

1 Kings

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Solomon's spectacular rule—and the downhill slide thereafter.

WHO WROTE IT? We don't know for sure, but it was probably a court official or someone who had access to official historical records.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Between 970 and 850 B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? First Kings covers Solomon's reign and the events surrounding the division of the kingdom.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1–3: Solomon becomes king after David's death
- Chapters 4–10: Solomon's accomplishments
- Chapter 11: Solomon's decline and death
- Chapter 12: The kingdom splits
- Chapters 13–16: The northern kingdom's rebellion against God
- Chapters 17–21: Elijah duels with Ahab and Jezebel
- Chapter 22: Ahab dies; Jehoshaphat, a good king, rules Judah

KEY CONCEPTS

- Wisdom
- Temple
- King

SCORECARD

- David:** Israel's greatest king
- Solomon:** David's son, known for his wisdom
- Rehoboam:** Solomon's successor, who listens to bad advice
- Jeroboam:** First king of the breakaway northern kingdom
- Elijah:** God's prophet
- Ahab and Jezebel:** A wicked royal pair

READING TIME



WORTH MEMORIZING

- 3:9 "Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?"
- 18:21 Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!"

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **LEADERSHIP EXAMPLES, GOOD AND BAD.** Like many other historical books, 1 Kings shows us that men are easily led astray by doing what comes naturally. Their only hope is in doing what comes supernaturally.

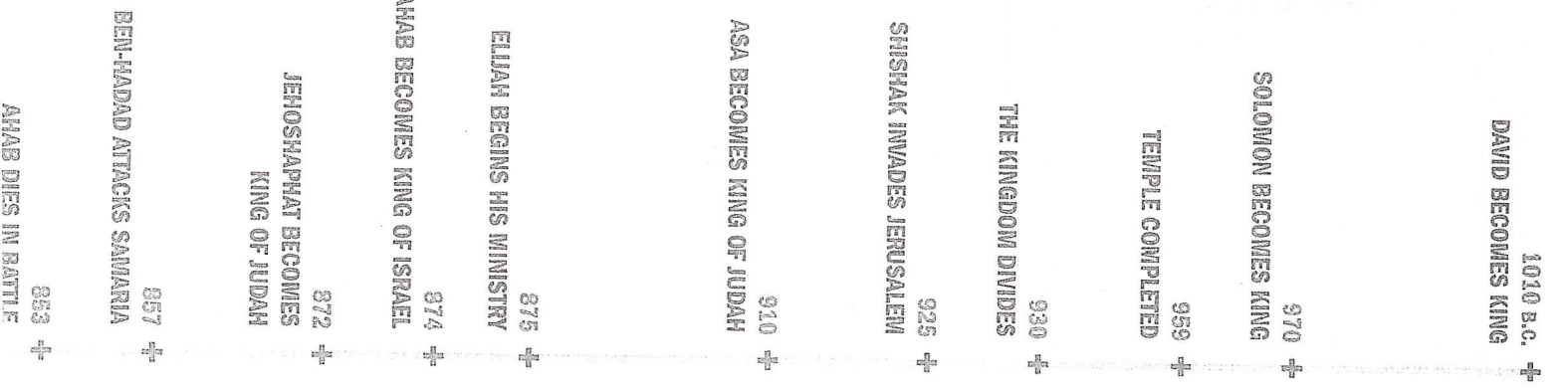
WHAT'S THE POINT OF

1 Kings?

++ ++
If leaders don't listen to God, they'll wish they had.



Timeline





ere's a Scripture trivia question: Who was the first person in the Bible to raise the dead, though he himself never died? And though he's the most frequently mentioned prophet in Scripture, he didn't write one word of the Bible. The answer is . . . Elijah—the rugged prophet who dominates much of 1 Kings.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings—one long book in the Hebrew—open with the story of how God blessed Israel during the days of Solomon, yet how the nation split apart and declined after Solomon's death. As you read 1 Kings, notice that chapters 1 through 11 describe the glory of Solomon's reign, but the remaining chapters tell of the growing failures of the successive kings in both North and South. Despite occasional lurches toward obedience, the priests, princes, and people of God spiraled downward like water through a drain until both nations were wiped away by neighboring empires.

Throughout the story, Elijah and his fellow prophets—men like Nathan, Ahijah, and Jehu—vainly called their nations to repentance. God's people today are still warning, cautioning, and proclaiming His message. At times, like Elijah, we see little outward success. But there's never reason to be discouraged where God is concerned. In reading 1 Kings, we learn that even the downward twists and turns of history serve the ultimate purposes of God, and the story of Elijah and his times reminds us that God is still on His throne as king of Israel and as Lord of all.

KEY VERSE:

“Keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.”
1 Kings 2:3

KEY ACTION:

We must be as cautious in times of prosperity as in times of peril, lest we relax our guard as Solomon did and allow our spiritual passion to grow lukewarm.

KEY PRAYER:

Lord, give me a wise and discerning heart to govern my life and distinguish between right and wrong.

KEY THOUGHT:

The decline of Israel during and after the days of Solomon warns us of the dangers of complacency, but also teaches us to practice the boldness of Elijah.

As the fiery Elijah prepared to leave this world, his mild-mannered assistant, Elisha, asked him for "a double share" of his spirit (2 Kings 2:9). Surprisingly, Elisha got his desire.

ELIJAH'S MIRACLES

- 1 Called a three-year drought (1 Kings 17:1)
- 2 Multiplied a widow's pantry supply (1 Kings 17:15-16)
- 3 Raised the widow's son back to life (1 Kings 17:19-22)
- 4 Called down heavenly fire at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-38)
- 5 Unleashed a rainstorm to end the drought (1 Kings 18:41-46)
- 6 Correctly predicted King Ahab's demise (1 Kings 21:17-24)
- 7 Called down fire on King Ahaziah's first set of troops (2 Kings 1:10)
- 8 Called down fire on King Ahaziah's second set of troops (2 Kings 1:11-12)
- 9 Split the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:8)

ELISHA'S MIRACLES

- 1 Split the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:14)
- 2 Purified a town's water supply (2 Kings 2:20-22)
- 3 Called down instant judgment on an insolent gang (2 Kings 2:24)
- 4 Provided enough water to satisfy three thirsty armies (2 Kings 3:14-20)
- 5 Multiplied a widow's oil supply to keep her from bankruptcy (2 Kings 4:3-6)
- 6 Correctly predicted a pregnancy (2 Kings 4:15-17)
- 7 Raised a boy back to life (2 Kings 4:32-37)
- 8 Stopped an epidemic of food poisoning (2 Kings 4:41)
- 9 Multiplied food to feed 100 men (2 Kings 4:43-44)
- 10 Healed an Aramean general of a skin disease (2 Kings 5:10-14)
- 11 Exposed his servant's secret greed and judged him (2 Kings 5:26-27)
- 12 Made an ax head float (2 Kings 6:6)
- 13 Struck Aramean invaders with blindness (2 Kings 6:18)
- 14 Correctly predicted the arrival of a king's hater: man (2 Kings 6:32-33)
- 15 Correctly predicted the lifting of Samaria's siege-famine, as well as a doubter's ugly demise (2 Kings 7:1-2)
- 16 Correctly predicted the death of King Ben-hadad and the political rise of Hazael (2 Kings 8:10-13)
- 17 Correctly predicted the regime change led by Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-3)
- 18 Correctly predicted King Jehoshaphat's military successes against Aram (2 Kings 13:14-19)
- 19 Raised a man from the dead—through dead himself (2 Kings 13:20-21)

BASIC SURVEY

1 KINGS

AUTHOR: Not stated and unknown; one early tradition claimed Jeremiah wrote 1 and 2 Kings.

DATE: Covering events from about 970–850 BC, 1 Kings was probably written sometime after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Israel divides into rival northern and southern nations.

DETAILS, PLEASE

After David's death, Solomon becomes king and builds God a temple in Jerusalem. God gives Solomon great wisdom, power, and wealth. Sadly, Solomon's wisdom fails him and he marries seven hundred wives, many of whom are foreign women who turn his heart to idols. When he dies, only the southern tribes follow his son Rehoboam in a nation called Judah. A former royal official named Jeroboam becomes king of the ten northern tribes; he initiates idol worship and many wicked rulers follow. Later, the prophet Elijah confronts evil King Ahab (and his wife, Jezebel) of Israel over their worship of the false god Baal.

QUOTEABLE

> "Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (18:37 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Scholars say 1 and 2 Kings were originally a single volume—and were split in half to allow for copying onto normal-sized scrolls.

SO WHAT?

Solomon's example provides a strong warning: even the most blessed person can drift from God and make big mistakes.

READ PSALM 72 AND PROVERBS 19.

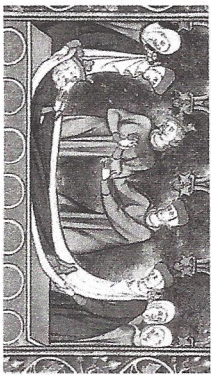
- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 68. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 62. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 62. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

SOLOMON'S RISE AND FALL

King David, in declining health, named Solomon (his son with Bathsheba) as his successor. After David's death, God spoke to Solomon in a dream, offering him anything he wanted—and Solomon chose wisdom. He requested, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" (1 Kings 3:9 KJV). God was so pleased with Solomon's request that in addition to giving him great wisdom, He gave him tremendous power and wealth.

Solomon soon built God a permanent temple in Jerusalem, and the Lord visited him again to promise blessings for obedience and trouble for disobedience (1 Kings 9:1–9). If His people disobeyed Him, God would



Solomon was named king when David, his father, died.

even abandon this temple Solomon had built. For most of his life Solomon was faithful, so God fulfilled His promise to make him wealthier, wiser, and more glorious than all other kings on earth.

Sadly, as Solomon grew old, his wisdom failed him; he married seven hundred women, many of them foreigners. Solomon compromised to please his pagan wives, and as a result, the Spirit of God lifted from his life and his wisdom departed. Worst of all, Solomon led all Israel into great sin. Therefore, God determined to remove most of his kingdom, leaving only Judah to David's line.

Nehemiah said, "Among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin" (Nehemiah 13:26 NKJV).

READ 1 KINGS 3 AND 9.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 68. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 63. →

CLOSER LOOK

SOLOMON BUILDS GOD'S TEMPLE

David had made extensive preparations for building the temple, and once Solomon became king, he requested King Hiram of Tyre to send the final cedar logs. Then, in the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began building, and Hiram sent skilled architects and stonemasons to help him. He also needed artisans to create pillars, statues of oxen, carts, a great basin, and other articles of bronze—as well as many smaller bowls, cups, and objects of gold and silver. A skilled bronze-worker named Hiram (an Israelite) was living in Tyre, so King Hiram sent him as well.



It took seven years for King Solomon to build the temple. This photograph shows Solomon discussing his plans.

This work took a tremendous amount of manpower, and though many Israelites helped, the main labor force were descendants of the Canaanites who remained in Israel. David organized them into labor gangs and set them to work (1 Chronicles 22:1–2). In addition, Solomon conscripted tens of thousands of Israelites to chop down cedars in Lebanon, quarry stones, and oversee the labor (1 Kings 5:13–16).

It took Solomon only seven years to do all the construction. Then the temple was complete, paneled inside with cedar boards and covered with gold. And all the articles for the temple were finished. The priests placed the ark of God in the Holy Place inside the temple. Then Solomon dedicated God's house. When he finished praying, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, and the cloud of the Lord's presence completely filled the temple (1 Kings 8:1–11; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3).

READ 1 KINGS 6 AND 2 CHRONICLES 6.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 64. →

CLOSER LOOK

REHOBOAM AND JEROBOAM



Rehoboam led the Israelites away from God when he set up two golden calves to worship.

who was boss” by declaring that he’d make their load even heavier. When the northern tribes heard this answer, they revolted. Then Jeroboam became their king.

God promised Jeroboam: “If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me . . . I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David” (1 Kings 11:38 NIV). But when Jeroboam realized that his people would continue going to Jerusalem to worship God, he worried that they’d eventually give their allegiance to Rehoboam. Therefore, “on the advice of his counselors,” Jeroboam set up golden calves in the northern kingdom to worship, so his people wouldn’t go to Judah (1 Kings 12:28 NLT). This led the Israelites into idolatry, and God warned that Héid judge Jeroboam and his entire kingdom as a result.

READ 1 KINGS 11-12.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 65.



CLOSER LOOK

AHAB, JEZEBEL, AND ELIJAH

In northern Israel, Ahab son of Omri became king, and he “did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him” (1 Kings 16:30 NIV). He not only worshipped the golden calves, but he married Jezebel, a Canaanite princess from Sidon, and began to worship her gods. Ahab built a temple for Baal in Samaria, and soon 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah ate daily at Jezebel’s table and promoted idol worship in Israel. Jezebel then launched a campaign to massacre every prophet of God (1 Kings 18:13, 19).

God raised up a powerful, miracle-working prophet named Elijah to withstand them. He called for a devastating drought on the land to punish Ahab and all Israel for their idolatry. Later, he challenged the priests of Baal on top of Mount Carmel to prove that their god was real by praying for him to send down fire from heaven to devour their sacrifice. Baal failed to respond, and only the true God sent fire.

One day, Ahab coveted the vineyard of an Israelite named Naboth, and when Naboth declined to sell it, Jezebel had false witnesses testify that he had “blasphemed God” (1 Kings 21:10 NKJV). Innocent Naboth was then stoned for blasphemy, and Ahab—the *real* blasphemer—took his vineyard. Elijah declared, “There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife” (1 Kings 21:25 NIV).

READ 1 KINGS 16:29-17:7 AND 21.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 68.



Ahab did evil in the eyes of the Lord, such as when he blasphemed to get Naboth’s vineyard. This painting by Sir Frank Dicksee (1853–1928) is titled *Jezebel and Ahab Meeting Elijah in Naboth’s Vineyard*.



HIDDEN TREASURE

THE TWO PROPHETS

Soon after Jeroboam set up the calf idol and an altar in Bethel, a prophet of God arrived from Judah and prophesied against the altar. Immediately it split apart and ashes flowed out. God had commanded the prophet not to eat or drink anything in Bethel, but to return straight to Judah, so he set out down the road. But an old prophet rode after him and lied that an angel had told him to bring him back to eat and drink. When they had eaten, the old prophet announced that the young prophet had disobeyed God, and on his way south, a lion killed him. God dealt so severely with the young prophet because He'd done outstanding miracles through him and had spoken clearly to him—yet he disobeyed.

READ 1 KINGS 13 AND PROVERBS 14.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

After delivering his warning of a coming drought, Elijah hid in the Cherith ravine. Later, God sent him north to Zarephath, in Phoenicia. There, Elijah asked a widow for bread. She answered that she had only a handful of flour and a little oil. Elijah told her not to fear and promised that if she shared the last of her food with him, God would make her tiny supply of flour and oil last for *years*. The widow believed him and “she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry” (1 Kings 17:15–16 NKJV). Jesus Himself spoke of God’s tender care for this Canaanite woman (Luke 4:25–26).

READ 1 KINGS 17 AND MATTHEW 15.



The painting *Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath* by Jan Victors (1619–1676) portrays the woman who was rewarded for feeding the prophet.

HIDDEN TREASURE

GOD VERSUS BAAL



The Baal prophets could not perform the feats that Elijah did in God’s name. This image by Guesave Dore (1832–1893) is titled *Slaughter of the Baal Prophets*.

around the altar: Then all the people cried, “The LORD—he is God!” (1 Kings 18:39 NLT).

READ 1 KINGS 18 AND 2 KINGS 1.

HIDDEN TREASURE

GOD ENCOURAGES ELIJAH

After God sent fire on Mount Carmel, Elijah prayed for rain, and God sent a heavy rainstorm. The drought was over! Many Israelites were convinced that the Lord was God, but the miracles didn’t cause a nationwide revival. So when Jezebel threatened to have Elijah killed, and no one stood with him, he became depressed. He fled south and prayed, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life” (1 Kings 19:4 NKJV). Instead, God sent an angel to strengthen him. Eventually Elijah arrived at Mount Sinai. God sent a great wind, then an earthquake; then fire swept across the mountain. But the Lord wasn’t in these things. Then God spoke to Elijah in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12 KJV) and mightily encouraged him to continue.

READ 1 KINGS 19 AND PSALM 56.

2 Kings

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? God's men in the midst of a deteriorating climate.

WHO WROTE IT? We don't know for sure, but it was probably a court official or someone who had access to official historical records.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Between 850 and 586 B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Second Kings takes place during the time of the divided kingdom.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1-8: Ministry of Elijah and Elisha
- Chapters 9-16: The divided kingdom
- Chapter 17: The fall of Israel, the northern kingdom
- Chapters 18-25: The fall of Judah, the southern kingdom

KEY CONCEPTS

- King
- Prophet
- Governant
- Book of the Law

SCORECARD

- Elijah:** The bold prophet
- Elisha:** His successor
- Joash:** King of Judah who repaired the Temple
- Hezekiah:** Another good king of Judah
- Josiah:** King of Judah who called people back to obedience to God's Word

READING TIME

1 Kings

2 Kings

3 Kings

4 Kings

5 Kings

WORTH MEMORIZING

- **6:16-17** "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!"
- **23:25** Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **GOD-FEARING PROPHETS AND POWERFUL KINGS.** One brought the eternal perspective, which sometimes irritated the other. But hearing what God has to say is always most important.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF

2 Kings?

+++

Men become like what they worship.



Timeline

- 930 B.C. + THE KINGDOM DIVIDES
- 848 + ELIJAH'S MINISTRY TRANSFERS TO ELISHA
- 841 + JEHU BECOMES KING OF ISRAEL
- 835 + JOASH BECOMES KING OF JUDAH
- 793 + JEROBOAM II BECOMES KING OF ISRAEL
- 760 + AMOS'S MINISTRY BEGINS
- 753 + HOSEA'S MINISTRY BEGINS
- 742 + NUCAM'S MINISTRY BEGINS
- 740 + ISAAH'S MINISTRY BEGINS
- 722 + ISRAEL (NORTHERN KINGDOM) FALLS
- 715 + HEZEKIAH BECOMES KING OF JUDAH
- 640 + JOSIAH BECOMES KING OF JUDAH
- 627 + JEREMIAH'S MINISTRY BEGINS
- 605 + FIRST DEPORTATION FROM JUDAH— DANIEL TAKEN
- 597 + SECOND DEPORTATION FROM JUDAH—EZEKIEL TAKEN
- 586 + JUDAH (SOUTHERN KINGDOM) FALLS



television gives us around-the-clock news, but it's a mixed blessing. A constant diet of current events can leave us in a state of nervous depression. Well, imagine following the news from ancient Israel during the days of the Old Testament kings! The God-fearing people of those days must have struggled mightily to maintain their morale amid the downward spiral of their times. The book of 2 Kings is like a news account of this discouraging succession of kings, starting with evil King Ahab. The first seventeen chapters of the book describe the events that occurred in the days of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah; the final eight chapters focus on Judah alone. The story concludes with Israel exiled in Assyria and Judah banished to Babylon.

It would be easy, reading all this, to close the book and sigh, "All is lost!" Yet throughout the story in 2 Kings, God never lost control of Israel's destiny, and His promises were undeterred. Even the fall of Judah, as tragic as it was, set the stage for subsequent events in Old Testament and Intertestamental times, leading to the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David.

Yes, we need to keep up with current events; but don't let the bad news of earth get you down. Focus on the Good News of Jesus Christ. Kings may fall and nations may falter, but God is still on His throne, and His rule will have no end.

KEY VERSE:

"So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them.'"
2 Kings 6:16

KEY ACTION:

We, like Elisha, should live with confidence in chaotic times, for we are protected by the invisible armies of the Lord of Hosts (see 2 Kings 6:17).

KEY PRAYER:

Lord, may a double portion of Your Spirit be upon me.

KEY THOUGHT:

Though the story of the decline and fall of Israel's monarchy appears bleak at times, God never lost control of Israel's destiny and His promises were undeterred.

BASIC SURVEY

2 KINGS

AUTHOR: Not stated and unknown; one early tradition claimed Jeremiah wrote 1 and 2 Kings.

DATE: Covering about three hundred years from the 800s BC on, 2 Kings was probably written sometime after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Both Jewish nations are destroyed for their disobedience to God.

DETAILS, PLEASE

The story of 1 Kings continues, with more bad rulers, a handful of good ones, and the loss of the two Jewish nations. Early in 2 Kings, Elijah's successor, Elisha, performs many miracles. The northern kingdom's rulers are entirely wicked, and Israel is "carried . . . away into Assyria" (17:6 KJV) in 722 BC. Judah, with occasional good kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah, lasts longer—but in 586 BC, the southern kingdom's capital of Jerusalem falls to Babylonian armies. The Babylonians burn and destroy the temple Solomon had built and break down all the walls of Jerusalem to prevent the Jews from ever rebelling against them again.

QUOTABLE

> The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight (17:20 NASB).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Elijah was the second man (after Enoch in Genesis 5:24) to go straight to heaven without dying. One of Judah's best kings, Josiah, was only eight years old when he took the throne (22:1).

SO WHAT?

Both Israel and Judah found that there were terrible consequences to sin. Even bad examples can be helpful, if we decide not to do the things that bring us trouble.

READ 2 KINGS 2 AND PSALM 41.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 74. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 69. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 69. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

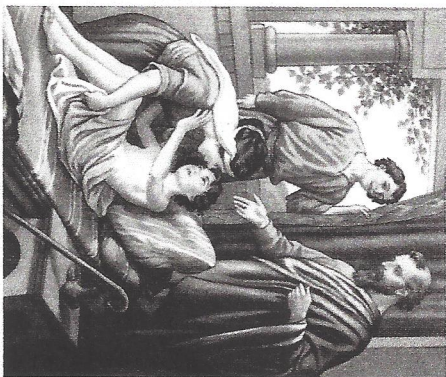
ELISHA THE MIRACLE WORKER

Directed by God, the prophet Elijah chose a successor, a man named Elisha. For years, Elisha learned from Elijah—even humbly pouring water as Elijah washed his hands (2 Kings 3:11). Then the Lord decided to take Elijah.

When asked what his final request was, Elisha asked, "Let a double portion of your spirit be upon me" (2 Kings 2:9 NASB). He and Elisha were walking along when "suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11 NIV). Elisha caught his mantle (cloak) as it fell, and the power of Elijah rested on him. Elisha did twice as many miracles as Elijah had done!

Elisha parted the Jordan River, purified a spring of water, called wild bears to protect himself, believed for water for a thirsty army, miraculously increased a widow's oil, raised a boy from the dead, made poisonous stew edible, multiplied barely loaves, healed a leper, made an iron ax head float, blinded an entire enemy army, foresaw that God would supply food for a starving city—and raised a dead man to life after *he himself* was dead!

Elisha lived during a very difficult time in northern Israel's history. A powerful northern kingdom called Aram was constantly seeking to *sm*



Elisha performed many miracles, including raising a boy from the dead. This miracle is depicted in the image *Elisha Raising the Shunammite's*.

conquer them. Wicked King Ahab had died, but his sons ruled. They destroyed idols of Baal, but worshipped the golden calves and vacillated between heeding the prophet and seeking to kill him (2 Kings 6:8–10, 31).

READ 2 KINGS 4–5.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 74. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 70. →

CLOSER LOOK

BATTLING THE ARAMEANS

The Arameans (called Syrians in the KJV) lived in what is now modern Syria, to the north of Israel. Already in 1000 BC, King David repeatedly battled Aramean kingdoms (2 Samuel 8:3–6). He finally subjugated them, and he and Solomon ruled over them for several decades. But toward the end of Solomon's reign, the Arameans threw off the Israelite yoke and regained their independence.

By the days of Ahab, king of Israel, the Arameans were united in one powerful kingdom and were constantly seeking to conquer Israel. Even though Ahab was a wicked king, there were times when he acknowledged God and followed the advice of His prophets—so God allowed him to defeat the Arameans twice. However, when he had a chance to completely crush them, Ahab foolishly made a peace pact. Later, Ahab waged war with Aram again, but died in battle (1 Kings 20:1–43; 22:1–4, 29–37).

The Arameans continued to oppress Israel during the days of Ahab's sons, Ahaziah and Joram—and during the reigns of later kings such as Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash. But north of Aram an even more powerful empire was rising—the Assyrians—and the kings of Judah and Israel alternated between alliances with Assyria and Aram, to offset each one's power. About 780 to 770 BC, Jeroboam II of Israel reconquered lands that Aram had taken. Then, in 732 BC, the Assyrians utterly conquered Aram and deported their people. From then on, Assyria was the greatest threat to Israel and Judah.

READ 1 KINGS 20 AND 2 KINGS 6:8–23.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 71.



CLOSER LOOK

THE NORTHERN KINGDOM



Tiglath-Pileser, who is featured in this stone artwork, led the Assyrians to attack Israel.

peatedly deliver them from their enemies, the Arameans. Finally the prophet Oded declared that “the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you” (2 Chronicles 28:11 NKJV). It had come time to pay for two centuries of sins and idol worship.

During King Pekah's reign, Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria attacked Israel and sacked many cities. He also conquered the regions of Gilead, Galilee, and the north, and took many captives. After Hoshea became king of Israel, the Assyrians returned—this time to stay—and Hoshea was forced to pay heavy tribute for several years. Then Hoshea tried to get Egypt's help to break free. The Assyrians discovered his plot, invaded the entire country, and after a three-year siege, Samaria fell. Then the Assyrians took all Israel captive. . . and that was the *end* of the northern kingdom.

“This disaster came upon the people of Israel because they . . . had done many evil things, arousing the LORD's anger. Yes, they worshiped idols, despite the LORD's specific and repeated warnings” (2 Kings 17:7, 11–12 NLT).

READ 2 KINGS 15:8–31 AND 17:1–23.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 74.



HIDDEN TREASURE

NAAMAN THE LEPPER IS HEALED

Naaman, commander of the Aramean army, was a leper. One day his wife's Hebrew slave girl said, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him." Soon Naaman and his servants were standing outside Elisha's door.



Naaman was healed when he washed himself in the Jordan River.

Elisha sent a servant out saying, "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then . . . you will be healed of your leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3, 10 NLT). Naaman was offended. He complained that the rivers of Damascus were much cleaner than the Jordan. He was about to leave, but his servants pointed out that he'd been told to do something quite simple. It was at least worth trying. So Naaman humbled himself and washed . . . and was healed!

READ 2 KINGS 5 AND LUKE 4:14-30.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

One time the Aramean army besieged Samaria, the capital of Israel, and there was a severe famine in the city. People ate disgusting things to survive. Finally, the king of Israel was ready to give up. However, Elisha told him that by tomorrow morning the siege would be over and there would be more than enough food for everyone. One of the king's officers mocked, "Look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2 NKJV). That night, however, God caused the Arameans to hear the noise of many chariots and horses. Thinking that it was the Egyptian army, the Arameans fled, leaving all their tents and food behind. The next morning the people had plenty of food again.

READ 2 KINGS 6:24-7:29 AND PSALM 104.

HIDDEN TREASURE

RUTHLESS KING JEHU

Elisha sent a prophet to tell Jehu, the fierce army commander, that God had anointed him king of Israel and that he was to wipe out Ahab's wicked house. Jehu immediately raced to Jezreel and slew King Joram (Ahab's son) and Ahaziah king of Judah (Ahab's relative).



Jehu was a violent leader and ordered Jezreel's servants to throw her out a window. This scene is depicted in *The Death of Jezebel* by Gustave Doré (1837-1883).

Jehu commanded Jezreel's servants to push her out a tower window, and they did. Jehu then besieged the city where Ahab's seventy sons were and persuaded the elders to kill them. Jehu then had all the priests of Baal slain, eliminating Baal worship from Israel. Jehu was a ruthless man, so he gladly did these violent deeds. . . but he didn't truly love God. For example, he refused to get rid of the golden calves—and this doomed the nation.

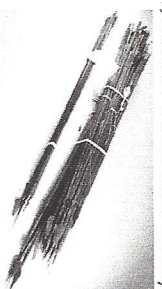
READ 2 KINGS 9-10.

HIDDEN TREASURE

ELISHA'S FINAL PROPHECY

The Arameans bitterly oppressed Israel, so God had mercy. Forty years had passed since Elisha's last prophecy or miracle, but when he was old and sick, he summoned King Jehoash. First, Elisha had the king shoot an "arrow of deliverance" out the window. Then Elisha told him to seize a bundle of arrows and strike the floor. Jehoash struck three times and stopped. Elisha was angry, saying that he should have struck five or six times; then he would have utterly defeated the Arameans. Sure enough, Jehoram defeated Aram only three times. After he died, Jeroboam II became king. The prophet Jonah declared that Jeroboam would restore the size of the kingdom—and he *did* (2 Kings 14:23-26). Jeroboam did what Jehoash had failed to do.

READ 2 KINGS 13 AND PSALM 118.



King Jehoash only struck the floor three times with arrows, and he only defeated the Arameans three times.

God's Love for Widows

1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4

IN BIBLE TIMES, widows were especially vulnerable. Women had no resources or recourse when their husbands died. They went from being completely protected and provided for to being completely on their own, often out on the dusty roads.

Maybe that's why God took a special interest in them and asks us to do the same.

The widow of 1 Kings 17 was on the edge of starvation. But Elijah told her of God's promised provision. She apparently believed this too-good-to-be-true pronouncement, because she did what Elijah asked. As a result, she and her son enjoyed many days of sufficient food. Later on, Elijah even restored the boy's life when he died from an illness.

Second Kings 4 tells of another godly widow living on the edge financially. When the prophet Elisha told the poor woman to gather jars and fill them with olive oil, she complied, even though she had only a few drops of oil on hand. After the olive oil multiplied into many jars, the widow sold them and had money for the future.

Perhaps the evident truth in these two stories is that God cares for the most endangered in a society. Who among us today is vulnerable and in need? Modern widows often have survivor benefits from their husbands' pension plans, but many don't—or they may need emotional support to help them through their grief. And what about others in the church or community who have fallen on bad times?

God is watching out for them—and watching to see if we care.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

1 Kings 11:1-13

MARRIAGE IS A GOOD THING—but Solomon went overboard with his 700 wives and 300 concubines. Deuteronomy 17:17 specifically says, "The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord." In time, his many women did take his heart away from God, which led to the loss of his kingdom.

Solomon's dalliance with the pagan gods of his harem stirred the anger of the one true God. Solomon even built shrines to foreign gods on the Mount of Olives. He added multiple shrines in his home for his foreign wives (1 Kings 11:7-8). In so doing, he doomed his dynasty.

His example forces the question: What do we love more than God? What captivates our senses and turns us away from seeking the Lord? Solomon certainly lived in a world of excess. He amassed wealth and pleasures beyond what most of us could even imagine. Ultimately, they turned his heart away from God.

Today, we may not collect hundreds of wives, but we have our own excesses. We live in the most prosperous consumer culture in history. We have access to everything from expensive gadgets to massive mansions that shout pride and success.

In relationships we feed one another with desire for more and more things. Even though our excesses seem less offensive than collecting wives, they can still steal our hearts away from the one God who deserves and demands our focus.

Jezebel's Juicy Plot

1 Kings 21

KING AHAH DOESN'T seem to have had the "killer instinct" much prized by some business executives. But he did have a wife who didn't hesitate to go for the jugular. When Ahab dithered about using his royal power to grab a prized piece of real estate, Jezebel took care of business for him.

In the ancient Middle East, land was an incredibly important possession. Property belonged to one family for generations. Leviticus 25 says that the land must be returned to the original owner in the year of Jubilee—even if the land was bought. That's part of why a man named Naboth loved his vineyard so much.

There was just one problem. Naboth's vineyard was right next door to King Ahab's palace in Jezreel. Like many powerful men would do in a similar situation, Ahab offered Naboth a deal: money, or an even better property in another location. But devotion to blood and land won out, and Naboth refused.

King Ahab sulked and moped until Jezebel, his crafty wife, decided to take matters into her own hands. She had Naboth framed for blasphemy and stoned to death. Then it was easy for the king to take over the land.

But before he did so, God stepped in to restore order, commanding Ahab to halt his predatory tactics. "Wasn't it enough that you killed Naboth?" asked Elijah, God's spokesman. "Must you rob him, too?" (1 Kings 21:19). Then God promised a bloody death for Ahab because of his evil actions.

It's good when husbands and wives want to help each other, but not down a path of wickedness, greed, and injustice. Sometimes, the much-prized "killer instinct" can be deadly.