



I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience™

# CHRONICLES

FAMILY GUIDE

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

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

*Amen.*

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——— Welcome to ———

# I M M E R S E

*The Bible Reading Experience*

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

## Planning Your Family Experience

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

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

The family guide readings end with a feature called Talking Together, created especially for young readers. These provide reflective statements and questions to help them think more deeply about the

Scriptures they have read. (Talking Together is also useful for guiding your family discussions.)

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

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

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

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

## DAY 1

# A New History of Israel

(from *Chronicles*, pages A9-A10)

This final part of the *Immerse* First Testament contains its three remaining books. This last collection focuses once again on telling stories. The Hebrew expression translated as *Chronicles* means “words or events of the days.” That is, it’s a record of day-to-day events, much like a diary or journal. The stories in this volume are all “chronicles” that tell how the people of God lived out their faith after his covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were established.

First comes the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*. This unique telling of Israel’s history is presented in most Bibles as four separate books, although it was originally a unified work. (Notice that the ending of 2 *Chronicles* overlaps with the beginning of *Ezra*.) This book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah* emphasizes the importance of the true worship of God. The shorter books in this volume, *Esther* and *Daniel*, show God’s people facing extreme challenges in foreign lands. Whether in their careful day-to-day observance of God’s Law or in their willingness to suffer death through persecution, faithful and courageous men and women demonstrate an unflinching loyalty to God.

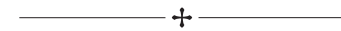
All three works presented here were written after the Jewish people were conquered by foreign empires and scattered among the other nations. These books tell stories that carry on the grand Story of God’s covenants into later centuries. It is important to read these final books of the First Testament with the overall development of the Bible’s story in mind.

God created the world to be his temple, the place where he would dwell in fellowship with humanity. After sin entered the world, God chose Abraham and his family, the people of Israel, as those who would bring blessing and life back into the world. But most of the story so far has been about Israel’s struggle to live up to its divinely given vocation. God initiated covenants with humanity in order to move the story closer and closer to his intention for all of creation. But the goal has not been

reached. God wants a people who worship him well so they can go out into the world to share his light and life.

The Exile had caused a crisis in Israel’s story, leading many to question God’s own faithfulness to the covenant as well as their status as his chosen people. God’s vision for Israel and for the world could not be fulfilled as long as foreign powers controlled God’s people and their land.

These books at the end of the First Testament were written to remind the people of their true story and their ultimate hope. The issues raised will continue into the period between the First Testament and the New Testament. As the years go by and Israel’s struggles persist, the longing for God to keep his covenant promises will grow stronger and stronger. This is a story begging for its fitting conclusion.



*We begin with the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*. Israel’s previously written history (from *Genesis* to *Samuel–Kings*) addressed the situation of Israel’s exile and answered the question: Why did the Exile happen? *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah* addresses the situation of the people after the Exile and answers the question: Who are we now?*

### TALKING TOGETHER:

It is striking that we often find the same events in the Bible told from more than one angle or viewpoint. We’ll see this in the New Testament where there are four presentations of the story of Jesus. Here we are entering the second telling of Israel’s main history. Why would the Bible do this? What’s the advantage of hearing different perspectives on something?

## DAY 2

## Back to the Beginning

(from *Chronicles*, pages 3-5)

*This new telling of Israel's history begins with an elaborate genealogy (or list of ancestors) that goes all the way back to Adam and reveals the origins and development of the twelve tribes of Israel. Special attention is given to Judah (the tribe of King David) and Levi (the tribe of priests). This genealogy helps the current generation see that they are linked to Israel's most ancient people and stories. Thus, the lists begin the work of reminding them of who they are.*



The descendants of Adam were Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah.

The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The descendants of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

The descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

The descendants of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.

The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

The descendants of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Cush was also the ancestor of Nimrod, who was the first heroic warrior on earth.

Mizraim was the ancestor of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines came.

Canaan's oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.

The descendants of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

The descendants of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

Arphaxad was the father of Shelah.

Shelah was the father of Eber.

Eber had two sons. The first was named Peleg (which means "division"),

for during his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language groups. His brother's name was Joktan.

Joktan was the ancestor of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were descendants of Joktan.

So this is the family line descended from Shem: Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and Abram, later known as Abraham.

+ + +

The sons of Abraham were Isaac and Ishmael. These are their genealogical records:

The sons of Ishmael were Nebaioth (the oldest), Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael. . . .

Abraham was the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac were Esau and Israel. . . .

+ + +

The sons of Israel were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

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Judah had three sons from Bathshua, a Canaanite woman. Their names were Er, Onan, and Shelah. But the LORD saw that the oldest son, Er, was a wicked man, so he killed him. Later Judah had twin sons from Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law. Their names were Perez and Zerah. So Judah had five sons in all.

The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.

The sons of Zerah were Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Darda—five in all.

The son of Carmi (a descendant of Zimri) was Achan, who brought disaster on Israel by taking plunder that had been set apart for the LORD.

The son of Ethan was Azariah.

The sons of Hezron were Jerahmeel, Ram, and Caleb.

Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, a leader of Judah.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

Salmon was the father of Boaz.

Boaz was the father of Obed.

Obed was the father of Jesse.

Jesse's first son was Eliab, his second was Abinadab, his third was Shimea, his fourth was Nethanel, his fifth was Raddai, his sixth was Ozem, and his seventh was David.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

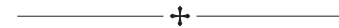
One of the important things to notice about lists of ancestors is how they slowly narrow in on certain family lines and then particular people. Adam has many sons, but God chooses to work through the line of Seth. Noah had three sons, but the story will move forward through Shem's family. And so it goes, down to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob), and then on to Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and King David. God's intention is to save the entire world, but to do that he keeps narrowing his focus on special families and unique individuals. They will play key roles as the plot moves on. God has his eye on the big story, yet he also focuses on the smallest details of our lives. Why is that important in the Bible? Why are both perspectives important for us too?

### DAY 3

## The Story of Israel—Short Version

(from *Chronicles*, pages 7-8, 10-12)

*In short order, this list of ancestors brings us to the tribe that descended from Israel's son Judah. King David and all the future kings in his family are from this tribe. After the kingdom of Israel split in two (following David's time), God doesn't abandon the northern tribes, but the true focus remains on Judah and the rulers from David's line. The northern kingdom strays far away from the covenant, so God allows the Assyrian Empire to defeat and remove them. The Jews who knew the story would read the list of Solomon's sons and recognize the kings of Judah. Those named at the end were the ones alive when God allowed the Babylonian Empire to wipe out Judah and take the people into exile.*



These are the sons of David who were born in Hebron:

The oldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel.  
 The second was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel.  
 The third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur.  
 The fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith.  
 The fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital.  
 The sixth was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah, David's wife.

These six sons were born to David in Hebron, where he reigned seven and a half years.

Then David reigned another thirty-three years in Jerusalem. The sons born to David in Jerusalem included Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon. Their mother was Bathsheba, the daughter of Ammiel. David also had nine other sons: Ithar, Elishua, Elpelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

These were the sons of David, not including his sons born to his concubines. Their sister was named Tamar.

The descendants of Solomon were Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah.  
 The sons of Josiah were Johanan (the oldest), Jehoiakim (the second), Zedekiah (the third), and Jehoahaz (the fourth).  
 The successors of Jehoiakim were his son Jehoiachin and his brother Zedekiah. . . .

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The oldest son of Israel was Reuben. But since he dishonored his father by sleeping with one of his father's concubines, his birthright was given to the sons of his brother Joseph. For this reason, Reuben is not listed in the genealogical records as the firstborn son. The descendants of Judah became the most powerful tribe and provided a ruler for the nation, but the birthright belonged to Joseph. . . .

+

There were 44,760 capable warriors in the armies of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They were all skilled in combat and armed with shields, swords, and bows. They waged war against the Hagarites,

the Jeturites, the Naphishites, and the Nodabites. They cried out to God during the battle, and he answered their prayer because they trusted in him. So the Hagriles and all their allies were defeated. The plunder taken from the Hagriles included 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep and goats, 2,000 donkeys, and 100,000 captives. Many of the Hagriles were killed in the battle because God was fighting against them. The people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh lived in their land until they were taken into exile.

The half-tribe of Manasseh was very large and spread through the land from Bashan to Baal-hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon. These were the leaders of their clans: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. These men had a great reputation as mighty warriors and leaders of their clans.

But these tribes were unfaithful to the God of their ancestors. They worshiped the gods of the nations that God had destroyed. So the God of Israel caused King Pul of Assyria (also known as Tiglath-pileser) to invade the land and take away the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as captives. The Assyrians exiled them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the Gozan River, where they remain to this day.

—*from the book of Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

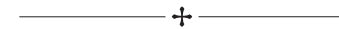
The story in the Bible is long and complicated. It can be hard to follow sometimes. The thing to remember is that all of it is anchored in the promises of God. God made a promise to Noah to preserve the earth. He made a promise to Abraham to save the world through his family. He promised Moses that he would be faithful to his people and teach them his ways. Finally, he promised David that kings would come from his family and that all nations would come under the rule of the true king from David's line. As we keep reading the story through the entire Bible, we will see that God keeps these promises. And these promises can change your life because you are part of the world that God is saving through them.

## DAY 4

# A Kingdom of Priests and an Empire of Praise

(from *Chronicles*, pages 12-13)

*As we've seen, the family line of King David is crucial for the story of the Bible. But there is another family line that we also need to know about. God chose Israel's son Levi to be the father of Israel's priests. The priests' job was to serve God in the Tabernacle (later the Temple) by offering sacrifices and leading the people in worship. A big part of Israel's role in the world was to show the nations what the true worship of God looked like. This included offering the sacrifices of animals, leading the music when the people gathered, and teaching the people the instructions God had shared in his law.*



The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The descendants of Kohath included Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

The children of Amram were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

Eleazar was the father of Phinehas.

Phinehas was the father of Abishua.

Abishua was the father of Bukki.

Bukki was the father of Uzzi.

Uzzi was the father of Zerariah.

Zerariah was the father of Meraioth.

Meraioth was the father of Amariah.

Amariah was the father of Ahitub.

Ahitub was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Ahimaaz.

Ahimaaz was the father of Azariah.

Azariah was the father of Johanan.

Johanan was the father of Azariah, the high priest at the Temple built

by Solomon in Jerusalem.

Azariah was the father of Amariah.

Amariah was the father of Ahitub.

Ahitub was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Shallum.  
 Shallum was the father of Hilkiah.  
 Hilkiah was the father of Azariah.  
 Azariah was the father of Seraiah.  
 Seraiah was the father of Jehozadak, who went into exile when the  
 LORD sent the people of Judah and Jerusalem into captivity under  
 Nebuchadnezzar. . . .

David assigned the following men to lead the music at the house of the LORD after the Ark was placed there. They ministered with music at the Tabernacle until Solomon built the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. They carried out their work, following all the regulations handed down to them. These are the men who served, along with their sons:

Heman the musician was from the clan of Kohath. His genealogy was traced back through Joel, Samuel, Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliel, Toah, Zuph, Elkanah, Mahath, Amasai, Elkanah, Joel, Azariah, Zephaniah, Tahath, Assir, Abiasaph, Korah, Izhar, Kohath, Levi, and Israel. Heman's first assistant was Asaph from the clan of Gershon. Asaph's genealogy was traced back through Berekiah, Shimea, Michael, Baaseiah, Malkijah, Ethni, Zerah, Adaiah, Ethan, Zimmah, Shimei, Jahath, Gershon, and Levi. Heman's second assistant was Ethan from the clan of Merari. Ethan's genealogy was traced back through Kishi, Abdi, Malluch, Hashabiah, Amaziah, Hilkiah, Amzi, Bani, Shemer, Mahli, Mushi, Merari, and Levi.

Their fellow Levites were appointed to various other tasks in the Tabernacle, the house of God.

Only Aaron and his descendants served as priests. They presented the offerings on the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense, and they performed all the other duties related to the Most Holy Place. They made atonement for Israel by doing everything that Moses, the servant of God, had commanded them.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Abraham's family was created and chosen by God to be a light to the world. At the heart of this was Israel's worship of God. For the nation's entire history, Israel was surrounded by mighty empires and powerful nations. The rulers of these empires worshiped themselves and their own strength and glory. They were in love with their own greatness. In

contrast, Israel was called to give glory and honor to the highest ruler: God—the One who is over all things. Do you think the nations of the world today are tempted to honor themselves over God? Are Christ-followers today a light to the world? Do they show people how to give glory only to the Creator?

## DAY 5

# We Are Still the People of God

(from *Chronicles*, pages 18-20)

*Sadly, the kingdom of Judah followed the path of the northern kingdom of Israel. They, too, abandoned their covenant with God. The people of Judah worshiped other gods, oppressed the poor, and refused to follow God's instructions in many ways. So God allowed Babylon to destroy Judah and take the people far away into exile. When these people and their children were eventually allowed to return, it was very important for them to know that they were linked to the earlier part of Israel's story. Was God still with them? Were they still supposed to worship him in the Temple? The genealogies here showed the people that there were connections to the earlier people God had called. There were still legitimate Levites, priests, gatekeepers, and those who helped in worship.*



So all Israel was listed in the genealogical records in *The Book of the Kings of Israel*.



The people of Judah were exiled to Babylon because they were unfaithful to the LORD. The first of the exiles to return to their property in their former towns were priests, Levites, Temple servants, and other Israelites. Some of the people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh came and settled in Jerusalem.

One family that returned was that of Uthai son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, a descendant of Perez son of Judah. Others returned from the Shilonite clan, including Asaiah (the oldest) and his sons.



From the Zerahite clan, Jeuel returned with his relatives. In all, 690 families from the tribe of Judah returned.

From the tribe of Benjamin came Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah; Ibneiah son of Jeroham; Elah son of Uzzi, son of Micri; and Meshullam son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah.

These men were all leaders of clans, and they were listed in their genealogical records. In all, 956 families from the tribe of Benjamin returned.

Among the priests who returned were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin, Azariah son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub. Azariah was the chief officer of the house of God.

Other returning priests were Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malkijah, and Maasai son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer.

In all, 1,760 priests returned. They were heads of clans and very able men. They were responsible for ministering at the house of God.

The Levites who returned were Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, a descendant of Merari; Bakbakkar; Heresh; Galal; Mattaniah son of Mica, son of Zicri, son of Asaph; Obadiah son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun; and Berekiah son of Asa, son of Elkanah, who lived in the area of Netophah.

The gatekeepers who returned were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their relatives. Shallum was the chief gatekeeper. Prior to this time, they were responsible for the King's Gate on the east side. These men served as gatekeepers for the camps of the Levites. Shallum was the son of Kore, a descendant of Abiasaph, from the clan of Korah. He and his relatives, the Korahites, were responsible for guarding the entrance to the sanctuary, just as their ancestors had guarded the Tabernacle in the camp of the LORD.

Phinehas son of Eleazar had been in charge of the gatekeepers in earlier times, and the LORD had been with him. And later Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was responsible for guarding the entrance to the Tabernacle.

In all, there were 212 gatekeepers in those days, and they were listed according to the genealogies in their villages. David and Samuel the seer had appointed their ancestors because they were reliable men. These gatekeepers and their descendants, by their divisions, were responsible for guarding the entrance to the house of the LORD when that house was a tent. The gatekeepers were stationed on all four sides—east, west, north,

and south. Their relatives in the villages came regularly to share their duties for seven-day periods.

The four chief gatekeepers, all Levites, were trusted officials, for they were responsible for the rooms and treasuries at the house of God. They would spend the night around the house of God, since it was their duty to guard it and to open the gates every morning.

Some of the gatekeepers were assigned to care for the various articles used in worship. They checked them in and out to avoid any loss. Others were responsible for the furnishings, the items in the sanctuary, and the supplies, such as choice flour, wine, olive oil, frankincense, and spices. But it was the priests who blended the spices. Mattithiah, a Levite and the oldest son of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with baking the bread used in the offerings. And some members of the clan of Kohath were in charge of preparing the bread to be set on the table each Sabbath day.

The musicians, all prominent Levites, lived at the Temple. They were exempt from other responsibilities since they were on duty at all hours. All these men lived in Jerusalem. They were the heads of Levite families and were listed as prominent leaders in their genealogical records.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The lists of ancestors in this book remind us that God works across the generations of humanity. History has its ups and downs. Sometimes people do well, and other times they fail miserably. But through it all God's intentions are still there, and he is working to bring all people into greater reality. Humans are a tough bunch and stubborn in their wrongdoing. It's when things look bad that we need the encouragement to keep trusting in God. What do you do when you find it difficult to see the progress of God's good plan? How do you renew your faith in him?

## DAY 6

## The King God Has Chosen

(from *Chronicles*, pages 20-22)

*The book transitions now from lists of ancestors to a more narrative style, telling the stories of the kings of Judah. Special attention will be given to King David, whom God promised would be the head of a dynasty of kings. David's love for the LORD was genuine, and his allegiance to him was firm. God raised David up and gave him success because God had determined that it was through David's line that the story of salvation would find its fulfillment.*



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

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

But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died. So Saul and his three sons died there together, bringing his dynasty to an end.

When all the Israelites in the Jezreel Valley saw that their army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and fled. So the Philistines moved in and occupied their towns.

The next day, when the Philistines went out to strip the dead, they found the bodies of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa. So they stripped off Saul's armor and cut off his head. Then they proclaimed the good news of Saul's death before their idols and to the people throughout the land of Philistia. They placed his armor in the temple of their gods, and they fastened his head to the temple of Dagon.

But when everyone in Jabesh-gilead heard about everything the Philistines had done to Saul, all their mighty warriors brought the bodies of Saul and his sons back to Jabesh. Then they buried their bones beneath the great tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

So Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD. He failed to obey

the LORD's command, and he even consulted a medium instead of asking the LORD for guidance. So the LORD killed him and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

+ + +

Then all Israel gathered before David at Hebron and told him, “We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who really led the forces of Israel. And the LORD your God told you, ‘You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be the leader of my people Israel.’”

So there at Hebron, David made a covenant before the LORD with all the elders of Israel. And they anointed him king of Israel, just as the LORD had promised through Samuel.

Then David and all Israel went to Jerusalem (or Jebus, as it used to be called), where the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of the land, were living. The people of Jebus taunted David, saying, “You'll never get in here!” But David captured the fortress of Zion, which is now called the City of David.

David had said to his troops, “Whoever is first to attack the Jebusites will become the commander of my armies!” And Joab, the son of David's sister Zeruiah, was first to attack, so he became the commander of David's armies.

David made the fortress his home, and that is why it is called the City of David. He extended the city from the supporting terraces to the surrounding area, while Joab rebuilt the rest of Jerusalem. And David became more and more powerful, because the LORD of Heaven's Armies was with him.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

The LORD is Lord of the whole earth. But he chose one man—Abraham—and promised that his family would bring hope back to all peoples. Within the family of Abraham, God later chose one man—David—to be Israel's ruler. God brought Israel into one place—the land of Israel—so the people could make their home there. Then within Israel, David took one city—Jerusalem—and made it his capital, the City of David. One man and one city. Small things, really, given the size and scale of the entire world. But if you want to know how God works, you have to watch the small things, the out-of-the-way places, and the unlikely people. God chooses what seems like nothing in the world in order to change the world. He chooses people like us.

## DAY 7

## David's Home, God's Home

(from *Chronicles*, pages 26-29)

*The Ark of the Covenant was a wood box overlaid with gold that was made in Moses' time, when Israel became a nation. God chose to have his own presence fill this box as a sign that he really did live with his people. Because before David's time Israel did not really have a capital city, there was not a permanent place for the Ark. But now that David had made Jerusalem his home and the nation's capital, David wanted to bring the sign of God's presence into the city too.*



David consulted with all his officials, including the generals and captains of his army. Then he addressed the entire assembly of Israel as follows: "If you approve and if it is the will of the LORD our God, let us send messages to all the Israelites throughout the land, including the priests and Levites in their towns and pasturelands. Let us invite them to come and join us. It is time to bring back the Ark of our God, for we neglected it during the reign of Saul."

The whole assembly agreed to this, for the people could see it was the right thing to do. So David summoned all Israel, from the Shihor Brook of Egypt in the south all the way to the town of Lebo-hamath in the north, to join in bringing the Ark of God from Kiriath-jearim. Then David and all Israel went to Baalah of Judah (also called Kiriath-jearim) to bring back the Ark of God, which bears the name of the LORD who is enthroned between the cherubim. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house. Uzzah and Ahio were guiding the cart. David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. Then the LORD's anger was aroused against Uzzah, and he struck him dead because he had laid his hand on the Ark. So Uzzah died there in the presence of God.

David was angry because the LORD's anger had burst out against Uzzah. He named that place Perez-uzzah (which means "to burst out against Uzzah"), as it is still called today.

David was now afraid of God, and he asked, "How can I ever bring the Ark of God back into my care?" So David did not move the Ark into the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-edom of Gath. The Ark of God remained there in Obed-edom's house for three months, and the LORD blessed the household of Obed-edom and everything he owned.

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

Then David summoned the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and these Levite leaders: Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. He said to them, "You are the leaders of the Levite families. You must purify yourselves and all your fellow Levites, so you can bring the Ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. Because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the LORD our God burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it properly." So the priests and the Levites purified themselves in order to bring the Ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to Jerusalem. Then the Levites carried the Ark of God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the LORD had instructed Moses.

David also ordered the Levite leaders to appoint a choir of Levites who were singers and musicians to sing joyful songs to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and cymbals. So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel along with his fellow Levites: Asaph son of Berekiyah, and Ethan son of Kushaiah from the clan of Merari. The following men were chosen as their assistants: Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers—Obed-edom and Jeiel.

The musicians Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were chosen to sound the bronze cymbals. Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were chosen to play the harps. Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah were chosen to play the lyres. Kenaniah, the head Levite, was chosen as the choir leader because of his skill.

Berekiyah and Elkanah were chosen to guard the Ark. Shebaniah, Josphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer—all of whom were priests—were chosen to blow the trumpets as they marched in front of the Ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were chosen to guard the Ark.

Then David and the elders of Israel and the generals of the army went to

the house of Obed-edom to bring the Ark of the LORD's Covenant up to Jerusalem with a great celebration. And because God was clearly helping the Levites as they carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

David was dressed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who carried the Ark, and also the singers, and Kenaniah the choir leader. David was also wearing a priestly garment. So all Israel brought up the Ark of the LORD's Covenant with shouts of joy, the blowing of rams' horns and trumpets, the crashing of cymbals, and loud playing on harps and lyres.

But as the Ark of the LORD's Covenant entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David skipping about and laughing with joy, she was filled with contempt for him.

They brought the Ark of God and placed it inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. When he had finished his sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the LORD. Then he gave to every man and woman in all Israel a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins.

David appointed the following Levites to lead the people in worship before the Ark of the LORD—to invoke his blessings, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph, the leader of this group, sounded the cymbals. Second to him was Zechariah, followed by Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel. They played the harps and lyres. The priests, Benaiah and Jahaziel, played the trumpets regularly before the Ark of God's Covenant.

—*from the book of Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

King David knew that there are key moments in the life of God's people where celebration is the only appropriate response to what God has done. When the sign of God's presence with his people—the Ark of the Covenant—came into Jerusalem, David made sure there was music, singing, dancing, and feasting. The worship of God was joyous and loud that day! Are there times like this in your life? Does your community celebrate the good gifts of God with delight and praise?

## DAY 8

# Sing about All That God Has Done

(from *Chronicles*, pages 29-31)

*A crucial part of celebration is music, and so Israel's festival was filled with singing and worship. David himself was a writer of songs and a skillful performer on the harp. Many of the songs in the book of Psalms were written by David. So now David composes a new song and gives it to Israel's worship leader, a man named Asaph.*



On that day David gave to Asaph and his fellow Levites this song of thanksgiving to the LORD:

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.

Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.

Exult in his holy name;

rejoice, you who worship the LORD.

Search for the LORD and for his strength;  
continually seek him.

Remember the wonders he has performed,  
his miracles, and the rulings he has given,  
you children of his servant Israel,  
you descendants of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the LORD our God.

His justice is seen throughout the land.

Remember his covenant forever—

the commitment he made to a thousand generations.

This is the covenant he made with Abraham  
and the oath he swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,

and to the people of Israel as a never-ending covenant:

“I will give you the land of Canaan  
as your special possession.”

He said this when you were few in number,  
a tiny group of strangers in Canaan.

They wandered from nation to nation,  
from one kingdom to another.

Yet he did not let anyone oppress them.

He warned kings on their behalf:

“Do not touch my chosen people,  
and do not hurt my prophets.”

Let the whole earth sing to the LORD!

Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.

Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.

Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.

Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!

He is to be feared above all gods.

The gods of other nations are mere idols,

but the LORD made the heavens!

Honor and majesty surround him;

strength and joy fill his dwelling.

O nations of the world, recognize the LORD,

recognize that the LORD is glorious and strong.

Give to the LORD the glory he deserves!

Bring your offering and come into his presence.

Worship the LORD in all his holy splendor.

Let all the earth tremble before him.

The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.

Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice!

Tell all the nations, “The LORD reigns!”

Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!

Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy!

Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD,

for he is coming to judge the earth.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Cry out, “Save us, O God of our salvation!

Gather and rescue us from among the nations,

so we can thank your holy name

and rejoice and praise you.”

Praise the LORD, the God of Israel,

who lives from everlasting to everlasting!

And all the people shouted “Amen!” and praised the LORD.

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

### TALKING TOGETHER:

Did you notice the sequence in this song? David begins by remembering all the good things God has already done for his people Israel. He created them as a nation and brought them to their own land. God remembers his covenant and he fulfills his promises. Yet God is also the God of the whole earth, of all peoples. It must be that one day everyone will see that he is truly the Lord of all. Then even the fields and forests will join in the song, because the LORD will reign and will make all things right. Say (or sing!) a prayer of thanksgiving to God today for everything he has already done and for all he will do when he returns as King.

## DAY 9

# Counting Things rather than Trusting God

(from *Chronicles*, pages 36-37)

*Even good people, people who love God and have given their lives to his service, sometimes fail and fall down. When David ordered that the size of his army be counted, he was being tempted to trust in the strength of numbers rather than in the power of God. The consequences for the nation were serious.*



Satan rose up against Israel and caused David to take a census of the people of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, “Take a census of all the people of Israel—from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north—and bring me a report so I may know how many there are.”

But Joab replied, “May the LORD increase the number of his people a hundred times over! But why, my lord the king, do you want to do this? Are they not all your servants? Why must you cause Israel to sin?”

But the king insisted that they take the census, so Joab traveled throughout all Israel to count the people. Then he returned to Jerusalem and reported the number of people to David. There were 1,100,000 warriors in all Israel who could handle a sword, and 470,000 in Judah.

But Joab did not include the tribes of Levi and Benjamin in the census because he was so distressed at what the king had made him do.

God was very displeased with the census, and he punished Israel for it. Then David said to God, “I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt for doing this foolish thing.”

Then the LORD spoke to Gad, David’s seer. This was the message: “Go and say to David, ‘This is what the LORD says: I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will inflict it on you.’”

So Gad came to David and said, “These are the choices the LORD has given you. You may choose three years of famine, three months of destruction by the sword of your enemies, or three days of severe plague as the angel of the LORD brings devastation throughout the land of Israel. Decide what answer I should give the LORD who sent me.”

“I’m in a desperate situation!” David replied to Gad. “But let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great. Do not let me fall into human hands.”

So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 people died as a result. And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But just as the angel was preparing to destroy it, the LORD relented and said to the death angel, “Stop! That is enough!” At that moment the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth with his sword drawn, reaching out over Jerusalem. So David and the leaders of Israel put on burlap to show their deep distress and fell face down on the ground. And David said to God, “I am the one who called for the census! I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep—what have they done? O LORD my God, let your anger fall against me and my family, but do not destroy your people.”

Then the angel of the LORD told Gad to instruct David to go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. So David went up to do what the LORD had commanded him through Gad. Araunah, who was busy threshing wheat at the time, turned and saw the angel there. His four sons, who were with him, ran away and hid. When Araunah saw David approaching, he left his threshing floor and bowed before David with his face to the ground.

David said to Araunah, “Let me buy this threshing floor from you at its full price. Then I will build an altar to the LORD there, so that he will stop the plague.”

“Take it, my lord the king, and use it as you wish,” Araunah said to David. “I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, and the threshing boards for wood to build a fire on the altar, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give it all to you.”

But King David replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it for the full price. I will not take what is yours and give it to the LORD. I will not present burnt offerings that have cost me nothing!” So David gave Araunah 600 pieces of gold in payment for the threshing floor.

David built an altar there to the LORD and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. And when David prayed, the LORD answered him by sending fire from heaven to burn up the offering on the altar. Then the LORD spoke to the angel, who put the sword back into its sheath.

When David saw that the LORD had answered his prayer, he offered sacrifices there at Araunah’s threshing floor. At that time the Tabernacle of the LORD and the altar of burnt offering that Moses had made in the wilderness were located at the place of worship in Gibeon. But David was not able to go there to inquire of God, because he was terrified by the drawn sword of the angel of the LORD.

Then David said, “This will be the location for the Temple of the LORD God and the place of the altar for Israel’s burnt offerings!”

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The temptation is always there for us. We can’t see God, and therefore sometimes we don’t believe that he can really help us or be there for us. We want something we can see and touch. We start to rely on our own strength or abilities to get us through. Or we start to trust in what we have, things like money or power. But only God is God, and in the end, only he has the ability to save and restore us. Do you find it easy or hard to trust God deeply?

## DAY 10

# Those Who Will Tend the House of the LORD

(from *Chronicles*, pages 39-40, 42)

*King David was well aware that, while he lived in a palace, God’s home among his people was merely a tent. So David wanted to build God a Temple, a special and beautiful place worthy of God’s presence. But*

*God revealed that David would not be the one to build this Temple. David was a man of violence and war, and his hands shed the blood of many men. Since he couldn't be the builder of God's house, David did the next best thing: He began all the preparations so that, when he died, everything would be ready for the next king to do the work.*



When David was an old man, he appointed his son Solomon to be king over Israel. David summoned all the leaders of Israel, together with the priests and Levites. All the Levites who were thirty years old or older were counted, and the total came to 38,000. Then David said, "From all the Levites, 24,000 will supervise the work at the Temple of the LORD. Another 6,000 will serve as officials and judges. Another 4,000 will work as gatekeepers, and 4,000 will praise the LORD with the musical instruments I have made." Then David divided the Levites into divisions named after the clans descended from the three sons of Levi—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. . . .

The sons of Amram were Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his descendants were set apart to dedicate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices in the LORD's presence, to serve the LORD, and to pronounce blessings in his name forever.

As for Moses, the man of God, his sons were included with the tribe of Levi. The sons of Moses were Gershom and Eliezer. The descendants of Gershom included Shebuel, the family leader. Eliezer had only one son, Rehabiah, the family leader. Rehabiah had numerous descendants. . . .

These were the descendants of Levi by clans, the leaders of their family groups, registered carefully by name. Each had to be twenty years old or older to qualify for service in the house of the LORD. For David said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has given us peace, and he will always live in Jerusalem. Now the Levites will no longer need to carry the Tabernacle and its furnishings from place to place." In accordance with David's final instructions, all the Levites twenty years old or older were registered for service.

The work of the Levites was to assist the priests, the descendants of Aaron, as they served at the house of the LORD. They also took care of the courtyards and side rooms, helped perform the ceremonies of purification, and served in many other ways in the house of God. They were in charge of the sacred bread that was set out on the table, the choice flour for the grain offerings, the wafers made without yeast, the cakes cooked in olive oil, and the other mixed breads. They were also responsible to check

all the weights and measures. And each morning and evening they stood before the LORD to sing songs of thanks and praise to him. They assisted with the burnt offerings that were presented to the LORD on Sabbath days, at new moon celebrations, and at all the appointed festivals. The required number of Levites served in the LORD's presence at all times, following all the procedures they had been given.

And so, under the supervision of the priests, the Levites watched over the Tabernacle and the Temple and faithfully carried out their duties of service at the house of the LORD. . . .

David and the army commanders then appointed men from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to proclaim God's messages to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, and cymbals. Here is a list of their names and their work:

From the sons of Asaph, there were Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. They worked under the direction of their father, Asaph, who proclaimed God's messages by the king's orders.

From the sons of Jeduthun, there were Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six in all. They worked under the direction of their father, Jeduthun, who proclaimed God's messages to the accompaniment of the lyre, offering thanks and praise to the LORD.

From the sons of Heman, there were Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shubael, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. All these were the sons of Heman, the king's seer, for God had honored him with fourteen sons and three daughters.

All these men were under the direction of their fathers as they made music at the house of the LORD. Their responsibilities included the playing of cymbals, harps, and lyres at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman reported directly to the king. They and their families were all trained in making music before the LORD, and each of them—288 in all—was an accomplished musician. The musicians were appointed to their term of service by means of sacred lots, without regard to whether they were young or old, teacher or student.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### **TALKING TOGETHER:**

Did you notice how the work of the Levites who wrote and sang songs is described? They "proclaimed God's messages to the accompaniment

of the lyre, offering thanks and praise to the LORD.” The words of our songs are meant to be God’s messages! And the Levites “were all trained in making music.” Both skill and hard work were necessary for this ministry to be done well. The combination of words and music is a powerful way to reach human hearts. This is why care must be taken to make sure the messages are well-crafted and are faithful to the Story of God we read in the Bible. How important is music in your life? How would you describe your experience with music when God’s people gather to worship him?

## DAY 11

### Entering the Joy of Love

(from *Chronicles*, pages 47-49)

*Here David continues his work of planning and gathering everything Solomon would need for building God’s Temple in Jerusalem. Notice the detail of what is required for the work of building the Temple to be done well: plans and specifications; contributions of gold, silver, and other precious metals; getting volunteers with all kinds of different skills; and a strong, dedicated leader to oversee all the work. David attends to all of this because, even though he won’t be part of it, he wants to make sure the project is done with excellence.*



David summoned all the officials of Israel to Jerusalem—the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the army divisions, the other generals and captains, the overseers of the royal property and livestock, the palace officials, the mighty men, and all the other brave warriors in the kingdom. David rose to his feet and said: “My brothers and my people! It was my desire to build a Temple where the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant, God’s footstool, could rest permanently. I made the necessary preparations for building it, but God said to me, ‘You must not build a Temple to honor my name, for you are a warrior and have shed much blood.’

“Yet the LORD, the God of Israel, has chosen me from among all my father’s family to be king over Israel forever. For he has chosen the tribe of Judah to rule, and from among the families of Judah he chose my father’s family. And from among my father’s sons the LORD was pleased to make

me king over all Israel. And from among my sons—for the LORD has given me many—he chose Solomon to succeed me on the throne of Israel and to rule over the LORD’s kingdom. He said to me, ‘Your son Solomon will build my Temple and its courtyards, for I have chosen him as my son, and I will be his father. And if he continues to obey my commands and regulations as he does now, I will make his kingdom last forever.’

“So now, with God as our witness, and in the sight of all Israel—the LORD’s assembly—I give you this charge. Be careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God, so that you may continue to possess this good land and leave it to your children as a permanent inheritance.

“And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the LORD sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. So take this seriously. The LORD has chosen you to build a Temple as his sanctuary. Be strong, and do the work.”

Then David gave Solomon the plans for the Temple and its surroundings, including the entry room, the storerooms, the upstairs rooms, the inner rooms, and the inner sanctuary—which was the place of atonement. David also gave Solomon all the plans he had in mind for the courtyards of the LORD’s Temple, the outside rooms, the treasuries, and the rooms for the gifts dedicated to the LORD. The king also gave Solomon the instructions concerning the work of the various divisions of priests and Levites in the Temple of the LORD. And he gave specifications for the items in the Temple that were to be used for worship.

David gave instructions regarding how much gold and silver should be used to make the items needed for service. He told Solomon the amount of gold needed for the gold lampstands and lamps, and the amount of silver for the silver lampstands and lamps, depending on how each would be used. He designated the amount of gold for the table on which the Bread of the Presence would be placed and the amount of silver for other tables.

David also designated the amount of gold for the solid gold meat hooks used to handle the sacrificial meat and for the basins, pitchers, and dishes, as well as the amount of silver for every dish. He designated the amount of refined gold for the altar of incense. Finally, he gave him a plan for the LORD’s “chariot”—the gold cherubim whose wings were stretched out over the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant. “Every part of this plan,” David told Solomon, “was given to me in writing from the hand of the LORD.”

Then David continued, “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Don’t be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will see to it that all the work related



to the Temple of the LORD is finished correctly. The various divisions of priests and Levites will serve in the Temple of God. Others with skills of every kind will volunteer, and the officials and the entire nation are at your command.”

Then King David turned to the entire assembly and said, “My son Solomon, whom God has clearly chosen as the next king of Israel, is still young and inexperienced. The work ahead of him is enormous, for the Temple he will build is not for mere mortals—it is for the LORD God himself! Using every resource at my command, I have gathered as much as I could for building the Temple of my God. Now there is enough gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood, as well as great quantities of onyx, other precious stones, costly jewels, and all kinds of fine stone and marble.

“And now, because of my devotion to the Temple of my God, I am giving all of my own private treasures of gold and silver to help in the construction. This is in addition to the building materials I have already collected for his holy Temple. I am donating more than 112 tons of gold from Ophir and 262 tons of refined silver to be used for overlaying the walls of the buildings and for the other gold and silver work to be done by the craftsmen. Now then, who will follow my example and give offerings to the LORD today?”

Then the family leaders, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the generals and captains of the army, and the king’s administrative officers all gave willingly. For the construction of the Temple of God, they gave about 188 tons of gold, 10,000 gold coins, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. They also contributed numerous precious stones, which were deposited in the treasury of the house of the LORD under the care of Jehiel, a descendant of Gershon. The people rejoiced over the offerings, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD, and King David was filled with joy.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Why was it so important that God’s house be built? Why was it important for the building to be done with such care and attention? The Creator of all things had decided to make his home on earth in a specific place, among one people, one nation. So Israel was required to do this correctly, according to the plans that God himself revealed to King David. Humans are gifted in many ways, with lots of unique skills found in different people. There are various kinds of resources available

to God’s people. All of these gifts were important in the construction of God’s house because so much was at stake.

In light of all this, it is remarkable to think that today we ourselves are God’s house. He lives within us, his people. Does this change the way you think about the gathering of God’s people and their place in the world?

## DAY 12

### All Is Now Ready

(from *Chronicles*, pages 49-50)

*As he had done often in his life, David sang a song of praise and thanksgiving to God because God had helped him once again. All the people had responded well to David’s request for help and donations to build the Temple. Now David could rest in peace, knowing that everything was ready.*



Then David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly:

“O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, may you be praised forever and ever! Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.

“O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace.

“O LORD our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you! I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously.

“O LORD, the God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes. Give my son Solomon the wholehearted desire to obey all your commands, laws, and decrees, and to do everything necessary to build this Temple, for which I have made these preparations.”

Then David said to the whole assembly, “Give praise to the LORD your God!” And the entire assembly praised the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and they bowed low and knelt before the LORD and the king.

The next day they brought 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams, and 1,000 male lambs as burnt offerings to the LORD. They also brought liquid offerings and many other sacrifices on behalf of all Israel. They feasted and drank in the LORD’s presence with great joy that day.

And again they crowned David’s son Solomon as their new king. They anointed him before the LORD as their leader, and they anointed Zadok as priest. So Solomon took the throne of the LORD in place of his father, David, and he succeeded in everything, and all Israel obeyed him. All the officials, the warriors, and the sons of King David pledged their loyalty to King Solomon. And the LORD exalted Solomon in the sight of all Israel, and he gave Solomon greater royal splendor than any king in Israel before him.

So David son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. He reigned over Israel for forty years, seven of them in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a ripe old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth, and honor. Then his son Solomon ruled in his place.

All the events of King David’s reign, from beginning to end, are written in *The Record of Samuel the Seer*, *The Record of Nathan the Prophet*, and *The Record of Gad the Seer*. These accounts include the mighty deeds of his reign and everything that happened to him and to Israel and to all the surrounding kingdoms.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

So David’s time in the story of God and his people came to an end. He knew that he couldn’t do everything himself; he could only do his part. One temptation we face is to think too much of ourselves, as if everything depends on us. It doesn’t. Our job is to join in with the great work of God and do our part—not everything. The other temptation we face is to think too little of ourselves. While we are not everything, God is

still counting on us to do our part. God is determined to work with us in bringing his rule back to earth. Thank God for inviting you into his story today. Then commit to doing your part with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Join God by doing his work in the world.

## DAY 13

# The Beginning of a Whole New World

(from *Chronicles*, pages 55-56, 58)

*It took Solomon twenty years to build the LORD’s Temple. It was a huge and complicated task. When it was done Solomon held a great ceremony to dedicate it to the worship of God. He asked God to hear the prayers that would be prayed in this Temple and to take up residence there and rule his people.*



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

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

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

Then the priests left the Holy Place. All the priests who were present had purified themselves, whether or not they were on duty that day. And the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and all their sons and brothers—were dressed in fine linen robes and stood at the east side of the altar playing cymbals, lyres, and harps. They were joined by 120 priests who were playing trumpets. The trumpeters and singers performed together in unison to praise and give thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, they raised their voices and praised the LORD with these words:

“He is good!

His faithful love endures forever!”

At that moment a thick cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple of God.

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

Then the king turned around to the entire community of Israel standing before him and gave this blessing: “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who has kept the promise he made to my father, David. For he told my father, ‘From the day I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I have never chosen a city among any of the tribes of Israel as the place where a Temple should be built to honor my name. Nor have I chosen a king to lead my people Israel. But now I have chosen Jerusalem as the place for my name to be honored, and I have chosen David to be king over my people Israel.’”

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

“And now the LORD has fulfilled the promise he made, for I have become king in my father’s place, and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised. I have built this Temple to honor the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. There I have placed the Ark, which contains the covenant that the LORD made with the people of Israel.”

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire community of Israel, and he lifted his hands in prayer. Now Solomon had made a bronze platform 7½ feet long, 7½ feet wide, and 4½ feet high and had placed it at the center of the Temple’s outer courtyard. He stood on the platform, and then he knelt in front of the entire community of Israel and lifted his hands toward heaven. He prayed, . . .

“O my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to all the prayers made to you in this place.

“And now arise, O LORD God, and enter your resting place, along with the Ark, the symbol of your power.

May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation; may your loyal servants rejoice in your goodness.

O LORD God, do not reject the king you have anointed.

Remember your unfailing love for your servant David.”

When Solomon finished praying, fire flashed down from heaven and burned up the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple. The priests could not enter the Temple of the LORD because the glorious presence of the LORD filled it. When all the people of Israel saw the fire coming down and the glorious presence of the LORD filling the Temple, they fell face down on the ground and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying,

“He is good!

His faithful love endures forever!”

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Why was the Temple so important in the life of Israel? We must remember that the Temple was a symbol of the entire universe. It was filled with images of earth, sea, and sky and with carvings of lilies and pomegranates, oxen and angels. The Temple was a sign that God had come down to live right there in the midst of his people. It was a promise that one day he will come down and fill the entire created world, making his home with us right here.

What happened inside the Temple? The worship of God, the Creator. What will one day fill the whole universe? The worship of God, the Creator. Praise and thank God today for his beautiful plan to reclaim and restore the entire creation.

## DAY 14

## The Wisdom and Wealth of King Solomon

(from *Chronicles*, pages 61-62)

*God was blessing Solomon with his protection and his gift of prosperity. The nations around Israel began to hear about Solomon's great success, and they had great respect for him. The queen of Sheba was from a kingdom south of Israel, and she had also heard about how great Solomon had become. So she came to Jerusalem to see for herself. She wanted to test Solomon's wisdom and see what he had accomplished.*



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

She exclaimed to the king, "Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! I didn't believe what was said until I arrived here and saw it with my own eyes. In fact, I had not heard the half of your great wisdom! It is far beyond what I was told. How happy your people must be! What a privilege for your officials to stand here day after day, listening to your wisdom! Praise the LORD your God, who delights in you and has placed you on the throne as king to rule for him. Because God loves Israel and desires this kingdom to last forever, he has made you king over them so you can rule with justice and righteousness."

Then she gave the king a gift of 9,000 pounds of gold, great quantities of spices, and precious jewels. Never before had there been spices as fine as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(In addition, the crews of Hiram and Solomon brought gold from Ophir, and they also brought red sandalwood and precious jewels. The king used the sandalwood to make steps for the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and to construct lyres and harps for the musicians. Never before had such beautiful things been seen in Judah.)

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba whatever she asked for—gifts of greater value than the gifts she had given him. Then she and all her attendants returned to their own land.

Each year Solomon received about 25 tons of gold. This did not include the additional revenue he received from merchants and traders. All the kings of Arabia and the governors of the provinces also brought gold and silver to Solomon.

King Solomon made 200 large shields of hammered gold, each weighing more than 15 pounds. He also made 300 smaller shields of hammered gold, each weighing more than 7½ pounds. The king placed these shields in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

Then the king made a huge throne, decorated with ivory and overlaid with pure gold. The throne had six steps, with a footstool of gold. There were armrests on both sides of the seat, and the figure of a lion stood on each side of the throne. There were also twelve other lions, one standing on each end of the six steps. No other throne in all the world could be compared with it!

All of King Solomon's drinking cups were solid gold, as were all the utensils in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. They were not made of silver, for silver was considered worthless in Solomon's day!

The king had a fleet of trading ships of Tarshish manned by the sailors sent by Hiram. Once every three years the ships returned, loaded with gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth. Kings from every nation came to consult him and to hear the wisdom God had given him. Year after year everyone who visited brought him gifts of silver and gold, clothing, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his horses and chariots, and he had 12,000 horses. He stationed some of them in the chariot cities, and some near him in Jerusalem. He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River in the north to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt in the south. The king made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stone. And valuable cedar timber was as common as the sycamore-fig trees that grow in the foothills of Judah. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and many other countries.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

So King Solomon became renowned for his great understanding and knowledge. He received many gifts from other nations and became very strong and very wealthy. In his grace, the LORD was watching over Solomon. The reign of King Solomon is a clear picture for us of God's intention that our life on earth is meant to be blessed. We were made to flourish, to live well and be at peace with others. We were created to understand how the world works and to be good stewards of it.

This is exactly what our sin and rebellion against God destroys. Our wrongdoing disrupts God's desire to bless us all, to bring us long and good life—in harmony with God himself, with other people, and with the creation around us. Pray today that more and more people will come to know God and follow his good ways for living.

**DAY 15****The Kingdom Splits**

(from *Chronicles*, pages 63-64)

*King Solomon ruled over Israel for a good long time—forty years. After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam followed him as king. Rehoboam had the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather David and his father Solomon. He faced the question that so many people face: What will I do with all that has been given to me, all that I am entrusted with?*



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

Rehoboam replied, “Come back in three days for my answer.” So the people went away.

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

The older counselors replied, “If you are good to these people and do your best to please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your loyal subjects.”

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

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

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam’s decision, just as the king had ordered. But Rehoboam spoke harshly to them, for he rejected the advice of the older counselors and followed the counsel of his younger advisers. He told the people, “My father laid heavy burdens on you, but I’m going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!”

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

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

“Down with the dynasty of David!

We have no interest in the son of Jesse.

Back to your homes, O Israel!

Look out for your own house, O David!”

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

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

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

But the LORD said to Shemaiah, the man of God, “Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the Israelites in Judah and Benjamin: ‘This is what the LORD says: Do not fight against your relatives. Go back

home, for what has happened is my doing!” So they obeyed the message of the LORD and did not fight against Jeroboam.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

It seems to happen in so many cases. Something good, strong, and beautiful is built. But then its future is entrusted to someone new, someone who lacks both the original vision and the original commitment. So good things are lost, what was whole is broken, and what was built is torn down. It is hard for humans to maintain goodness over time. The struggle to follow God well starts over with each new generation. What can we do to renew our allegiance to God in our time? How can we take good care of the worthy things that we have been given?

## DAY 16

### The Good King Asa

(from *Chronicles*, pages 67-69)

*King Rehoboam ruled in Jerusalem for seventeen years. He was an evil king who did not follow the LORD with all his heart, as David had done. Rehoboam’s son Abijah became the next king, but he ruled for just a few years. From this point on we follow the journeys of the descendants of King David who became king after him. The big question behind all of these stories is whether these kings can lead God’s people into faithful worship and allegiance to God. If Abraham’s family is to ever reach their destiny of bringing light and life back to all peoples, they will need someone to lead them well.*



When Abijah died, he was buried in the City of David. Then his son Asa became the next king. There was peace in the land for ten years.

Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the LORD his God. He removed the foreign altars and the pagan shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded the people

of Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his law and his commands. Asa also removed the pagan shrines, as well as the incense altars from every one of Judah’s towns. So Asa’s kingdom enjoyed a period of peace. During those peaceful years, he was able to build up the fortified towns throughout Judah. No one tried to make war against him at this time, for the LORD was giving him rest from his enemies. . . .

Then the Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded, and he went out to meet King Asa as he was returning from the battle. “Listen to me, Asa!” he shouted. “Listen, all you people of Judah and Benjamin! The LORD will stay with you as long as you stay with him! Whenever you seek him, you will find him. But if you abandon him, he will abandon you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach them, and without the Law to instruct them. But whenever they were in trouble and turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him out, they found him.

“During those dark times, it was not safe to travel. Problems troubled the people of every land. Nation fought against nation, and city against city, for God was troubling them with every kind of problem. But as for you, be strong and courageous, for your work will be rewarded.”

When Asa heard this message from Azariah the prophet, he took courage and removed all the detestable idols from the land of Judah and Benjamin and in the towns he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, which stood in front of the entry room of the LORD’s Temple.

Then Asa called together all the people of Judah and Benjamin, along with the people of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who had settled among them. For many from Israel had moved to Judah during Asa’s reign when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. The people gathered at Jerusalem in late spring, during the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign.

On that day they sacrificed to the LORD 700 cattle and 7,000 sheep and goats from the plunder they had taken in the battle. Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul. They agreed that anyone who refused to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, would be put to death—whether young or old, man or woman. They shouted out their oath of loyalty to the LORD with trumpets blaring and rams’ horns sounding. All in Judah were happy about this covenant, for they had entered into it with all their heart. They earnestly sought after God, and they found him. And the LORD gave them rest from their enemies on every side.

King Asa even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother because she had made an obscene Asherah pole. He cut down her obscene pole, broke it up, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. Although the pagan shrines were not removed from Israel, Asa's heart remained completely faithful throughout his life. He brought into the Temple of God the silver and gold and the various items that he and his father had dedicated.

So there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The strength of God's covenant with his people, the family of Abraham, was closely tied to their loyalty to God as their High King. God was using his people as a way to start over with the human race after the great rebellion. God would begin by winning Israel's loyalty, and then he would use them to bring blessing to the whole world. So it was essential for Israel to worship only the one, true God and show complete allegiance to him. When Israel did this, God would bless and protect them. When they broke the covenant by worshiping other gods and powers, they would lose God's favor and preservation. God wants this same loyalty from us today. Are we giving that to him? Do we love and serve him above everything else?

## DAY 17

### Yes, Go Up and Be Victorious—or Not

(from *Chronicles*, pages 70-73)

*King Asa followed the LORD faithfully in his early years as king, though he did falter toward the end of his reign. Late in his life he developed a serious foot disease, yet he still would not turn to God for help. And so he died. Then came his son Jehoshaphat.*



Then Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became the next king. He strengthened Judah to stand against any attack from Israel. He stationed troops in all the fortified towns of Judah, and he assigned additional garrisons to

the land of Judah and to the towns of Ephraim that his father, Asa, had captured.

The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father's early years and did not worship the images of Baal. He sought his father's God and obeyed his commands instead of following the evil practices of the kingdom of Israel. So the LORD established Jehoshaphat's control over the kingdom of Judah. All the people of Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so he became very wealthy and highly esteemed. He was deeply committed to the ways of the LORD. He removed the pagan shrines and Asherah poles from Judah.

In the third year of his reign Jehoshaphat sent his officials to teach in all the towns of Judah. These officials included Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah. He sent Levites along with them, including Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah. He also sent out the priests Elishama and Jehoram. They took copies of the Book of the Law of the LORD and traveled around through all the towns of Judah, teaching the people. . . .

Jehoshaphat enjoyed great riches and high esteem, and he made an alliance with Ahab of Israel by having his son marry Ahab's daughter. A few years later he went to Samaria to visit Ahab, who prepared a great banquet for him and his officials. They butchered great numbers of sheep, goats, and cattle for the feast. Then Ahab enticed Jehoshaphat to join forces with him to recover Ramoth-gilead.

"Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?" King Ahab of Israel asked King Jehoshaphat of Judah.

Jehoshaphat replied, "Why, of course! You and I are as one, and my troops are your troops. We will certainly join you in battle." Then Jehoshaphat added, "But first let's find out what the LORD says."

So the king of Israel summoned the prophets, 400 of them, and asked them, "Should we go to war against Ramoth-gilead, or should I hold back?"

They all replied, "Yes, go right ahead! God will give the king victory."

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not also a prophet of the LORD here? We should ask him the same question."

The king of Israel replied to Jehoshaphat, "There is one more man who could consult the LORD for us, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but trouble for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah."

Jehoshaphat replied, "That's not the way a king should talk! Let's hear what he has to say."

So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, “Quick! Bring Micaiah son of Imlah.”

King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah, dressed in their royal robes, were sitting on thrones at the threshing floor near the gate of Samaria. All of Ahab’s prophets were prophesying there in front of them. One of them, Zedekiah son of Kenaanah, made some iron horns and proclaimed, “This is what the LORD says: With these horns you will gore the Arameans to death!”

All the other prophets agreed. “Yes,” they said, “go up to Ramoth-gilead and be victorious, for the LORD will give the king victory!”

Meanwhile, the messenger who went to get Micaiah said to him, “Look, all the prophets are promising victory for the king. Be sure that you agree with them and promise success.”

But Micaiah replied, “As surely as the LORD lives, I will say only what my God says.”

When Micaiah arrived before the king, Ahab asked him, “Micaiah, should we go to war against Ramoth-gilead, or should I hold back?”

Micaiah replied sarcastically, “Yes, go up and be victorious, for you will have victory over them!”

But the king replied sharply, “How many times must I demand that you speak only the truth to me when you speak for the LORD?”

Then Micaiah told him, “In a vision I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd. And the LORD said, ‘Their master has been killed. Send them home in peace.’”

“Didn’t I tell you?” the king of Israel exclaimed to Jehoshaphat. “He never prophesies anything but trouble for me.”

Then Micaiah continued, “Listen to what the LORD says! I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the armies of heaven around him, on his right and on his left. And the LORD said, ‘Who can entice King Ahab of Israel to go into battle against Ramoth-gilead so he can be killed?’

“There were many suggestions, and finally a spirit approached the LORD and said, ‘I can do it!’

“‘How will you do this?’ the LORD asked.

“And the spirit replied, ‘I will go out and inspire all of Ahab’s prophets to speak lies.’

“‘You will succeed,’ said the LORD. ‘Go ahead and do it.’

“So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of your prophets. For the LORD has pronounced your doom.”

Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah walked up to Micaiah and slapped him across the face. “Since when did the Spirit of the LORD leave me to speak to you?” he demanded.

And Micaiah replied, “You will find out soon enough when you are trying to hide in some secret room!”

“Arrest him!” the king of Israel ordered. “Take him back to Amon, the governor of the city, and to my son Joash. Give them this order from the king: ‘Put this man in prison, and feed him nothing but bread and water until I return safely from the battle!’”

But Micaiah replied, “If you return safely, it will mean that the LORD has not spoken through me!” Then he added to those standing around, “Everyone mark my words!”

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

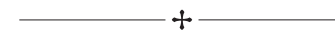
Have you ever been in a situation in which everyone is agreeing to do the wrong thing? It’s very hard to do the right thing when that happens. God’s prophet Micaiah was willing to stand out and speak the truth, even though he had to pay a price. May God always give us the strength to respect him and his ways, even in the face of real pressure from other people.

## DAY 18

### Secretly Saving the King

(from *Chronicles*, pages 78-80)

*The next two kings after Jehoshaphat were Jehoram and Ahaziah, two evil men who turned the people of God away from their covenant with the LORD. It was a horrible time in the kingdom of Judah, with much killing and wrongdoing. The question then became whether a good king could be found, someone who would lead the people back to their God.*



When Athaliah, the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, learned that her son was dead, she began to destroy the rest of Judah’s royal family. But Ahaziah’s sister Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, took Ahaziah’s infant son, Joash, and stole him away from among the rest of the king’s children,



who were about to be killed. She put Joash and his nurse in a bedroom. In this way, Jehosheba, wife of Jehoiada the priest and sister of Ahaziah, hid the child so that Athaliah could not murder him. Joash remained hidden in the Temple of God for six years while Athaliah ruled over the land.

In the seventh year of Athaliah's reign, Jehoiada the priest decided to act. He summoned his courage and made a pact with five army commanders: Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zicri. These men traveled secretly throughout Judah and summoned the Levites and clan leaders in all the towns to come to Jerusalem. They all gathered at the Temple of God, where they made a solemn pact with Joash, the young king.

Jehoiada said to them, "Here is the king's son! The time has come for him to reign! The LORD has promised that a descendant of David will be our king. This is what you must do. When you priests and Levites come on duty on the Sabbath, a third of you will serve as gatekeepers. Another third will go over to the royal palace, and the final third will be at the Foundation Gate. Everyone else should stay in the courtyards of the LORD's Temple. Remember, only the priests and Levites on duty may enter the Temple of the LORD, for they are set apart as holy. The rest of the people must obey the LORD's instructions and stay outside. You Levites, form a bodyguard around the king and keep your weapons in hand. Kill anyone who tries to enter the Temple. Stay with the king wherever he goes."

So the Levites and all the people of Judah did everything as Jehoiada the priest ordered. The commanders took charge of the men reporting for duty that Sabbath, as well as those who were going off duty. Jehoiada the priest did not let anyone go home after their shift ended. Then Jehoiada supplied the commanders with the spears and the large and small shields that had once belonged to King David and were stored in the Temple of God. He stationed all the people around the king, with their weapons ready. They formed a line from the south side of the Temple around to the north side and all around the altar.

Then Jehoiada and his sons brought out Joash, the king's son, placed the crown on his head, and presented him with a copy of God's laws. They anointed him and proclaimed him king, and everyone shouted, "Long live the king!"

When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and the shouts of praise to the king, she hurried to the LORD's Temple to see what was happening. When she arrived, she saw the newly crowned king standing in his place of authority by the pillar at the Temple entrance. The commanders and trumpeters were surrounding him, and people from all over the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Singers with musical instruments

were leading the people in a great celebration. When Athaliah saw all this, she tore her clothes in despair and shouted, "Treason! Treason!"

Then Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders who were in charge of the troops, "Take her to the soldiers in front of the Temple, and kill anyone who tries to rescue her." For the priest had said, "She must not be killed in the Temple of the LORD." So they seized her and led her out to the entrance of the Horse Gate on the palace grounds, and they killed her there.

Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and the king and the people that they would be the LORD's people. And all the people went over to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They demolished the altars and smashed the idols, and they killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.

Jehoiada now put the priests and Levites in charge of the Temple of the LORD, following all the directions given by David. He also commanded them to present burnt offerings to the LORD, as prescribed by the Law of Moses, and to sing and rejoice as David had instructed. He also stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the LORD's Temple to keep out those who for any reason were ceremonially unclean.

Then the commanders, nobles, rulers, and all the people of the land escorted the king from the Temple of the LORD. They went through the upper gate and into the palace, and they seated the king on the royal throne. So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was peaceful because Athaliah had been killed.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

There are times in our lives when things go terribly wrong, and sometimes we are called on to take strong action, to do something bold. Jehoiada, one of God's faithful priests, took that bold action. At the risk of his own life he hid the infant Joash so that Joash wouldn't be killed. Then, when the time was right, Jehoiada rallied support and brought out the new king. It was time for the people of Judah to return to their roots, to recommit to their covenant with God. It has been said that the way to get through a crisis is to be prepared ahead of time. We must firmly decide before we are tested what we will do when the testing comes. Do you feel confident in your commitment to God right now? Will you have the strength to do the right thing, even when it's risky?

## DAY 19

## A Good Beginning, a Bad Ending

(from *Chronicles*, pages 80-81)

*The priest Jehoiada invested in the young King Joash, and it paid off. As long as Jehoiada was there to guide Joash and provide good counsel, then Joash did well as king. It looked like the true worship of God would continue in Judah.*



Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother was Zibiah from Beersheba. Joash did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight throughout the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest. Jehoiada chose two wives for Joash, and he had sons and daughters.

At one point Joash decided to repair and restore the Temple of the LORD. He summoned the priests and Levites and gave them these instructions: "Go to all the towns of Judah and collect the required annual offerings, so that we can repair the Temple of your God. Do not delay!" But the Levites did not act immediately.

So the king called for Jehoiada the high priest and asked him, "Why haven't you demanded that the Levites go out and collect the Temple taxes from the towns of Judah and from Jerusalem? Moses, the servant of the LORD, levied this tax on the community of Israel in order to maintain the Tabernacle of the Covenant."

Over the years the followers of wicked Athaliah had broken into the Temple of God, and they had used all the dedicated things from the Temple of the LORD to worship the images of Baal.

So now the king ordered a chest to be made and set outside the gate leading to the Temple of the LORD. Then a proclamation was sent throughout Judah and Jerusalem, telling the people to bring to the LORD the tax that Moses, the servant of God, had required of the Israelites in the wilderness. This pleased all the leaders and the people, and they gladly brought their money and filled the chest with it.

Whenever the chest became full, the Levites would carry it to the king's officials. Then the court secretary and an officer of the high priest would

come and empty the chest and take it back to the Temple again. This went on day after day, and a large amount of money was collected. The king and Jehoiada gave the money to the construction supervisors, who hired masons and carpenters to restore the Temple of the LORD. They also hired metalworkers, who made articles of iron and bronze for the LORD's Temple.

The men in charge of the renovation worked hard and made steady progress. They restored the Temple of God according to its original design and strengthened it. When all the repairs were finished, they brought the remaining money to the king and Jehoiada. It was used to make various articles for the Temple of the LORD—articles for worship services and for burnt offerings, including ladles and other articles made of gold and silver. And the burnt offerings were sacrificed continually in the Temple of the LORD during the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest.

Jehoiada lived to a very old age, finally dying at 130. He was buried among the kings in the City of David, because he had done so much good in Israel for God and his Temple.

But after Jehoiada's death, the leaders of Judah came and bowed before King Joash and persuaded him to listen to their advice. They decided to abandon the Temple of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and they worshiped Asherah poles and idols instead! Because of this sin, divine anger fell on Judah and Jerusalem. Yet the LORD sent prophets to bring them back to him. The prophets warned them, but still the people would not listen.

Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: Why do you disobey the LORD's commands and keep yourselves from prospering? You have abandoned the LORD, and now he has abandoned you!"

Then the leaders plotted to kill Zechariah, and King Joash ordered that they stone him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's Temple. That was how King Joash repaid Jehoiada for his loyalty—by killing his son. Zechariah's last words as he died were, "May the LORD see what they are doing and avenge my death!"

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

The horrible reversal that we see in the life of King Joash teaches us two key things. First, the role of those around us can be crucial to the direction of our lives. The things we hear from others can influence us

strongly, for either good or ill. But second, it is important that we not try to survive on the faith of other people. Good friends and mentors and parents can help us, but we must make our own clear commitment to the LORD and then follow the path he has for us.

## DAY 20

# A Sad and Stubborn King

(from *Chronicles*, pages 86-87)

*And so the kings of Judah came and went. Some were faithful to God and tried to lead the people to worship and obey him. But others turned their backs on God completely and led the nation into greater sin and the worship of false gods. The history of God's people is a history of the struggle for their souls.*



Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. He did not do what was pleasing in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestor David had done. Instead, he followed the example of the kings of Israel. He cast metal images for the worship of Baal. He offered sacrifices in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. In this way, he followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan shrines and on the hills and under every green tree.

Because of all this, the LORD his God allowed the king of Aram to defeat Ahaz and to exile large numbers of his people to Damascus. The armies of the king of Israel also defeated Ahaz and inflicted many casualties on his army. In a single day Pekah son of Remaliah, Israel's king, killed 120,000 of Judah's troops, all of them experienced warriors, because they had abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors. Then Zicri, a warrior from Ephraim, killed Maaseiah, the king's son; Azrikam, the king's palace commander; and Elkanah, the king's second-in-command. The armies of Israel captured 200,000 women and children from Judah and seized tremendous amounts of plunder, which they took back to Samaria.

But a prophet of the LORD named Oded was there in Samaria when

the army of Israel returned home. He went out to meet them and said, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah and let you defeat them. But you have gone too far, killing them without mercy, and all heaven is disturbed. And now you are planning to make slaves of these people from Judah and Jerusalem. What about your own sins against the LORD your God? Listen to me and return these prisoners you have taken, for they are your own relatives. Watch out, because now the LORD's fierce anger has been turned against you!"

Then some of the leaders of Israel—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berekiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—agreed with this and confronted the men returning from battle. "You must not bring the prisoners here!" they declared. "We cannot afford to add to our sins and guilt. Our guilt is already great, and the LORD's fierce anger is already turned against Israel."

So the warriors released the prisoners and handed over the plunder in the sight of the leaders and all the people. Then the four men just mentioned by name came forward and distributed clothes from the plunder to the prisoners who were naked. They provided clothing and sandals to wear, gave them enough food and drink, and dressed their wounds with olive oil. They put those who were weak on donkeys and took all the prisoners back to their own people in Jericho, the city of palms. Then they returned to Samaria.

At that time King Ahaz of Judah asked the king of Assyria for help. The armies of Edom had again invaded Judah and taken captives. And the Philistines had raided towns located in the foothills of Judah and in the Negev of Judah. They had already captured and occupied Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages. The LORD was humbling Judah because of King Ahaz of Judah, for he had encouraged his people to sin and had been utterly unfaithful to the LORD.

So when King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria arrived, he attacked Ahaz instead of helping him. Ahaz took valuable items from the LORD's Temple, the royal palace, and from the homes of his officials and gave them to the king of Assyria as tribute. But this did not help him.

Even during this time of trouble, King Ahaz continued to reject the LORD. He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus who had defeated him, for he said, "Since these gods helped the kings of Aram, they will help me, too, if I sacrifice to them." But instead, they led to his ruin and the ruin of all Judah.

The king took the various articles from the Temple of God and broke them into pieces. He shut the doors of the LORD's Temple so that no one

could worship there, and he set up altars to pagan gods in every corner of Jerusalem. He made pagan shrines in all the towns of Judah for offering sacrifices to other gods. In this way, he aroused the anger of the LORD, the God of his ancestors.

The rest of the events of Ahaz's reign and everything he did, from beginning to end, are recorded in *The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel*. When Ahaz died, he was buried in Jerusalem but not in the royal cemetery of the kings of Judah. Then his son Hezekiah became the next king.

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

It should be clear to us by now that the rulers of God's people were in an ongoing struggle to faithfully follow him. God had special plans for the descendants of Abraham. They were supposed to play a critical role in God's bigger story. But how can they be a light to the world when they themselves are so attracted to the darkness?

## DAY 21

### Remember Passover?

(from *Chronicles*, pages 90-91)

*The royally wicked King Ahaz was replaced by his son Hezekiah. Hezekiah was twenty-five when he became king, and he immediately told the Levites to repair and restore the LORD's Temple. "In the very first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah reopened the doors of the Temple of the LORD and repaired them. He summoned the priests and Levites to meet him at the courtyard east of the Temple. He said to them, 'Listen to me, you Levites! Purify yourselves, and purify the Temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove all the defiled things from the sanctuary. Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God.'"*



King Hezekiah now sent word to all Israel and Judah, and he wrote letters of invitation to the people of Ephraim and Manasseh. He asked everyone

to come to the Temple of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the LORD, the God of Israel. The king, his officials, and all the community of Jerusalem decided to celebrate Passover a month later than usual. They were unable to celebrate it at the prescribed time because not enough priests could be purified by then, and the people had not yet assembled at Jerusalem.

This plan for keeping the Passover seemed right to the king and all the people. So they sent a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north, inviting everyone to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the LORD, the God of Israel. The people had not been celebrating it in great numbers as required in the Law.

At the king's command, runners were sent throughout Israel and Judah. They carried letters that said:

"O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he will return to the few of us who have survived the conquest of the Assyrian kings. Do not be like your ancestors and relatives who abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and became an object of derision, as you yourselves can see. Do not be stubborn, as they were, but submit yourselves to the LORD. Come to his Temple, which he has set apart as holy forever. Worship the LORD your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.

"For if you return to the LORD, your relatives and your children will be treated mercifully by their captors, and they will be able to return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful. If you return to him, he will not continue to turn his face from you."

The runners went from town to town throughout Ephraim and Manasseh and as far as the territory of Zebulun. But most of the people just laughed at the runners and made fun of them. However, some people from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem.

At the same time, God's hand was on the people in the land of Judah, giving them all one heart to obey the orders of the king and his officials, who were following the word of the LORD. So a huge crowd assembled at Jerusalem in midspring to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They set to work and removed the pagan altars from Jerusalem. They took away all the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

On the fourteenth day of the second month, one month later than usual, the people slaughtered the Passover lamb. This shamed the priests and Levites, so they purified themselves and brought burnt offerings to the Temple of the LORD. Then they took their places at the Temple as

prescribed in the Law of Moses, the man of God. The Levites brought the sacrificial blood to the priests, who then sprinkled it on the altar.

Since many of the people had not purified themselves, the Levites had to slaughter their Passover lamb for them, to set them apart for the LORD. Most of those who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun had not purified themselves. But King Hezekiah prayed for them, and they were allowed to eat the Passover meal anyway, even though this was contrary to the requirements of the Law. For Hezekiah said, “May the LORD, who is good, pardon those who decide to follow the LORD, the God of their ancestors, even though they are not properly cleansed for the ceremony.” And the LORD listened to Hezekiah’s prayer and healed the people.

So the people of Israel who were present in Jerusalem joyously celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. Each day the Levites and priests sang to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. Hezekiah encouraged all the Levites regarding the skill they displayed as they served the LORD. The celebration continued for seven days. Peace offerings were sacrificed, and the people gave thanks to the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

The entire assembly then decided to continue the festival another seven days, so they celebrated joyfully for another week. King Hezekiah gave the people 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep and goats for offerings, and the officials donated 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep and goats. Meanwhile, many more priests purified themselves.

The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced, including the priests, the Levites, all who came from the land of Israel, the foreigners who came to the festival, and all those who lived in Judah. There was great joy in the city, for Jerusalem had not seen a celebration like this one since the days of Solomon, King David’s son. Then the priests and Levites stood and blessed the people, and God heard their prayer from his holy dwelling in heaven.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

God’s people had completely forgotten how to celebrate their freedom festival. It had been generations since they had observed Passover, and even the worship leaders weren’t quite sure what to do. But King Hezekiah knew what this festival meant. It celebrated the great Exodus, when God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. Passover was supposed to be observed every year. Hezekiah brought it back so the people would remember who they really were—God’s people on mission in the world.

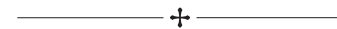
Remembering God’s saving acts in the past is a key reminder that this same God will come down and save us again. This is important for us, too. Do we have any big celebrations of what God has done for us? What could our celebrations look like?

## DAY 22

### The Child King Josiah

(from *Chronicles*, pages 97-99)

*As it so often happened in the history of God’s people, a good king was followed by an evil king. Hezekiah’s son Manasseh turned away from God, following witchcraft and even putting up altars for false gods in God’s own Temple. Then late in his life, he repented and returned to the LORD. After that, Manasseh’s son Amon became king, and he was as evil as his father before him. But unlike his father, Amon did not repent, and eventually his own royal officials conspired against and killed him. Amon, however, had a young son who was very different from his father.*



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

During the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David. Then in the twelfth year he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem, destroying all the pagan shrines, the Asherah poles, and the carved idols and cast images. He ordered that the altars of Baal be demolished and that the incense altars which stood above them be broken down. He also made sure that the Asherah poles, the carved idols, and the cast images were smashed and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the pagan priests on their own altars, and so he purified Judah and Jerusalem.

He did the same thing in the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, and in the regions all around them. He destroyed the pagan altars and the Asherah poles, and he crushed the idols into dust.

He cut down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. Finally, he returned to Jerusalem.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, after he had purified the land and the Temple, Josiah appointed Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of Jerusalem, and Joah son of Joahaz, the royal historian, to repair the Temple of the LORD his God. They gave Hilkiah the high priest the money that had been collected by the Levites who served as gatekeepers at the Temple of God. The gifts were brought by people from Manasseh, Ephraim, and from all the remnant of Israel, as well as from all Judah, Benjamin, and the people of Jerusalem.

He entrusted the money to the men assigned to supervise the restoration of the LORD's Temple. Then they paid the workers who did the repairs and renovation of the Temple. They hired carpenters and builders, who purchased finished stone for the walls and timber for the rafters and beams. They restored what earlier kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

The workers served faithfully under the leadership of Jahath and Obadiah, Levites of the Merarite clan, and Zechariah and Meshullam, Levites of the Kohathite clan. Other Levites, all of whom were skilled musicians, were put in charge of the laborers of the various trades. Still others assisted as secretaries, officials, and gatekeepers.

While they were bringing out the money collected at the LORD's Temple, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that was written by Moses. Hilkiah said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!" Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan.

Shaphan took the scroll to the king and reported, "Your officials are doing everything they were assigned to do. The money that was collected at the Temple of the LORD has been turned over to the supervisors and workmen." Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king.

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

So Hilkiah and the other men went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem

to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe.

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

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

So they took her message back to the king.

Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the Temple of the LORD with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and the Levites—all the people from the greatest to the least. There the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the LORD's Temple. The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the LORD's presence. He pledged to obey the LORD by keeping all his commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. He promised to obey all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll. And he required everyone in Jerusalem and the people of Benjamin to make a similar pledge. The people of Jerusalem did so, renewing their covenant with God, the God of their ancestors.

So Josiah removed all detestable idols from the entire land of Israel and required everyone to worship the LORD their God. And throughout the rest of his lifetime, they did not turn away from the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Don't ever underestimate what a young person can do! King Josiah's heart was with the LORD from the very beginning of his life. Within the kingdom of Judah he removed everything related to the worship of the false gods and ordered the repair of the Temple. Then, when the law

of God was rediscovered, the young king did all he could to bring his people back into relationship with the LORD. Josiah renewed the covenant the people had with God. When all this happened Josiah was still a teenager. What good thing could God do through you?

## DAY 23

### Is It All Over?

(from *Chronicles*, pages 102-103)

*The kings of Judah came and went. Some tried to reform the nation, but they could not stem the tide of evil that continually rolled over the people. From the kings to the priests and leaders to the people themselves, sin had taken hold of the nation. God's people were acting no different from the nations around them. How could such a people be a light for God's ways? How could they bring God's blessing to other peoples? In fact, they couldn't. So after giving them many chances and sending many prophets to warn them, God finally acted.*



Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. But Zedekiah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and he refused to humble himself when the prophet Jeremiah spoke to him directly from the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had taken an oath of loyalty in God's name. Zedekiah was a hard and stubborn man, refusing to turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.

Likewise, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful. They followed all the pagan practices of the surrounding nations, desecrating the Temple of the LORD that had been consecrated in Jerusalem.

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them. The Babylonians

killed Judah's young men, even chasing after them into the Temple. They had no pity on the people, killing both young men and young women, the old and the infirm. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. The king took home to Babylon all the articles, large and small, used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the LORD's Temple and from the palace of the king and his officials. Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value. The few who survived were taken as exiles to Babylon, and they became servants to the king and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said.

IN THE FIRST YEAR of King Cyrus of Persia, the LORD fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

“This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

Then God stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of the LORD. And all their neighbors assisted by giving them articles of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many valuable gifts in addition to all the voluntary offerings.

King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods. Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

The walls of the City of David—Jerusalem—were torn down. The Temple of the Creator God was burned to the ground. God’s own special people, the family of Abraham, were either killed or led away into exile. The nation had shown no allegiance to God, so God finally abandoned them to their punishment. But then something remarkable happened, something new. God gave his people a fresh start, a chance to start over. The story of Abraham’s family, of God’s work in the world, is not finished. What does it mean to you that God is a God of forgiveness and fresh starts?

**DAY 24****Those Who Oppose Us**

(from *Chronicles*, pages 107-108)

*It was a time of new beginnings. God’s people were rebuilding not only their Temple but also their story and their calling. They had betrayed God, but he brought them back to their land to start afresh. They were now a small and humble people, but God still had plans for them—and for the world.*



The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were rebuilding a Temple to the LORD, the God of Israel. So they approached Zerubbabel and the other leaders and said, “Let us build with you, for we worship your God just as you do. We have sacrificed to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here.”

But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel replied, “You may have no part in this work. We alone will build the Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us.”

Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.

Years later when Xerxes began his reign, the enemies of Judah wrote a letter of accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Even later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, the enemies of

Judah, led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and it was translated for the king.

Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem. They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam). They also sent greetings from the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal had deported and relocated in Samaria and throughout the neighboring lands of the province west of the Euphrates River. This is a copy of their letter:

“To King Artaxerxes, from your loyal subjects in the province west of the Euphrates River.

“The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls. And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.

“Since we are your loyal subjects and do not want to see the king dishonored in this way, we have sent the king this information. We suggest that a search be made in your ancestors’ records, where you will discover what a rebellious city this has been in the past. In fact, it was destroyed because of its long and troublesome history of revolt against the kings and countries who controlled it. We declare to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the province west of the Euphrates River will be lost to you.”

Then King Artaxerxes sent this reply:

“To Rehum the governor, Shimshai the court secretary, and their colleagues living in Samaria and throughout the province west of the Euphrates River. Greetings.

“The letter you sent has been translated and read to me. I ordered a search of the records and have found that Jerusalem has indeed been a hotbed of insurrection against many kings. In fact, rebellion and revolt are normal there! Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the entire province west of the Euphrates River, receiving tribute, customs, and tolls. Therefore, issue orders to have these men stop their work. That city must not be rebuilt except at my express command. Be diligent, and don’t neglect this matter, for we must not permit the situation to harm the king’s interests.”



When this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem. Then, with a show of strength, they forced the Jews to stop building.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Was it jealousy or just long-standing hatred of people who were different from them? Whatever the reason, the enemies of God’s people were determined to stop the work on the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Make no mistake. There are real enemies of God’s work in the world—people who will do almost anything to stop it. Sometimes they will have an impact on our efforts to bring God’s Kingdom to earth. This calls for wisdom on our part—and patience and persistence. We do not hate in return, but neither do we stop working.

## DAY 25

# What Hope Looks Like

(from *Chronicles*, pages 111-113)

*When you’ve lost everything, every sign of hope is important. God’s people Israel had indeed lost everything—their homeland, their freedom, their king and all their leaders, and even their place to worship God. It was all gone. But suddenly, they were called to go back home and pick up the pieces. How did this happen? Because God had softened the heart of King Artaxerxes of Persia. But the situation also called for a new leader to step up and guide the people back to their true purpose.*



Many years later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, there was a man named Ezra. He was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest. This Ezra was a scribe who was well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given to the people of Israel. He came up to Jerusalem from Babylon, and the king gave him everything he asked for,

because the gracious hand of the LORD his God was on him. Some of the people of Israel, as well as some of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, traveled up to Jerusalem with him in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes’ reign.

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in August of that year. He had arranged to leave Babylon on April 8, the first day of the new year, and he arrived at Jerusalem on August 4, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.

King Artaxerxes had given a copy of the following letter to Ezra, the priest and scribe who studied and taught the commands and decrees of the LORD to Israel:

“From Artaxerxes, the king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the teacher of the law of the God of heaven. Greetings.

“I decree that any of the people of Israel in my kingdom, including the priests and Levites, may volunteer to return to Jerusalem with you. I and my council of seven hereby instruct you to conduct an inquiry into the situation in Judah and Jerusalem, based on your God’s law, which is in your hand. We also commission you to take with you silver and gold, which we are freely presenting as an offering to the God of Israel who lives in Jerusalem.

“Furthermore, you are to take any silver and gold that you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the voluntary offerings of the people and the priests that are presented for the Temple of their God in Jerusalem. These donations are to be used specifically for the purchase of bulls, rams, male lambs, and the appropriate grain offerings and liquid offerings, all of which will be offered on the altar of the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. Any silver and gold that is left over may be used in whatever way you and your colleagues feel is the will of your God.

“But as for the cups we are entrusting to you for the service of the Temple of your God, deliver them all to the God of Jerusalem. If you need anything else for your God’s Temple or for any similar needs, you may take it from the royal treasury.

“I, Artaxerxes the king, hereby send this decree to all the treasurers in the province west of the Euphrates River: ‘You are to give Ezra, the priest and teacher of the law of the God of heaven, whatever he requests of you. You are to give him up to 7,500 pounds of silver, 500 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, 550 gallons of olive oil, and an unlimited supply of salt. Be careful to provide whatever the God of heaven demands for his Temple, for why should we risk bringing God’s anger against the realm of the king and his sons? I also decree that no priest, Levite, singer,

gatekeeper, Temple servant, or other worker in this Temple of God will be required to pay tribute, customs, or tolls of any kind.

“And you, Ezra, are to use the wisdom your God has given you to appoint magistrates and judges who know your God’s laws to govern all the people in the province west of the Euphrates River. Teach the law to anyone who does not know it. Anyone who refuses to obey the law of your God and the law of the king will be punished immediately, either by death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.”

Praise the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who made the king want to beautify the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem! And praise him for demonstrating such unfailing love to me by honoring me before the king, his council, and all his mighty nobles! I felt encouraged because the gracious hand of the LORD my God was on me. And I gathered some of the leaders of Israel to return with me to Jerusalem.

—*from the book of Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

God called Ezra forward to play a special leadership role at a unique time in Israel’s story. This re-founding of the nation needed someone with the credentials and the commitment to help the people believe this could actually happen. Ezra could show he was a descendant of Aaron, the father of all Israel’s priests. He also had a commission from the king of Persia and was given the resources that were required. But mostly, Ezra had a clear sense of being called and empowered by God to do the work in this moment. Only a few are intended to be this kind of leader. For the rest of us, the question is: Will we faithfully and humbly serve those whom God has called?

## DAY 26

# A Prayer to Make Things Right

(from *Chronicles*, pages 115-116)

*Ezra the priest and the rest of the remnant of Israel arrived in Jerusalem after their long journey from Babylon after the Exile. Everything was*

*now ready for them to begin the work of rebuilding the ruins of the Temple and the city. But something wasn’t right.*



When these things had been done, the Jewish leaders came to me and said, “Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons. So the holy race has become polluted by these mixed marriages. Worse yet, the leaders and officials have led the way in this outrage.”

When I heard this, I tore my cloak and my shirt, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down utterly shocked. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel came and sat with me because of this outrage committed by the returned exiles. And I sat there utterly appalled until the time of the evening sacrifice.

At the time of the sacrifice, I stood up from where I had sat in mourning with my clothes torn. I fell to my knees and lifted my hands to the LORD my God. I prayed,

“O my God, I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you.

For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our ancestors until now, we have been steeped in sin. That is why we and our kings and our priests have been at the mercy of the pagan kings of the land. We have been killed, captured, robbed, and disgraced, just as we are today.

“But now we have been given a brief moment of grace, for the LORD our God has allowed a few of us to survive as a remnant. He has given us security in this holy place. Our God has brightened our eyes and granted us some relief from our slavery. For we were slaves, but in his unfailing love our God did not abandon us in our slavery. Instead, he caused the kings of Persia to treat us favorably. He revived us so we could rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruins. He has given us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

“And now, O our God, what can we say after all of this? For once again we have abandoned your commands! Your servants the prophets warned us when they said, “The land you are entering to possess is totally defiled by the detestable practices of the people living there. From one end to the other, the land is filled with corruption. Don’t

let your daughters marry their sons! Don't take their daughters as wives for your sons. Don't ever promote the peace and prosperity of those nations. If you follow these instructions, you will be strong and will enjoy the good things the land produces, and you will leave this prosperity to your children forever.'

"Now we are being punished because of our wickedness and our great guilt. But we have actually been punished far less than we deserve, for you, our God, have allowed some of us to survive as a remnant. But even so, we are again breaking your commands and intermarrying with people who do these detestable things. Won't your anger be enough to destroy us, so that even this little remnant no longer survives? O LORD, God of Israel, you are just. We come before you in our guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in your presence."

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The first psalm in Israel's songbook told them: "Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers." It was the influence of Israel's neighboring nations that helped bring them down. By intermarrying with them, Israel welcomed their false religious practices into their homes and hearts. This defeated the whole purpose of God calling Israel to be a unique nation devoted only to him. The requirement for that is pure hearts and clear commitments. In what ways today are we tempted to compromise our loyalty to God?

## DAY 27

### Rebuilding Justice

(from *Chronicles*, pages 120, 124)

*Nehemiah was a high official for King Artaxerxes in Persia. But he belonged to the people of Israel, and he was concerned for the city of Jerusalem and the Jews who had returned there. So he asked Artaxerxes for permission to go to Jerusalem and help with the project there. He knew that there was opposition from some of the neighboring people*

*and that those working on rebuilding the city and the Temple needed support, leadership, and encouragement.*



So I arrived in Jerusalem. Three days later, I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us except the donkey I was riding. After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. So, though it was still dark, I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. But now I said to them, "You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!" Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king.

They replied at once, "Yes, let's rebuild the wall!" So they began the good work.

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. "What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" they asked.

I replied, "The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem." . . .

About this time some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest against their fellow Jews. They were saying, "We have such large families. We need more food to survive."

Others said, "We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards, and homes to get food during the famine."

And others said, "We have had to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay our taxes. We belong to the same family as those who are wealthy, and our children are just like theirs. Yet we must sell our children into slavery just to get enough money to live. We have already sold some of our daughters, and we are helpless to do anything about it, for our fields and vineyards are already mortgaged to others."

When I heard their complaints, I was very angry. After thinking it over, I spoke out against these nobles and officials. I told them, “You are hurting your own relatives by charging interest when they borrow money!” Then I called a public meeting to deal with the problem.

At the meeting I said to them, “We are doing all we can to redeem our Jewish relatives who have had to sell themselves to pagan foreigners, but you are selling them back into slavery again. How often must we redeem them?” And they had nothing to say in their defense.

Then I pressed further, “What you are doing is not right! Should you not walk in the fear of our God in order to avoid being mocked by enemy nations? I myself, as well as my brothers and my workers, have been lending the people money and grain, but now let us stop this business of charging interest. You must restore their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes to them this very day. And repay the interest you charged when you lent them money, grain, new wine, and olive oil.”

They replied, “We will give back everything and demand nothing more from the people. We will do as you say.” Then I called the priests and made the nobles and officials swear to do what they had promised.

I shook out the folds of my robe and said, “If you fail to keep your promise, may God shake you like this from your homes and from your property!”

The whole assembly responded, “Amen,” and they praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

For the entire twelve years that I was governor of Judah—from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of the reign of King Artaxerxes—neither I nor my officials drew on our official food allowance. The former governors, in contrast, had laid heavy burdens on the people, demanding a daily ration of food and wine, besides forty pieces of silver. Even their assistants took advantage of the people. But because I feared God, I did not act that way.

—*from the book of Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The project in Jerusalem was critical for the reestablishment of God’s people in their homeland. But Nehemiah knew that if there was injustice among Abraham’s family, it would threaten everything they were working for. The whole point of God choosing Israel and bringing them to their own land was so they could show the world what God’s intentions for the world were. An essential part of that is taking care of other people, especially the poor. God’s heart for our world is the same today, and our work for God’s Kingdom is also hurt if we don’t follow

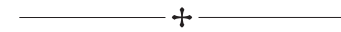
God in this. What practical things can we do for poor people? How can we help those who struggle to pay for their basic needs?

## DAY 28

### To Read, to Know, and to Understand

(from *Chronicles*, pages 129-130)

*Ezra and Nehemiah had been leading the people well. It was hard work to rebuild Jerusalem, and these men of God had guided and inspired everyone to work together on this great goal. But something had happened while the people were in exile in Babylon. They had lost touch with God’s earlier words to them and had forgotten God’s instructions. If Abraham’s family was going to get a fresh start in the world, they would have to recover the story and the teaching that made them who they were.*



In October, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey.

So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. To his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. To his left stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet.

Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—then

instructed the people in the Law while everyone remained in their places. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, “Don’t mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the LORD your God.” For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

And Nehemiah continued, “Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!”

And the Levites, too, quieted the people, telling them, “Hush! Don’t weep! For this is a sacred day.” So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words and understood them.

On October 9 the family leaders of all the people, together with the priests and Levites, met with Ezra the scribe to go over the Law in greater detail. As they studied the Law, they discovered that the LORD had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should live in shelters during the festival to be held that month. He had said that a proclamation should be made throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, telling the people to go to the hills to get branches from olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees. They were to use these branches to make shelters in which they would live during the festival, as prescribed in the Law.

So the people went out and cut branches and used them to build shelters on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of God’s Temple, or in the squares just inside the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. So everyone who had returned from captivity lived in these shelters during the festival, and they were all filled with great joy! The Israelites had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua son of Nun.

Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God on each of the seven days of the festival. Then on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, as was required by law.

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

We, too, can lose track of who we are and what our story is if we aren’t immersed in God’s word. The Bible’s story has been guiding God’s people for a long, long time. The beginning of God’s work to

save and restore his creation goes way back to the ancient world. So we also need people to come alongside us and help us understand what it means and how we can live that story today. You are doing that right now by reading and talking about the Bible with others! Keep it up!

## DAY 29

### An Honest Prayer

(from *Chronicles*, pages 130-133)

*The great work of rebuilding was being completed. The Book of the Law of God had been read to all the people. Israel’s new start was going well. But there was something that still needed to happen, something that had to be made right.*



On October 31 the people assembled again, and this time they fasted and dressed in burlap and sprinkled dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners as they confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors. They remained standing in place for three hours while the Book of the Law of the LORD their God was read aloud to them. Then for three more hours they confessed their sins and worshiped the LORD their God. The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani—stood on the stairway of the Levites and cried out to the LORD their God with loud voices.

Then the leaders of the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—called out to the people: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, for he lives from everlasting to everlasting!” Then they prayed:

“May your glorious name be praised! May it be exalted above all blessing and praise!

“You alone are the LORD. You made the skies and the heavens and all the stars. You made the earth and the seas and everything in them. You preserve them all, and the angels of heaven worship you.

“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him from

Ur of the Chaldeans and renamed him Abraham. When he had proved himself faithful, you made a covenant with him to give him and his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites. And you have done what you promised, for you are always true to your word.

“You saw the misery of our ancestors in Egypt, and you heard their cries from beside the Red Sea. You displayed miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his officials, and all his people, for you knew how arrogantly they were treating our ancestors. You have a glorious reputation that has never been forgotten. You divided the sea for your people so they could walk through on dry land! And then you hurled their enemies into the depths of the sea. They sank like stones beneath the mighty waters. You led our ancestors by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night so that they could find their way.

“You came down at Mount Sinai and spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and instructions that were just, and decrees and commands that were good. You instructed them concerning your holy Sabbath. And you commanded them, through Moses your servant, to obey all your commands, decrees, and instructions.

“You gave them bread from heaven when they were hungry and water from the rock when they were thirsty. You commanded them to go and take possession of the land you had sworn to give them.

“But our ancestors were proud and stubborn, and they paid no attention to your commands. They refused to obey and did not remember the miracles you had done for them. Instead, they became stubborn and appointed a leader to take them back to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and rich in unfailing love. You did not abandon them, even when they made an idol shaped like a calf and said, ‘This is your god who brought you out of Egypt!’ They committed terrible blasphemies.

“But in your great mercy you did not abandon them to die in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud still led them forward by day, and the pillar of fire showed them the way through the night. You sent your good Spirit to instruct them, and you did not stop giving them manna from heaven or water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell!

“Then you helped our ancestors conquer kingdoms and nations, and you placed your people in every corner of the land. They took over the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og

of Bashan. You made their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and brought them into the land you had promised to their ancestors.

“They went in and took possession of the land. You subdued whole nations before them. Even the Canaanites, who inhabited the land, were powerless! Your people could deal with these nations and their kings as they pleased. Our ancestors captured fortified cities and fertile land. They took over houses full of good things, with cisterns already dug and vineyards and olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate until they were full and grew fat and enjoyed themselves in all your blessings.

“But despite all this, they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They turned their backs on your Law, they killed your prophets who warned them to return to you, and they committed terrible blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies, who made them suffer. But in their time of trouble they cried to you, and you heard them from heaven. In your great mercy, you sent them liberators who rescued them from their enemies.

“But as soon as they were at peace, your people again committed evil in your sight, and once more you let their enemies conquer them. Yet whenever your people turned and cried to you again for help, you listened once more from heaven. In your wonderful mercy, you rescued them many times!

“You warned them to return to your Law, but they became proud and obstinate and disobeyed your commands. They did not follow your regulations, by which people will find life if only they obey. They stubbornly turned their backs on you and refused to listen. In your love, you were patient with them for many years. You sent your Spirit, who warned them through the prophets. But still they wouldn’t listen! So once again you allowed the peoples of the land to conquer them. But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!

“And now, our God, the great and mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of unfailing love, do not let all the hardships we have suffered seem insignificant to you. Great trouble has come upon us and upon our kings and leaders and priests and prophets and ancestors—all of your people—from the days when the kings of Assyria first triumphed over us until now. Every time you punished us you were being just. We have sinned greatly, and you gave us only what we deserved. Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey your Law or listen to the warnings in your commands and laws. Even

while they had their own kingdom, they did not serve you, though you showered your goodness on them. You gave them a large, fertile land, but they refused to turn from their wickedness.

“So now today we are slaves in the land of plenty that you gave our ancestors for their enjoyment! We are slaves here in this good land. The lush produce of this land piles up in the hands of the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They have power over us and our livestock. We serve them at their pleasure, and we are in great misery.”

—from the book of *Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

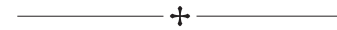
The prayer of the Levite leaders was honest—honest about all that God had done for them through all the years and honest about the repeated failure of the people to live up to their covenant with God. All of Israel’s long history reveals one key thing: God is determined to work in partnership with humans, but humans have a very hard time holding up their end of things. Now here Israel is back in their own land but still enslaved to others. This deeply honest prayer nearly shouts out to God: When will this change? When will this story find its right ending? What’s to become of us? What’s to become of your plan to save the world through us? These questions are the same ones we can ask God in our time.

## DAY 30

# Celebrate, Dance, and Sing

(from *Chronicles*, pages 137-139)

*To those who were old enough to have seen Jerusalem and the Temple before their destruction by Babylon, the new versions were not that impressive. They were still mourning over what had been lost. But for those who were either too young to remember or were born in exile in Babylon, seeing the new walls of Jerusalem was a wonder. The new city wasn’t the biggest and most impressive thing in the world, but it was still a fresh start. God had already shown his people that he could do great things through small beginnings. Maybe he would do it again.*



For the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The singers were brought together from the region around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites. They also came from Beth-gilgal and the rural areas near Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built their own settlements around Jerusalem. The priests and Levites first purified themselves; then they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

I led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs to give thanks. One of the choirs proceeded southward along the top of the wall to the Dung Gate. Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah. Then came some priests who played trumpets, including Zechariah son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, a descendant of Asaph. And Zechariah’s colleagues were Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. They used the musical instruments prescribed by David, the man of God. Ezra the scribe led this procession. At the Fountain Gate they went straight up the steps on the ascent of the city wall toward the City of David. They passed the house of David and then proceeded to the Water Gate on the east.

The second choir giving thanks went northward around the other way to meet them. I followed them, together with the other half of the people, along the top of the wall past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, then past the Ephraim Gate to the Old City Gate, past the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel, and on to the Tower of the Hundred. Then we continued on to the Sheep Gate and stopped at the Guard Gate.

The two choirs that were giving thanks then proceeded to the Temple of God, where they took their places. So did I, together with the group of leaders who were with me. We went together with the trumpet-playing priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah—and the singers—Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. They played and sang loudly under the direction of Jezrahiah the choir director.

Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

On that day men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for

the offerings, the first part of the harvest, and the tithes. They were responsible to collect from the fields outside the towns the portions required by the Law for the priests and Levites. For all the people of Judah took joy in the priests and Levites and their work. They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as commanded by David and his son Solomon, and so did the singers and the gatekeepers. The custom of having choir directors to lead the choirs in hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God began long ago in the days of David and Asaph. So now, in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel brought a daily supply of food for the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Levites. The Levites, in turn, gave a portion of what they received to the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

—*from the book of Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

One thing we clearly learn from the Bible is that there are times when the only appropriate action is a pull-out-all-the-stops celebration. At certain key moments God takes decisive steps, steps that change the direction of the story from that moment forward. When this happens, God's people should stop what they're doing; bring out the music, the food, and the dances; and simply rejoice. Joyous occasions call for nothing short of a joyous response. And God delights when his people are happy. Have you experienced such moments in your life with God? Has your community had times of joyous celebration in the amazing work of God?

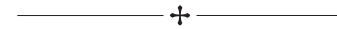
## DAY 31

### Finding a New Queen

(from *Chronicles*, pages 146-148)

*The Babylonian Empire defeated the kingdom of Judah, smashed the Temple, and destroyed Jerusalem. But after Babylon, the Persian Empire arose and ruled for over two hundred years. It was a king of Persia who allowed the Jewish exiles to go back to Israel and begin their national life again. But not everyone went back home. Many Jews remained in other countries and faced the challenge of living as God's people in a foreign land.*

*The book of Esther tells us one of the stories of these exiles in Persia. One day King Xerxes was holding a great feast and called for his wife Queen Vashti to wear her crown and come to the feast. But the queen refused. This made the king furious, and he decided to banish Queen Vashti forever.*



But after Xerxes' anger had subsided, he began thinking about Vashti and what she had done and the decree he had made. So his personal attendants suggested, "Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint agents in each province to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem at the fortress of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, will see that they are all given beauty treatments. After that, the young woman who most pleases the king will be made queen instead of Vashti." This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect.

At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter.

As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so. Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

Before each young woman was taken to the king's bed, she was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments—six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments. When it was time for her to go to the king's palace, she was given her choice of whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted to take from the harem. That evening she was taken to the king's private rooms, and the next morning



she was brought to the second harem, where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name.

Esther was the daughter of Abihail, who was Mordecai's uncle. (Mordecai had adopted his younger cousin Esther.) When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she accepted the advice of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. She asked for nothing except what he suggested, and she was admired by everyone who saw her.

Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in early winter of the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem and Mordecai had become a palace official, Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.

One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthana and Teresh—who were guards at the door of the king's private quarters—became angry at King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him. But Mordecai heard about the plot and gave the information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai credit for the report. When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

—*from the book of Esther*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The elements of the plot are coming together here. Esther is a beautiful young woman, and the king has favored her above the other young women, even making her his queen. She is a Jew, but on the advice of her cousin Mordecai, she is keeping this a secret from the king and from the other royal officials. And then there's this little side story about Mordecai uncovering a plot by two guards to murder the king. All of these pieces will be important as the story moves forward.

One thing we learn from reading the whole story of the Bible is that God is in even the small details. Sometimes God works quietly in the background, but the pieces are all important to how things will turn out in the end. A key part of our faith is believing that God is working even when we can't see what he's doing.

## DAY 32

### A Threat and a Great Risk

(from *Chronicles*, pages 148-150)

*Life for God's people in foreign lands was difficult. The Jews stood out because their practices were so different from those of other people. They followed God's laws closely, and they were often viewed with suspicion because their highest loyalty was not to the nation they lived in but to God himself.*



Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect.

Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew.

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage. He had learned of Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes.

So in the month of April, during the twelfth year of King Xerxes' reign, lots were cast in Haman's presence (the lots were called *purim*) to determine the best day and month to take action. And the day selected was March 7, nearly a year later.

Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain

race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury."

The king agreed, confirming his decision by removing his signet ring from his finger and giving it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king said, "The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit."

So on April 17 the king's secretaries were summoned, and a decree was written exactly as Haman dictated. It was sent to the king's highest officers, the governors of the respective provinces, and the nobles of each province in their own scripts and languages. The decree was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king's signet ring. Dispatches were sent by swift messengers into all the provinces of the empire, giving the order that all Jews—young and old, including women and children—must be killed, slaughtered, and annihilated on a single day. This was scheduled to happen on March 7 of the next year. The property of the Jews would be given to those who killed them.

A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that they would be ready to do their duty on the appointed day. At the king's command, the decree went out by swift messengers, and it was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa fell into confusion.

When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

—*from the book of Esther*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

This story reveals the mystery that is at the heart of the Bible's story of human life. God is actively involved in what is happening, but he has also given real responsibility to people. We are called to fully participate in the action, not just sit around passively waiting for God to do everything. We can't see everything clearly, but we still have to act and do the best we can. Sometimes we have to take risks. We pray for God to show us the way to go. We pray for God to help us. We pray for God to surprise us with the ending.

## DAY 33

## Why Is There a New Jewish Festival?

(from *Chronicles*, pages 151-152, 154-155)

*So the Jews fasted and prayed for three days, asking God to give Esther favor with the king. Then on the third day of the fast Esther stepped forward and entered the court of the king. King Xerxes held out his gold scepter and welcomed Esther to come in and speak. She asked the king if she could prepare a great banquet for the king and also invite Haman. The king agreed. After the first banquet, Esther asked them to return for a second banquet. And Esther continued her plan to plead for mercy for her people, the Jews.*



That night the king had trouble sleeping, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him. In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes.

"What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?" the king asked.

His attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

"Who is that in the outer court?" the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared.

So the attendants replied to the king, "Haman is out in the court."

"Bring him in," the king ordered. So Haman came in, and the king said, "What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?"

Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" So he replied, "If the king wishes to honor someone, he should bring out one of the king's own royal robes, as well as a horse that the king himself has ridden—one with a royal emblem on its head. Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king's robes and led through the city square on the king's horse. Have the official shout as they go, 'This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!'"

"Excellent!" the king said to Haman. "Quick! Take the robes and my

horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Leave out nothing you have suggested!"

So Haman took the robes and put them on Mordecai, placed him on the king's own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, "This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!" Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated.

When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, his wise advisers and his wife said, "Since Mordecai—this man who has humiliated you—is of Jewish birth, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue opposing him."

While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet. On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king."

"Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?"

Esther replied, "This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy." Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen. Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden.

Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him. In despair he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden.

The king exclaimed, "Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?" And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman's face, signaling his doom.

Then Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, "Haman has set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall in his own courtyard. He intended to use it to impale Mordecai, the man who saved the king from assassination."

"Then impale Haman on it!" the king ordered. So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided. . . .

Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to the Jews near and far, throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes, calling on them to celebrate an annual festival on these two days. He told them to celebrate these days with feasting and gladness and by giving gifts of food to each other and presents to the poor. This would commemorate a time when the Jews gained relief from their enemies, when their sorrow was turned into gladness and their mourning into joy.

So the Jews accepted Mordecai's proposal and adopted this annual custom. Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted to crush and destroy them on the date determined by casting lots (the lots were called *purim*). But when Esther came before the king, he issued a decree causing Haman's evil plot to backfire, and Haman and his sons were impaled on a sharpened pole. That is why this celebration is called Purim, because it is the ancient word for casting lots.

So because of Mordecai's letter and because of what they had experienced, the Jews throughout the realm agreed to inaugurate this tradition and to pass it on to their descendants and to all who became Jews. They declared they would never fail to celebrate these two prescribed days at the appointed time each year. These days would be remembered and kept from generation to generation and celebrated by every family throughout the provinces and cities of the empire. This Festival of Purim would never cease to be celebrated among the Jews, nor would the memory of what happened ever die out among their descendants.

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote another letter putting the queen's full authority behind Mordecai's letter to establish the Festival of Purim. Letters wishing peace and security were sent to the Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the empire of Xerxes. These letters established the Festival of Purim—an annual celebration of these days at the appointed time, decreed by both Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther. (The people decided to observe this festival, just as they had decided for themselves and their descendants to establish the times of fasting and mourning.) So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim, and it was all written down in the records.

—*from the book of Esther*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

We learn from the story of Esther that we, too, must sometimes take bold actions for the sake of others. We, too, must be courageous and trust that God is working. There are great powers in our world, just like in ancient Persia. Just as Esther and Mordecai did, we must be willing to confront

the dominant powers of our world in creative ways. We, too, must ask and work for justice in God's world. And we, too, can rightly celebrate the good gifts of community and life that we receive from God.

## DAY 34

# The Holy and Hopeful Book of Daniel

(from *Chronicles*, pages 157-158)



**IN THE FEW CENTURIES** before the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the nation of Israel faced increasing pressure as they lived under the rule of hostile empires. This meant dealing with not only the possibility of religious contamination but also the threat of extinction. . . . The book of Daniel shows the steadfastness of God's people under the rule of several powerful empires. . . .

The book of Daniel is divided into two main parts: a collection of stories and a collection of apocalyptic visions. The six stories in the first part are of two different types: interpretation stories and deliverance stories. In the interpretation stories, a mystery arises that the king's own wise men can't interpret or resolve, but the Most High God of Israel reveals the meaning to Daniel. In the deliverance stories, the king demands that the Jews compromise their worship of God (by worshiping an idol or by abandoning regular times of prayer to God) and attempts to execute them when they refuse. But God powerfully intervenes to rescue his people from danger. Both story types emphasize that Israel's God is the one true Creator and King over all things. . . .

After these stories, the book presents four visions filled with vivid and intricate symbolism. These visions closely follow the conventions of a particular type of writing known as *apocalypse*, which often features heavenly visitors, symbols representing historical periods, and a command to seal up the book, among other elements. Apocalyptic literature developed as a genre late in the First Testament period. In the face of suffering and uncertainty, the Jewish people needed stories

that would reveal the cosmic realities behind their experience and give them hope in the battle against the rulers of this world. . . .

The stories and visions in the book of Daniel work together to strengthen God's people as they struggle to maintain their distinctive identity as a people loyal to God alone. They reveal that God is truly working, even when it looks like evil is triumphing. The pride of even the greatest human rulers is shown to be empty and weak when the Most High God acts to save his people.

The book of Daniel became one of Israel's most popular books in the first century AD, the time of Jesus. God's people were still suffering greatly under the oppression of foreign Roman rulers, and they were longing for the arrival of God's promised redeemer. Daniel gave them hope that God would bring a change in the future: "Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will last forever, and all rulers will serve and obey him."

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

It can be a strange experience reading the stories of the Bible. Let's admit it: the world of the Bible is very different from our world today. So much has changed! As we read the Bible, one of the things we must do is try to enter into its ancient world. We read and learn how things were in the world so long ago. We need to remember how different it was and not try to think about it the way we think about our own time and place.

But once we have agreed to read the Bible on its own terms, as an ancient story, we also have to remember that the Bible is the beginning of a great story. We are living in that same story! So God begins his work to rescue the world in the stories we read in the Bible. Then that story catches up to us in our own time, inviting us in to join God in this great work. Pray today for God to help you find ways to live the story of the Bible in your own situation.

## DAY 35

# All Kinds of Kingdoms, But Only One Lasts Forever

(from *Chronicles*, pages 162-163)

*In the second year of his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream. He didn't know what the dream meant, and he couldn't sleep anymore. None of the king's wise men or magicians could tell the king what the dream was or what it meant. This made the king furious, and he decided to kill all the wise men and magicians in his kingdom. Daniel, one of the king's wise counselors, was someone the king counted on to give him good advice. So Daniel prayed to God, asking him to reveal to Daniel what the dream was and what it meant. That night, God showed Daniel the dream, and Daniel praised God for revealing the secret to him. Then he went to the king.*



"While Your Majesty was sleeping, you dreamed about coming events. He who reveals secrets has shown you what is going to happen. And it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart.

"In your vision, Your Majesty, you saw standing before you a huge, shining statue of a man. It was a frightening sight. The head of the statue was made of fine gold. Its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs were bronze, its legs were iron, and its feet were a combination of iron and baked clay. As you watched, a rock was cut from a mountain, but not by human hands. It struck the feet of iron and clay, smashing them to bits. The whole statue was crushed into small pieces of iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold. Then the wind blew them away without a trace, like chaff on a threshing floor. But the rock that knocked the statue down became a great mountain that covered the whole earth.

"That was the dream. Now we will tell the king what it means. Your Majesty, you are the greatest of kings. The God of heaven has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and honor. He has made you the ruler over all the inhabited world and has put even the wild animals and birds under your control. You are the head of gold.

"But after your kingdom comes to an end, another kingdom, inferior to

yours, will rise to take your place. After that kingdom has fallen, yet a third kingdom, represented by bronze, will rise to rule the world. Following that kingdom, there will be a fourth one, as strong as iron. That kingdom will smash and crush all previous empires, just as iron smashes and crushes everything it strikes. The feet and toes you saw were a combination of iron and baked clay, showing that this kingdom will be divided. Like iron mixed with clay, it will have some of the strength of iron. But while some parts of it will be as strong as iron, other parts will be as weak as clay. This mixture of iron and clay also shows that these kingdoms will try to strengthen themselves by forming alliances with each other through intermarriage. But they will not hold together, just as iron and clay do not mix.

“During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered. It will crush all these kingdoms into nothingness, and it will stand forever. That is the meaning of the rock cut from the mountain, though not by human hands, that crushed to pieces the statue of iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold. The great God was showing the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true, and its meaning is certain.”

Then King Nebuchadnezzar threw himself down before Daniel and worshiped him, and he commanded his people to offer sacrifices and burn sweet incense before him. The king said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is the greatest of gods, the Lord over kings, a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this secret.”

Then the king appointed Daniel to a high position and gave him many valuable gifts. He made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, as well as chief over all his wise men. At Daniel’s request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon, while Daniel remained in the king’s court.

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The kingdoms of this world come and go. Some are great, and some are small. Some seem to last a long time, but others exist only for a short time. But there is only one Kingdom of God. God revealed to Daniel that other kingdoms would follow after King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. But then God’s own Kingdom would come down to earth, and it would be a Kingdom without end. The whole vision is a picture of the entire story of the Bible. All the human kingdoms and nations of history will pass away. But God will be King forever. He will save his people and the earth will be repaired and restored.

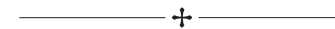
Jesus is the one who brought the Kingdom of God to earth. This Kingdom is still growing, and when Jesus returns to us, his Kingdom will be complete. Does this vision and this story give you hope for our world?

## DAY 36

### Worship My Statue, or Else!

(from *Chronicles*, pages 163-164)

*King Nebuchadnezzar had begun to learn about the God of Israel. He called him “the greatest of gods, the LORD over kings.” But apparently Nebuchadnezzar had more to learn. He is not just the God who reveals mysteries but who loves and rescues his people.*



King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then a herald shouted out, “People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king’s command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “Long live the king! You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments. That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your

Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, “Didn’t we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,” they replied.

“Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!”

Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke!

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in

him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!”

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

“The God whom we serve is able to save us.” With these words, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego showed that they had firm confidence in God’s ability to rescue them from deadly danger. They knew that God is the great Creator and that he has power over all things. However, notice what else they say: “but even if he doesn’t . . . we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

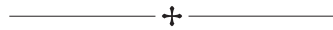
These men knew for sure that God was able to save them. But they also knew that sometimes God chooses not to rescue his people from every danger. Why? We are not told, and we don’t know the mind of God. But as with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we commit to serve the one, true God anyway. What does it mean to trust God like this, no matter what happens to us, good or evil? How is this faith related to what we believe God will do in the end?

## DAY 37

# What the Kings of the World Must Learn

(from *Chronicles*, pages 165-167)

*The lessons for King Nebuchadnezzar continue. Like all the kings of the ancient world, Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that the gods had favored him and given him a great kingdom and great wealth because he deserved it. Some of these kings even believed that they themselves were divine—living gods on the earth—and that they should be worshiped.*



“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living in my palace in comfort and prosperity. But one night I had a dream that frightened me; I saw visions that terrified me as I lay in my bed. So I issued an order calling in all the wise men of Babylon, so they could tell me what my dream meant. When all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers came in, I told them the dream, but they could not tell me what it meant. At last Daniel came in before me, and I told him the dream. (He was named Belteshazzar after my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

“I said to him, ‘Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too great for you to solve. Now tell me what my dream means.

“While I was lying in my bed, this is what I dreamed. I saw a large tree in the middle of the earth. The tree grew very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. It had fresh green leaves, and it was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. All the world was fed from this tree.

“Then as I lay there dreaming, I saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. The messenger shouted,

“Cut down the tree and lop off its branches!

Shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit!

Chase the wild animals from its shade  
and the birds from its branches.

But leave the stump and the roots in the ground,  
bound with a band of iron and bronze  
and surrounded by tender grass.

Now let him be drenched with the dew of heaven,  
and let him live with the wild animals among the plants of the  
field.

For seven periods of time,  
let him have the mind of a wild animal  
instead of the mind of a human.

For this has been decreed by the messengers;  
it is commanded by the holy ones,

so that everyone may know  
that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world.  
He gives them to anyone he chooses—  
even to the lowliest of people.”

“Belteshazzar, that was the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now tell me what it means, for none of the wise men of my kingdom can do so. But you can tell me because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.’

“Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, ‘Belteshazzar, don’t be alarmed by the dream and what it means.’

“Belteshazzar replied, ‘I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you! The tree you saw was growing very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. It had fresh green leaves and was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

“Then you saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals of the field for seven periods of time.’

“This is what the dream means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king. You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses. But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.

“King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.”

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The rulers of the nations of the world are continually tempted to overestimate themselves—how much power they have and how important



they are. The book of Daniel is perhaps the clearest book in the Bible about this point. It also has the strongest presentation on the uniqueness of the power and glory of God himself. In the end, only God's Kingdom will stand. Every other earthly nation and ruler will pass away. Since this is true, the right attitude for anyone in a position of power or authority is humility.

Pray today for the rulers of the nations of the world. Ask God to give them a vision of their proper place and a humble mindset of service to others.

## DAY 38

### Time and Truth

(from *Chronicles*, pages 168-169)

*The lessons for the kings of Babylon continue, and now the consequences are becoming more severe. One way or another, they will learn the truth about the Most High God.*



Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines. So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.

The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!"

But when all the king's wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.

But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and frightened. There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

"You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and

your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! So God has sent this hand to write this message.

“This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is what these words mean:

*Mene* means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

*Tekel* means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.

*Parsin* means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed.

And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The book of Daniel teaches us that time and truth walk hand in hand. This means that falsehood may succeed for a season, but it will not last or stand forever. Those leaders who run the world and think they are powerful rarely think of themselves as accountable to God. But in the end they will be.

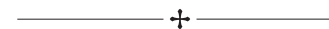
Did the leaders honor God? Did they follow his instructions and lead people well in the ways of justice and righteousness? Did they think of themselves as servants to others? These questions matter because all of us—especially leaders—will have our actions and attitudes weighed and tested by a God who is fair.

## DAY 39

### Someone Like a Son of Man

(from *Chronicles*, pages 171-173)

*Another vision, another revelation of what God is up to, another set of symbols and interpretations, and another promise about a future that God’s people have not yet seen but that fills their hearts with hope.*



Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar’s reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw.

In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others.

The first beast was like a lion with eagles’ wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off, and it was left standing with its two hind feet on the ground, like a human being. And it was given a human mind.

Then I saw a second beast, and it looked like a bear. It was rearing up on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And I heard a voice saying to it, “Get up! Devour the flesh of many people!”

Then the third of these strange beasts appeared, and it looked like a leopard. It had four bird’s wings on its back, and it had four heads. Great authority was given to this beast.

Then in my vision that night, I saw a fourth beast—terrifying, dreadful, and very strong. It devoured and crushed its victims with huge iron teeth and trampled their remains beneath its feet. It was different from any of the other beasts, and it had ten horns.

As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.

I watched as thrones were put in place  
and the Ancient One sat down to judge.  
His clothing was as white as snow,  
his hair like purest wool.  
He sat on a fiery throne  
with wheels of blazing fire,

and a river of fire was pouring out,  
 flowing from his presence.  
 Millions of angels ministered to him;  
 many millions stood to attend him.  
 Then the court began its session,  
 and the books were opened.

I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn's boastful speech. I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire. The other three beasts had their authority taken from them, but they were allowed to live a while longer.

As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me. So I approached one of those standing beside the throne and asked him what it all meant. He explained it to me like this: "These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever."

Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, the one so different from the others and so terrifying. It had devoured and crushed its victims with iron teeth and bronze claws, trampling their remains beneath its feet. I also asked about the ten horns on the fourth beast's head and the little horn that came up afterward and destroyed three of the other horns. This horn had seemed greater than the others, and it had human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly. As I watched, this horn was waging war against God's holy people and was defeating them, until the Ancient One—the Most High—came and judged in favor of his holy people. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom.

Then he said to me, "This fourth beast is the fourth world power that will rule the earth. It will be different from all the others. It will devour the whole world, trampling and crushing everything in its path. Its ten horns are ten kings who will rule that empire. Then another king will arise, different from the other ten, who will subdue three of them. He will defy the Most High and oppress the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws, and they will be placed under his control for a time, times, and half a time.

"But then the court will pass judgment, and all his power will be taken away and completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will last forever, and all rulers will serve and obey him."

That was the end of the vision. I, Daniel, was terrified by my thoughts and my face was pale with fear, but I kept these things to myself.

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The book of Daniel and this passage from it were very popular in the first century, during the time of Jesus and the birth of the Christian movement. Why? Because God's people were still suffering under the cruel hardship of a foreign power. The book of Daniel gave the people hope because it was filled with promises that God and his Kingdom would have the last word.

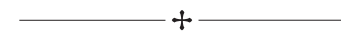
Jesus quoted from this very vision to help the people understand who he was and what he was doing. He spoke of himself as the Son of Man who would receive authority and power over every other nation on earth. God the Father sent Jesus the Son to win the ultimate victory over sin and death and every power that opposes God and his rule. Life and love and peace will win at last. Deciding to follow Jesus is deciding to be a part of God's great future.

## DAY 40

### And Then . . . Resurrection!

(from *Chronicles*, pages 177, 180-181)

*The final vision in the book of Daniel is about both the hardest time to come and God's greatest victory. As they say, it is always darkest right before the dawn.*



In the third year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) had another vision. He understood that the vision

concerned events certain to happen in the future—times of war and great hardship.

When this vision came to me, I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three whole weeks. All that time I had eaten no rich food. No meat or wine crossed my lips, and I used no fragrant lotions until those three weeks had passed.

On April 23, as I was standing on the bank of the great Tigris River, I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people.

Only I, Daniel, saw this vision. The men with me saw nothing, but they were suddenly terrified and ran away to hide. So I was left there all alone to see this amazing vision. My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. Then I heard the man speak, and when I heard the sound of his voice, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground.

Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, still trembling, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, “Daniel, you are very precious to God, so listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you.” When he said this to me, I stood up, still trembling.

Then he said, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. Now I am here to explain what will happen to your people in the future, for this vision concerns a time yet to come.” . . .

“At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever. But you, Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal up the book until the time of the end, when many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase.”

Then I, Daniel, looked and saw two others standing on opposite banks of the river. One of them asked the man dressed in linen, who was now

standing above the river, “How long will it be until these shocking events are over?”

The man dressed in linen, who was standing above the river, raised both his hands toward heaven and took a solemn oath by the One who lives forever, saying, “It will go on for a time, times, and half a time. When the shattering of the holy people has finally come to an end, all these things will have happened.”

I heard what he said, but I did not understand what he meant. So I asked, “How will all this finally end, my lord?”

But he said, “Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is kept secret and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, cleansed, and refined by these trials. But the wicked will continue in their wickedness, and none of them will understand. Only those who are wise will know what it means.

“From the time the daily sacrifice is stopped and the sacrilegious object that causes desecration is set up to be worshiped, there will be 1,290 days. And blessed are those who wait and remain until the end of the 1,335 days!

“As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you.”

—*from the book of Daniel*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The battle throughout the Bible is about life versus death, about all the forces of evil trying to undo God’s good creation and God’s work to defend and renew what he made in the first place. What Daniel’s final vision teaches us is that evil will be strongest and darkest right before God wins his greatest triumph. At that time, God’s holy people will not just experience life after death but will be given their whole lives back. They will be raised from the dead to experience a physical life that can never be taken away. They will live in God’s renewed world—a new heavens and a new earth. This is the promise Daniel received.

The long first part of the Bible closes with this vision and this promise. And this stunning picture of the future is for us, too. We have the same hope. How can this hope for the future change the way we live now?

