The opposition worked. King Artaxerxes believed the fake news about the returning Jews and ordered their work on the temple to cease (4:24). The delay lasted approximately fourteen years, during which time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah ministered to the exiles, urging them to resume building (5:1-2). With the help of King Darius, who searched the Persian archives and found Cyrus's decree and then made his own proclamation, Zerubbabel resumed construction and completed the temple. Now the house of God was ready for the return of the high priest.

The Way Up

There are many impressive accolades to consider about Ezra, a priest and a scribe. For example, he was a learned man who studied the Scriptures thoroughly and knew them well. As such, he was also considered an expert instructor and professor of theology. According to Jewish tradition, Ezra led the effort to compile the canon of Old Testament Scripture and arrange it according to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. He also founded a gathering of Jewish scholars known as the "Great Synagogue" plus instituted local synagogues as places of worship. Finally, like the apostle Paul, Ezra was a prolific writer of inspired Holy Scripture, including the Chronicles, Nehemiah, and the book that bears his name. If all of this is true of Ezra, according to the Talmud, then he is certainly worthy of the special place given to him in Jewish religious history.

Ezra's character was even more impressive. He models for all



Ezra

RETURN FROM EXILE

the sort of person who ascends into the holy presence of Almighty God. For example, Ezra was a man of integrity who possessed a strong commitment to the word of God. In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, Ezra made his way from Babylonia to Jerusalem with a resolute heart and mind. Ezra 7:10 says, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

Did you notice the progression in 7:10? Study, practice, and then teach. That was Ezra’s game plan, and it worked well for him. Though not a perfect man, Ezra could not imagine teaching some truth that he was not personally living by the power of God. He knew that no return from spiritual exile would ever happen apart from a commitment to read, study, and apply God’s word to his life personally and then to the nation. Integrity demanded that it start with him.

Ezra also modeled humility by depending wholly on God. Ezra says in 8:21, “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.” Ezra’s complete and total dependence upon God for their safety as they traveled from Babylonia to Jerusalem is impressive, given that he could have asked the king to provide a security detail along the way. However, Ezra was embarrassed to make the request because he told the king the Lord would protect them.

Finally, Ezra possessed a sensitivity to the things that displeased God. His heart was easily convicted by personal and national sin. For example, officials brought disturbing news to Ezra upon his return to Jerusalem. The people who returned with Zerubbabel decades earlier had not kept themselves separate from the pagan nations. In fact, some of them had intermarried with the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Ammonites, the Egyptians, and more. Ezra responded with a convicted heart. “As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and



Ezra

RETURN FROM EXILE

beard and sat appalled” (9:3).

How could this happen? Had the Jewish exiles not learned anything from seventy years of captivity? Why would they travel down the same road that led them into captivity in the first place? Ray Stedman observes, “This is a vivid reminder that the flesh within us never changes. No matter how long we may walk in the Spirit, we will never arrive at a place where we cannot revert to the worst we have ever been if we depart from dependence upon the Spirit of God.” In other words, the hymn writer is right. “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.”

One of the first casualties we experience when we wander away from God is the loss of sensitivity to the things that displease Him, followed by a loss of intimacy with the Almighty. In spiritual exile, we do not hear the voice of God or feel His presence as much as we did before. But there is a way back and a way up if we choose to follow Christ again with integrity, humility, and obedience.

The book ends with a list of people who were faithful to God’s word and who repented of their sin of intermarriage (10:1-44). After reading Ezra, ask God to keep your heart sensitive to what displeases Him, and then ask Him to give you the courage to confront evil as Ezra did.

OUTLINE	1-6	7-10
FOCUS	First Return: Zerubbabel Cyrus decree The Way Back	Second Return: Ezra Artaxerxes decree The Way Up
TIMELINE	536 B.C.	456 B.C.
KEY VERSE	1:3	7:10



Nehemiah

BUILDING a BETTER LIFE

“Build Back Better” is the campaign slogan Joe Biden chose when he ran for president of the United States in 2020. Political campaign slogans are what they are. Some are better than others. All reflect a candidate’s attempt to separate himself from others running for the same office and perhaps from the person who held the office previously.

Nehemiah did not use a campaign slogan when he returned to Jerusalem in 445 BC to rebuild the walls of the holy city. However, something like “Build Back Better” might have worked well. Better yet, “Building a Better Life” (my title for this chapter) captures the essence of what the Lord called Nehemiah to do at a critical time in Old Testament history when the physical walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins, leaving the Jewish people vulnerable to their enemies.

Like the broken, dilapidated walls of the holy city, is your life a pile of ruins and rubble? Is your heart filled with despair? If yes, Nehemiah’s story, which is part of God’s story, will inspire you to build a better life with divine help and face your future with hope.

Who is Nehemiah, and how does the book by his name fit into the ultimate road trip through the Bible? Nehemiah, a contemporary of Ezra, served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. As cupbearer, Nehemiah earned the king’s trust by testing the royal



Nehemiah

BUILDING a BETTER LIFE

wine for poison before serving it to the royal family and guests. Nehemiah was living in the citadel of Susa, which was the capital of the Persian Empire (Iran) and the location of the Royal Palace, when his brother, Hanani, brought disturbing news about the Jews who had survived the exile: “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire” (1:3).

This news dislocated Nehemiah’s heart. For days, he mourned, fasted, and prayed until one day, King Artaxerxes asked why his otherwise jolly cupbearer was so sad. Nehemiah took a considerable risk by appearing sad in the king’s presence, let alone by telling the king about the broken wall in Jerusalem. As he began to share what was on his heart, Nehemiah said, “Then I was very much afraid” (2:2).

Nehemiah’s deep concern for the welfare of his people and the holy city led him to cast aside his fears, trust God, and take bold action. Upon receiving permission from the king, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem with a plan that God birthed in his heart to rebuild the holy city’s wall and restore the people. It was no small task. In the face of great opposition, Nehemiah completed the reconstruction project in fifty-two days, a miracle of God that even Israel’s enemies had to acknowledge (6:16). The revival of the people living within the walls of Jerusalem took much longer and required the commitment of Nehemiah’s life and leadership, from which we can learn many life lessons.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem twelve years after Ezra returned and ninety years since Zerubbabel

CHRIST CONNECTION

Like Christ, Nehemiah left his privileged position to serve others.

BIG IDEA

Building a better life requires prayer, planning, people, and persistence.

MEMORY VERSE

“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

NEHEMIAH 1:4

AUTHOR AND DATE

Ezra
450-425 B.C.



returned with the first Jewish remnant. Most, including Zerubbabel, had died and a new generation took their place. Something prophetic was also happening. The permission granted to Nehemiah by King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall marked the beginning of Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27). This breathtaking prophecy includes a timeline for the coming of Messiah and God's continued story through the end of the age. God is always up to something more than we can imagine.

How can we build a better life for ourselves and our families? Nehemiah models the need for prayer, planning, people, and persistence. Let's take a closer look.

Prayer

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. In fact, his nickname is knee-hemiah because he was frequently on his knees before God. Nehemiah 1 sets the tone for the priority of prayer in the book and in Nehemiah's life and leadership. Nearly the entire first chapter is given to Nehemiah's prayer shortly after he received news about the condition of the exiles in Jerusalem (1:4-11). Read a man's prayers, and you get some sense of how his heart beats.

Shortly after that, Nehemiah found himself in the presence of the king. Artaxerxes inquired about his sadness. He listened to Nehemiah's concern and then asked his cupbearer, "What is it you want?" The king's question opened a wide door for Nehemiah. Before he charged through it, he writes, "Then I prayed to the God of heaven" (2:4). Did Nehemiah fall on his knees in front of the king? Did he run into his prayer closet? No. Rather, he paused in his spirit and prayed silently to God. In this way, Nehemiah models for us how to pray on the run and without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Nehemiah prayed many more times throughout the book. He models for us how prayer demonstrates our dependence upon God as we build a better life.



Planning

Nehemiah was also a man with a plan. His leadership and administrative skills are impressive. For example, before he left the palace with the royal permission that he needed to return to Jerusalem, he possessed the clarity of mind to request security for the long, dangerous journey plus the building supplies he needed when he arrived (2:7-9).

Clearly, Nehemiah had already been formulating a plan in his mind since his brother first briefed him on the conditions in Jerusalem. He had done some homework and was prepared to make the requests. But there is more to Nehemiah's notable planning skills.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem surreptitiously. After three days, he set out at night to survey the city walls. He only took a few trusted people with him and, even then, did not tell them what was on his heart. After an all-night inspection, Nehemiah addressed the nobles and officials and said, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." Nehemiah also gave God credit for granting him grace before the king.

The old saying is true: As a leader, you must inspect what you expect. Nehemiah did not take anything for granted. He modeled another old saying: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Some Christians I meet are too spiritual to plan. They pride themselves on leaving all things in God's hands while remaining personally passive. Others are aggressive, proactive planners, but they plan presumptuously without praying and seeking the Lord's wisdom first (James 4:13-17; Proverbs 16:9). Nehemiah modeled a healthy balance between praying, planning, trusting God, and taking bold action. Samuel Chadwick might have been thinking about Nehemiah when he prayed, "O Lord, make us intensely spiritual, but keep us perfectly natural and thoroughly practical."



People

As a leader, Nehemiah also prioritized people who were essential to the task of building a better life. He could not rebuild the wall by himself, nor did he try. Chapter 3 records the many people who put their shoulders to the physical work. Many hands made the work go fast, but none of it was easy.

Nehemiah organized the work brilliantly, starting in the north and working counterclockwise from gate to gate. He divided the work into roughly forty sections. He gave proper credit by naming the people who reconstructed each gate, starting with Eliashib and his fellow priests who went to work rebuilding the Sheep Gate (3:1). This shows that even the priests were willing to roll up their robes and get dirty. Like Jesus, they came to serve, and not to be served (Matthew 20:28). They also had a vested interest in restoring the gate through which the animals arrived for the daily sacrifice, as did others who worked on sections of the wall near their own home.

The diversity of work and workers on the wall is noteworthy. For example, Uzziel, the goldsmith, laid bricks next to Hananiah, the perfumer (3:8). Shallum worked on the wall with his teenage daughters (3:12). As a father, I would like to know how he made that happen. Common people worked alongside the district rulers of Jerusalem. Overall, the people's enthusiasm for the project was contagious. Verse 20 says, "Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section." The phrase "next to him" repeatedly appears in chapter 3, giving the sense that the entire community came together and worked side by side for the glory of God and for their common good.

However, it should not surprise us that some were not willing to lift a finger. Nehemiah 3:5 says, "The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors." Every sacred project attracts those who are takers, not givers, people who think they are too entitled to



get involved. They are usually the ones who offer the most criticism, too.³⁵ Even though these ‘takers from Tekoa’ would certainly benefit from the reconstruction project, they made no personal sacrifice of time, talent, or money to help make it happen. Are you a giver or a taker from Tekoa?

Great leaders understand that it takes a wide range of people to build a better life for all. They get the right people on board and match their time and talent to the right task; one for all and all for one God-glorifying outcome.

Persistence

Finally, Nehemiah modeled persistence in the face of great opposition, which is also necessary when building a better life. The first taste of opposition came to Nehemiah after he presented the letters from King Artaxerxes to the Trans-Euphrates governors. Nehemiah 2:10 says, “When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.” Later, after Nehemiah inspected the walls and addressed the city officials, Geshem the Arab joined with the other vision vandals to form an unholy trinity that mocked Nehemiah’s plans. ““What is this you are doing?” they asked. ‘Are you rebelling against the king?’” (2:19).

Nehemiah stood strong against the initial opposition by responding, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem” (2:20). However, the vision vandals were relentless. Two chapters later, the opposition returns and grows in strength and numbers (4:7-9).

Again, Nehemiah’s response was intensely spiritual, perfectly natural, and thoroughly practical. He prayed and then posted guards. But even this did not sway the enemies of God. Sanballat, Tobiah,



Nehemiah

BUILDING a BETTER LIFE

and Geshem continued to scheme and plot against the Jews. But God foiled and frustrated their plan. Nehemiah did not hesitate to strengthen his defenses. This time he encouraged those who carried materials to do their work with one hand and carry a weapon in the other. Plus, half of the men did work while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor (4:16-17).

The opposition never ended, even after Nehemiah rebuilt the wall in fifty-two days (6:15). The unholy trinity sent messengers to persuade Nehemiah to meet with them on the plain of Ono. Nehemiah saw through their scheme to harm him and refused. After four failed attempts, Sanballat sent his personal aide, who arrived with a threatening letter that was full of false accusations. Nehemiah replied with another rhetorical punch in the nose, “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” And then he prayed to the God of heaven, “Now strengthen my hands” (6:8-9).

As New Testament believers, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). The world, the flesh, and the devil work against us every day as we build a better life with God’s help. Thus, we must put on the whole armor of God as we do his work.

Much more could be said about Nehemiah’s life and leadership, like how he cared for the poor (5:1-19) and how he governed the people well after the wall was rebuilt.

OUTLINE	1-7	8-13
FOCUS	Rebuilding the Wall Construction	Governing the People Instruction
KEY VERSE	6:15-16	8:8



Esther

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Antisemitism rears its ugliness in every generation and places all around the world. Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist, first coined the term *antisemitism* in 1879 in reference to hostility toward and discrimination against the Jewish people. The most extreme example of Jewish hatred and Judeophobia (fear of Jews) in recent history occurred from 1933 to 1945, while Nazi Germany led the state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jews. The name Adolf Hitler is synonymous with Jewish hatred.³⁶

Centuries earlier, a Persian named Haman had more in common with Hitler than the letter H in their name.³⁷ Haman never got to carry out his murderous intentions against the Jewish people as Hitler did, but his hatred for the Jews was just as real and palpable. We learn about Haman and ancient antisemitism in the Old Testament book of Esther. There, we also see how God's providential hand protected those Jewish people who remained in Persia while other exiles returned to the holy land after seventy years of Babylonian captivity.

Queen Esther is literally the “star” of this story on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Esther's Hebrew name is *Hadassah*, meaning “Myrtle,” but her Persian name, Esther, comes from a word derived from the Persian word for “star.” Etymology aside, Queen



Esther

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Esther deserves to be the namesake of the book in many more ways than Haman, who is the villain. Other main characters include King Ahasuerus, Queen Vashti, and Mordecai. More on them later as the story unfolds.

Another main character in this biblical story is worth noting, although the author of the book never mentions His name. Strangely, the book of Esther does not contain God's name.³⁸ Some argue that God's non-mention is intentional by the author to highlight divine providence, which speaks of God's invisible activity, His work behind the scenes. Providence refers to the way God acts sovereignly "without violating human free will, and without interrupting the ordinary ongoing of human affairs."³⁹ In other words, God works in covert ways.

George Washington often used the word providence to describe what he personally witnessed and experienced while fighting in America's Revolutionary War. For example, after the Battle of the Monongahela or Braddock's Defeat that took place in the summer of 1755 when Washington was twenty-three years old, the young revolutionary soldier found bullet holes in his military jacket, to which he referred in a letter to his younger brother, John Augustine Washington. The story circulated, and the Reverend Samuel Davies of Virginia mentioned the bullet holes in a sermon, crediting divine providence with preserving Washington's life "for some important service to his country."⁴⁰

The non-mention of God in Esther reminds us that God's work is not always as obvious as a miracle. But when God works providentially, when He works behind the scenes, He is no less

CHRIST CONNECTION

Like Christ, Esther served as an advocate for her people.

BIG IDEA

God works in providential ways.

MEMORY VERSE

"And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this."

ESTHER 4:14

AUTHOR AND DATE

Uncertain
465 B.C.



intentional.

Esther recalls the story of God’s providential protection over the Jews who remained in the land of their captivity. The Jews who did not return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra are a type of worldly Christians who love their Babylonian lives, and yet God still cares for them. The apostle John would have said to them, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

The Rise of Queen Esther

Esther begins “in the days of Ahasuerus,” king of Persia (1:1).⁴¹ According to one scholar, Ahasuerus was a “mixture of passionate extremes,” which explains how he treated Queen Vashti in chapter one.

Ahasuerus loved a good party. Esther begins in the third year of his reign and with the king giving a feast that lasted for six months (180 days) for the sole purpose of showing off his royal wealth. To spice up the party, a drunk Ahasuerus requested the presence of his wife, Queen Vashti, to put her crown and beauty on display before his drunk friends. Her refusal enraged the king and raised more than a few eyebrows among the king’s officials. Concern grew about the queen’s behavior and how she might influence other women to show contempt for their husbands (1:17). At the suggestion of his advisors, King Ahasuerus deposed Queen Vashti. She was never allowed in his royal presence again. The king spent the next four years looking for a new queen.

During that time, Esther, the adopted daughter of Mordecai the Jew, became part of the king’s harem because of her natural beauty (2:7). She and others entered beauty training for one year before their presentation to the king. Esther quickly gained favor along with seven others who advanced to the best place in the harem. When it came time for Esther’s presentation to Ahasuerus, “the king loved Esther



more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (2:17). To celebrate, the king honored Esther with a feast, abated taxes for the people, and gave generous gifts that only a king could provide.

Haman’s Evil Plot

Meanwhile, Mordecai uncovered a devious plot to assassinate the king. He shared his intelligence with Queen Esther, who then told the king. After an investigation discovered the plot was real, the king executed the two henchmen who devised it. Afterward, Ahasuerus strengthened his security detail by promoting Haman to a position above all royal officials. The king commanded all of his servants to bow in Haman’s presence. However, Mordecai, who served at the king’s gate, refused to bow when Haman came to the palace. This enraged Haman, who thought he was worthy of worship fit for a god (3:1-15).

In retribution for Mordecai’s contempt, and because he was a Jew, Haman devised a plan to destroy all of Mordecai’s people who lived throughout Persia, casting Pur until the lots justified his rage against the Jews.⁴² Then, Haman reported to the king, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not to the king’s profit to tolerate them” (3:8). Haman’s plan to destroy the Jews pleased the king who gave the edict to execute all Jews, throwing the citadel of Susa into confusion.

Upon learning of the edict to destroy the Jews, Mordecai arrived at the entrance of the king’s gate in sackcloth, weeping and lamenting loudly, which was not allowed under Persian law. Queen Esther learned of Mordecai’s public display of distress. Through a messenger, she told him to change his clothes. Mordecai refused and



urged Esther to persuade the king to rescind the edict and protect the Jewish people.

Esther was reluctant to enter the king's presence without the king's invitation because the penalty for doing so was death. However, Mordecai pleaded with Esther by saying that even she would not escape Haman's holocaust and then added, "and who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14). Persuaded by Mordecai's urgency, Esther sent word for Mordecai to gather the Jews in Susa for fasting and prayer as she prepared to approach the king.

Divine Providence

Three days later, Esther stood in the inner court of the king's palace at significant personal risk. Until now, the queen had kept secret that she was a Jew, adding peril to her predicament. No doubt, the queen breathed a sigh of relief when Ahasuerus held forth his golden scepter as a sign that she was welcome in his presence. Esther invited the king and Haman to a feast the next day. She planned to expose Haman's evil intentions after a sumptuous meal (5:1-8). Meanwhile, Haman built gallows fifty feet high on which he planned to hang Mordecai the Jew (5:9-14).

That night, the hand of divine providence went to work again. This time, King Ahasuerus was sleepless in Susa. To quell his insomnia, he asked for someone to read to him from the book of memorable deeds, which contained the record of when Mordecai brought to light an assassination plot against the king. The king remembered that Mordecai had not been rewarded for his loyalty. So, Ahasuerus called Haman to the palace the next day and said, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" (6:6) Full of pride, Haman thought the king was talking about him and advised dressing the honoree in royal clothing, placing him on a royal horse, and giving a parade to honor him. When Haman



learned that the king was planning to honor Mordecai, the blood rushed from his face.

All of this set the stage for Queen Esther in ways that she could never orchestrate alone. In a providential twist of fate, the king instructed Haman, the Jew-hater, to make all the preparations for honoring Mordecai, the Jew. When Queen Esther held her feast and then exposed Haman's plot to destroy the Jews, the king, to everyone's surprise, ordered the execution of Haman on the gallows that he had built to hang Mordecai (7:7-10). Later, King Ahasuerus promoted Mordecai to serve as the king's premier, and he became great among the Jews (10:1-3).

On the very day that Haman had planned for the destruction of the Jews, the exact opposite happened. The Bible says, "The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them." (9:2). Throughout Persia and according to the king's new edict, the Jews slaughtered those who planned to destroy them. The next day, the Jews "rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness" (9:17). Mordecai and Queen Esther commemorated these days by establishing an annual feast called Purim, after the term Pur, which the Jews still celebrate today (9:26-28).

For Such a Time as This

The demonstration of divine providence in the book of Esther is worth further contemplation. Esther's story teaches us about the Lord's providential timing and placement. Behind the scenes, the eternal God of the ages works all things out according to His perfect timing, and He does so without violating human will.

More than two millennia ago, God took the pagan practice of casting lots (Pur), which Haman used to set the date of the Jew's destruction, and turned it to His sovereign advantage. Earlier, an unknown Jewish girl named Esther providentially rose to power at the right time after participating in an ancient beauty pageant. Mordecai



Esther

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

recognized this act of divine providence when he said to Esther, “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:14).

God’s providential timing reminds me of the first Christmas. After making the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, pregnant Mary and Joseph arrived in their hometown because Caesar Augustus decreed that all the Roman world should be registered (Luke 2:1). Was this a coincidence? No, Jesus Messiah was born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet Micah predicted in the Old Testament (Micah 5:1-2) because God providentially moved Mary and Joseph into the right place at the right time. According to the apostle Paul, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Take comfort in knowing that God’s providential timing is perfect in your life, too. He is working behind the scenes in ways that you cannot orchestrate on your own. Allowing for divine providence to work requires the patience of faith. But it also requires the vision of faith to know that God is up to something good in your life (Romans 8:28). For example, can you see that God might have placed you right where you are as a lifeline to the people in your family, neighborhood, or place of work? In other words, you are uniquely positioned to reach the people in your closest proximity with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If not you, who? If not now, when?

As a believer in Jesus Christ, your life is not an accident nor a series of coincidences. You are where you are “for such a time as this.” Sometimes I hear parents express fear about the evil world in which their kids are growing up. Some even choose not to have children in order to protect them from the rise of evil in the next generation. However, consider that God is raising your kids and grandkids for such a time as their generation will face. They will encounter antisemitism and many other evils by faith in the same providential God that Queen Esther and Mordecai trusted.



Esther

FOR SUCH a TIME as THIS

OUTLINE	1-4	5-10
FOCUS	Jews Endangered Haman	Jews Delivered Esther
KEY VERSE	4:14	8:17



Small Group Discussion Questions



JOSHUA

1. How would you describe the big idea of the book of Joshua?
 2. How is Joshua a type of Christ? Where do you see Christ connections in the book?
 3. Compare and contrast the conquests of Jericho (6:1-27) and Ai (7:1-26). What important spiritual lessons do they teach?
 4. Discuss how Joshua pictures the abundant Christian life. What is it? What will it take for you to experience it?
 5. Read Joshua 24:15-15. What choice must you make in order to put God first in your life?
-

JUDGES

1. What is the big idea in the book of Judges? How does it impact our daily walk with Jesus?
2. Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. Are we living in similar times?
3. Where is the Christ connection in Judges?
4. Many of the judges seems to exhibit as many failures as they do successes. Why does God make use of leaders with such obvious weaknesses?
5. What judge do you identify with the most, and why?

Small Group Discussion Questions



RUTH

1. What is the big idea in the book of Ruth? How does it impact our daily walk with Jesus?
 2. How is Jesus Christ portrayed in Ruth? Hint: What is a kinsman redeemer?
 3. Why is Ruth significant in the overall flow of God's story?
 4. Discuss Boaz and Ruth's romantic relationship. What can couples learn from their courtship?
 5. How does Ruth's story illustrate God's faithfulness?
-

1 SAMUEL

1. What is the big idea in the book of 1 Samuel? How does it impact our daily walk with Jesus?
2. How and where is Christ portrayed in 1 Samuel?
3. Reflect on 1 Samuel 3:1-21. What can we learn from young Samuel about discerning the voice of God?
4. Why was Israel's desire to have a king like all the other nations wrong? What can we learn from their turning point?
5. What turning points are you facing in your life right now?

Small Group Discussion Questions



2 SAMUEL

1. Who is the main character in 2 Samuel? What are the main lessons you learned from his life?
 2. Why is King David such a large figure in God's story?
 3. Recall 2 Samuel 11. What mistake(s) did King David make that led him into sexual sin?
 4. How can we reconcile King David's sin with the idea that he was a man after God's own heart?
 5. How did King David model the grace of God? How does God's grace flow through your life toward others?
-

1 KINGS

1. What is the big idea in 1 Kings? How does it impact our daily lives?
2. Where is Christ portrayed in 1 Kings?
3. How does Solomon's reign portray the future eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ?
4. Name two good kings and two bad kings in 1 Kings. What did each have in common?
5. How did God use the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings? What impresses you about his ministry?

Small Group Discussion Questions



2 KINGS

1. What is the big idea in 2 Kings and how does it apply to your life?
 2. How does Elisha's ministry point us to Christ?
 3. How were the ministries of Elijah and Elisha different, and why? What is your biggest takeaway from their ministries?
 4. Read Galatians 6:7. How does it apply to 2 Kings? How does it apply to your life?
 5. What aspect of God's character does 2 Kings reveal to us?
-

1 CHRONICLES

1. What meaning did you derive from the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1-9?
2. Discuss your own ancestral roots and spiritual heritage? Have you drifted away from the God of your childhood?
3. Review 1 Chronicles 29. What is the connection between giving and worship? Are you a steward or an owner, a giver or a taker?

Small Group Discussion Questions



2 CHRONICLES

1. For what purpose did Ezra compile the Chronicles? What does he emphasize in 2 Chronicles and why?
 2. Name the good kings in Judah and discuss what they did right in the eyes of the Lord. What big idea do we learn from them?
 3. How does 2 Chronicles point us to Christ?
 4. Read 2 Chronicles 36:17-21. What do the sabbath laws have to do with Judah's seventy-year Babylonian captivity?
 5. Who is Cyrus? What is the significance of his proclamation in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23?
-

EZRA

1. How do you see Christ portrayed in the book of Ezra?
2. The book of Ezra can be divided neatly into two sections. What are the themes of each section, and what spiritual principles can we learn from them?
3. What do we learn from Zerubbabel about the way back to God?
4. What do we learn from Ezra about returning from spiritual exile?
5. What role did God's word play in the lives of the returning exiles? What can we learn from their experience that applies to our lives today?

Small Group Discussion Questions



NEHEMIAH

1. Where do you see Christ portrayed in the book of Nehemiah?
 2. How does Nehemiah's prayer life inspire you?
 3. What leadership principles did you learn from Nehemiah's example?
 4. What does Nehemiah teach us about handling opposition?
 5. What makes it difficult or easy for you to trust God to fix what is broken in your life?
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ESTHER

1. What is your biggest takeaway from the book of Esther? What is the big idea?
2. Is antisemitism alive today? How can you show love and respect for the Jewish people?
3. Read Esther 4:13-14 and reflect upon the phrase "for such a time as this."
4. Where do you see the providential hand of God at work in your life?
5. How does trusting in the providence of God require faith and vision?

- ¹ The story of Rahab, the gentile prostitute who hid the Israeli spies in faith, also points to the blood atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ when she tied the scarlet cord in the window of her house (Joshua 2:1-24). As a reminder of God's grace, Rahab appears in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1) and in the Hebrews hall of faith (Hebrews 11).

- ² Some argue that Moses eventually made it to the Promised Land when both he and the prophet Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).

- ³ J Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Bible: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis through Revelation*, pg. 239.

- ⁴ Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews settles the matter of Canaan's typology once and for all. "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:8-10).

- ⁵ Some believe that the prophet Samuel might have written the book of Judges.

- ⁶ Dr. Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible: Introduction to Judges*, p. 283.

- ⁷ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation*, Vol. 2: Judges to Esther, pg. 14.

- ⁸ Pride, anger, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy and greed, the "seven deadly sins," are the kind of "Canaanites" in our lives that we need to destroy, or they will destroy us.

- ⁹ Other reminders in the Bible that God is pro-women include Queen Esther and Mary Magdalene. Mary and two other women were the first to appear at the empty tomb three days after Jesus was crucified. God entrusted the news of His Son's resurrection first to a group of women.

- ¹⁰ The name "Naomi" means "pleasant." However, Naomi is anything but pleasant as she returns to Bethlehem. She is bitter because of the deaths of her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Upon returning to Bethlehem, she tells her friends to call her "Mara," which means "bitter." Bitterness is a choice as much as joy is.

- ¹¹ The Hebrew word *Goe!* appears thirteen times in the book of Ruth.

- ¹² “Major Evangelical Adoption Agency Will Now Serve Gay Parents Nationwide,” NYTimes.com, accessed on March 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/01/us/bethany-adoption-agency-lgbtq.htm>
- ¹³ In 1758, Robert Robinson wrote the Christian hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” with the lyric “here I raise my Ebenezer” in reference to 1 Samuel 7:12.
- ¹⁴ David likely wrote Psalms 7, 27, 31, 34, and 52 while he ran from Saul.
- ¹⁵ On the hit television show *Bewitched*, Agnes Moorehead plays a witch named Endora, the antagonist mother-in-law of Darrin Stephens, an ordinary mortal man. Her name comes from the twenty-eighth chapter of 1 Samuel where Saul visits a witch who lived in a place called Endor.
- ¹⁶ See Matthew 21:9, 22:45; and Acts 13:22-23
- ¹⁷ See Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 37:25; and Revelation 20:1-6
- ¹⁸ David’s forty-year reign began in 1011 B.C. and ended in 971 B.C.
- ¹⁹ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation*, Vol. 2: Judges to Esther, pg. 77.
- ²⁰ After building the temple, Solomon took another thirteen years to build his own palace (1 Kings 7:1-12).
- ²¹ As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not only children of God, but also joint heirs with Christ, who give us a divine portion from His treasury (Romans 8:17).
- ²² God sent the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea to the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Pre-exilic prophets sent to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nahum, and Micah. Post-exilic prophets sent to the Southern Kingdom include Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Ezekiel and Daniel delivered the word of the Lord to the Southern Kingdom during the Babylonian exile.
- ²³ In the Northern Kingdom, an evil king named Jeroboam set the standard by which every other king is evaluated in Scripture (13:2). Whereas, in the Southern Kingdom, King David is the plumb line against which every ruler after him is measured (18:3). The impact of one’s leadership casts a long shadow for good or evil.

- ²⁴ See Luke 1:17; John 1:19-28; Matthew 11:14; and Malachi 4:5-6. A real head-scratcher, one of the papers I wrote in seminary asked, “Is John the Baptist the prophet Elijah?”
- ²⁵ Elisha’s request for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit is like the double blessing mentioned in the Old Testament in relation to one’s birthright, or the inheritance received by the eldest son (Deuteronomy 21:17).
- ²⁶ Overall, nineteen kings who did evil in the eyes of the Lord reigned in the Northern Kingdom, starting with King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-14:20).
- ²⁷ Keeping track of what is happening in the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah can get confusing. Chapters 11-17 alternate narratives between kings in Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- ²⁸ The Chronicles mention as many as fourteen different documents from which the compiler drew his material, including the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chronicles 27:7) and the writings of seers and prophets like Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29). Divine inspiration led careful human scholars to draw from these documents to yield the treasures known as 1 and 2 Chronicles.
- ²⁹ Jesus said to His followers, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).
- ³⁰ When touring the capital of the United States of America in Washington D.C., be sure to look for the nation’s spiritual heritage chiseled into stone, written into her founding documents, and put on display in the numerous bronze and marble statues throughout the city.
- ³¹ A cubit is approximately 18 inches, which makes the Egyptian that Benaiah struck down seven and a half feet tall.
- ³² Christians in America must be careful not to Westernize our faith in such a way that we claim the same covenant blessings (or curses) that God meant for His chosen people, Israel. Replacement Theology makes this mistake to an extreme, purporting that the New Testament church is the new Israel, the fulfillment of all of God’s promises made originally to the nation of Israel.
- ³³ “History of hymns: ‘Come Thou fount of every blessing,’” by C. Michael Hawn of Discipleship Ministries, accessed on April 28, 2021 at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-come-thou-fount-of-every-blessing>

- ³⁴ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation*, Vol. 2: Judges to Esther, p. 194.
- ³⁵ The famous evangelist D.L. Moody was once criticized for the way he did evangelism. He replied, “The way I do evangelism poorly is better than you not doing it at all.”
- ³⁶ Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed on May 12, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism>
- ³⁷ Haman serves as a type of the Antichrist who is to come, as does Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who brought great pain and suffering upon the Jews around 168 BC.
- ³⁸ The non-mention of God has perplexed many Bible-lovers through the centuries and has led some, like reformer Martin Luther, to reject Esther altogether from the canon of Holy Scripture. Because Luther was given to “occasional lapses in self-restraint” (Baxter), we can ignore his tirade against both Esther and the book of James.
- ³⁹ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation*, Vol. 2: Judges to Esther, p. 261.
- ⁴⁰ Mary V. Thompson, “Ask Mount Vernon,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, accessed on May 12, 2021, <https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/ask/question/i-heard-a-story-about-how-george-washington-wore-a-coat-into-battle-and-discovered-afterward-that-the-coat-had-bullet-holes-in-it-can-i-learn-more-about-the-story>
- ⁴¹ Until recently, historians could not identify Ahasuerus outside of the Bible. However, recent archeological discoveries have confirmed that he is Xerxes (the Greek form of his Persian name) who reigned as king of Persia from 485 BC to 465 BC. This is another example of how archeology supports the Bible’s accuracy.
- ⁴² The ancient practice of casting lots (rolling the dice) called Pur was a way to determine the right course of action by chance. Haman based his life on chance in contrast to the providential hand of God.

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

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Road Trip 7: The Pauline Epistles

Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

Ron Jones is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

