



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: History of Israel (1–2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

Theme: A Troubled Kingdom

Overview: After the glory days of David and Solomon, Israel's kingdom began to unravel. This month, students will learn of the wisdom God gave Solomon, the calls for reform under the good kings Asa and Josiah, the testimony of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and how a nation struck down by its own sin was not defeated, because God's purposes still stood.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

The books of Kings do not name their author; Jewish tradition credits the prophet Jeremiah. The writer drew on court records such as “the book of the annals of the kings of Israel” and “of Judah” (1 Kings 14:19, 29). Chronicles is also anonymous; Jewish tradition attributes it to Ezra the priest and scribe, and its author is often simply called “the Chronicler.”

Audience

First and Second Kings were written for God’s people in exile, explaining why both kingdoms fell: the kings and the people turned away from the Lord despite the warnings of his prophets (2 Kings 17:13-14). Chronicles was written for the Jews who returned from Babylon, encouraging them to seek the Lord, worship him rightly, and trust his promises to David’s house.

Date

The events in this study span from Solomon’s reign (about 970–930 BC) to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and Cyrus’s decree allowing the exiles to return in 538 BC. Kings was completed during the exile, after 561 BC (2 Kings 25:27), and Chronicles was written after the return, around 450–400 BC.

Setting

After Solomon’s death the kingdom divided. Ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom (Israel), which fell to Assyria in 722 BC; Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom (Judah), ruled by David’s descendants. The lessons move from Solomon’s court in Jerusalem, to the reforms of Asa and Josiah in Judah, to

Elijah’s contest on Mount Carmel and Elisha’s ministry in the north, and finally to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

Theme

The kingdom was troubled because its kings and people were unfaithful, yet God remained faithful. He gave wisdom to those who asked, raised up reformers who led the people back to him, sent prophets to testify that “the Lord—he is God” (1 Kings 18:39), and even after judgment moved the heart of a pagan king to bring his people home. The promise to Abraham and David would not fail.

Why Study 1–2 Kings and 2 Chronicles?

Israel’s troubled history warns us and gives us hope. This study calls believers to embrace God’s wisdom, to return to the Lord who hears his people’s prayers, to know by the testimony of the prophets that the Lord is God, and to seek him with all their hearts, knowing they will find him.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 9:1-8, 22-24

WEEK 2: 2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15; 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19

WEEK 3: 1 Kings 18:31-39; 2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15

WEEK 4: 2 Chronicles 36:11-23

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Embrace wisdom and knowledge, find God's pleasure.**

STUDY: History of Israel (1–2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 9:1-8, 22-24

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Proverbs 1–3; 1 Kings 4:29-34

THE WISDOM OF GOD

BY MARK SCOTT

The founders of the United States prayed for wisdom. Pastor William Rogers prayed the following at the Constitutional Convention on July 4, 1787: “Be Thou their wisdom and their strength.” On this Independence Day, our nation’s 245th birthday, praying for wisdom is still more than a good idea (James 1:5). And it should not just be when times are hard. King Solomon prayed such a prayer at the zenith of Israel.

The Request for Wisdom*2 Chronicles 1:7-13*

David had died (1 Chronicles 29:28), and Solomon was now king. Solomon’s request for wisdom came while he was worshipping the Lord. He had gone to Gibeon (site of the tent of meeting). Solomon’s request for wisdom came within the context of the new king offering a thousand burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 1:6).

God took the initiative. He appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5) and challenged him to ask (inquire, beg, or request) for whatever he wanted (cf. Matthew 7:7-11). Solomon acknowledged God’s greatness before requesting anything. He acknowledged God’s great *kindness* (loyal love) that he had shown to his father and God’s grace and *promise* (word) in making him king to govern a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.

But then came the big ask. Solomon requested *wisdom* (ethical and religious prudence) and *knowledge* (cognition that shows up in street smarts)—words that appear 11 times in our printed text. The request was not selfish or turned inward. The purpose of this wisdom was for leading the people (being able to *go in and out* among them) and for *governing* (ruling or judging) them.

Here is a stunning truth: God answers prayer. God underlined the sanctity of Solomon’s request by highlighting five things Solomon did not request (wealth, possessions, honor, death of your enemies—the *lives of those who hate you*—and long life). As a bonus for such a pure request, God granted Solomon the wealth, possessions, and honor he did not request. In fact, God gave Solomon most impressive gifts (2 Chronicles 1:14-17; cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34).

The Demonstration of Wisdom*2 Chronicles 9:1-8*

Several years had transpired between chapter 1 and chapter 9. During that time, Solomon built and dedicated the temple. The word on the street was Solomon was healthy, wealthy, and wise. Word of his fame spread

1,200 miles into southwestern Arabia. So, the unnamed queen of Sheba journeyed to Jerusalem to test Solomon with *hard questions* (riddles or proverbs). The queen sweetened the state visit by bringing a very great caravan. Her camels carried spices, gold, and gems. The queen peppered Solomon with *questions* (words) and told him everything on her mind.

In a word, she was overwhelmed. Nothing was too *hard* (hidden) for Solomon. With amazement, she noticed seven things: Solomon’s wisdom, his palace, his food (good quality and in abundance), his officials, servants, cupbearers, and his burnt offerings (1 Kings 10:4-5). She admitted what she had heard (the *word*) in her country about Solomon was true. She admitted that she had to see it with her own eyes. She admitted that Solomon’s fame far exceeded the report she had heard.

The queen remarked how happy the people and the officials must be to experience Solomon’s wisdom. Then this pagan queen did something remarkable. She praised Solomon’s God. She took note of how Solomon’s God had *delighted* (took pleasure) in him and had placed him on the throne of Israel. She could see that Solomon’s God loved Israel and had the desire to uphold them forever through Solomon’s ministry of justice and righteousness.

The Reward of Wisdom*2 Chronicles 9:22-24*

The queen was so impressed with Solomon’s wisdom that she gave him all kinds of gold and goods. This created a domino effect. Other kings followed the queen’s lead (2 Chronicles 9:9-21). God’s promise to bless Solomon with wealth and possessions came via pagan kings and their kingdoms. The result? Solomon was *greater* (excelled) in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

All the kings of the earth wanted in on what the queen had experienced. They sought to *hear* (to be in the presence of) the great king. They wanted to know what God had put in his heart. Solomon’s wealth grew exponentially as the kings of the earth kept taking their gifts to Jerusalem year after year.

The Continental Congress could well have become the “contentious congress” were it not for praying for wisdom.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

ALWAYS A STEP AHEAD

BY DAVID FAUST

Thomas Sowell said, “It takes considerable knowledge just to realize the extent of your own ignorance.” Instead of boasting about how enlightened we are, we should recognize our human limitations and humbly tap into the infinite wisdom of God.

The Lord Takes the Initiative

The inspired writer sums up the first day of creation by saying, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (Genesis 1:5). That same phrase is repeated for each of the six days of creation. It sounds backwards to us, because we assume morning comes first. Why does evening come before morning in the Genesis narrative? Maybe, in part, to remind us that God is always a step ahead.

We go to bed at night thinking our day’s work is done, but that’s when the Lord is just getting started. He stays busy through the night while we rest. We get up in the morning thinking, “Let’s make something happen,” but God already has been at work for half a day! Our job is to join in the work he already has begun.

Our Inventions Reflect God’s Creations

“There is nothing new under the sun,” wise Solomon observed long ago (Ecclesiastes 1:9). What we call inventions are imitations of God’s handiwork.

We build swimming pools; God made oceans. We make light bulbs; God made the moon and stars. We make ice cubes; God makes glaciers. We use air fresheners; he perfumes the atmosphere with roses and pine needles. We invent dimmer switches to turn down the lights; God makes the sun set slowly on summer evenings, painting the sky with shades of pink and gold.

We plug in fans and air conditioners; God made the desert wind and the ocean breeze. We make furnaces and fireplaces; the Creator uses the sun to warm the earth from above and magma to heat it from beneath. We create photos and videos; God created eyes to behold and minds to remember what we see.

We cover floors with tiles and rugs; God carpets valleys with prairie grass and wildflowers. We gulp down bottled drinks; he provides aquifers beneath the crust of

the earth and pours water from the clouds. We listen to music; God designed sound waves and eardrums, and he gave us fingers to strum and toes to tap. We carve statues; God crafts sculptures in sandstone canyons.

We build zoos. “God made the wild animals . . . the livestock . . . and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:25). For centuries, scientists and adventurers tried to discover how to fly, but flight was a simple invention for the Creator of cardinals and blue jays, eagles and hawks, mosquitoes and bumblebees, butterflies and bats, herons and hummingbirds, swans and doves.

God wasn’t surprised when we discovered electricity, split atoms, built X-ray machines, and labeled chromosomes. Our scientific discoveries don’t startle him. He has been waiting patiently for us to uncover them! We send messages swiftly around the world by email or phone, but since the dawn of time, prayers have traveled instantaneously to the throne room of Heaven.

It’s good to pursue wisdom—to develop our minds and expand our knowledge. But instead of stirring intellectual pride, the best education leads us to insist, “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:27).

Personal Challenge:

The queen of Sheba came to Solomon “to test him with hard questions” (2 Chronicles 9:1), and his explanations satisfied her curious mind. What are the top three or four questions you would like to resolve about God and the Bible? Write them down and develop a plan to address them. Here are some options to consider:

- Read books or articles on apologetics that deal with your questions.
- Talk about your questions with a trusted counselor or Bible teacher.
- Watch videos featuring Christian apologists who tackle the issues that have been bothering you.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you serve God last week?
2. What new challenge or opportunity did you experience last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 9:1-8, 22-24** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the story from these passages in a minute or less.

3. What do you find most intriguing about these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What can you infer about Solomon's character traits from these passages?
 - How would you describe his lifestyle?
 - What biblical themes do you see in these passages?
 - What truths are revealed (whether they come from godly or pagan sources)?
 - What example(s) to follow do you see in these passages?
5. What do you learn about God and his character from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do these passages teach you about the value of obedience?
8. What do you learn about how to serve God well, whatever your position?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge do you anticipate facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15; 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Return to the Lord, for he hears the prayers of his people.**

STUDY: History of Israel (1–2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15; 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Chronicles 34; Jeremiah 7:2-7

THE CALL FOR REFORM

BY MARK SCOTT

It did not take many years for the wisdom of Solomon to unravel and the kingdom to be divided. The narrator of Chronicles is kind to Solomon, but the narrator of Kings told how Solomon's wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-4). Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, abandoned the Lord (2 Chronicles 12:1) and the kingdom split—ten tribes against two.

The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (and their wicked kings) continued in a downward spiral until their Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. The two tribes of the Southern Kingdom followed suit, but from time to time they had moments of reform and spiritual health. Second Chronicles primarily traces the history of the Southern Kingdom. Two good kings, Asa and Josiah, led the call for godly reforms in Judah. The selected passages from 2 Chronicles give us three ingredients for reform.

Seeking the Lord

2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15

The Spirit of God came on a prophet named Azariah, and he gave a strong exhortation to the third king of Judah (Asa) as well as the Southern Kingdom (designated as Judah and Benjamin). The God of the Bible is the “withness” God—he is “with us” (Matthew 1:23), but our lesson text points out we are called to also be *with* (beside) him. The prophet promised the king that if he would seek God, then God would allow himself to be found. If Asa *forsook* (left off) God, however, then God would forsake him.

The prophet also acknowledged that God's people had been wayward. They had turned to other gods and had not listened to the priests sent to teach the law. But dissatisfaction can be a great impetus to revival. In Israel's *distress* (sorrow) they turned to the Lord. A great truth of Scripture is that God is not good at hide-and-seek. He desires that people find him (cf. Acts 17:27). In his permissive will, God allowed turmoil in the land and strife between kingdoms and cities. But the prophet called the king to be strong and not give up his efforts at reform.

Asa removed the *detestable* (abominable or filthy) idols in his area and *repaired* (renewed) the altar of burnt offering in the temple. Great numbers of people followed their godly king in this reform. They sacrificed 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep as part of renewing the covenant of the Lord. Alongside of their sacrifices they brought their praise. This included loud shouting and blasts from trumpets and horns. They sought God, and he was found by them.

Reading the Word

2 Chronicles 34:14, 29-33

We move forward almost 300 years from one of the earlier kings to the last good king of the Southern Kingdom. Josiah became king when he was 8 years old (2 Chronicles 34:1). He reigned for 31 years and did what King David had done. When he was older, Josiah initiated a reform to repair the temple, which had fallen into disarray. In the process of those repairs, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord. Some scholars suggest this was just a portion of Deuteronomy, but there is no good reason to suggest the whole Pentateuch is not being considered. The section that perhaps was especially convicting was Deuteronomy 17:18-20, which speaks of the king rewriting the Law when he comes to power.

When Josiah heard the reading of the Book of the Covenant (The Ten Commandments?), he had himself a good Bible cry. He quickly gathered his spiritual directors and inquired what he and the people could do. A prophetess and her husband (Huldah and Shallum) ultimately were enjoined to give their counsel. The prophetess said God's judgment would come, but that Josiah's days would end in peace since he humbled himself before the Lord. There is no substitute for the public reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13) in bringing about reform. Josiah renewed the covenant and pledged his obedience to God.

The people followed the examples of these two kings. The people were at rest in Asa's reforms, and they were at peace in Josiah's reforms.

Remembering Our Roots

2 Chronicles 35:1-2, 18-19

Seeking the Lord and reading the Word produced celebration. The nation of Israel was birthed in the Passover in Egypt. Successful revivals occur when people remember their roots. So Josiah's people returned to their roots by observing the Passover.

This chapter describes the extent to which Israel celebrated this Passover. The celebration was extensive and complete. In fact, it reminded the people of how Passover was celebrated during the days of Samuel. Once again, the path forward was accomplished by going backward.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

THE MISSING BOOK

BY DAVID FAUST

On a January night in 2017, thieves nearly pulled off a daring heist in a crime one reporter likened to the plot of a *Mission: Impossible* movie. Two men cut holes in the roof of a warehouse in London, rappelled down through the ceiling to avoid security sensors, and hauled away 16 bags in a car driven by a third accomplice. Their target was not cash or jewels, but rare books valued at over \$3 million that were being shipped to an auction in Las Vegas. In 2020, authorities found the stash buried under the floor of a house in Romania, and members of an organized crime group have been charged with the theft. The recovered books include first-edition volumes written by Galileo, Copernicus, and Sir Isaac Newton, and an edition of *Aesop's Fables* published in 1505.

The Old Testament tells an interesting story about a missing book. The temple had fallen into disrepair, and young King Josiah decided to restore it. During the construction project, workers discovered “the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses” (2 Chronicles 34:14). It was remarkable that they found the Book, but why did they lose it in the first place? God’s Law was priceless, handed down from the days of Moses. How could anyone misplace it?

Hidden in Plain Sight

The Book wasn’t lost as much as it was neglected and taken for granted—hidden in plain sight. It had been there in the temple all along, but no one was paying attention to it.

Are we losing sight of God’s Book? In America today, the Bible is readily available but frequently ignored. We have more tools for biblical study than at any previous time in history. Yet, according to a 2020 survey conducted by Barna Research, only half of American adults believe the Bible is the Word of God, down from three-quarters just 20 years ago. And there is considerable inconsistency between the plain teachings of the Bible and the behaviors of those who say we believe it.

Is the Book missing from our preaching, our student ministries, and small groups? In my son Matt’s jail ministry, he often talks with inmates about three worldview questions (adapted from Charles Colson): Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die? These universal questions about origin, purpose, and destiny are relevant to people of all cultures and educational levels, and they are best answered by a biblical worldview.

Sadly, God’s Book is missing in many families. According to Barna, a person’s worldview starts developing at 15 to 18 months of age, and it’s almost completely developed by age 13. Friends, media, teachers, coaches, church leaders, and public figures exert influence as well, but parents are the most important factor in shaping what children believe and do. Without the Book, confusion reigns.

When King Josiah rediscovered the Scriptures and heard what they said, he was deeply moved. He realized the nation had departed from God’s will. He called the people together, read God’s Word aloud, “and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul” (2 Chronicles 34:31). The missing Book addressed what they and their nation had been missing.

Personal Challenge:

Think about the three worldview questions mentioned above: Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die? How does the Bible shape your answers? Discuss these questions this week with at least one other person, and/or talk about them with your small group.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what specific way did you serve God last week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then repeat the process with **2 Chronicles 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19**. Ask a third person to summarize the stories from these passages. Remind them to keep it simple, as if sharing it with a group of middle schoolers.

3. What similarities do you see between Asa's reforms (in 2 Chronicles 15) and Josiah's reforms (in chapters 34 and 35)?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What spurred on the reforms of Asa?
 - What spurred on the reforms of Josiah?
 - What conditions and circumstances were King Asa and the people facing before the reforms?
 - How did both Asa and Josiah respond personally to the circumstances and to God's leading?
 - Note that in both accounts, the king went first in repentance and renewal of heart, and then the people joined in social reforms. What do you learn about leadership and cultural change by their examples?
 - What do you learn from these passages about the vitality of God's Word?
 - What do you learn about the place of corporate celebrations and worship?
 - How might commemorating events from the past be valuable for our faith today?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about God's people?
7. What does it look like in your own life to keep (obey) God's commands, statutes, and decrees with all your heart and with all your soul?
8. What opportunities do you have this week to serve the Lord your God? How will you follow through?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge are you facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Kings 18:31-39; 2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Know by the testimony
of prophets the Lord is
God.**

STUDY: History of Israel (1–2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 1 Kings 18:31-39; 2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Chronicles 24:19; Psalm 100; Acts 3:18-19; 2
Kings 17:13

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHETS

BY MARK SCOTT

The prophets of the Old Testament were the mean junkyard dogs of Israel. They nipped at the heels of kings, priests, and the people to keep them on the straight and narrow. They functioned like prosecuting attorneys against Israel. Their goal was to give Israel an accurate picture of God and to bring them back to him (2 Chronicles 24:19; 2 Kings 17:13).

Though no Bible books are named for Elijah or Elisha, they are two of the most significant prophets of the Old Testament. Both men made it into Jesus' ordination sermon (Luke 4:25-28), and some of their miracles are templates for miracles of Jesus (e.g., 2 Kings 4:18-37 with Luke 7:11-17). Their testimonies play large in this lesson.

God of Israel*1 Kings 18:31-39*

Elijah burst on the scene during the reign of wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 17:1). The king had sold out to the idol gods and the people followed Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33). Since the drought failed to get the attention of the people, a contest was arranged at Mount Carmel. Sacrifices were made on altars. The prophets of Baal went first, but fire failed to come down from heaven to acknowledge their sacrifice.

Elijah then stepped forward. He took twelve stones (one for each tribe) and built an altar. He dug a trench around it and arranged the wood on it. He butchered a bull and laid it on the altar. Then he "baptized" the altar with four large jars with water three separate times. Finally, he prayed a simple but decisive prayer in which he acknowledged who God was, who he (Elijah) was, and what God had commanded. He pleaded with God to answer with fire so that Israel would turn their hearts back to God. Elijah's prayer was answered dramatically. The fire that fell from heaven consumed everything, including the stones, the soil, and even the water. The people were convinced and cried, "The Lord—he is God!"

God of the Prophets*2 Kings 2:11-14*

Leadership transitions are always important. Elijah had already called Elisha to follow him in prophetic ministry (1 Kings 19:19-21). Now it came time for that prophetic mantle of leadership to be passed to Elisha in such a way that other prophets would affirm it (2 Kings 2:15).

As Elijah began his journey to the Jordan River, Elisha seemed aware something big was about to happen. Second Kings 2 described how the two journeyed east

from Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, and then to the Jordan River. Elijah struck the river with his cloak and it parted. (The same place where Israel had crossed over into the Promised Land and the same place where Jesus would be baptized?) Elisha requested a double portion of the Spirit that rested on Elijah. In reply, Elijah said, in effect, "Keep your eyes open" (v. 10).

The moment arrived when Elisha saw the *chariot of fire and horses of fire* (symbols of God's presence and power in battle). Then a *whirlwind* (storm or tempest) took Elijah to heaven, and Elisha saw him no more. Elisha used Elijah's torn garment—all that remained of the senior prophet—and tried it out on the Jordan River. History repeated itself. The waters parted, and Elisha walked across back into the land of Israel.

God of the World*2 Kings 5:9-15*

After coming up from the Jordan Valley, Elisha performed several miracles to affirm he was God's new representative (2 Kings 2:19-4:44).

Elisha's influence spread to Aram (modern-day Syria), where bands of raiders from there would cross into the land of Israel. Due to Israel's disobedience, these raids were successful. Some Israelites were taken captive. One was an unnamed little girl who knew of Elisha's ministry.

Naaman was a commander in the king of Aram's army, but he had leprosy. The little girl informed Naaman's wife that Elisha could heal him. So Naaman took gifts and ultimately made his way to Elisha's place.

Elisha did not even greet Naaman (a sign of disrespect in that world?). Instead, he sent a messenger to tell the commander to *wash . . . seven times in the Jordan*. Naaman objected and felt he was being treated with disrespect. But Naaman's servants calmed the commander, and he complied with Elisha's strange request. "His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy." Not only did Naaman's skin change, so did his attitude. He acknowledged that there is *no God in all of the world except in Israel*.

The testimony of the prophets is that Israel and the whole world should know that God is God.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you ever been speechless? Maybe your friends threw a surprise party, and you were too stunned to speak. Or some shocking news took your breath away. On the memorable days when my children were born or adopted, I struggled to put my feelings into words. At least I got my voice back quicker than the old priest Zechariah, who couldn't speak for months until his son John was born.

What if you're a preacher without any fresh ideas to share, and Sunday is coming? It's tough being speechless when it's your job to give speeches. I have been a preacher for many years, but occasionally when I'm asked to speak, my first reaction is to think, *I have nothing to say!*

Public speaking isn't for everyone. We're not all like Elijah, whose bold prayer brought Heaven's fire to the mountaintop. Or Peter, who preached and saw thousands baptized. Or Paul, who addressed influential philosophers in Athens. But if we watch for opportunities, we all can be like Philip, who shared the gospel with an audience of one . . . an Ethiopian in a chariot.

Just as authors have to overcome writer's block, God's ambassadors have to overcome preacher's block. Whether your audience is large or small, what should you do if you have the opportunity to speak, but feel like you have nothing to say? Here are some suggestions that have helped me.

Recognize you're in good company. Moses didn't consider himself a great speaker. Neither did Jeremiah. The apostle Paul showed classic symptoms of stage fright when he came to Corinth "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). You don't have to be an eloquent orator to deliver God's message. If the Lord used a fig-picker like Amos and a fisherman like Peter to communicate his Word, he can use you.

Seek God's help. Your own prayers—and the prayers of others—can help you get unstuck. Paul urged his

friends to pray that God would open a door for the gospel and help him "proclaim it clearly" (Colossians 4:3-4).

Keep it simple. When I get stuck during sermon preparation, I ask myself, *Why am I struggling? Am I trying too hard?* The goal is to express the Word, not to impress the crowd. Jesus communicated profound truth by using uncomplicated language and down-to-earth illustrations. In a world starving for hope, the theme of DBR is always relevant: Death, Burial, and Resurrection—the bad news of sin followed by the good news of Christ.

Speak from your heart. Listeners can detect even a hint of phoniness, but sincerity and conviction make the message harder to resist.

Do your job. Paul instructed Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Pats on the back are not the goal. Like faithful postal workers, our job is to deliver the mail and share God's message in every season, undeterred by "snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night."

Trust God with the results. We plant and water seeds, but the Lord makes them grow. Remember, it pleases God "through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). If you and I feel speechless now and then, it doesn't mean God has nothing to say.

Personal Challenge:

What opportunities has God given you to be an ambassador of the gospel? What step will you take this week—either one-on-one or in a group—to communicate biblical truth to someone who needs to hear it?

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you serve the Lord last week?
2. What challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Kings 18:31-39** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then repeat the process with **2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15**. Ask a third person to retell the stories from these three passages. Remind them to keep it simple.

3. What do you learn about the ministries and purposes of these prophets from these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What repeating phrases or concepts do you find in these passages, and what do they demonstrate to you?
 - What were the main topics of Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 18:36-37)?
 - What was the result of his prayer?
 - How would you describe the leadership transition between Elijah and Elisha?
 - Naaman's pride, plans, and preferences nearly prevented him from being cured. Why are humility and submission so vital to our healing?
 - In what ways is Naaman's story an illustration of God's gracious (unmerited) work in saving sinners?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. It's been said that "faith that doesn't lead to obedience isn't faith at all." What do you learn about the connection between faith and obedience from these passages?
8. Like Elijah and Elisha, we can be God's ambassadors to help people know that the Lord is God. What step will you take this week—either one-on-one or in a group—to communicate biblical truth to someone who needs to hear it? (For six suggestions on how to do this, see Dave Faust's Application article in this lesson.)
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge are you facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Chronicles 36:11-23** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Seek the Lord with all
your heart, and you will
find him.**

STUDY: History of Israel (1–2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 36:11-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 29:10-14

DOWN BUT NOT DEFEATED

BY MARK SCOTT

The apostle Paul listed challenges he faced in ministry in more than one letter (1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:24-29; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5). But in 2 Corinthians 4:9 he used the phrase, “struck down, but not destroyed.” The writer of 2 Chronicles could say a similar thing about the nation of Israel (the Southern Kingdom) when they were taken away to Babylonian captivity. This pre-exilic historical book ends on a very sour note. The last king of Judah (Zedekiah) was horribly corrupt, and Nebuchadnezzar came and burned the city and the temple. But offstage a note of hope was being played that would allow God to fulfill his promise to save the world through Jesus (Genesis 12:3).

The Last King*2 Chronicles 36:11-14*

Josiah was the last great king of Judah, but his sons (Jehoahaz and Eliakim) did not follow in the ways of their father. The first was deported to Egypt, and the second (whose name was changed to Jehoiakim) was deported to Babylon. Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, reigned just beyond three months, and then his brother Zedekiah became the last king of Judah. During his reign of eleven years, Zedekiah had a hot and cold relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar killed him.

Zedekiah did evil and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 21:3-7; 32:1-5). Even though Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord to him, Zedekiah would not turn to the Lord. Even worse, Zedekiah led the leaders of the priests and the people also to be unfaithful to God by enjoining the practices of the nations. He also *defiled* (to pollute or to profane) the temple of the Lord. And, as if that were not enough, Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon who had empowered him. The last king of Judah was a really bad man.

The Last Straw*2 Chronicles 36:15-21*

God cannot be faulted for his patience. Time and again God sent *messengers* (ambassadors or maybe even angels) and prophets because he had *pity* (compassion) on his people. But God (and his messengers) cannot be mocked (Galatians 6:7) or scoffed at. God’s *wrath* (anger, indignation, or fury) is nothing to be tested. When it kicks in, there is no *remedy* (healing).

The stunning truth in all of this is how God used a nation worse than Israel to punish Israel (see the book of

Habakkuk). Nebuchadnezzar killed young men even in the temple; his death rampage was indiscriminate—age, gender, and health mattered not. The temple was burned, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the treasures of the temple and the leaders were plundered. The people of Jerusalem who escaped death were hauled to captivity and became servants of the current and future empires.

Even in the midst of all this, one can see the mercy of God. Since God’s people were either dead or captured, there was no one to work the land. Therefore, in a twisted way, the land experienced an extended Sabbath of sorts. Jeremiah had predicted that this Sabbath would essentially last seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10-14; Daniel 9:2; Ezra 1:1). God’s people should not presume on the kindness of God (Romans 2:4).

The New Hope*2 Chronicles 36:22-23*

The chronicler made a final historical note (538 BC). Babylon imploded (Daniel 5:30-31), and the Persians came to power. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were replaced by the likes of Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus. Cyrus clearly was an unusual potentate. The text told us why. The Lord *moved the heart* of Cyrus. Even more than this, God called Cyrus his “anointed” (the word for Messiah in Isaiah 45:1). To what extent Cyrus realized Yahweh used him we do not know. But his generous nature of allowing conquered peoples to return to their homeland is well attested in a great archaeological artifact called the Cyrus Cylinder. While the writing on the clay cylinder does not mention Israel by name, it refers to Cyrus’s uncharacteristic benevolent ways.

Cyrus admitted as much in his decree (v. 23; cf. Ezra 1:2-3). He recognized that God had given him his reign and even *appointed* (charged) him to build a temple in Jerusalem. He allowed the Jews to return home, helped them financially, and gave them governmental protection. They returned home in three waves under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These leaders were assisted by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The new hope was that once the remnant was back in the land of Israel, God could send a savior so that the good news could come out of Zion. In that savior the nations could have a new hope.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

WHEN IT ALL COMES CRASHING DOWN

BY DAVID FAUST

I visited a church in Alaska during late winter. Hard-packed ice covered the roads and two feet of snow covered the ground. The congregation had a pitch-in dinner following the worship service that Sunday. While the adults ate and talked, the children went outside to enjoy dogsled rides provided by a local musher. None of the adults participated, but I figured, *What are the odds I will ever get another chance to ride on a dogsled?* So, I swallowed my pride and got in line with the kids. When my turn came, I climbed onto the dogsled and laughed as the team of huskies whisked me around the church grounds.

Later that day, my host took me to see an ice-sculpting display. We walked around looking at statues carved from thick blocks of ice harvested from a nearby lake. The sculptures—several feet tall and skillfully carved—included a replica of the Statue of Liberty, a gigantic elephant, a crystal palace, and a child's playground complete with a slide carved from the ice. I asked my host, "What happens to these sculptures when spring comes?" He shrugged and said, "They all just melt away." It was sad to realize that after all the effort it took to craft those ice sculptures, they would simply melt to the ground with the spring thaw.

The Law of Entropy

Isn't that the way things are in this world? Eventually everything comes crashing down or slowly melts away. We admire the towering redwoods and other tall trees, but in time they will fall to the ground. We build elaborate houses, stadiums, office towers, and cathedrals, but will those structures still exist 500 years from now? The Pyramids in Egypt, the Colosseum in Rome, and the Parthenon in Greece still generate awe centuries after ancient artisans constructed them, but they are crumbling replicas of their former glory.

A basic principle in physics is the law of entropy or disintegration: things tend toward disorder and decay. To see the law of entropy at work, look at your own face in the mirror. Our bodies decline with age. Today's

glamorous stars of stage and screen will fade into insignificance, replaced by tomorrow's trendy celebrities enjoying their 15 minutes of fame. Once-agile athletes succumb to arthritis and cancer. Once-brilliant minds drift into the sad fog of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The Bible doesn't whitewash all of this bad news. It tells us the unvarnished truth about sin's devastating effects: physical pain, emotional sorrow, relational disruption, spiritual death. Adam and Eve got kicked out of the Garden. The fickle Jewish people saw their precious temple destroyed by the Babylonians.

The Hope of Eternity

We must keep reading. And when we do, we discover that for the faithful, the story doesn't end with devastation and despair. God's story leads to redemption, reconciliation, and rebuilding. It climaxes in the final chapters of Revelation, where instead of entropy on a dying planet, there's eternity on a new heaven and earth where a tree of life always bears fruit, and where there's no more pain or tears, no more physical and mental decline, no more death.

Human achievements eventually melt to the ground, but God has in store for us "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter 1:4). The bad news? "The world and its desires pass away." The good news? "Whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

Personal Challenge:

Look over your calendar for the coming week. How many items on your to-do list will have lasting impact, and how many of them deal with temporary things that eventually will pass away?

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you live your faith as God's ambassador last week, helping someone know that the Lord is God?
2. What new challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 36:11-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage in one minute or less.

3. What words or phrases from verses 11-21 express to you the general mood of this passage?
 - How would you describe the mood of verses 22-23?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - In your own words, how would you describe King Zedekiah?
 - What influence did Zedekiah have on the people?
 - In what ways was God patient and loving with the people even as they became increasingly unfaithful to him?
 - What consequences did the people eventually have to face?
 - How do you reconcile the fact that Cyrus the Great, a pagan king, freed the Jewish exiles, allowed them to return to Judah, and rebuilt their temple?
5. What do you learn about God's nature, especially his sovereignty (his supreme control over all), from this passage?
6. What do you learn about the nature of humans?
7. What connections do you see between humility and obeying God?
8. How will you be a godly influence with the people closest to you this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge or opportunity do you anticipate this week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.