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DAILY *manna*

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2009

GENERAL EDITOR

Rev Isaac Ong

Daily devotions for reading through the Bible

Dear *Daily Manna* readers,

Welcome again to another quarter of *Daily Manna* readings. Over the next three months, we will be covering the period of the Kings from Saul, David and Solomon during the time of the united kingdom, and through to the break-up of the Jewish nation into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Israel's demand for a king marked the end of her theocracy and the beginning of the monarchy. However, human kings are no solutions to man's sin problem. On the contrary, the kings of Israel exacerbated the problems. The lesson in the records of the kings is that while Israel was unfaithful, God remained faithful. It is my prayer that through the Bible and *Daily Manna* readings this quarter, your heart will be impressed with this blessed truth.

A note to new Daily Manna readers

In this book, you will find a reading plan that will guide you through reading the Bible in two years. You will also find a simple exposition based on the reading of the day. From the day's Bible passages, *Daily Manna* highlights biblical principles which may be applied in the Christian's daily living. We pray that the *Daily Manna* readings will make your reading through the Bible a more meaningful experience. Over the next two years, our focus will be on the Old Testament with the aim of giving you a more in depth study of the Old Testament books.

A step-by-step approach

1. Read the day's Bible chapters assigned in *Daily Manna*.
2. Review the Bible chapters to get an overview of what you have just read.
3. Read the accompanying devotions in *Daily Manna* and reflect on the lessons learnt.
4. Pray and ask God to help you apply His Word to your life.

In His grace,
Pastor Isaac Ong
Calvary B-P Church

BIBLE LESSON*Ruth 1***LESSON****Making right
decisions to move on****VERSE 18**

*When she saw that she was
steadfastly minded to go with
her, then she left speaking
unto her.*

The events in this beautiful book took place during the time of the judges, when the Israelites drifted away from the Lord. Perhaps God sent this terrible famine [v. 1] to judge and bring them back to Himself. Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem for Moab, a Gentile country, in search of food and sustenance. However, they could not get away from God's judgement. He and his two sons died there.

Naomi, Elimelech's wife, decided to return to her hometown, Bethlehem. Ruth and Orpah, their daughters-in-law, had to make a choice. The choices made were important because it would affect their whole life on earth and for eternity. Ruth chose well to follow Naomi and the true living God. She returned to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. Naomi's testimony must have influenced her greatly. Are others drawn to the Lord by the way we live and act? Ask God for wisdom to make the right decisions when you face a crisis in your life.

None of us can run away from our destiny. Our Lord gives us the freedom to choose and make our own personal decisions. We cannot ignore His will or go against it. Ultimately, His will prevails because the counsel of the Lord stands forever [Psalm 33:11].

Ruth obediently entrusted her trials to the Lord in faith. She believed that God would work all things for her good and for His glory [Romans 8:28]. Are you steadfastly minded to follow Jesus all the way?

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 1**

QUESTION

How do you handle a crisis? Endure it, escape it or entrust it to the Lord?

BIBLE LESSON*Ruth 2***LESSON****Favoured by God's
gracious providence****VERSE 10**

*Then she fell on her face,
and bowed herself to the
ground, and said unto him,
Why have I found grace
in thine eyes, that thou
shouldest take knowledge of
me, seeing I am a stranger?*

God's providence working in our lives is both a delight and a mystery. He is constantly working in us and for us to achieve His gracious purposes and for our ultimate good.

It was a time of wheat and barley harvest when Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem. Therefore, she went to work immediately in order to provide food for her mother-in-law and herself. She happened to go to the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi. According to the Israelite law, any grain that was dropped was to be left for the poor people and needy widows. Ruth took the initiative to work, showing her devotion and responsibility to take care of Naomi. Indeed, God's sovereign hand is clearly seen in leading Ruth to the field of this kinsman, Boaz. She trusted in the Lord to provide for all her needs. We, too, can have a similar experience when we allow God to guide our steps. This was also the experience of Abraham's servant—"I being in the way, the Lord led me" [Genesis 24:27].

Ruth found a place of refuge in Israel's God. She was looking for someone who would show her grace [v. 2, 10, 13]. The channel of that grace was Boaz. His kindness went beyond what the law required. God was about to create a new relationship for Ruth and Boaz.

Let us be thankful that God took the initiative to love us and provide salvation when we are spiritually dead in sins. Never underestimate the power of God's grace.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 2**

THOUGHT

**Marvellous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!**

BIBLE LESSON*Ruth 3***LESSON****Obedient faith
turning defeat into
victory****VERSE 5**

*And she said unto her, All
that thou sayest unto me I
will do.*

Our parents and elders are always looking out for our best interests. We should heed their advice as they are older and wiser than we. Their advice, knowledge and experiences can be invaluable.

Naomi's advice to Ruth seemed strange. However, Ruth simply followed what she said because she knew her mother-in-law was kind, trustworthy and filled with moral integrity. Naomi instructed her to act according to Israelite law. By observing the custom, Ruth could inform Boaz that he was an eligible kinsman-redeemer. Boaz could find someone to marry Ruth or he could marry her himself. Ruth was not only a hearer of the Word but also a doer.

The willingness to obey the Lord is the key to knowing and doing the will of God for our lives. You will be blessed when you do it. Ruth went and fell at the feet of Boaz. She asked Boaz to obey the law of a kinsman-redeemer and take her as his wife [v. 6-9]. She submitted herself to him [v. 10]. Boaz was moved by her virtuous testimony. He calmed her fears [v. 11] and promised to look after her. "I will do to thee all that thou requirest."

Boaz redeeming Ruth is a picture of Christ redeeming us from the bondage of sin. If you put your faith in Jesus today, He will assure you, "Fear not." He wants to rebuild your life. He will give you blessings that will last through eternity. He will change your defeat into victory.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 3

THOUGHT

**Come to the Saviour, make no delay—
Here in His Word He's shown us the way.**

BIBLE LESSON*Ruth 4***LESSON****Empty hearts now
filled with joy****VERSE 15**

*And he shall be unto thee
a restorer of thy life, and a
nourisher of thine old age:
for thy daughter in law,
which loveth thee, which
is better to thee than seven
sons, hath born him.*

The Book of Ruth closes with a wedding. Boaz knew that he could find his relatives at the city gate. It was the centre of activity and also a good place to find witnesses [v. 2]. Here was the appropriate place for him to make his transaction.

Boaz made an announcement that he would buy the property. He would also marry Ruth. The purpose of this marriage was to preserve the family name and property. The people of the city were happy when Boaz fulfilled his promise to Ruth. Boaz is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who bought us with His precious blood. Due to God's grace, Ruth the Moabitess was allowed to worship God with the Israelites. The Lord blessed their marriage. Ruth gave birth to a son, who was to become the grandfather of King David, and an ancestor of the Lord Jesus.

Out of Naomi's tragedies came even greater blessings than seven sons. She continued to trust God during her tough times. Even in our sorrow and calamities, God can bring great blessings. Ruth's love for her mother-in-law was known throughout the city. Her kindness towards Naomi was consistent to the end. Both women waited patiently for God to work out His plan.

Similarly, God has a plan for us. Will you allow God to plan your life? Will you let Him reign in your life? God promises to fill your empty heart with joy and satisfaction.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 4-5

THOUGHT

Joy comes not from what we have but from what we are. – Charles Spurgeon

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 1***LESSON****God answers prayers****VERSE 19**

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.

People do all sorts of things when they are depressed. Some resort to violence and hurt themselves and others. Others alienate themselves. Hannah prayed earnestly and wept before God. She was praying fervently and in humility. She referred to herself as the handmaid of God. In prayer, it is far better to have a heart without words than to have words without a heart.

Hannah had been longing for a son. Her vow to God was that if He blessed her with a son, she would dedicate his whole life to serve God. Her husband Elkanah agreed to her vow. Hannah was a God-fearing person and what she did was scriptural [Numbers 30].

The Lord indeed blessed Hannah with a son. He was named Samuel and after he was weaned Hannah brought him to the house of God. She vowed that she would dedicate Samuel to serve God for as long as he lived.

As a sign of his consecration, Samuel would not cut his hair. We are not compelled to make any vows to God. But if we do, it has to be voluntary and we must honour any vow that we make [Ecclesiastes 5:4–8]. Hannah gave of her best in faith and devotion. She was interested in pleasing God and her relationship with Him was personal. It does not matter what others think of us. It is most important what God thinks.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 6–7

THOUGHT

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. – Psalm 30:5b

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 2***LESSON****God knows what is best and He looks at our hearts****VERSE 1**

And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

How can it be that after Hannah left Samuel, her first-born son, at the tabernacle, she was singing praises and rejoicing in her heart? She had a close relationship with God and she counted it a joy and an honour that God accepted her prayers and helped her fulfil her vow. She was grateful that she could make an offering in the person of her son, whom she had consecrated to serve God for the rest of his life.

God will bless our offerings and sacrifice when we count it a privilege to be able to do so. Hannah praised God for His holiness [v. 2], knowledge [v. 3], power [v. 4–8] and judgement [v. 9–10]. God will honour the humble and will bring shame to the proud. Hannah had only one son and yet she gave him to the Lord.

God gave us His only begotten son, Jesus Christ so that those who receive Him as Saviour will be saved. God rejoices to see a sinner who humbles himself before Him, and He will surely bless that soul.

Eli had two sons but scripture describes them as “sons of Belial”, meaning that they are worthless men or scoundrels. They committed offences in the tabernacle and this sorely displeased God. Why is it that God did not punish them? In His mercy, God gave them time to repent before the final judgement was executed. Unlike them, Samuel grew in favour both with the Lord and with men [v. 26].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 8

THOUGHT**Meditate on 1 Samuel 2:30.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 3***LESSON****A humble heart and attentive ear****VERSE 10**

And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

Once again, we see the contrast between the faithfulness of Samuel and the wickedness of Eli's sons. It was the same Eli who taught his sons as well as Samuel but Eli's sons did things their own way while Samuel obeyed God.

We can be reading from the same Bible what determines our behaviour is our heart. Those who followed Eli's son either became wayward or resented coming to God's house, leading to a spiritual decline. God stopped sending signs and prophetic messages. The silence was God's judgement and soon He would change the situation by speaking His precious word to an obedient child.

God spoke to Samuel while he was in bed. Initially unaware that God was calling him, Samuel said after the fourth call, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." We must be quiet and have an attentive ear for the Lord to speak to us.

When the next day came, it was business as usual for Samuel. Samuel was matured enough not to spread around what he had heard. He did not even tell Eli until he was asked to do so. It was bad news for Eli and his family. God would bring an end to their misbehaviour. Eli accepted the news because he knew that whatever the Lord did, it was for good. Eli said, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good" [v. 18].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 9

THOUGHT

God will leave His house only in the hands of obedient and faithful servants.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 4***LESSON****God will judge as He has warned****VERSE 22**

And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

It was a very sad day for Israel but God had already warned them through Samuel. God had been long-suffering to Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, as well as to the people. He had given them time to repent.

For 120 years, people witnessed Noah building the ark. Only Noah's family was saved. Throughout history, God has always warned of eternal judgement and has provided a way of salvation through Jesus Christ. God is patient but time will run out and judgement is sure. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" [2 Peter 3:9].

The Philistines invaded Israel. Instead of praying and asking for God's mercy and deliverance, the people took out the ark. The ark is just a piece of furniture, not a good luck charm. There are no good luck charms, not even crosses and Bibles. We look at outward things but God looks at our hearts. For that reason, we are not to bow down to any images [Exodus 20:4–5]. Sadder news awaited Eli when he found out that both his sons had been killed and the ark captured by the enemy. Eli fell backwards and died. The glory of God departed from Israel.

Today, God's glory dwells in His people individually [1 Corinthians 6:19–20] and in His church collectively [Ephesians 2:19–22]. Christians as individuals and as members of the body of Christ must glorify God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 10

THOUGHT

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. – James 4:8

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 5–6***LESSON****The power and mercy of God****I SAMUEL 6:20**

And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?

The celebration of the Philistines in winning the war and capturing the ark was very short-lived. They paid heavily for treating the Almighty God like the dumb idols that they worshipped. The Psalmist says that the worshippers are as dumb as the idols that they worship [Psalm 115].

Their idols were broken and the Philistines suffered plagues and sicknesses as a lesson for treating the Living God lightly. He is their Creator, too. Sadly, they hardened their hearts. The ark is no longer welcomed because judgement followed wherever the ark went.

For a final test, the Philistines mounted the Ark on cows that had new calves. These cows had never pulled a cart before. The instinct of these cows would be to go to their young. To the Philistines' surprise, the cows pulled the cart towards Israel. If cows obeyed God, how much more people who are created in the image of God? "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" [Isaiah 1:3].

When the ark was returned, the priests should have covered it as instructed in the law. The people were not supposed to look at the ark. Sadly, many were stricken dead for this. We are to respect anything dedicated to the glory of God [Acts 7:48–50]. Look to Jesus for salvation out of a genuine heart to believe and obey, never out of curiosity.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 11

THOUGHT

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – Hebrews 10:31

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 7***LESSON****Serve only the true
God****VERSE 3**

And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

The Ark of the Covenant—the glorious symbol of the abiding presence of Jehovah—was now safely out of enemy hands, in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim of Benjamin [1 Samuel 1–2, Joshua 18:28]. However, a new problem had arisen from the new generation of Israelites. These Israelites, who had depended on Jehovah as their King for centuries, now wanted an earthly king to rule over them, just like the other nations. Samuel was tasked to handle this complex transition in Israel’s history from the rule of judges to one of monarchy.

The installation of a king was not Samuel’s main cause for concern. He knew that it was crucial for the Israelites to obey and trust in God alone or the nation would not succeed. Samuel thus gathered the people for a meeting at Mizpah and urged them to repent from idolatry. Throughout Israel’s history, the people had strayed by worshipping other gods instead of the one true God. Forsaking idolatry was only the first step in getting right with God. They also had to prepare their hearts and dedicate themselves solely to God.

Today, even seemingly neutral pursuits such as education, career, ambition, material gain and hobbies can turn into “gods” that take priority over God in a believer’s life. Remember the first commandment [Exodus 20:3]. The Bible warns that we cannot worship both God and mammon [Matthew 6:24].

A choice must be made. Anything that takes the place of God in our hearts must be cast out.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 12–13**

THOUGHT

Idols in the heart are far more dangerous than idols in the temple. – Warren Wiersbe

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 8***LESSON****The call for a king****VERSE 7**

And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

The appointment of Samuel's two sons as judges over Israel was a disaster. Joel and Abiah did not walk in the way of the Lord but became corrupt and greedy. The situation was made worse when the Israelites had to face an impending invasion by Nahash, king of the Ammonites. They were becoming desperate.

For the longest time, the only King Israel had was Jehovah Himself. This theocratic nation now desired a king who would lead them in battle. The people became more anxious because of the corrupt acts of Joel and Abiah. They took it upon themselves to ensure that they would not fall into political trouble caused by incompetent men. This was their mistake.

Israel was unique and privileged because God had separated them from the other nations, making them a unique nation as one led by the Divine One. God had cared for them since the beginning and given them many victories in battles. Now, the Israelites wanted to renounce the divine government. They would later pay the price.

We must not be so presumptuous as to think that we can run our lives by our finite wisdom. Let us not be deceived by pride and worldly wisdom into thinking that we do not need God to lead us. He is the all-powerful Creator Who knows us better than we know ourselves. And He loves us with an everlasting love [Jeremiah 31:3]. Do you earnestly look to God for daily guidance in your life?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 14-15

PRAYER

Take my will and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal Throne.

– Frances Havergal

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 9***LESSON****Choosing a leader****VERSE 2**

And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

Although displeased, God granted Israel's request for a king to "save" them from the Philistines. The search for a leader produced Saul, whom God had selected to be the nation's first ruler. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, which was nearly wiped out due to its rebellion against the law [Judges 19–20]. God had instructed Samuel to expect him and, by God's providence, Saul was led to Samuel through a series of incidents.

When God chose a king of His own heart, he did not look for one with impressive physique but of innocence and sweetness [1 Samuel 16:7, 12]. But when God had to choose a king of the people's heart, He chose one who was stately and grand, which the people desired. Tall, handsome and well-built, Saul resembled the type of king the people would admire. However, there was no mention of his spiritual life.

Like the people, Samuel had a tendency to be impressed by good looks [1 Samuel 10:23, 24]. The Lord, Who was aware of this, told him, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature ... for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" [1 Samuel 16:1–7].

Even today, the world is impressed by outward beauty and possessions. But God looks past these and searches deep within us. He knows the secrets of the heart [Psalm 44:21] and whether we are true towards Him [Matthew 15:8], a reminder that in all situations, we must seek to honour God, not man.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 16–17

THOUGHT

It is not what men think of you but what God knows of you that counts in the judgement.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 10***LESSON****Our sufficiency is of God****VERSE 1**

Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

The anointing of Saul by Samuel gave him leadership over God's people. Their initial meeting in 1 Samuel 9 was unusual because it started off with Saul looking for his father's lost donkeys. This was followed by three signs, which were special lessons for Saul to learn.

First, two men would tell Saul that the lost animals had been found [v. 2]. The lesson here for Saul was that God could solve Saul's problems. Likewise, we must remember that while we work, God is also working in the background. Waiting on God requires patience and He will show us what to do next.

The second sign would take place at the oak of Tabor. There, Saul would meet three pilgrims heading for Bethel [v. 3–4]. He would then be given two of the three loaves of bread. The lesson here was that God would supply all Saul's needs. Likewise, Christ tells us not to worry but trust Him completely [Matthew 6].

Third, Saul was to be empowered by the Spirit of the Lord [v. 5–6]. He would join a group of prophets in worship and prophesying. This spiritual power would provide him with endurance and enable him to serve. As long as Saul obeyed God, he would be given the ability to serve God.

Regardless of our personal accomplishments and the wealth of our resources, let us remember that our only sufficiency is of God. Without Him, we are nothing.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 18

THOUGHT

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God. – 2 Corinthians 3:5

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 11–12***LESSON****Fear the Lord and
serve Him****I SAMUEL 12:24**

*Only fear the LORD, and
serve him in truth with all
your heart: for consider
how great things he hath
done for you.*

Saul's first test was to defeat the Ammonites led by Nahash, who told the Jabeshites that he would spare their lives if they removed their right eye. During the one-week grace period that was granted, the Jabeshites went straight to Saul's home in Gibeah for help. For the second time, God's Spirit came upon Saul, moving him to mobilise supporters—300,000 from Israel and 30,000 from Judah. The Ammonites believed the Jabeshites' lie [1 Samuel 11:10] and were defeated by Saul and his men.

After that victory, Samuel transferred civil authority over Israel to Saul. There was great rejoicing by the people and Saul made sure that glory was given to God. The people had rejected the kingship of Jehovah and the counsel of Samuel, the last of the judges [1 Samuel 7:6, 15–17].

Before leaving office as judge, Samuel set the record straight. In his farewell message, he defended his own ministry, recalled God's mercies upon Israel and exhorted the people to fear and obey God. He reminded them that God was still their King and that their future success would depend on their trust in Him alone. The appointed king was only God's servant; both Saul and the people would have to honour God.

This challenge also applies to believers today. We are to fear the Lord and serve Him. Consider all that Christ has done for us. He has blessed us in so many ways and yet how often we have taken Him for granted. Is the fear of the Lord and our love for Him evident in our lives?

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 19**

THOUGHT

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
... – Psalm 111:10**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 13***LESSON****Costly impatience****VERSE 9**

And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

Saul's army was diminishing from 3,000 to 600 and those who remained were paralysed with fear because of the large Philistine army. He became impatient and took matters into his own hands when Samuel did not turn up for the rendezvous. He was walking by sight and not by faith [v. 11]. This rendezvous was God's way of testing Saul's faith and patience. Saul failed miserably in this first test and never learnt to trust and obey God throughout his life.

What was Saul's response when Samuel finally turned up? He was quick to put the blame on Samuel and claimed that he had no choice but to offer the sacrifices since Samuel did not come as planned [v. 12]. This "blame game" was also played by Adam and Eve when confronted by God for their sins in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Both did not acknowledge their sin; neither did they repent. As a result, they were expelled from God's presence.

Saul's pride, impatience, disobedience and deception were judged by God, and sentence was passed by the prophet Samuel [v. 13–14]. He lacked the faith of his son, Jonathan, who trusted the Lord for victory [1 Samuel 14:6]. Neither did he have the conviction of young David that "the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands" [1 Samuel 17:47]. Saul's sin at Gilgal cost him his kingship, which was given to David, a man after God's own heart.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 20

THOUGHT

... Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. – Zechariah 4:6

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 14***LESSON****A rash and foolish
vow****VERSE 24**

And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.

The soldiers were exhausted from the fighting and needed physical nourishment to regain their strength. Instead, Saul forbade them to take any food or they would suffer the death penalty. Saul's motive in making such a rash and foolish vow was for self-glory, "that I may be avenged on mine enemies". He was out of the will of God and had no discernment to make the right decisions as his heart was not right with God. He placed superstitious faith in the Ark of God [v. 18] and did not seek counsel from the Lord.

On the other hand, Jonathan exercised faith in God, believing "that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" [v. 6]. God honoured his faith and paved the way for a great victory. However, the abstinence of food weakened Saul's army, preventing "a much greater slaughter among the Philistines" [v. 30]. It also caused the people to sin after sunset when they took the meat with the blood, which was forbidden by the law of God. It also almost caused the death of Jonathan, who ignorantly tasted the honey. Such were the results of a foolish command of King Saul, who had no faith in God.

In the Book of Judges, Jephthah also made a rash vow to sacrifice anyone who came out to meet him upon his triumphant return [Judges 11:30–31] and lived to regret it when his only beloved daughter came out of the house to welcome him joyously.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 21

THOUGHT

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God. – Ecclesiastes 5:2a

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 15***LESSON****To obey is better
than sacrifice****VERSE 22**

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

God's instruction to King Saul was simple: completely destroy the Amalekites [v. 3]. Saul succeeded in defeating the Amalekites but instead of completely destroying them as commanded, he took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive and retained the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs. When Samuel confronted Saul for his disobedience, Saul told a series of lies to justify what he did.

We are all as guilty as Saul. God had revealed Himself to us through the Bible. Nothing more can be added to His Word. Our job is to simply obey and follow His commandments. How many of us and how often have we disobeyed God's commandments? Instead of repenting, how many of us try to justify our disobedience by giving "valid" reasons?

Saul certainly tried to justify his disobedience and his final excuse was that the best of the spoil and cattle were preserved for the purpose of sacrifice to God. While sacrifices to God are important, it is more important to obey. God cannot be "bribed" and has no need of our earthly possessions.

"To obey is better than sacrifice." This is a common theme in the Bible [Psalm 40:6–8, 51:16–17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11–17; Mark 12:33] though sacrifice is not unimportant. It is so important that it demands clean hands and heart. If one's heart is not truly repentant or does not truly love God, the sacrifice would be a hollow ritual.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
RUTH 1-2**

CHALLENGE

Approach Sunday worship with the right attitude, partake the Lord's Supper with the right heart and give offerings with the right joy and thankfulness.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 16***LESSON****Inward beauty more important than outward appearance****VERSE 7**

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
RUTH 3-4**

Due to King Saul's disobedience of God's clear commandments, he forfeited his throne. While he was still in office, God had deemed him unfit for duty as king of the Israelites. Samuel had also broken his relationship with Saul.

God then told Samuel to stop mourning for Saul and prepare himself to be directed and used for the appointment of a new king. Samuel had the tendency to choose a person based on his appearance. Saul was tall and handsome, and Samuel was looking for someone of that same stature. God, however, had other plans and warned Samuel against having such selection criteria.

Appearance does not reveal one's heart. God judges by faith and character, not appearance. Instead of choosing one of the seven sons of Jesse who were men of strength and stature, God called Jesse's youngest child, David, a young boy and an insignificant shepherd who was not even worth calling back to attend the dinner, to be the next king to replace Saul.

God searches the human heart and knows a person's motives [1 Chronicles 28:9, Jeremiah 17:10, Romans 8:27]. While we cannot look into man's heart and often judge a person by his appearance, we can control how we think and function. We can be fooled and we can fool others but not God. We should therefore devote more effort into working on our character and faith rather than our outward appearance. The rewards will be eternal. David was aptly described by God as "a man after His own heart".

PRAYER

God, please help me guard my heart and mind, and help me meditate on Philippians 4:8.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 17–18***LESSON****Have faith like David****I SAMUEL 17:50**

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

This is one of the most well-loved children's stories—David and Goliath. It was said that Goliath the Philistine was almost 10 feet tall. He continued to taunt the Israelite soldiers to a one-on-one battle, with the winner being the victor of the war. No Israelite soldier was capable or dared to accept his challenge.

Then a shepherd boy called David appeared. While others only saw an invincible giant, David saw an ordinary unsaved man shaming the name of God. Despite severe doubt and criticism from his compatriots, David displayed extraordinary faith in God by going forth to fight Goliath—not for personal glory but to defend the name of God. The conduct of the fight itself was another miracle—a giant clad in full armour and weapons of war versus a boy clothed in a shepherd's attire, five stones and a sling. With God's help, it took only David's sling and a single stone to bring Goliath down.

Are you faced with an insurmountable challenge today? Is the unprecedented global economic climate affecting you financially? Is your relationship right with your family, friends and colleagues? Whatever difficulty you are facing today, do not lose faith. The story of David, a shepherd boy, triumphing over Goliath should serve as proof and encouragement to us all.

Have faith in our Almighty God like David had. Keep His statutes and He will see us through whatever earthly difficulties there may be.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 1-2

PRAYER

Oh Lord, help me to be like David, brave and faithful, always ready to defend your Name.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 19***LESSON****Amazing protection****VERSE 10**

And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.

To protect his own kingdom and because of his jealousy, King Saul had now made David his archenemy and Saul's first priority was to eliminate David, making several attempts to kill him.

First, Saul asked Jonathan and all his servants to kill David. He publicly made known his intention even though David was his son-in-law. Second, when David was with Saul in his house, he tried to kill David with his javelin [v. 10]. This was the third time that Saul had tried to kill David with his javelin. But all those attempts failed because God was looking over David.

There shall not a hair fall from your head without God's knowledge. Finally, David was forced to hide in his own house. Even then, Saul sent his guards there to kill him [v. 11]. David fled to the prophet Samuel at Ramah but the determined Saul sent soldiers after David. However, they were overcome by the Spirit of God. Eventually, Saul personally went to Ramah but he, too, was overcome by the Spirit of God [v. 20–24].

Saul, with all his military power and resources, was unable to eliminate David. In all these attempts, God protected His servant David and kept him safe. Although David underwent severe trials, he kept his faith in God for he knew that God was his defence. "Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: For God is my defence, and the God of my mercy" [Psalm 59:17].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 3

PRAYER

O God, we thank Thee for Thou art able to protect us from all evil, for Thou are infinite in wisdom, might and power.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 20***LESSON****A trusting and binding friendship****VERSE 42**

And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

The friendship between Jonathan and David was wonderful, pure, sincere, honest and touching. Jonathan was the heir to the throne but he knew that David was appointed by God and anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. Nevertheless, Jonathan availed himself and provided all assistance for the welfare of his friend David. Here are the salient points of the friendship between them.

First, they were frank with one another. David asked, “What have I done?” [v. 1]. Second, Jonathan was prepared to do all he could for David. “Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee” [v. 4]. Third, Jonathan agreed to carry out the plan to find out Saul’s intention against David’s life [v. 5–32]. David was confident that Jonathan would not betray him. On his part, Jonathan was willing to risk his life for David, to speak up and defend David in front of his father and officials. Fourth, David trusted Jonathan in telling him the true outcome [v. 10–13].

Jonathan was caught between loyalty to his friend and obedience to his father. Even though Jonathan loved his father, he loved God more. He was willing to be submissive to God’s plan for David to be the king of Israel over his father’s instruction. Jonathan was willing to do right over his own family ties. The friendship between David and Jonathan stood this test because it was built on their mutual faith in the Lord.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 4

CHALLENGE

Let’s build lasting friendship among brethren based on our faith in God, Who is just and righteous.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 21***LESSON****Sorrowful deceptions****VERSE 13**

*And he changed his
behaviour before them,
and feigned himself mad in
their hands, and scrabbled
on the doors of the gate,
and let his spittle fall down
upon his beard.*

David left Jonathan and was on the run. He had now become a wanted man. This was the beginning of his life in exile of about 10 years. He had sought refuge with Samuel at Ramah and the high priest Ahimelech at Nob.

David might have wanted Ahimelech to enquire for him before the Lord for guidance. However, when Ahimelech asked David the reason for his visit, David lied, "The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place" [v. 2]. The Bible, being the Word of God, always gives a truthful account. God does not conceal the lies and weaknesses of His servant David.

David's visit to Ahimelech resulted in the massacre of 85 priests. We do not know for sure if the massacre could be avoided had David told the truth. But the massacre is a warning that lies can have unintended and tragic consequences.

David then fled to Achish, the king of Gath. The Philistines did not welcome David's presence for they considered him their enemy. To save himself, David pretended to be mad and continued to run for his life. Under such trying circumstances, David resorted to trickery instead of relying on God. Perhaps it is this event in David's life that caused him to write, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" [Psalm 56:3].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 SAMUEL 5

PRAYER

**Lord, strengthen me, for I know Thou will
redeem me in my adversities.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 22***LESSON****Saul, a king without God****VERSE 15**

Did I then begin to enquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.

These were the words spoken by Ahimelech as he begged Saul to spare his life. However, Saul was consumed with jealousy and hatred for David. Saul continued to pursue David relentlessly. He neglected his prime duty to govern and provide for his people and nation. He obtained loyalty of his officials by giving them worldly gains and positions. He even accused Jonathan of conspiracy. When Doeg, an Edomite, reported to him of David's visit to Ahimelech, Saul summoned the high priest and all the priests at Nob to stand trial [v. 9–11].

Saul maliciously accused Ahimelech of conspiring with David to harm him. He refused to listen to Ahimelech's plea that he was the priest of the Lord, that David had rendered invaluable service to Saul and that he was innocent of all the charges. Saul showed no mercy and ordered Ahimelech and all the priests to be killed.

When Saul's servants did not obey him because they would not kill the priests, Saul ordered Doeg to kill all the priests. In all, 85 priests were ruthlessly murdered. Doeg then proceeded to kill all the people at Nob. Saul did nothing to stop the innocent bloodshed. A man without God is capable of committing great evil.

Psalms 52, 57 and 142 were written by David to recount these events. Lives were lost and a great price was paid to deliver David. Likewise, a life was given, and a greater price paid on the cross of Calvary to deliver sinners from God's judgement.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 SAMUEL 6

PRAYER

Lord, be my master and the Lord of my life that I may walk righteously.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 23***LESSON****A godly approach****VERSE 2**

*Therefore David enquired
of the LORD, saying,
Shall I go and smite these
Philistines? And the LORD
said unto David, Go, and
smite the Philistines, and
save Keilah.*

David was a man after his God's heart. He had always sought God's will, followed and obeyed God's Word. God prospered him. While Saul was in pursuit against David's life, he neglected to protect Israel and the Philistines invaded Keilah. Upon hearing the news, David inquired from the Lord whether he should go and save Keilah. God said that David should save Keilah but his men thought it was not a good idea to fight the Philistines. David enquired from the Lord a second time. The Lord's answer was the same, and David went against the Philistines and saved Keilah.

When David knew that Saul was going to Keilah to capture him, David sought guidance from the Lord again. God answered David that Saul would go to Keilah and the men of Keilah would deliver David and his men to Saul. Upon hearing God's answer, David and his 600 men arose and left Keilah.

In contrast, Saul presumed God was still on his side [v. 7, 21]. He tried with all his might to capture David but did not know that God had already left him. Presuming that God is on your side when you are doing wrong is a tragic mistake.

In the midst of much distress, Jonathan went to David and "strengthened his hand in God" [v. 16]. What a wonderful and encouraging friend we see in Jonathan—one who strengthens the hand of another in the Lord.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 7

PRAYER

Lord, let me always be reminded to seek Thy guidance for I know You care for me.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 24***LESSON****David: Reverential
and gracious****VERSE 6**

*And he said unto his men,
The LORD forbid that I
should do this thing unto
my master, the LORD's
anointed, to stretch forth
mine hand against him,
seeing he is the anointed of
the LORD.*

Saul, after dealing with the Philistines, returned to pursue David. David was forced to hide in the caves at En-gedi. There were many caves around the area but, by divine providence, Saul went to the same cave where David and his men were hiding to relieve himself. David's men sensed that this was the opportunity given by the Lord and urged him to kill Saul [v. 4, 10].

David and his men had been on the run. For his own interest and that of his family and his followers, it would have been the perfect excuse for David to kill Saul, end his exile and be crowned king of Israel.

But signs and circumstances are not necessary indications of God's will if they contradict the law of God. David did not listen to his men but he cut off a corner of Saul's robe as proof of his heart's intent. Even then, David's conscience smote him and he knew it was not the right thing to do because Saul was the Lord's anointed. David also stopped his men from acting against Saul.

Though Saul sought to kill David, he had no intention to return evil with evil. David was gracious. He had no intention to kill Saul. David returned evil with kindness. He trusted the Lord and was submissive to His will. "The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand" [v. 15].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 8-9

PRAYER

Lord, give me Thy wisdom that I shall be gracious to others and be a witness for Thee.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 25***LESSON****Blessed are the
peacemakers****VERSE 33**

*And blessed be thy advice,
and blessed be thou, which
hast kept me this day from
coming to shed blood, and
from avenging myself with
mine own hand.*

This chapter begins with the death and mourning of Samuel, Israel's prophet and judge [v. 1]. Living up to the meaning of his name (fool), Nabal's treatment of David caused his own demise. He was mean and surly in his attitude towards David's men [v. 2–13]. However, Abigail's wisdom and humility resulted in staying David's hand from taking vengeance. She was rewarded with a marriage proposal from David after Nabal had died [v. 14–44].

The cause and effect between wisdom and folly can be seen in the different reactions of Nabal and his wife, Abigail. Blinded by greed and selfishness, Nabal was ungrateful towards David and his men. His grievous words fuelled David's wrath. On the other hand, Abigail was prudent in dealing with David's anger. Her soft answer pacified and calmed him, ensuring peace for everyone.

When was the last time you were a peacemaker? Have you ever helped someone from wrongdoing? Perhaps a friend of yours acted as your mediator during a conflict. Being called the children of God is the promise and reward of peacemakers mentioned in Matthew 5:9. Let us emulate the example of Abigail in our daily inter-personal relationship with others. Handle impending problems with prudence. Be humble to accept correction and advice from others.

As ambassadors for Christ, we have a peacemaking mission, reconciling the world unto God. This is evidence of our sonship in Him. We have this privilege of the ministry of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:17–21].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 10–11

PONDER

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. – Proverbs 15:1

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 26***LESSON****How merciful are you?****VERSE 23**

The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed.

It is heartening to read of David's graciousness in sparing Saul's life once again. He had learnt his lesson, leaving vengeance to the Lord [v. 1–12]. David took the king's sword to prove that he meant Saul no ill will. Though he taunted Abner, David was cautious not to insult King Saul in any way [v. 13–20]. Good intentions uttered by Saul did not result in any changed conduct. This was the last encounter between the two men [v. 21–25]. Note King Saul's "prophetic" words in the last verse.

How David reacted to King Saul's treatment of him was commendable. David's belief in God's promise of kingship to him helped him not to take matters into his own hands. He was loyal to Saul despite the latter's harmful intentions towards him.

David was able to exercise self-control and not render evil for evil. King Saul was at David's mercy yet David did not harm the king. He respected Saul's position of authority but not the person's wicked deeds. David was able to do so because of his faithfulness and trust in God's sovereignty.

Scripture teaches that love begets love. Read Matthew 18:24–35 of the wicked servant who was merciless towards his own fellow servant. He did not show mercy after experiencing forgiveness from his master. If you were David, how would you react? Take your revenge at the most opportune moment? Exploit the situation just because your "enemy" is now at your mercy?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 12

PROMISE

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. – Matthew 5:7

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 27***LESSON****Being deceitful****VERSE 12**

And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.

Verses 1 to 7 refer to David's plan to settle his family in the land of the Philistines. He went to Gath and sought refuge from King Achish. We read of David plotting and deceiving the king in the next section [v. 8–12]. David determined by his own wisdom to safeguard himself by putting some distance between King Saul and him.

It has been said that the best of men is at best still a man. So we should not be too surprised that David was beset by fear. His sin of unbelief in God's protection at this point of time had led to a series of evil plotting and deceitful lies. David waged war against the remaining enemies of Israel. All these were done in the guise of fighting for King Achish.

When we yield to temptation, it can easily lead to further sinning. A life without God's guidance results in selfish living. We must not become pawns of Satan to do his bidding. David's trust in a heathen king for protection was misguided. This momentary lapse of faith and belief is a warning to us to trust only in our Lord Jesus.

How is your Christian walk at this stage? Are you living a life of compromise? Do not be a fair-weather believer. Always put your trust in God alone. Do not waver and be fearful when things go wrong for us. Firm, unshakeable confidence in God's promises will preserve us from the trials of life.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 SAMUEL 13

PRAYER**Help me to remain faithful in all that I do.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 28***LESSON****God's silence****VERSE 6**

*And when Saul enquired
of the LORD, the LORD
answered him not, neither
by dreams, nor by Urim,
nor by prophets.*

King Achish trusted David to the extent of making him the king's bodyguard [v. 1–2]. King Saul's fear of the Philistines resulted in him seeking help from the witch of Endor. Saul contacted the dead prophet, Samuel, for guidance [v. 3–19]. The message from Samuel terrified Saul so much that he fell helplessly to the ground. He had to be persuaded to eat in order to regain his strength for the battle [v. 20–25].

How low King Saul had sunk is revealed in this chapter. He broke the very law that he had enforced. God forbade any dealings with witches and necromancers [Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:11–12]. Those guilty of such deeds are an abomination unto the Lord. Contacting the dead—known as necromancy—is expressly forbidden by God. There is no record of Saul seeking Samuel's advice when the prophet was alive. Such was Saul's state of distress and desperation out of fear of the Philistines.

Silence from God should serve as a warning to King Saul of his impending doom. How about you and me? Have we allowed the things of the world to distract us from following our Lord?

The key verse for today indicates the level of Saul's spiritual standing before God. Today, we do not seek God in dreams or visions. Keep close to our Lord Jesus by faithfully reading His Word and praying to Him. How is your prayer life right now?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 14

PRAYER**Teach me to heed Your still, small voice.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 29***LESSON****A way out****VERSE 9**

And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle.

Though King Achish trusted David completely, his princes had doubts about David's loyalty. They insisted on removing David from the battle scene [v. 1–5]. Indeed, David had a narrow escape out of his dilemma. The king requested him to return to the land of the Philistines [v. 6–11].

Poor, faithless David was not forgotten by our Almighty God. David's unbelief led him to Philistine land to seek for safety and shelter. However, God is always faithful in keeping His Word [2 Timothy 2:13]. Providence is at work here to ensure that David did not have to fight against his own people. God was gracious to provide a way out for David. So David did not participate in the battle where Saul and his sons were slain. He was not guilty of stretching forth his hand against the Lord's anointed.

David spent his time in Gath by invading the Geshurites, the Gezrites and the Amalekites. King Achish was convinced that David was willing to be his servant. David had made a good impression on the king.

Even though we had done wrong, God can still use us to do His will. However, do not be misled into thinking that we can escape the consequences of our unbelief and wrongdoing. Scripture teaches that we reap what we sow. In David's latter years, he suffered the heartache of being deceived by his own family members and servants. Are you caught in a similar situation? Pray for God's timely deliverance.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 15

REMINDER**Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Samuel 30–31***LESSON****Saul's ignominious death****I SAMUEL 31:9**

*And they cut off his head,
and stripped off his armour,
and sent into the land of
the Philistines round about,
to publish it in the house of
their idols, and among the
people.*

Upon David's return to Ziklag, he found the city burnt and his people taken captives. Grief-stricken, his men blamed David for their loss [1 Samuel 30:1–6]. However, David sought the Lord for guidance. Then he prepared to pursue the Amalekites. Through divine providence, David was aided by a young Egyptian man [1 Samuel 30:7–15].

Amidst the merry-making of the Amalekites, David defeated them swiftly and easily. He recovered what was originally his [1 Samuel 30:16–20] and shared the spoils generously with his people. King Saul's defeat and suicide are described in detail here [1 Samuel 31:1–7]. The bodies of Saul and his three sons were laid to rest by the men of Jabesh-gilead [1 Samuel 31:8–13].

What a sad way for a king to die. Saul was never concerned about his spiritual condition. Even at the point of death he was more worried about loss of face. He did not want to die at the direct hands of his enemies, so he killed himself. The manner of one's physical death, no matter how tragically ignominious, is not as important as his spiritual standing before God. In this last chapter of 1 Samuel, nothing was mentioned about the souls of Saul and his sons.

The lesson here is that we must fear the One Who is able to destroy both body and soul. The time and nature of our death are known only to God. How prepared are you to meet your Maker?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 16

THOUGHT

For the believer, death is the gateway to heaven.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 1*

LESSON

Consequence of a lie

VERSE 10

So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

Second Samuel begins with the death of Saul, the first king of Israel [1 Samuel 31]. It tells us how God enabled David to unite the 12 tribes of Israel into one nation, defeat their enemies, expand their borders and prepare the way for Solomon to be the next king. The book ends just before the death of David.

David and his men had been back two days in Ziklag from his successful expedition against the Amalekite raiders. A messenger came with news of Saul's death on the third day of his return to Ziklag [v. 2]. Upon hearing the news, David rent his clothes and put earth upon his head as a sign of mourning for Saul's death.

The Amalekite's story was a lie. He apparently sought recognition or reward for claiming to have killed Saul who had committed suicide [1 Samuel 31:4]. As a mercenary or looter, he must have come across Saul's body on the battlefield, and took his crown and bracelet to substantiate his fabrication. Apparently, David believed the account of the Amalekite and had him executed on the basis of his own testimony of having slain the king [v. 15–16].

The fabrication of the Amalekite revealed the depravity of his heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" May this serve as a warning to us. We must watch our words at all times. Be wary of every idle conversation.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 17-18

WARNING

Beware of idle speech and a loose tongue.

BIBLE LESSON

2 Samuel 2

LESSON

Against one another

VERSE 21

*And Abner said to him,
Turn thee aside to thy right
hand or to thy left, and
lay thee hold on one of the
young men, and take thee
his armour. But Asahel
would not turn aside from
following of him.*

The death of Saul did not immediately open the way for David to ascend to the throne. The tribe of Judah had acknowledged David as king but the majority of the people in Israel had not. So he sought guidance from the Lord [v. 1]. God answered his prayer and directed him to go to Hebron, the oldest city in the land. It was here that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were buried. It was the right place for David to be crowned. In obedience to the Lord, David went to Hebron and the people of Judah anointed him as king [v. 4].

However, the followers of Saul did not acknowledge David as king. They chose Saul's son, Ishbosheth, to be their king instead. So the nation was divided—Judah led by David and the other tribes under Ishbosheth. Before long, there was a civil war between the two groups and David's army won the battle. Indeed, this internal strife was a sad day for God's people.

It is always sad when people of one nation fight against each other. It is sadder still when family members do not get along. It is saddest when God's people in the same church are at odds against one another. Do you have a conflict with anyone? Pray and ask the Lord to resolve that problem right now.

May God help us to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel" [Philippians 1:27b], not against one another.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 19-20

PRAYER

Lord, keep us united in our service for You.

BIBLE LESSON

2 Samuel 3

LESSON

Well done!

VERSE 36

And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.

The battle of Chapter 2 was over but the war between the families of Saul and David continued for a long time. David became progressively stronger, and Saul's house became weaker and weaker. David's marriage to the daughter of Talmi, King of Geshur [v. 3], probably sealed an alliance between the two kings. Marriage alliances between royal houses as a means of concluding treaties and sealing relationships between nations were common in the ancient Near East. However, David's marriages violated the Law [Deuteronomy 7:3; 17:17]. The kings of Israel were to depend on God alone for help, not on alliances with foreign kings.

Ishbosheth's accusation of Abner's affair with Rizpah, one of Saul's concubines, was a serious charge. It was interpreted as a type of claim to the throne [2 Samuel 16:20–21]. Feeling hurt and angry, Abner switched sides and vowed to help make David king over all Israel. He made unifying speeches before the tribes of Benjamin and Hebron. But Abner was killed by Joab out of vengeance for his murder of Joab's brother, Asahel [2 Samuel 2:23].

Hebron was a city of refuge [Joshua 21:13]. In such a city, no one could slay a murderer without a trial [Numbers 35:22–25]. Hence, David did not consider Joab's action justifiable. David issued a royal edict commanding all the people to mourn and attend Abner's funeral. What David did pleased the people.

We can say the same about our Lord Jesus Christ. Is our behaviour pleasing as well?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 21

PRAYER

May we grow in favour with God and men.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 4***LESSON****A righteous man****VERSE 11**

*How much more, when
wicked men have slain a
righteous person in his own
house upon his bed? shall
I not therefore now require
his blood of your hand, and
take you away from the
earth?*

Ishbosheth lost courage after Abner's death. He had no real support for the throne. He was most likely unpopular with many of his countrymen. They must have been frustrated by his inability to strengthen and govern the country. This led to his assassination in his own house by two of his army officers, Baanah and Rechab. Both of them thought that David would reward them but they were mistaken.

Both men were judged by David and found guilty of murder. As a result, they were condemned to death. Their bodies were hung over a pool in Hebron as a public denouncement of their evil deeds [Deuteronomy 21:22]. Ishbosheth was buried with full military honour in Hebron in the sepulchre of Abner, for they were relatives.

David called Ishbosheth "a righteous person" for he was not guilty of any crime. As Saul's son, it was natural to think that he was next in line for the throne. Again, David was shown to be righteous and fair as he built his kingdom by justice, not treachery. He did not follow the philosophy that the end justifies any means.

David trusted in the sovereign control of God. He believed that God would keep His promise and in due time he would be the king of Israel. God knows the way of the righteous and blesses their obedience in Him. Just like David, let us be righteous and fair in our attitudes towards others. Do not be guilty of any foul play to get what you want.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 SAMUEL 22

PRAYER**Lord, keep me in the path of righteousness.**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 5–6***LESSON****Doing God's work
God's way****2 SAMUEL 6:10**

*So David would not remove
the ark of the LORD unto
him into the city of David:
but David carried it aside
into the house of Obed-
edom the Gittite.*

Chapter 5 tells us that David was crowned king of the whole nation of Israel. One of the military acts of David was to capture the fortress on Mount Zion from the Jebusites. He captured Jerusalem, which became the capital city. God gave David two victories over the Philistines when they attacked him.

The Ark was a reminder to Israel that God's presence was with them. After the Philistines had returned to Israel, it remained in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim for a long time. Now David wanted to bring it to Jerusalem. The Ark was to be carried by the sons of Kohath [Numbers 3:30–31]. It was not to be placed on a cart or be touched [Numbers 4:15].

But the Israelites followed the pattern of the Philistines and put the Ark on a new cart [2 Samuel 6:3–4]. When the oxen stumbled and it looked like the Ark was going to fall, Uzzah immediately stretched out his hand to hold the Ark. He was killed immediately. The Lord punished him because only the priests were allowed to touch the Ark. This reminded Israel that no matter how long ago God had said something, He still meant it.

The lesson is that God's work must be done in God's way, if it is to have God's blessing. Being omnipotent, our Lord does not need help from anyone. Thank God for choosing us to be His instruments. However, we must be clean vessels fit for the Master's use.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 23

PRAYER

Not my will, Lord, but Thine be done, and be done in Thy way.

BIBLE LESSON

2 Samuel 7

LESSON

When God says “no”

VERSE 16

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

David wanted to build God a house—a permanent structure to house the Ark. God says “no” to him. However, the Almighty promised to let one of David’s descendants do it. We know that this descendant was Solomon. Furthermore, God declared that He would establish a kingdom for David that lasts forever.

Although God rejected David’s request to build the temple, He nonetheless praised David for having done well because he had the God-honouring desire in his heart [2 Chronicles 6:7–9]. God knows our heart. When we are willing but unable—for reasons beyond our control—to do the things that we want to do for God, we would be considered to have done our part by God too. So we have to accept the possibility that God may say “no” to some of our burdens and aspirations, be they noble and selfless. When God says “no”, it is not necessarily a rejection but a redirection.

Also, when God says “no”, it does not necessarily mean that our request is not good. Sometimes it is because God has a better plan than ours. Here, David is interested in building a physical structure but God had in mind something bigger: a spiritual building. The physical building is temporary but the spiritual building is forever. God’s plan to build a house for David is far more strategic than any plan David had in mind to build for God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 24

THOUGHT

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. – Isaiah 55:9

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 8***LESSON****David's military victories****VERSE 11**

Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued;

This chapter summarises the military victories of David over Israel's enemies: the Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, Assyrians and Edomites. These military activities must be viewed in the light of God's covenant with Israel [Genesis 15:17–21]. The Lord had promised Israel the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River. And the Lord used David to fulfil the promise. These victories made David very famous. He was careful, however, to give God the glory [v. 11–12]. God was protecting him in all the battles. Twice in this chapter [v. 6, 14] we read: And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.

David's victories enriched the treasuries with gold and silver that were subsequently used by Solomon for the construction of the temple [1 Kings 7:51]. Indeed, Solomon would never have been able to do as he did if David, his father, had not gathered these stores of gold and silver. Thus, other men labour and we enter into their labours but the accomplished building is credited by God to each. He did not forget David when Solomon's temple was completed.

The dedication of the gold and silver collected from their enemies foreshadows God's purpose that Gentiles should contribute to the building of His Temple. It speaks of the spiritual temple, the church, which is made up of people from every nation of the earth. Just as David prevailed in his military battles, so too is our Lord in the gathering of souls from every nation on this earth.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 25

THOUGHT

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 8:11

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 9***LESSON****Fear not****VERSE 7**

*And David said unto him,
Fear not: for I will surely
shew thee kindness for
Jonathan thy father's sake,
and will restore thee all the
land of Saul thy father; and
thou shalt eat bread at my
table continually.*

David had ascended the throne of Israel. It would have been politically expedient for him to kill all the descendants of his rival Saul, as kings normally did in those days. But instead, David wanted to show kindness to Saul's family because he wanted to honour a covenant he had made with Jonathan [1 Samuel 20:14–15]. So Mephibosheth, being the only relative left of the family, was brought into the palace.

We see in David's dealings with Mephibosheth a picture of God's grace to lost sinners. Mephibosheth represents all who are elect sinners. His name means "big shame". He deserved to die on account of his relationship with Saul. David took the initiative to search for him. He was called into the palace and "adopted" as one of David's sons. And these happened all for Jonathan's sake.

So it is with God's children. Before the eyes of God, we are Mephibosheths—people of great shame. By our very nature we are unable to initiate any search for God. It is God Who takes the initiative to search for us. We are called and saved, not because we deserve it but on account of a covenant God the Father had made with His Son before the world came into existence.

"Fear not, Mephibosheth!" That is what God speaks to all His elect people. Just as David invited Mephibosheth to come to him, so Jesus Christ invites us to come to Him. He has promised to show us kindness, and He cannot lie.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 26–27

HYMN

**Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner, saved by grace!**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 10***LESSON****The Lord does that
which seemeth Him
good****VERSE 12**

*Be of good courage, and
let us play the men for our
people, and for the cities
of our God: and the LORD
do that which seemeth him
good.*

The Amalekites had humiliated the messengers of Israel. The humiliation amounted to a declaration of war. To protect themselves, they hired the Syrians to fight with them against the Israelites. Joab, the commander of David's forces, found himself surrounded by Amalekites on one side and Syrians on the other. So he divided his troops. He put his brother Abishai in charge of one group while he took charge of the other. They pledged themselves to help each other.

Joab knew that the line between life and death in a battle was very fine. If a soldier worried about what was going to happen to him, he would cease to be courageous. He also knew that the battle was about the honour of Israel, and ultimately God, because Israel was a nation chosen by God. Being the commander of the army of God, he reminded the Israelites of their loyalty to God. By saying, "And the Lord do that which seemeth Him good," Joab was telling the Israelite soldiers that no matter what the outcome was, whether they were going to be alive or dead, the important thing was: God was honoured.

In our work for God in this world, we too can expect to face situations where our self-interests may be put at risk. The lesson we can learn from Joab is not to worry about what happens to us but to trust that whatever the outcome, God means it for good.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 28-29

THOUGHT

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. – Acts 20:24

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 11–12***LESSON****Thou shalt not die****2 SAMUEL 12:13**

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

Here we see David, the man after God's own heart, coveting his neighbour's (Uriah) wife, committed adultery and subsequently, in an attempt to cover up his sin, bore false witness (against Uriah) and had him killed.

While the sin of adultery might have been committed on the spur of the moment, the sin of murder was clearly premeditated, a crime for which David could be executed according to the Law. But as soon as he acknowledged his sins [2 Samuel 12:13], we were told that God put his sin away and he would not die. Nonetheless, he paid dearly, to the tune of four times of what he caused others to suffer [2 Samuel 12:6]. David took Uriah's life, but he would lose four of his own, including the life of the baby son he had with Bathsheba.

One might ask: why should a baby die for the sin his father had committed? There is no easy answer to this question. But one thing is clear: Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? [Genesis 18:25] Nevertheless, we can take comfort from the revelation that David believed he would see the baby again when he went to heaven [2 Samuel 12:23].

It should encourage us to know that even the best men and women in the Bible had their faults and failures, just as we have. Yet the Lord in His sovereign grace was able to use them to accomplish His purposes. What David had gone through shows that when the elect of God sins, God will chasten [Hebrews 12:7].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 30–31

THOUGHT

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. – 1 Corinthians 10:12

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 13***LESSON****The wiles of an unworthy son****VERSE 15**

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.

God had blessed David with many sons [1 Chronicles 28:5]. Amnon was the oldest of David's sons and the heir apparent to the throne. He felt he had privileges that the rest of David's sons did not have. In his lust for his half-sister Tamar [v. 1–5], he feigned illness and asked for her. When Amnon got Tamar alone, he raped her. Having gratified his lust, he then rejected her completely. She left weeping bitterly over her humiliation. David was furious but did nothing. David's failure to act made a bad situation worse and resolution became impossible.

Absalom, Tamar's brother, harboured hatred against his half-brother Amnon. For two years, he patiently and carefully plotted revenge on Amnon. During the sheep-shearing festivities, Amnon was slain at Absalom's behest [v. 28–29]. Absalom then fled to Geshur [v. 37–38]. David gradually accepted Amnon's death but just as he did nothing to punish Amnon for his sin, David also did nothing to punish Absalom.

1 John 1:9 teaches us what to do when we sin. It is corrective theology. Romans 6:12–13 teaches us how to handle sin before we commit it. It is preventive theology, to which Christians should pay more attention.

The purpose of 2 Samuel 13 is to help us prevent this kind of sin rather than help us recover after having fallen into it. It is a strong warning against letting our passion lead us because of the consequences that will follow.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 1

THOUGHT**Read 1 Corinthians 6:13–20.**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 14***LESSON****What we sow, we will reap****VERSE 14**

For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.

David yearned for his exiled son Absalom. Joab confronted David by putting a story of a family problem into the mouth of a wise woman from Tekoa [v. 4–9]. The essence of the story is that one brother killed another and if the death penalty for murder was invoked, as other relatives were demanding, then there would be no living heir. The story parallels the position between Absalom and Amnon.

Verse 14 is the key verse in this chapter. The wise actress reminded David that life is brief. When life ends, it is like water spilt onto the earth and cannot be recovered. God devises ways to show mercy and forgive offenders. He also makes plans to enable a banished person to be reconciled to Him. The Cross is the greatest historical proof of this truth.

The chapter concludes by recording the reconciliation between David and Absalom [v. 28–33]. But the seed of bitterness had been sown and Absalom nourished the anger in his heart for two more years. The seed would bear the fruit of conspiracy and rebellion against David himself.

Adultery and murder were David's sins [2 Samuel 12:9], and the sins of his children (Amnon defiling his sister Tamar and Absalom murdering his brother Amnon). This was the beginning of David's punishment even though he found repentance and forgiveness of sin from God [Psalm 51]. By sending Tamar to Amnon and Amnon to Absalom, David was reaping what he had sown [Galatians 6:7].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 2

THOUGHT

God always devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 15*

LESSON

The value of friends

VERSE 21

And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

In Chapter 15 we read of the treachery and rebellion of Absalom. This handsome, brilliant, gifted younger son of David carefully stole the allegiance and hearts of the people away from God's anointed king, David. He then conspired with close friends to usurp his father and take the throne for himself. Absalom staged a revolt on the advice of Ahithophel.

Taken completely by surprise, David, with his household and supporters, was driven out of Jerusalem. Even in retreat and sadness, he prayed to God and assigned key people to be his eyes and ears in Jerusalem and send him all the information that would help him plan his strategy. David also appointed Hushai to thwart the counsel that disloyal Ahithophel gave Absalom [v. 31–34].

David had lost Absalom as a son but he won the friendship of many others in Israel. The king's servants modelled true service by offering to do whatever David needed them to do [v. 15–18]. Ittai expressed his friendship and declared his obedience and loyalty to the king [v. 19–23]. Zadok and Abiathar became informants and made sure their friend David had the information he needed to guarantee his safety [v. 24–29]. Hushai was willing to hazard his own safety to defend David [v. 30–37].

Their friendly relationship was characterised by trust, understanding and encouragement. True friends do not let you stand alone.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 3

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be a friend to someone in need.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 16***LESSON****In God's hands****VERSE 12**

*It may be that the LORD
will look on mine affliction,
and that the LORD will
requite me good for his
cursing this day.*

In 2 Samuel 16:1–4 David encountered Ziba, the first of two men with links to the house of Saul. The other was Shimei [v. 5–14]. This happened while David was fleeing from his son Absalom. Ziba attempted to ingratiate himself with David. He maliciously told David that Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, had defaulted to Jerusalem. David accepted Ziba's report too quickly without checking the facts. God's leaders must constantly be on guard lest they make unwise decisions on the basis of incomplete information.

Shimei abused and cursed David. While his charge that David was a man of bloodshed [v. 8] was true, as David had murdered Uriah, Shimei actually meant that David was responsible for the murders of Abner and Ishboseth, which was not true. David felt that the words of Shimei's curse [v. 7–8] might be God's punishment for that sin [v. 10–11]. He hoped that by showing mercy to Shimei, God might be merciful to him [v. 12]. David refused to have him struck down and left the matter to the Lord.

Unlike David, when people curse or abuse us, we often want to silence them or defend ourselves by asking them to justify their charges. But with God's protective love, we become less concerned with what others say and entrust the matter to God.

We are in God's hands, no matter what others say about us. He has seen our distress and in time will repay us for the cursing we have received. Let us trust Him and abide in His love.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 4

THOUGHT

How did Jesus respond to words spoken against Him? Read 1 Peter 2:20–23.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 17–18***LESSON****The grief of a victorious father****2 SAMUEL 18:33**

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 5-6**

Absalom called for a council of war. Ahithophel urged Absalom to let him lead 12,000 men to attack David while he was still weak [2 Samuel 17:1–4]. Hushai advised Absalom not to be hasty but to muster all Israel under his leadership and overpower David with a large army. Hushai’s advice was taken. Obviously, this was the Lord’s doing, to frustrate Ahithophel’s advice and bring disaster on Absalom. Ahithophel was so grieved by the rejection of his advice that he committed suicide.

Receiving information of Absalom’s plans, David and his followers quickly crossed the Jordan and reached Mahanaim. Three new Transjordanian friends—Shobi, Machir and Barzillai—provided food and shelter for David and his troops [2 Samuel 17:27–29].

In the civil war that followed, David’s troops won the battle in the forests of Ephraim. Absalom, whose full head of hair was his crowning glory, got his hair caught in the branches of a tree. His vanity had become his downfall. Contrary to David’s order to spare his son, Joab plunged three spears into the heart of defenceless Absalom. He was also struck by Joab’s men [2 Samuel 18:14–15].

For David, the victory over Absalom was bittersweet. He regained his throne but lost Absalom. David privately poured out his heart before God in unremitting grief [2 Samuel 18:33a]. David’s flaws stand as a warning to us by God. We are not to succumb to lust. We are not to withdraw from involvement with our children.

THOUGHT

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. – Ephesians 6:4

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 19***LESSON****How should leaders behave?****VERSE 5**

And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines;

When David mourned for Absalom despite his ungratefulness and sins, Joab rebuked David for this act of weakness. David faced four other settings in this chapter: with Shimei, Mephibosheth, Barzillai and the people of Israel and Judah.

After the mourning of Absalom, David marched into the city of Judah, both to regain his kingdom and to unite Israel. He sensed that squabbles and dissensions were sprouting all over. He replaced his general Joab with another, Amasa. This was done for several reasons. Joab was impudent, he defied David's order not to slay Absalom, his popularity and authority were increasing, and thus presented a threat. David showed kindness and mercy to his previous enemies, namely, Shimei, as others were watching to see the outcome.

David could not help but be overcome with grief when faced with the loss of Absalom. He merely displayed a father's love, in spite of the cruel nature and scheming heart of his son. Joab reprimanded him for this and was later replaced. But Joab justly rebuked David because he felt that although David was grieving as a father, he had a greater responsibility as a leader towards his people.

Likewise, leaders in the church have to be mindful of their responsibilities. Leaders have to consider their roles before reacting to situations. Being human, leaders can sometimes struggle with this high order. Let us pray for our leaders.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 7-8

PRAYER

O Lord, I pray that You give the leaders of my church the strength to play their role well despite the many challenges they face.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 20*

LESSON

Consequences of a weak leader

VERSE 5

So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him.

Sheba, the son of Bichri, caused trouble for David by inciting the northern tribes of Israel not to follow David and accept him as king. This was treason. David gave charge over Amasa to kill Sheba quickly. But Amasa's delay led to Sheba's escape, and resulted in dire consequences.

David ordered Abishai to search out Sheba. Abishai collaborated with his brother, Joab. When they caught up with Amasa, Joab killed him and then trailed Sheba to the city of Abel. A wise old lady living in that city saved it from being destroyed by gathering support from the city's inhabitants to sniff out Sheba and kill him. This ended Joab's plan to destroy the city.

We see here the dire consequences of a leader. Amasa was the king's general but he was slow to carry out the king's order. When he met Joab and Abishai, he was not wary of them, resulting in his death. When he died, his soldiers just passed by him. Amasa's corpse was merely covered with cloth and cast to the side of the road.

Every believer is a leader in some sense. When one is appointed leader, one has the responsibility to carry out his tasks promptly, diligently and efficiently. Being a leader means one has to be on one's toes, and be answerable for one's failures. But it is not easy to execute all orders successfully. Let us pray for our leaders that they be given strength and wisdom by God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 9

PRAYER

O Lord, being a leader is a challenging task. I pray that You grant our church leaders strength and wisdom.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 21***LESSON****Human sacrifice in Israel****VERSE 6**

*Let seven men of his sons
be delivered unto us, and
we will hang them up unto
the LORD in Gibeah of Saul,
whom the LORD did choose.
And the king said, I will
give them.*

This chapter can be divided into two parts: the sacrifice to the Gibeonites to atone for Saul's sins [v. 1–14] and the victorious battles between the Israelites and the Philistines [v. 15–22]. It was at this time that David's men suggested that he retire from fighting as he had become weary.

The land of Israel was suffering from a three-year famine. David sought the Lord and was told that it was a punishment for Saul's sins. Saul had ignored the covenant that Israel made with the Gibeonites and killed them. The Gibeonites demanded restitution—seven males from Saul's lineage to be killed by the Gibeonites as a form of pardon from them. After much deliberation, David chose two sons of Rizpah (Saul's concubine) and five sons of Michal (Saul's daughter).

This episode teaches us that God does not condone sin, and that the civil authorities are ordained by God to ensure that crimes do not go unpunished. The question is asked: Why are the descendants of Saul held accountable for his sins? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" [Ezekiel 18:20]. Here, God was referring to the eternal consequences of sin. In 2 Samuel 21, the death of Saul's sons represented the effects of sin caused by Saul.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 10

THOUGHT

Sin exacts a price and brings pain beyond the one who commits it.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 22*

LESSON

**Deliverance from
God**

VERSE 20

*He brought me forth also
into a large place: he
delivered me, because he
delighted in me.*

This chapter is a hymn of David in which he gave thanks to God for the many victories He had given him and for the gracious way He had worked to bring him to the throne of Israel. There are some who believed that David wrote this hymn in his prime before the Uriah incident and before the census incident. But it is more likely that David adapted it from Psalm 18 in his old age.

The point of this hymn is to recognise that God remained faithful despite David's many failures. God, being omniscient, would definitely have known of David's future sins before David even committed them. When David sinned, there were repercussions. David was not exempted from having to face the earthly consequences of his sins. But as for his standing before God, David was confident that God was his "rock of salvation".

Despite David's sins, the Almighty still blessed David and rewarded him. God made David king and restored his kingdom. God will bless those whom He chooses to bless and curse those whom He chooses to curse because He is the sovereign God.

Likewise, we must realise that sinning is breaking God's commandment, and God will never condone sin. But we are confident that in Christ we are forgiven and delivered from the eternal wrath of God because our Lord Jesus has paid the price of sin on our behalf.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 11

THOUGHT

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. – Romans 8:1

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 23***LESSON****To be praised and numbered by God****VERSE 39**

Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

Thirty-seven mighty soldiers were named in this chapter. They were mighty because they stood by David's side, fighting fiercely and valiantly for him, Israel and God. They were mighty because they killed by the hundreds. They were mighty because they fought without fear when others fled. They were mighty because they served their king with full loyalty.

The first three were Adino, Eleazar and Shammah. The second group of mighty men were not named but they formed the 30 listed in verses 24–29. Two other mighty men were Abishai and Benaiah. With the exception of the second group of the three mighty men, all the others were named in the Bible. Altogether, 37 mighty men were numbered to receive honour.

Great warriors in the past participated in many battles of faith so that their names could be recorded in the annals of history. Christian missionaries who have given their lives in foreign lands include David Livingstone, who spent his life in Africa, Amy Carmichael in India and Adoniram Judson in Burma. In recent history, John Elliot was killed by the Auca Indians but his wife, Elizabeth, continued his work.

What do you want to be remembered for? The founder of a great company? The winner of some competition? A straight 'A' student? Paul has this to say, "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" [1 Corinthians 9:25].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 12

THOUGHT

Are you running for an incorruptible crown?

BIBLE LESSON*2 Samuel 24***LESSON****Be filled with
godliness****VERSE 10**

*And David's heart smote
him after that he had
numbered the people. And
David said unto the LORD,
I have sinned greatly in
that I have done: and now,
I beseech thee, O LORD,
take away the iniquity of
thy servant; for I have done
very foolishly.*

This is the second great sin of David. He commanded Joab to take a census of his kingdom so that he could know the number of soldiers under his command. Joab advised David against the idea because it was a mark of pride. But David refused to heed Joab's counsel.

When Joab reported the strength of David's soldiers to him, David immediately realised his great sin. Perhaps it could be that Satan's grip on David was released only then. Immediately, David repented and asked God for forgiveness. In his mercy, God forgave him but He sent the prophet Gad to ask David to choose his punishment. David chose three days of pestilence, in which 70,000 people died.

At a cursory level, we may question why God punished David for something He instigated in the first place [v. 1]. However, we see in 1 Chronicles 21:1 that Satan was the true culprit. As in the case of Job, Satan sought permission from God to tempt David. Hence, we must be mindful that Satan is always lurking around, choosing his next victim to tempt.

Satan tempts everyone but he is more likely to tempt Christians who are very fervent in their faith. The devil works hardest against those who are fervent for God. The stone-cold Christian does not pose a threat and is useless anyhow. We should pray for ourselves and one another that we will not be tempted by Satan. Let us fill our minds with godliness at all times for an empty mind is the devil's playground.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 13-14**

PRAYER

**Dear God, I pray that You keep my mind
occupied with godly things at all times.**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 1***LESSON****The man who wanted to be king****VERSE 5**

Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

The two books of Kings were originally just one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles record the history of the Jewish nation from the time of Saul to the downfall of Judah under the hand of the Babylonians.

First Kings dovetails Second Samuel, covering the end of the reign of David and the coronation of Solomon. The book begins with another tragic family affair in David's household, which was another consequence of his sin with Bathsheba. After Nathan confronted David, he unknowingly passed a judgement for his own sin. David had arranged for Uriah to be killed and for that, four of his sons would die. By the time of First Kings, three had died—the baby who was born to Bathsheba, Amnon and Absalom. Adonijah would be the fourth.

God had already appointed Solomon to be David's successor [1 Chronicles 28:5–7]. But Adonijah, the son of Haggith [2 Samuel 3:4], was next in line to the throne after Amnon and Absalom. Like his elder brother, Adonijah garnered the support of the court officials and proclaimed himself king. David, being the ever indulgent father, did nothing to stop Adonijah. The plot was exposed by Nathan and Solomon was hastily installed.

Adonijah exemplifies a person who never bothers to discover and submit to the will of God. He claimed what he thought he deserved but only to find out that his personal desires were not in line with the will of God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 15–16

THOUGHT

Seek God's will by living for His glory.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 2***LESSON****Be a man!****VERSE 2**

*I go the way of all the earth:
be thou strong therefore,
and shew thyself a man;*

David was not a perfect man but he was a man after God's own heart, and he "served his own generation by the will of God" [Acts 13:36]. David, knowing that his death was near, gave this fatherly advice to Solomon, "Shew thyself a man" [v. 2].

Saul, the first king of Israel, and David's sons—Absalom and Adonijah—are examples of what manhood ought not to be. A man is not characterised by good looks and a well-toned body. A man is not one who can garner a following. The measure of a man is not his power or wealth.

What then is a real man? He is one who lives according to God's Word. "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgements, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses ..." [v. 3]. Solomon's responsibility was much heavier. He was to be a man not just to his own family but also to the whole nation. His subjects would look to him as their example.

Every man, in a sense, is a leader; be it in the home as husband or father, or in his place of work as a disciple of Christ. The world expects Christians to be different. They demand a higher standard, and rightly so, because we claim that we have the truth. As our Lord says, we are to be the light of the world [Matthew 5:14].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 17-18

THOUGHT

When your friends see you, what aspect of your life is most evident?

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 3***LESSON****Seeking peace with
the world****VERSE 1**

*And Solomon made affinity
with Pharaoh king of
Egypt, and took Pharaoh's
daughter, and brought her
into the city of David, until
he had made an end of
building his own house, and
the house of the LORD, and
the wall of Jerusalem round
about.*

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 19**

The saying that the son is a chip off the old block did not hold true for David and Solomon. There were many differences between David and Solomon. David was accustomed to the rustic life of a shepherd. Solomon, however, was more attuned to the life of a prince. After all, he was born at a time when Israel was at the height of its power.

David was more contemplative, and he wrote the psalms. Solomon was more pragmatic, and he gave us the Book of Proverbs. David was a shepherd-king who loved God's people. Solomon was an aristocrat-king who used God's people. At David's death, the people mourned. At Solomon's death, the people begged his son for a lighter burden. David was a man after God's own heart. Solomon was a man after peace for Israel.

To attain that peace, Solomon was known for his many treaties with the neighbouring nations. These treaties included marriages. Solomon's first wife was the daughter of Pharaoh [v. 1]. Solomon's strategy of multiple peace treaties is testimony of his wisdom but it also speaks of his lack of reliance upon God.

God had called Israel to be His peculiar people [Deuteronomy 14:2]. Peace and security comes by trusting God, Who is our "refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" [Deuteronomy 33:27a]. Solomon thought that if he would be friendly with the other nations, they would be friendly with him. It was a wrong judgement because he failed to heed his father's deathbed advice [1 Kings 2:3-4].

THOUGHT

Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. – James 4:4

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 4***LESSON****Peace all around****VERSE 20**

Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.

This chapter is a description of the tangible results of Solomon's able administration and governance. Solomon wisely retained the 12 ministers who followed and served David faithfully as his team of counsellors.

Under Solomon, Israel expanded her territories [v. 21]. His policies also resulted in great prosperity for the people of Judah. The population increased as "the sand which is by the sea in multitude" [v. 20]. This reads almost like a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise [Genesis 22:17]. The people were "eating and drinking, and making merry" [v. 20] and there was "peace on all sides" [v. 24]. God also blessed Solomon personally. He controlled the surrounding nations [v. 24]. He had a personal stable of 40,000 stalls of horses [v. 26] and lacked nothing [v. 27]. Solomon was "wiser than all men" [v. 31].

However, we must not equate physical blessings with spiritual blessings. To say that all was well in Israel does not mean that God was pleased with Israel. To God, peace and prosperity are not necessarily the marks of success. Israel under Solomon's reign was riding on the crest of its success but it was also heading towards a disaster.

One sign of the downward spiral is Solomon's departure from God's Word. Contrary to God's law, Solomon increased the number of horses [Deuteronomy 17:16]. Solomon began well but he lacked his father's steadfast devotion to God. Solomon failed to walk before the Lord in truth with all his heart and soul [1 Kings 2:4].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 20

THOUGHT

The measure of a man's success is not measured by his wealth but by his relationship with God.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 5–6***LESSON****The building project****I KINGS 5:5**

And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.

The two largest building projects that Solomon undertook were the temple and his palace. The former took seven years [1 Kings 6:38] and the latter took almost twice as long [1 Kings 7:1]. The idea of building a temple was conceived by David [2 Samuel 7] but the work was left to Solomon.

Although David did not live to see even the first foundations being laid for the temple, he had prepared the materials for the building [1 Chronicles 22:14]. The amount of money was staggering. David gave of his own wealth “three thousand talents of gold ... seven thousand talents of refined silver” [1 Chronicles 29:3–4].

Besides the financial resources, David also gave the building plans of the temple to Solomon [1 Chronicles 28]. David also assembled a team of craftsmen to do the work [1 Chronicles 22]. Solomon continued the effort by acquiring cedar from Lebanon. David prepared for the building of the temple. Solomon purposed to build it. David planted. Solomon watered. And by the grace of God, the temple was completed.

Any building project—especially that of building God’s house—is going to be challenging. It can bring out the worst in God’s people, as well as the best. The building of the Tabernacle under Moses and the temple under Solomon were successfully completed because it was God-directed. These two reasons—God-directed preparation and God-directed purpose—will answer the questions of why we want to expand God’s work and whether we have the ability to expand God’s work.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 21

THOUGHT

Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. – Psalm 132:3–5

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 7***LESSON****The splendour of Solomon's palace****VERSE 1**

But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

First Kings 6:38 tells us that Solomon spent seven years building God's temple but he spent 13 years building his own palace [v. 1]. Chapter 7 gives us a detailed description of some architectural features of Solomon's palace, which were similar to that of God's temple [1 Kings 6:36; 7:12]. God's temple was glorious but it appears that Solomon wanted his palace to be equally spectacular.

Two viewpoints regarding the amount of time Solomon spent on building God's temple and his own palace are offered. The positive view is that Solomon saw a greater urgency, and hence shorter construction time, in completing God's house. He showed greater regard to the honour of God than his own glory. Matthew Henry praised Solomon, saying: "He was in no haste for his own palace, but impatient till the temple was finished and fit for use. Thus we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction."

The negative view is that Solomon spared no cost in making his palace as magnificent as God's temple. It said something about his values. Look around you. The most beautiful buildings in the world today are commercial buildings, shopping malls and entertainment centres. These say something about our values, too.

"It does show the place which his own personal comfort and luxurious tastes had come to occupy in the life of Solomon ... It is often by such simple tests that the deepest facts of a human life are revealed." – Campbell Morgan

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 22

THOUGHT

If each of us is busy building our own house, God's house will be neglected.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 8***LESSON****The glory of God fills the temple****VERSE 11**

So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

For nearly 500 years after the Exodus, the dwelling place of God had been a tent. Now, the tabernacle was replaced by a glorious temple built by Solomon. “The cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord” [v. 10b–11].

This was the cloud of glory, often seen in the Old and New Testaments. The cloud, a symbol of divine glory and presence, appeared to have filled not only the Holy of Holies but also the entire temple. By this, the Israelites knew that God had honoured the place with His presence, and taken it for His dwelling.

Why did the priests feel that it was impossible to stay in the temple much longer because of God’s intense presence? Was not God loving, gentle and kind to His people? Yes, He was. But He was also holy. The holiness of God made the priests feel that they could not stand before His presence. Similarly, Isaiah [Isaiah 6:5], Peter [Luke 5:8], Paul [Acts 9:4] and John [Revelation 1:17] also felt stricken in the presence of God. Men simply cannot feel at ease in sensing the difference between their sinfulness and God’s holiness.

The filling of the temple with the glory of God can be likened to a believer being filled with the Holy Spirit. But we must first confess and repent of our sins for God’s Spirit to fill us and manifest through us.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 23–24

THOUGHT

Glory is an aspect of God’s character; His glory cannot reside in the presence of sin.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 9***LESSON****God hallows the temple****VERSE 3**

And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

God told Solomon that He would establish him and his descendants upon the throne of Israel forever, provided they obey His commands. If they forsook Him, He would abandon the temple and the people. God was pleased to be associated with His house. He hallowed it, put His name and set His eyes and heart there.

Solomon built and dedicated the temple but it was God Who hallowed it. Men cannot make a place holy. Solomon could only build a building but God alone would sanctify it. F.B. Meyer said: "Man builds; God hallows. This co-operation between man and God pervades all life. Man performs the outward and mechanical; God the inward and spiritual. Paul plants, Apollos waters; but God gives the increase. We must be careful to do our part with reverence and godly fear ... Build what you will; but never be satisfied unless God sets His eyes and heart upon your life, hallowing and sanctifying each day and act to Himself."

God tells Solomon plainly that his kingdom upon Israel would last if and only if he "wilt walk before me ... in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee" [v. 4]. The temple was designed to protect the Israelites in obedience, not in rebellion.

Similarly, through the Bible, God sets clearly before us what is good and evil, and lets us know what we must and must not do. If we do our part, God will not fail to do His.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 1-2

THOUGHT

We can till land, we can plant corn, but only God can grow the corn.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 10***LESSON****Solomon's great
wealth****VERSE 23**

*So king Solomon exceeded
all the kings of the earth for
riches and for wisdom.*

Verses 14–29 outline the immense worldly possessions Solomon had amassed. God blessed Solomon with great riches but Solomon allowed that blessing to turn into a curse because he disobediently multiplied silver and gold for himself. Solomon initially did not set his heart on riches. He had asked for wisdom to lead the people of Israel. When Solomon asked for wisdom, God promised him riches as well [1 Kings 3:13]. As a result, Solomon's wealth became legendary.

Why does the Bible record so extensively the material possessions of Solomon? In the Old Testament, riches were seen as “concrete evidence of God's blessings”. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job were all rich men.

Having tasted all earthly enjoyments, Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes to show the vanity of all worldly things, the vexation of spirit that attends them, and the folly of setting our hearts upon them. Solomon declared, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” We do not have to be as rich as Solomon to learn the same lesson. The gift of highest value has no price tag; it is the gift of salvation by our Lord Jesus.

Wealth does not prove that a person is living right with God. Neither does poverty indicate sin. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” [1 Timothy 6:17]. Believers should not be preoccupied with money matters as the most important treasure is not earthly but heavenly.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 3–4**

THOUGHT

**Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own
wisdom. – Proverbs 23:4**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 11–12***LESSON****Solomon forsook
God****I KINGS 11:5**

*For Solomon went after
Ashtoreth the goddess of
the Zidonians, and after
Milcom the abomination of
the Ammonites.*

In his old age, Solomon turned his heart away from God. He got himself entangled with strange gods [1 Kings 11:4–8]. He went after Ashtoreth of the Zidonians and Milcom of the Ammonites. He built temples for Chemosh of the Moabites, and Molech of the Ammonites. Together with his foreign wives, he burnt incense and sacrificed unto their pagan gods.

This seems almost unbelievable! A man of great heritage, wisdom and blessings had turned to depraved pagan gods. Solomon probably thought that he could continue worshipping God in addition to embracing pagan deities. But this is never acceptable to God as He demands to be the only God in our life. As a result, a life filled with bright hope ended in dark gloom.

Here lies a tragic example of the power of lust. Solomon found himself in places where he never thought he would be—burning incense and offering human sacrifices at the altars of pagan gods. The power of lust can lead us to a spiritual mess where we do things we never thought we would do.

Solomon's apostasy was such a waste of great spiritual blessings. If this could happen to the "wisest man who ever lived", then what hope do we have, apart from keeping very close to the Lord Jesus? We sometimes think that great spiritual experiences will guard us from sin and keep us faithful to God. This may not always be so. Let the example of Solomon drive us to deeper abiding in Christ.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I KINGS 5**

THOUGHT

Solomon's extraordinary gift of wisdom was not enough to prevent him from falling into grievous faults.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 13***LESSON****Disobeying God****VERSE 26**

And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him.

We saw how Jeroboam prevented the Israelites from worshipping in Jerusalem by building golden calves in Bethel and Dan, forming his own priesthood and declaring his own religious feasts, not in accordance to God's commandments. God sent a prophet from Judah to cry against Jeroboam's altar.

The prophet also foretold the birth of a future king of Judah, Josiah by name, and he would destroy the altar that was made by Jeroboam. This prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 23:15. As an affirmation, the altar was split and ashes from it were poured out. Jeroboam's hand also withered when he stretched out towards the prophet. When Jeroboam realised the consequences of his acts, he asked the prophet to pray for his hands to be healed, and the prophet complied.

After his hand was healed, Jeroboam invited the prophet to stay and enjoy his hospitality. However, God instructed the prophet not to eat or drink in Bethel, and not to return the same way that he came. Later, an older prophet was able to trick him into doing exactly what God had forbidden him. Consequently, God's judgement on him was swift. He was killed by a lion as he departed from the old prophet's home.

Our sins may not be as great as Jeroboam's but, like the disobedient prophet, we have no excuse. But take heart. When we sin, we "have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" [1 John 2:1]. Let us confess our sins, and have them cleansed by the precious blood of our Saviour.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

1 KINGS 6

THOUGHT

Meditate on Romans 5:20–21.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 14*

LESSON

**Children, a heritage
of the Lord**

VERSE 13

*And all Israel shall mourn
for him, and bury him: for
he only of Jeroboam shall
come to the grave, because
in him there is found some
good thing toward the LORD
God of Israel in the house of
Jeroboam.*

Jeroboam's son, Abijah, was sick. Anxious for the fate of Abijah, Jeroboam instructed his wife to disguise herself and look for Ahijah the prophet, who prophesied of his kingship. Although Ahijah was blind, God told him to expect Jeroboam's wife and instructed him on what to say to her.

When Jeroboam's wife came, Ahijah told her that her child would die as soon as she reached home. Moreover, Ahijah also spoke against Jeroboam's rule and described how God would raise up another to overthrow him. Israel would also be judged because of Jeroboam's sins. When Jeroboam's wife returned to her family the child died, as Ahijah had prophesied.

Amidst this seeming tragedy in Jeroboam's household, God's Word holds some comfort to parents whose children are called home to be with the Lord—"because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam" [v. 13b]. Our Lord is gracious and would not allow innocent children to perish [Matthew 18:14]. Nevertheless, this does not excuse Christian parents from their duties to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord [Proverbs 22:6].

Let us treasure our children as God's gift to us, to be nurtured and trained as faithful servants, fit for the Master's use. Take every opportunity to share God's Word with them [Deuteronomy 6:7] so that they can be brought to the saving grace of God. Teach them to trust in the Lord, even as we continue to trust Him as the Master of our own lives.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 7

CHALLENGE

**Train up a child in the way he should go: and
when he is old, he will not depart from it. –
Proverbs 22:6**

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 15***LESSON****Where the heart is****VERSE 3**

And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.

Israel was split into two after the death of Solomon: the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ruled in Judah, while Jeroboam, who escaped Solomon's hands, returned to establish his kingdom in Israel. Rehoboam was succeeded by Abijam, who was succeeded by Asa. In Israel, the dynastic line ran from Jeroboam to Nadab to Baasha.

Of these kings, only Asa found favour in the eyes of God, because his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days [v. 13]. Contrast him with his father, whose heart was not perfect with the Lord [v. 3]. God's ways are far superior to ours. Out of the loins of an evil king and father came Asa, a godly son and a good king. It was Asa who removed homosexuality from the land and the idols that his fathers made.

Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord. In order to have a close walk with God, we should examine our hearts, for out of the hearts of man proceed evil thoughts [Matthew 15:19]. If left unchecked, these can lead to more grievous sins.

Let us confess our sins before the Lord daily and, like Daniel, purpose in our hearts every morning to lead a sanctified and holy life, for the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. Begin each day with a prayer to ask the Lord to help us and strengthen us so that we can withstand the fiery darts of the devil.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 8

PRAYER

Oh Lord, lead and direct my footsteps today that I might not stray from the straight and narrow path. Grant me the wisdom to know right from wrong, and the strength to withstand the temptations that so easily beset me.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 16***LESSON****The sins of kings and nations****VERSE 2**

Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins;

A succession of evil kings ruled the kingdom of Israel from Baasha to Ahab. Note the manner in which some of the evil kings gained their thrones. Zimri was Elah's captain. He killed Elah to become king of Israel. He also destroyed the house of Baasha in the process. Zimri, however, reigned for only seven days. Omri, who was elected in the battlefield by the Israelites, forced Zimri to take his own life when he besieged Zimri. Later, Omri had to contend with Tibni, and prevailed against him. Palace intrigue and murder was common.

This chapter also describes Ahab, who succeeded Omri, as the worst of all the evil kings of Israel. He thought it "a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam", and worshipped Baal after marrying Jezebel, a pagan princess.

The conditions of the world today are not much different from the conditions of Israel in the times of these kings. Nations and rulers strive for power and there is civil unrest in many parts of the world. Without the leadership of a God-fearing ruler, a nation can easily slip into chaos.

However, take comfort that our Almighty God is still on the throne. No event in this world takes place without His permission. Our Lord warns us that in these last days, nations shall rise against nations. Let us seek every opportunity therefore to spread the Gospel while it is still day. The night cometh when no man can work.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 9-10

THOUGHT

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. – Matthew 28:19

BIBLE LESSON

1 Kings 17–18

LESSON

Finding help in troubled times

I KINGS 17:14

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

In the reign of the most wicked king of Israel, God sent the greatest of the Old Testament prophets to rebuke him. Elijah began his ministry by prophesying a drought in Israel as a sign of God’s judgement. In the period of the drought, God helped Elijah tide over the dry period by sending ravens to feed him, and later by sending him to a widow in Zarephath who provided him with shelter and food. The widow in turn was blessed with an abundance of flour and oil, through God’s miracles done by Elijah. The widow’s son was also revived from death.

At the end of the drought, which lasted three and a half years, God sent Elijah to confront Ahab and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Here, in front of all the Israelites, Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal when God sent fire to burn up the sacrifice. Elijah then slew the prophets of Baal and turned the people of Israel back to God. Rain also returned to the land of Israel.

During an economic downturn such as what we are experiencing today, many are looking for ways and means to sustain themselves and their families. Like the rain in Elijah’s time, the prosperity that people take for granted can no longer be taken for granted. Clearly, blind worship and rituals, like those performed by the prophets of Baal, will not “awaken” any slumbering gods.

Like the poor widow, we must trust in God and put Him first in our lives.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I KINGS 11–12

CHALLENGE

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. – Matthew 6:33

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 19***LESSON****Elijah, the man of
fear****VERSE 4**

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Chapter 19 stands in stark contrast to the preceding two chapters. It deals with the same man but the difference now is like night and day. In Chapters 17 and 18, we saw Elijah strong in the power of God. He used God's power to minister to others, vindicate the name of the Lord and bring his people back to God. Elijah was victorious, bold and confident in the face of all kinds of problems. He was occupied with the Lord and fully aware of God's presence. His attitudes and focus were on the promises of the Word and prayer.

But in Chapter 19, we see a weak Elijah, operating out of his own ways. He was a deserter, running away scared and terrified of Jezebel and depressed, wishing he was dead. He had a poor attitude. Elijah was no longer occupied with God but with people and conditions. He failed to pray and stand on the promises of God.

All of us have our own struggles of weakness and discouragement. God gives us this portrait of Elijah to teach us how vulnerable we are, how important our focus and our attitudes are, and how much we constantly need the grace of God for every moment and every breath. We are instruments used by God to display His glory but worthless in ourselves apart from Him [1 Corinthians 3:5-7; 2 Corinthians 4:7].

A believer's greatest strength is focus, dependence and faith in the Lord.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 13-14

THOUGHT

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. – 1 Corinthians 10:12

BIBLE LESSON

1 Kings 20

LESSON

I am the Lord of the hills and valleys

VERSE 28

And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Ben-hadad was the king of Syria and under him were 32 other kings and their cities. Ahab was the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel whose capital city was Samaria. Ben-hadad had a great army of more than one hundred thousand foot soldiers, as well as horses and chariots while Ahab had only 7,232 soldiers.

Two battles took place in this chapter. In the first battle, an understaffed and under-armed Israel defeated the mighty army of Ben-hadad. The defeat was so total that Ben-hadad had to flee for his life on his horse. It was God Who gave victory to Israel so that they might know that He is the Lord [v. 13].

Ben-hadad and his advisors, however, reasoned that since Ahab won the battle fought on the mountain of Samaria, their god must be a god of the mountain. Thinking that it would not be a god of the plains, they planned the second battle to be fought on the plains. Again, the army of Ben-hadad was badly defeated and 127,000 soldiers were killed that day. In the first battle, Ben-hadad realised that God was the King of the mountains but now he had to admit God was also the King of the plains.

Like the Syrians, Ahab and Israel, we need to learn that God is the Lord of the hills and the valleys, that He is the King of creation, that He reigns over all.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 15

THOUGHT

There is one thing that we must never forget. There is only one Lord of life. He is the Lord Jesus. We should know that He died to be our Saviour and He lives to be our Lord.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 21***LESSON****The spread of sin****VERSE 25**

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard. Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard for his own vegetable garden as it was near his royal house. Ahab was willing to trade for the land or pay for it. But Naboth, in obedience to God's law, refused to sell the land [v. 3].

Not having his expectations met, Ahab went into his house displeased. Ahab's tantrum was assuaged in the person of Jezebel, his wife, who plotted by accusing Naboth of blaspheming God and the king. Naboth was eventually stoned to death. Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth. This added evil to evil. Even with Naboth dead, the land should belong to his heirs or family. Ahab claimed the land as a royal right because the king could seize the land of any executed criminal.

God pronounced judgement upon Ahab through Elijah. Dogs would lick his blood [v. 19], his posterity would be cut off [v. 21] and dogs would eat Jezebel [v. 23]. When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went about mourning.

God honoured Ahab's repentance and stayed His hand of judgement against the king. If Ahab had not humbled himself that way, his judgement would have come swiftly.

This shows that God gave the prophecy of judgement as an invitation to repentance. In all things, remember that God is merciful—always desiring the true repentance of sinners.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 16

THOUGHT

Consider your expectations well, for out of them come frustration and covetousness. It is better to change your expectations than to scheme to get them.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Kings 22***LESSON****The death of Ahab****VERSE 23**

Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Ahab was killed in a battle that he waged against the Syrians for the purpose of regaining possession of Ramoth-gilead [v. 1–38]. This was the city that Ben-hadad promised to return to Israel [1 Kings 20:34] in exchange for leniency after defeat in battle, but never did. King Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat of Judah to help him in the battle.

Though Ahab's 400 prophets promised victory, Jehoshaphat asked for Micaiah, a prophet of God. Micaiah was warned beforehand to prophesy victory, just like the other prophets [v. 13]. However, Micaiah was determined to speak what the Lord said to him [v. 14]. When Micaiah came before Ahab, he first told Ahab what he wanted to hear—Israel would be victorious. But when he was pressed for the truth, Micaiah then said that Israel would be defeated and Ahab would be killed [v. 17].

Ahab thought that he could thwart God's will and Micaiah's prophecy by disguising himself as a common soldier. Ahab also insisted that Jehoshaphat wear his royal robe in the battle.

Finding himself as the only identifiable king in the battle, Jehoshaphat found himself quickly in danger. He cried out unto the Lord and was rescued when they turned back from pursuing him. Ahab, however, did not escape death. He was killed by an arrow, which struck him between the unprotected parts of his armour. This seemed to be pure chance but God's Word when spoken would set out to accomplish His will.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 17

THOUGHT

Man's ways cannot thwart God's will.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 1***LESSON****Trust in the Lord or else****VERSE 3**

But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 18

The Second Book of Kings records the history of over 300 years, from the rebellion of Moab to the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The history exhibits little less than a series of crimes, disasters, divine benefits and judgements. We meet with a few kings in Judah who feared God and promoted the interests of pure religion in the land. But most were idolaters and profligates of the highest order.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was more corrupt. All its kings were idolaters as well as vicious and cruel tyrants. Elijah and Elisha stood up on behalf of God and truth in this fallen, idolatrous kingdom, and bore a strong testimony against the corruptions of the princes, and the profligacy of the people. Their powerful ministry was confined to the 10 tribes. Judah had its own prophets.

The avenging hand of God fell first upon Israel and afterwards upon Judah. Israel, torn by domestic and foreign wars, was subjugated by the king of Assyria. The people were led away in captivity and the land was occupied by strangers.

Ahaziah followed the Baal worship of his father. When Ahaziah became sick due to his fall, he sent men to Ekron to inquire from the priests of false gods whether he would recover. Twice the king's men (102 of them) were destroyed by fire called by Elijah from heaven. On the third occasion, Elijah followed the captain to see Ahaziah. He told him that he would never recover from his illness. Ahaziah died soon after.

THOUGHT

Many of us put our hopes on the false gods of this world. Our real hope lies in the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit through frequent prayer.

BIBLE LESSON

2 Kings 2

LESSON

A hard thing: a double portion of God's blessings

VERSE 9

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

Elisha was a faithful disciple of Elijah. He followed Elijah wherever he went and knew that he would be taken away by God. As they were walking, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha cried out, tearing his clothes as if to mourn the loss of his “father”.

Elisha’s request was not to have any worldly possessions or advantage but spiritual power to discharge his office correctly. The “double portion” is a reference to the proportion of a father’s property, which was the right of an eldest son [Deuteronomy 21:17]. Elisha was to be a worthy successor of Elijah, carrying on his work and mentoring the sons of the prophets. Elisha also had the same perverse generation to deal with, requiring him to have the spirit of Elijah and in a stronger measure (double portion).

Elijah called Elisha’s request “a hard thing”, meaning to say that such a request was not his power. “God alone can give this; yet if you see me taken away from you, it shall be so.” This would be a sign both to Elijah that it was agreeable to the Lord to ask of him this favour, and to Elisha to expect it. Elisha’s request is “a hard thing” because those are who best prepared for spiritual blessings are aware of their own unworthiness to receive them.

We need to follow after the example of our predecessors, to labour after their spirit and to be earnest with God for the grace that carried them through their work and enabled them to finish well.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 19-20

THOUGHT

The Apostle Paul exhorted Christians to “covet earnestly the best gifts”, but a more excellent way is through Christian love.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 3***LESSON****What have I to do with you?****VERSE 14**

And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

During the reign of Jehoram (an idolatrous king of Israel), Mesha (king of Moab) rebelled against Israel. Jehoram, Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom joined forces against the Moabites and were brought into great distress for want of water [v. 6–10]. The three kings went to Elisha to inquire of the Lord, who promised them water and a complete victory [v. 18–19].

When the three kings found Elisha, the prophet had a special word for Jehoram, “What have I to do with thee?” [v. 13]. Elisha gave a stern rebuke to Jehoram. Sarcastically, Elisha told Jehoram that he should consult the Baal prophets of his parents—Ahab and Jezebel. But out of respect to Jehoshaphat, Elisha gave in to their request and told them what to do.

Is this not the case when people are in deep trouble? They will call on the name of God to deliver them. When accused of wrongdoing, they will swear to the highest heavens that they are near faultless and ask God to be their witness. Once the danger and trouble have passed, they will forget what they have said.

God is not merely our problem solver. This is the situation of Jehoram. Though he removed the image of Baal that his father had set up [v. 2], he continued in Baal worship. His heart was very far removed from worshipping the true God.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 KINGS 21–22**

THOUGHT

Dear friend, are you a modern-day Jehoram? One who worships God but is an idolater in heart?

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 4***LESSON****God sometimes hides things from true prophets****VERSE 27**

And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.

Elisha travelled rather frequently through the town of Shunem. In that town, there was a notable woman who kept a good house and was very hospitable to Elisha and provided food and rest for him. She knew that Elisha was a prophet and asked her husband to provide a room for Elisha's use.

Elisha reciprocated her kindness by asking her what she wanted. Being happy with her present condition, she wanted nothing from Elisha. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, informed him that the woman's husband was old and they were childless. Elisha told the woman that she would have a son. The woman later conceived and bore a son. When the boy was grown, he was stricken with a headache and died in her arms [v. 20]. The confused and angry mother went to see Elisha.

When she saw Elisha, she threw herself at his feet. Gehazi wanted to push her away but Elisha perceived that she was overwhelmed with some unknown cause of distress. The woman told Elisha that she was contented and happy even though she was childless. And when Elisha prophesied that she would have a son, she was wary. Now, with the sudden death of her son, she had become a mother in mourning, more sorrowful than if she were to remain childless.

When Elisha came to the woman's house, he went to the child, and prayed to the Lord [v. 33], Who raised the boy from the dead.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 1-2

THOUGHT

Are you sensitive as Elisha was to the plight of others?

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 5–6***LESSON****God's army****2 KINGS 6:17**

And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

Elisha, through revelation, knew all the secret designs of the king of Syria against Israel. He informed the king of Israel, who then took extra precaution and thus avoided being defeated. The king of Syria later found out that Elisha had penetrated his secrets. “The prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” [2 Kings 6:12b]. Frustrated with his attempts, he sent a great army to Dothan to capture Elisha, the prophet of God.

The king of Syria thought that he could keep his thoughts hidden from the omniscient God and Elisha. God read the king's mind like an open book and He could penetrate the king's secrets with respect to the Israelite army. Likewise, God knows us better than we know ourselves. God is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” [Hebrews 4:12c].

When the Syrian army surrounded the place by night to apprehend the prophet, his servant was paralysed with fear. His faith was easily shaken by the surrounding army. Elisha remained calm and said these comforting words, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” [2 Kings 6:16]. He prayed to God to open the eyes of his young servant. The prayer was answered and he saw the mountain upon which Dothan stood full of fiery horses and chariots round about Elisha. The fiery horses and chariots were symbols of the protecting powers of heaven, which surrounded the prophet.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 3

THOUGHT

The opening of the eyes, which Elisha prayed for, was those of the Spirit, not of the body. The eye of faith sees the reality of the divine presence and protection where all is vacancy or darkness to the ordinary eye.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 7***LESSON****The sin of silence****VERSE 8**

And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

Here are four starving lepers who wisely reasoned that it was better to go to the Syrians and die by the sword than to sit where they were and starve to death. Imagine their surprise when they arrived in the Syrian camp and found all the soldiers gone and all the wealth of the Syrian army left for their taking.

They were overjoyed at their good fortune and began to live it up. They would have said that it was tremendous what God had done for them. All that is equally true of the Christian for Scripture speaks of our God “Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy”.

The point is that we are not to enjoy these things selfishly, but sacrificially with others. Someone defined evangelism as one satisfied beggar telling other hungry beggars where to find bread. We are found to find others. We are won to win others. We are saved to point others to our Saviour. Yet so often we are guilty of selfish enjoyment.

All around us are people who need what the redeemed have. We who have been saved need to remember that the blessings of the Lord were given to us so that we can share them with those around us. Not everyone has what we have and we need to realise that. When we hoard up the Lord’s blessings, the sin of silence is our sin.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 4

THOUGHT

When did you last speak to someone about Christ?

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 8***LESSON****The problem of depravity****VERSE 13**

And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

When Hazael undertook this mission for King Benhadad, he already had resolved upon his murder. He aspired to be number one in Syria. He was a man hungry for power. At the same time, he took measures to deceive. He promoted his dark ambition slyly at every opportunity.

Is not the human heart skilled in disguise and deception? We never would have suspected Hazael. He was a trusted servant—someone to whom Benhadad looked for counsel and guidance. A cursory look at this man would make you believe that he was generous, obedient, respectful and courteous, but beneath the veneer of respectability covered a heart that was desperately wicked. Hazael did not acknowledge his potential for evil. He did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things anticipated.

It is easy to think we are above gross sin and can control our actions. We think we would never sink so low. When not immediately exposed to temptations, we do not believe we are capable of such cruelties and are highly insulted when the contrary is said about us. Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is startling. So little do we know of our own heart that when we have the power and opportunity, we do the things that we detest, with a willing heart and a ready hand.

The Bible teaches us that the answer lies in the depravity of the human heart. Hazael is a clear illustration of the problem of depravity.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 5

THOUGHT

The heart of human problem is ever the problem of the human heart.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 9***LESSON****Be sure your sin will
find you out****VERSE 36**

Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel.

Twenty years had passed since Elijah spoke for the Lord to Ahab that “the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel”. Now, the word of the Lord came true. God continued to exact vengeance upon the house of King Ahab for his theft of Naboth’s vineyard. This is a reminder that the Lord’s pursuit of justice can span over generations, and no sinner can escape His long arm of justice. Only in our individualistic, modern world would we imagine that wrongdoing in past generations leaves no responsibility for us today.

There are two important truths from this. First, God’s patience will not last forever. There is a day of judgement coming for all of us. There is a day when God will finally say this far and no farther. Our God is patient but His patience does run out.

Second, God still looks for Elijahs who will stand up for him. We live in strange times—morally confused times, days of religious and spiritual compromise. How we need a generation of men and women who will have the courage of their convictions and not just deliver the good news but have the courage to deliver the bad news, too.

In the world there are only two groups. You have Ahab and Jezebel, and you have Naboth and Elijah, and there is nothing in between. Ultimately, you are either with Ahab and Jezebel or you are with Naboth and Elijah.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 6

THOUGHT**Except you repent, you too will perish.**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 10***LESSON****A peril we need to avoid****VERSE 31**

But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.

Jehu is a strange mixture of good and evil. On the one hand, he exhibited virtues, such as his commitment to God's cause and contempt of God's rival. On the other hand, he entertained vices. He destroyed one form of error but he sanctioned another. Instead of being interested in the Word, he was indifferent to the Word. He had become God's instrument for carrying out justice but he had not become God's servant. He was neither cold-hearted nor half-hearted. He did with his might what his hands found to do.

Are you committed to God's cause? Can you be indifferent? The one charge laid against Christians is the charge of acting inconsistently. Is it not so easy to crusade boldly against one thing and yet compromise in the case of another? Putting away Baal is of little use if we keep the calves at Dan and Bethel.

Christian work needs Christian people who will go in the name of Christ, who will go for the sake of Christ, who will go in the power of Christ, who will go for the glory of Christ.

Are you apathetic? Is the glow gone? Is your passion missing? Are you inconsistent in your walk? Check the condition of your heart towards God. The Psalmist prayed, "... unite my heart to fear thy name" [Psalm 86:11b]. Will you make that your prayer? Nothing but walking in the law of the Lord with all our heart will secure our walking consistently.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 7-8

THOUGHT

We can be very active in our work for God and still not give the heartfelt obedience He desires.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 11–12***LESSON****Hope not in wealth****2 KINGS 12:4**

And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the LORD, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the LORD,

Here is an account of the measures that the young king took for repairing the temple by levying taxes. In 2 Kings 12:4, we read of three kinds of giving: “the money of every one that passeth the account”, as an offering to the Lord; “the money that every man is set at”, that is, the redemption price of every one who had devoted himself or any thing belonging to him to the Lord; and free will or voluntary offerings made to the sanctuary. The best giving to the work of God is that which is prompted in your heart.

Do you bring your tithe to God's house? Perhaps the suggestion comes but you put it away and refuse to consider it. The Holy Spirit impresses upon your heart but you reason, “Why should I part with what has cost me so much to get?”

Beware of stifling these promptings. To yield to them would bring untold blessing into heart and life. Besides, the money is only yours as a stewardship. The thought to give it to God is only the Master's request for His own.

The great mistake with us is that we do not hold all our property at God's disposal, seeking His directions for its administration. Too many are anxious to hoard up for themselves that which God has given them. Let us make a complete surrender to our Lord, and from the heart say, “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.”

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 9-10

THOUGHT**The tithe belongs to the Lord.**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 13***LESSON****Our gracious God****VERSE 23**

And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

We worship a gracious God Who is longsuffering towards our sins and disobedience. He is not willing that any should perish [2 Peter 3:9]. His graciousness is seen in the way He dealt with the two wicked kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Jehoahaz and his son, Jehoash. Both “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin”.

Jehoahaz only turned to God at a time of crisis, when the oppression of their enemies, Syria, became intolerable. God graciously sent a deliverer.

Jehoash, on the other hand, had the sense to consult the ageing prophet Elisha and God gave him three great victories over the Syrians. It was only when the people sinned so flagrantly that they blasphemed the name of the Lord and defiled His land that God finally permitted both Israel and Judah to be defeated and taken into bondage in 722 and 586 BC respectively.

Christians should learn a lesson from these kings and not tempt the Lord. Walk with Him daily. Hearken to His commandments “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” [Micah 6:8]. Do not turn to Him only in times of crisis or when disaster comes into your life and then make all kinds of promises only to forget them when things return to normal.

Remember. “He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger forever” [Psalm 103:9].

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 11-12**

THOUGHT

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. – Proverbs 1:33

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 14***LESSON****Pride goes before a fall****VERSE 10**

*Thou hast indeed smitten
Edom, and thine heart
hath lifted thee up: glory of
this, and tarry at home: for
why shouldest thou meddle
to thy hurt, that thou
shouldest fall, even thou,
and Judah with thee?*

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 13**

We live in an era where pride, disguised under names like self-confidence and self-esteem, is lauded as a virtue. Management gurus teach us that it is the secret for success in business and career, and even our children are taught to cultivate such qualities. But the Word of God clearly teaches that pride is a sin, and records for our instruction many examples of men who have allowed pride to lead them into trouble. One such person is King Amaziah, who ruled Judah for 29 years.

He started well and “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord” but he later abandoned God and was assassinated, like his father before him. He led his army to a rousing victory over the renegade Edom. However, it was that very victory that led to his downfall. His confidence sky-high from the win on the battlefield, Amaziah challenged the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He suffered a humiliating defeat and was captured. Four hundred cubits of the wall of Jerusalem were broken down. The city, the Temple and the palace were looted, and hostages were carried to Samaria.

Ironically, it was the wicked northern king Jehoash who gave Amaziah godly advice and warned him not to let his heart be lifted up by his earlier success. Jehoash’s parable is insightful as it warns that pride often blinds the mind and inflates the ego that one cannot tell fact from fiction.

Christians must walk humbly before God and trust Him to direct our paths.

THOUGHT

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. – 1 John 2:16

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 15***LESSON****Disobedience has its consequences****VERSE 18**

And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

Right from the beginning [Exodus 20:5], God had warned the children of Israel that if they went after other gods, not only they, but their descendants would face the consequences. We see this clearly happening in the events of this chapter.

After Israel was divided, King Jeroboam made two golden calves for the people to worship [1 Kings 12:25–33]. Here we see a succession of five wicked kings of Israel following after his footsteps with the attendant chaos and trouble. Four of them were assassinated. Shallum reigned only one month, Zachariah six months, and Pekahiah for two years. Menahem, the cruellest of them all, reigned for ten years, and Pekah for 20 years. In spite of repeated warnings from God’s messengers they persisted in their sins, wilfully ignorant of the coming judgement at the hands of the Assyrians.

As the Northern Kingdom stumbled towards destruction, their southern counterpart did slightly better. Azariah and his son Jotham were faithful in doing “that which was right in the sight of the Lord”. Their main failures were that they failed to remove the high places. Nevertheless, the kingdom was happy, compared with the state of Israel.

As Matthew Henry puts it: “The imperfections of true believers are very different from the allowed wickedness of ungodly men. Such is human nature, such are our hearts, if left to themselves, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. We have a reason to be thankful for restraints, for being kept out of temptation, and should beg of God to renew a right spirit within.”

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 14**

THOUGHT

**Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. –
James 1:15b**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 16***LESSON****Sin of compromise****VERSE 2**

Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father.

Ahaz succeeded his father Jotham as king of Judah. Ahaz was everything that his forefather David was not. Consequently, the country became weak. Instead of turning to Jehovah, he became subservient to the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser, shamelessly calling himself his “servant” and “son.” He took wealth from the temple, palace and the princes, and sent them as a gift to Tiglath-Pileser.

When it came to worship, Ahaz imitated the wicked kings of Israel, even adopting the terrible worship of the pagans and sacrificed his son to a pagan god. On a trip to Damascus to visit the Assyrian king, Ahaz saw a heathen altar and decided to build one like it in Jerusalem. He ordered Urijah the priest to henceforth use it instead of the God-designed bronze altar. The Bible did not record any objections from Urijah.

This sort of compromise is replicated in many liberal churches today, especially those in the West. The faith of the founding fathers has been abandoned and all sorts of worldly practices and philosophies have been adopted. For example, a 1999 survey of 103 church leaders by the British Broadcasting Corporation found that only three believed in the literal, biblical, version of the Creation. Only 13 out of 80 believed that Adam and Eve really existed and nearly one in four said that they did not believe in the virgin birth.

In the United States, the Episcopal Church has an openly homosexual bishop who left his wife—and mother of his two daughters—to cohabit with his male lover.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 15

PRAYER

Pray that our leaders, both political and religious, will not go the way of Ahaz.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 17–18***LESSON****God keeps His covenant****2 KINGS 17:18**

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

Hoshea, the last king of Israel, continued in the sins of his predecessors and led his people in widespread idolatry, false worship and rejection of God's laws, turning a deaf ear to the pleas and warning of the prophets whom God had sent.

It was clearly stated in God's covenant with His people that their disobedience would bring defeat in war, oppression and slavery [Deuteronomy 28]. Thus He sent the Assyrians to repossess the land that He had given to Israel, and deported many of the citizens, and repopulated Israel with Gentile peoples from lands that Assyria had conquered. So, about 210 years after it was established, the Northern Kingdom became extinct as a sovereign nation.

Meanwhile, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was blessed by a godly king by the name of Hezekiah. He introduced reforms and undid many of the sins of his father Ahaz. He removed the high places, putting an end to idol worship and restoring temple worship. When faced with the threat from a powerful enemy, he turned to God for deliverance. As promised, God protected His people from their enemies, and judgement on Judah was averted, at least for more than a century.

Our God is entirely consistent in His dealings with His children, rewarding obedience with peace and blessings, and punishing disobedience with suffering and chaos. This is true for nations as well as individuals. Let us learn a lesson from Hoshea and Hezekiah and choose the right path for ourselves.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 16

THOUGHT

If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. – Joshua 24:20

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 19***LESSON****A letter to the Lord****VERSE 14**

And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

This chapter relates that King Hezekiah, upon hearing the report of Rabshakeh's speech, sent a message to the prophet Isaiah to pray for him. Isaiah replied with an answer of peace. Rabshakeh, upon returning to the king of Assyria, sent a terrifying letter to Hezekiah. He spread it before the Lord and prayed to Him for deliverance from the Assyrians. The Lord answered him through Prophet Isaiah, promising him deliverance from his enemies, which were destroyed by an angel in one night. Sennacherib, who fled to Nineveh, was slain by his two sons.

Upon receiving the terrifying letter from Sennacherib, Hezekiah enclosed this in another letter—a praying letter—and sent it to the King of kings. He would not reply to this letter but he would leave it with his King to answer it. He wished to show how completely he could place his trouble before God. God assured him that He would glorify Himself in the ruin of the Assyrians. What an uplifting and comforting reply from God under the threat of a proud and arrogant man!

Often, only a letter was received, yet what a world of woe it contains. Only a letter but it has crushed a noble spirit, broken a mother's heart, cast down a man in unutterable anguish and woeful disappointment. Who can tell what troubles the reception of a letter may convey?

Let us spread it before the Lord.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 17-18

THOUGHT

Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. – Galatians 6:11

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 20***LESSON****To die or not to die?****VERSE I**

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

This chapter gives an account of Hezekiah's sickness, his prayers and the answer from God, the means and sign of his recovery. The king of Babylon sent his ambassadors to congratulate him and Hezekiah, in the pride and vanity of his heart, showed them his treasures. Hezekiah was reproved by Isaiah; he was humbled, and submitted to the sentence pronounced on his house.

Upon hearing the Word of God regarding his impending death, Hezekiah wept sorely. Matthew Henry commented: "There was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case: He was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which he feared would, through the corruption of the people, fall to the ground, if he should die. However, it does not appear that he had now any son and, if he should die childless, both the peace of his kingdom and the promise to David would be in danger." In His mercy, God prolonged his life by another 15 years.

Neither greatness nor goodness can exempt anyone from sickness and death. When the powers of life are sacredly devoted to God for promoting the good of others, we cannot but yearn for a longer life. The Apostle Paul yearned to be with Christ, which is far better. But ministering to the people and being with them was more needful. Our best efforts must always be to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 19-20

THOUGHT

**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. –
Philippians 1:21**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 21***LESSON****Acts of apostasy****VERSE 3**

For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

This chapter gives a short history of two wicked kings and their reigns: Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh was charged with great idolatry and seducing the children of Israel to sin. A prophecy was given out of the destruction of Jerusalem for his sins. An account was given of his death and burial. Amon, his son, succeeded him. He committed evil and a conspiracy was plotted against his life. Josiah, his son, reigned in his stead.

The reign of Manasseh was the longest and darkest in the history of Judah. He pulled down what his father had painfully toiled for years to build up, particularly the work of religious reformation. He completely desecrated the temple of God and worshipped all the hosts of heaven. His pernicious influence carried the whole nation along with him into idolatry. He shed innocent blood, particularly those who opposed and witnessed against his idolatrous practice.

Jewish tradition has it that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder [Hebrews 11:37]. He added iniquity unto iniquity, which the Lord would not pardon [2 Kings 24:4]. Manasseh began life amidst the holiest influences but sank until he became the execration of Judah's history.

If God's Word is not received with love and gratitude, and if it is not feared, He will come and remove the candlestick from its place so that man may go astray and become a prey to terrible errors. Let us take earnest heed, for to fall is easier than to rise.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 21-22

THOUGHT

Justly are those that forsake God are forsaken of Him; He never leave any till they have first left Him. – Matthew Henry

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 22***LESSON****Power of influence****VERSE I**

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

This chapter begins with the age and character of Josiah, king of Judah. It related his orders for repairing the temple, his attention to the book of the law, which was found and read to him, and the effect it had upon him. He commanded certain persons to inquire of the Lord who came to Huldah the prophetess. She answered the king by foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, giving the reason for it and assuring the king that it would not be in his days.

We see in Josiah a child king, a boy-king seeking God, a youthful royal reformer. At a tender age, unlike Manasseh, he took courage and was not ashamed to declare himself on the Lord's side when the whole nation was moving in the opposite direction of apostasy. When he came of age, he behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of the people and took away the abominations of the land. He directed his heart unto the Lord and, in a time of the ungodly, he established the true worship of God.

He was a good son of a wicked father while Hezekiah, a godly king, was the father of a wicked son. Grace is not hereditary and does not run in the blood. However, few influences are more powerful than that of example. The child imitates his parent. The schoolboy imitates his classmate.

What kind of influence are you giving to those around you?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 23

THOUGHT

The most useful Christians are generally those who have sought the Lord in their early days. – Preacher's homiletic commentary

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 23***LESSON****Mystery of
Providence****VERSE 29**

*In his days Pharaoh-nechoh
king of Egypt went up
against the king of Assyria
to the river Euphrates: and
king Josiah went against
him; and he slew him at
Megiddo, when he had seen
him.*

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 24**

This chapter records Josiah's public reading of the Law, the people renewing their covenant with God and his progress in the work of religious reformation. Yet the wrath of God was still determined upon the land. Josiah was taken away by an untimely death. He was succeeded by his two sons, whose reigns were wicked.

The reformation under Josiah expanded in its scope and thoroughness. The hope of Judah rose to its brightest zenith amidst his reforming effort and the Spirit of God bore witness that "there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" [v. 25]. But alas, he was cut down in the midst of his usefulness.

Bishop Hall writes: "What eye doth not now pity and lament the untimely end of Josiah? Whom can it choose but affect to see a religious, just, virtuous prince, snatched away in the vigor of his age? After all our foolish moan, the Providence that directed that shaft to his lighting place, intends that wound for a stroke of mercy. The God whom Josiah serves, looks through his death at his glory, and will deliver him from the view and participation of the miseries of Judah. O the wonderful goodness of the Almighty, whose very judgements are merciful! O the safe condition of God's children."

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

THOUGHT

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. – Isaiah 57:1

BIBLE LESSON*2 Kings 24–25***LESSON****The fall of Jerusalem****2 KINGS 25:9**

And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

Chapters 24 and 25 conclude with the last three kings of Judah, namely, Jehoiakim, succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin, and, finally, Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiachin, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. For his rebellion and according to the Word of God, Zedekiah and the inhabitants of the land, with all the treasures of the temple, were carried to Babylon. It concluded with the kindness shown to Jehoiachin from the king of Babylon, after 37 years of his captivity in Babylon.

Bishop Hall writes: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the wonder of all times, the paragon of nations, the glory of the earth, the favourite of heaven, the Zion city of our God, how art thou now become heaps of ashes, the hills of rubbish, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin!”

The promises and warnings of the Divine Word have been faithfully fulfilled, and the divine justice fully vindicated. While Israel remained true to Jehovah, the city was invincible and impregnable. It was only after unparallel obstinacy in sin that Jerusalem was abandoned to its fate.

In the history of the Jewish state, this great truth is clearly and powerfully impressed that as righteousness exalteth a nation, so sin is the reproach to any people. We are exhorted by Scripture to, first of all, offer supplication, prayers, intercession and the giving of thanks, for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 25

THOUGHT

God is slow to punish, and delays the final blow till all possible means of reclamation are exhausted. – Preacher's homiletic commentary

