

1 Kings

A Women's Bible Study · Comprehensive Overview

Prepared for eight weeks of discussion — a study of kings and prophets, wisdom and its unraveling, and the women whose faith and choices shape the story.

How This Study Works

This overview is meant to be read once, before the study begins, to give you the whole landscape of 1 Kings before we walk through it a piece at a time. You do not need to master it. Think of it as the map you glance at before a long hike — it tells you where the high points are, why the trail bends where it does, and what to watch for along the way.

Each week we will take one unit of the book and its own study guide. The guides are built for conversation, not lecture: they orient you to where we are in the story, walk through the passage, open up the history and the Hebrew where it illuminates the text, and then turn to the questions that matter for us as women, as mothers and daughters, and as people trying to live faithfully. A handful of key verses will be marked in each guide to read aloud together — you are not expected to have read the whole passage in advance.

FROM THE TRADITION

Our home base is Wesleyan. This study reads Scripture from within the Methodist tradition — attentive to grace that goes before us, meets us, and perfects us. Where a passage has been read differently across the centuries by Catholic, Orthodox, or Reformed Christians, the guides will say so plainly and fairly, so that we understand not only what we believe but why other faithful Christians have read the text as they have.

The Book at a Glance

1 Kings covers roughly a century and a half of Israel's history, from about 970 to 850 BC. It opens with an aged King David and the scramble to succeed him, follows his son Solomon to the dazzling height of Israel's power and wealth, and then watches the kingdom crack in two and begin a long, slow decline. It ends not with a king at all, but with a prophet — Elijah — standing against a corrupt throne. That movement, *from throne to prophet*, is the key to the whole book.

Where it sits in the Bible

1 and 2 Kings were originally a single scroll, divided later for convenience. Together with Joshua, Judges, and 1–2 Samuel, they form what scholars call the Deuteronomistic History — a sweeping account of Israel in the land, told from the vantage point of a single, searching question: why did it all fall apart? The books were given their final shape during or after the Babylonian exile, when Israel had lost the land, the throne, and the Temple. The writers look back and answer: this happened because kings and people alike abandoned the covenant. It is history written to explain a catastrophe — and to insist that God was faithful even when His people were not.

A WORD ON THE WORD “COVENANT”

The Hebrew *bērît* (בְּרִית) runs underneath the entire book. A covenant is not a contract between equals; it is a binding relationship God initiates and sustains. Solomon's Temple prayer, the promises to David, and the prophets' rebukes all assume it. When kings “do evil in the sight of the LORD,” the standard they fail is the covenant. Keep the word in mind — it is the thread the writers are tracing.

The shape of the story

1. The rise (chapters 1–11). Solomon secures the throne, asks God for wisdom, builds the Temple, and brings Israel to a golden age — then compromises it away through foreign alliances and idolatry.
2. The rupture (chapters 12–16). Solomon's son loses the northern tribes through arrogance. The kingdom splits into Israel (north) and Judah (south), and the north spirals quickly into idolatry.
3. The prophet (chapters 17–22). Elijah confronts King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The drama shifts from palaces to the prophetic word — fire on Mount Carmel, a whisper on Mount Horeb, and a stolen vineyard that seals a king's fate.

The World Behind the Book

To feel the weight of 1 Kings, it helps to picture the world it describes.

A united kingdom, briefly

When Solomon took the throne, Israel was at its largest and most secure it would ever be. David had subdued the surrounding enemies; Solomon inherited peace, trade routes, and tribute. For one generation, Israel was a genuine regional power, trading with Egypt, Tyre, and the fabled kingdom of Sheba. The Temple was the crown of that age — a permanent house for a God who had traveled with His people in a tent for four hundred years.

Why the kingdom split

Solomon's glory came at a cost his people paid. He taxed heavily and conscripted labor to fund his building projects. When he died, the northern tribes asked his son Rehoboam to ease the burden. Rehoboam, listening to his young advisors instead of his elders, promised to make it heavier — and ten tribes walked away. From that day the people of God were divided: Israel in the north, with its capital eventually at Samaria, and Judah in the south, holding Jerusalem and the Temple and the line of David.

The house of Omri and the crisis of Baal

The back half of 1 Kings centers on the northern dynasty of Omri and especially his son Ahab, who married Jezebel, a princess of Sidon. She brought the worship of Baal with her and set out to make it Israel's official religion, killing the prophets of the LORD. This is the fire Elijah walks into. The conflict is not merely political — it is a struggle for the soul of the nation: will Israel belong to the LORD, or to Baal?

CROSS-REFERENCES

For the curious: The Bible's account of Omri and Ahab is echoed in archaeology. Ahab's dynasty is named on the Moabite Stone and in Assyrian records, and the “ivory house” Ahab built (1 Kings 22:39) matches ivory inlays excavated at Samaria. The world of 1 Kings is not legend — it left fingerprints in the ground.

Threads to Follow

These are the recurring themes worth watching across the weeks. Naming them now will help you notice them as they surface.

1. Wisdom — and its limits

Solomon is the wisest man who ever lived, and his wisdom cannot save him from himself. The book raises an uncomfortable, honest question: what good is wisdom if the heart is divided? It is a theme that reaches every one of us who has known the right thing and done otherwise.

2. The divided heart

Again and again the book measures a king by whether his heart was “wholly true to the LORD.” Solomon’s was not, “for his wives turned away his heart” (11:4). Division — of the heart, then of the kingdom — is the book’s great tragedy, and the mirror it holds up to us.

3. The word of the LORD that comes to pass

Prophets thread through the book, and their words always land. What God says through Ahijah, through the man of God, through Elijah, comes true. In a story full of failing kings, the reliable character is God’s word itself.

4. Faithfulness in small and hidden places

Some of the book’s most luminous moments belong not to kings but to those with no power at all — a widow with a handful of flour, a servant who hides a hundred prophets, a prophet fed by ravens and then by an angel. For a group of women, many of them mothers, this thread rewards close attention: the book keeps insisting that faithfulness in the small, unseen place is where God most often shows up.

FOR REFLECTION

Worth holding onto from the start: As we move through kings and battles and Temple furnishings, keep asking — where is God quietly at work in the margins of this story, in the people history would have forgotten? Those margins are often where this book does its deepest work.

The Women of 1 Kings

1 Kings is largely a story of kings, but its women are neither few nor incidental. Several of them turn the plot, and together they offer a remarkable range of portraits — wise and foolish, powerful and powerless, faithful and ruinous. Because this study is ours, we will give them their due.

THE WOMEN WE WILL MEET

Bathsheba — once vulnerable, now a queen mother who secures her son's throne (ch. 1–2).

The two mothers before Solomon — one willing to give up her child rather than see him die; Scripture's piercing study of a mother's love (ch. 3).

The Queen of Sheba — a foreign queen who comes to test Solomon and leaves praising his God (ch. 10).

The widow of Zarephath — a starving Gentile mother whose small act of trust becomes a channel of miracle, and whose grief Elijah answers (ch. 17).

Jezebel — a queen who uses her power to corrupt a nation and murder the innocent; the book's great study of influence turned to ruin (ch. 16–21).

Notice, as the weeks unfold, how often the book sets these women in contrast — the widow who gives her last meal against the queen who seizes another man's vineyard; the mother who surrenders her child against the mothers who cannot. These pairings are not accidents. They are the book teaching us to see.

The Eight-Week Schedule

Here is the path we will walk. The weeks are built to give the richest passages room to breathe and to keep our discussions from feeling rushed. If a conversation runs long and we linger an extra week somewhere, that is a feature, not a failure — the schedule serves the study, not the other way around.

Week	Passage	Focus
1	1 Kings 1–2	The fight for David's throne; Solomon secures the kingdom. Bathsheba as queen mother.
2	1 Kings 3–4	Solomon's dream at Gibeon and his request for wisdom; the judgment between two mothers.
3	1 Kings 5–8	Building and dedicating the Temple; Solomon's great prayer.
4	1 Kings 9–11	The Queen of Sheba and the height of glory; the foreign wives, idolatry, and God's judgment.
5	1 Kings 12–14	Rehoboam's folly and the kingdom torn in two; Jeroboam's golden calves.
6	1 Kings 15–16	A rapid succession of kings; the rise of Ahab and Jezebel.
7	1 Kings 17–18	Elijah, the ravens, the widow of Zarephath, and the showdown on Mount Carmel.
8	1 Kings 19–22	The still small voice; the call of Elisha; Naboth's vineyard and the end of Ahab.

Should the group take to 1 Kings, its story runs straight on into 2 Kings — Elijah's ascent, Elisha's ministry, and the road to exile. We have shaped this study so that it could become the first half of a longer journey through the Kings, if you wish it to be.

“The LORD was not in the wind... and after the fire a still small voice.” — 1 Kings 19:11–12

Week 1 — The Fight for the Throne

1 Kings 1–2 · David's Last Days and Solomon's Rise

Where We Are

The book opens on an old man dying. David — the shepherd, the giant-slayer, the king who danced before the Ark — is now so frail he cannot keep warm. The great figure of Israel's story is fading, and the question that hangs over these two chapters is the oldest question in any family and any kingdom: *who comes next?*

What follows is not a gentle passing of the crown. It is a palace power struggle, complete with a self-appointed prince, a whispered counter-move, a deathbed oath, and — once Solomon is secure — a settling of old scores. These chapters can feel harsh, even ruthless. But read closely, they are also about promises kept, a mother who acts decisively for her son, and the fragile beginning of the reign that will build the Temple. This is where the story of 1 Kings is set in motion.

THE CAST OF CHAPTERS 1–2

David — the dying king, roused one last time to name his successor.

Adonijah — David's eldest surviving son, who crowns himself before anyone can stop him.

Bathsheba — Solomon's mother, who moves to secure the throne she was promised for him.

Nathan — the prophet who once confronted David; now he acts to protect the succession.

Solomon — David's son by Bathsheba, and the LORD's choice for the throne.

Joab & Abiathar — a general and a priest who back the wrong man.

Walking Through the Passage

A throne claimed in the dark (1:1–1:27)

While David lies dying, his son Adonijah decides not to wait. He gathers chariots, horsemen, and fifty runners, wins over Joab the general and Abiathar the priest, and holds a coronation feast — all without a word to his father. It is a quiet coup, dressed as a celebration. But Nathan the prophet sees it, and he goes to Bathsheba with a plan.

A mother secures a promise (1:11–1:31)

Nathan sends Bathsheba to David to remind him of an oath: that Solomon would reign. She enters the king's chamber, bows, and speaks plainly — Adonijah has made himself king, and the eyes of all Israel are on David to say who will truly succeed him. Nathan arrives to confirm her words. The aged king rouses himself and swears again the oath he had made: Solomon will sit on the throne. In a book full of powerful men, it is a woman's decisive action that turns the moment.

Solomon anointed (1:32–1:53)

David acts at once. Solomon is set on the king's own mule, led to Gihon, and anointed by Zadok the priest to the sound of the trumpet and the people's shout: “Long live King Solomon!” The noise reaches Adonijah's feast. His guests scatter. Adonijah flees to the altar and grabs its horns, begging for mercy — and Solomon, for now, grants it.

David's charge and Solomon's consolidation (2:1–2:46)

David's final words to Solomon are two things at once: a soaring call to “walk in [God's] ways” and keep the covenant, and a cold list of old enemies to deal with. After David dies, Solomon secures his reign — Adonijah overreaches and is executed, Abiathar is exiled, Joab is struck down at the very altar he flees to, and Shimei is eventually killed for breaking his confinement. By the chapter's end, “the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.” These are hard verses, and we will not pretend otherwise in our discussion.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “BE STRONG”

David charges Solomon: “Be strong, and show yourself a man” (2:2). The word is *chāzaq* (חָזַק) — to be firm, resolute, to take courage and hold fast. It is the same word Moses speaks to Joshua and God speaks to the exiles. Notice what it is joined to: strength here is not conquest or force but faithfulness — “be strong... and keep the charge of the LORD your God.” The strength David commends is the strength to stay true.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

You need not have read the whole passage in advance. These are the hinge verses of the story — read them aloud together as you come to them, and let them anchor the conversation.

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 1:29–30 — David keeps his oath to Bathsheba: “As the LORD lives... Solomon your son shall reign after me.”

1 Kings 1:39–40 — Solomon is anointed and the people rejoice “so that the earth was split by their noise.”

1 Kings 2:2–4 — David's charge: “Be strong... and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

The promise behind it all (2 Samuel 7:12–16). God's covenant with David — that his offspring would build God's house and his throne would be established forever — is the promise Solomon's succession begins to fulfill. Every claim to this throne is a claim on that promise.

Bathsheba's earlier story (2 Samuel 11–12). The woman who now secures the throne first entered David's story through his sin against her. That she stands here as honored queen mother is part of the quiet grace running under these chapters.

Refuge at the horns of the altar (Exodus 21:12–14). Adonijah and Joab both flee to the altar. The law gave the altar as a place of refuge — but not for the guilty who acted with deliberate intent. The background sharpens what happens to each man.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

How do we read Solomon's harsh beginning? These chapters trouble many readers. Solomon's consolidation — executions, exile, a killing at the altar — sits uneasily beside his reputation for wisdom. Christians have read this in more than one way.

The Wesleyan instinct, our home base, is to resist whitewashing the text. John Wesley read Scripture's kings as real and flawed people whom God nonetheless used, and he was quick to distinguish what the Bible *reports* from what it *approves*. The narrator tells us these things happened and that they secured the kingdom; he does not hold them up as models of holiness. We are free — obligated, even — to hold Solomon's later wisdom and his early ruthlessness in honest tension.

The Reformed tradition tends to emphasize God's sovereign purpose working even through morally mixed human actions — the throne is established because God ordained it, not because the means were pure. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions have often read the passage typologically: Solomon, the son of David who builds the temple and establishes a kingdom of peace, foreshadows Christ — while never forgetting that the shadow is only a shadow, and a deeply imperfect one.

What unites these readings is a refusal to make the Bible tidier than it is. The same book that will soon show us Solomon praying one of Scripture's most beautiful prayers shows us first how he came to power. Both are true.

For Our Lives

The guides for this study turn, each week, to what the passage asks of us — as women, as mothers and daughters, as people trying to keep our own hearts whole. These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist.

AS WOMEN

Bathsheba is the pivot of chapter 1. When a self-appointed prince is about to seize everything, it is her voice — clear, brave, and timely — that moves the king to keep his word. She had every reason to stay silent and safe; she spoke instead. Where in your life is there a word that needs speaking clearly and in time — a truth others are waiting on, a promise that needs holding someone to? What makes it hard to speak, and what might it protect if you did?

AS MOTHERS

Bathsheba acts for her son — not by grasping, but by standing on a promise that was made and reminding the one who made it. There is a kind of maternal advocacy here that is neither passive nor pushy: she knows what her son was promised and she will not let it quietly slip away. Where are you called to advocate for your children — and how do you tell the difference between standing on a genuine promise and simply wanting your own way? David, for his part, hands Solomon a charge more than a crown: “walk in his ways.” What is the charge you most want to hand your children — the thing that matters more to you than any success they could have?

AS DAUGHTERS

Solomon receives his father's last words — a mix of soaring faith and hard, worldly counsel. Our parents, too, hand us a mixed inheritance: wisdom and wounds, faith and blind spots, all tangled together. Part of growing up is learning to receive the good without pretending the hard parts aren't there. What did you inherit from your mother or father that you are grateful for? What have you had to sort through, keeping the gold and setting down the rest? And what would it mean to honor them honestly — without either idolizing or dismissing them?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: What surprised you most in these opening chapters? Was there anything that troubled you?

Going deeper:

1. Bathsheba and Nathan both take risks to secure Solomon's throne. What do you make of their willingness to act rather than wait? When is waiting faith, and when is it fear?

2. David's charge to Solomon holds together “walk in God's ways” and a list of scores to settle. How do you sit with that combination? What does it tell us about David — and about how the Bible portrays its heroes?

3. The chapter keeps returning to oaths and promises kept. Where in your own life has a kept promise made all the difference — and where has a broken one left its mark?

4. “Be strong... and keep the charge of the LORD.” If strength here means faithfulness rather than force, where do you most need that kind of strength right now?

To close: As we begin 1 Kings, what is one thing you're hoping to find, or ask, or understand better over these weeks together?

Next week: *Solomon's dream at Gibeon, his request for wisdom, and the judgment between two mothers (1 Kings 3–4).*

Week 2 — A Wise and Discerning Heart

1 Kings 3–4 · Solomon's Dream and the Two Mothers

Where We Are

Last week the throne was won. This week the young king who won it does something unexpected: given anything he could ask of God, he asks for wisdom. These two chapters show us Solomon at his very best — humble before God, and then astonishingly discerning before two desperate women. If chapters 1–2 were about how power is seized, chapters 3–4 are about what power is *for*. The answer, at least at the start of Solomon's reign, is to serve and to judge rightly on behalf of the powerless.

At the heart of the week is one of the most famous scenes in all of Scripture: two mothers, one living child, and a king who threatens to cut the baby in two. It is a story that has fascinated readers for three thousand years — and for a group of mothers, it opens straight onto the deepest questions of love, sacrifice, and what it means to want another's good more than your own claim.

A SHADOW BEFORE THE LIGHT

Chapter 3 opens with a quiet warning we should not skip: Solomon makes a marriage alliance with Egypt and “the people were sacrificing at the high places” (3:1–3). The narrator notes that Solomon loved the LORD — “only” he worshiped at the high places. That small word *only* is a seed. The compromises that will one day undo him are already present, even in his golden hour. Wisdom and vulnerability sit side by side from the beginning.

Walking Through the Passage

The dream at Gibeon (3:4–3:15)

At Gibeon, God appears to Solomon in a dream and offers him a blank check: “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon’s answer is remarkable for what it is not. He does not ask for long life, riches, or the death of his enemies. He confesses he is “but a little child” who does not know how to go out or come in, and asks instead for “an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil.” God is so pleased that He grants the wisdom *and* the things Solomon did not request. The prayer of a leader who knows his own smallness is answered beyond his asking.

The two mothers (3:16–3:28)

Then comes the test that proves the gift. Two women who share a house each bore a child; one baby died in the night, and both now claim the living one. There are no witnesses. It is one woman’s word against another’s. Solomon calls for a sword and orders the living child divided in two, half to each. And in that terrible instant, the true mother is revealed: she would rather give her son away and live without him than see him killed. “Give her the living child, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.” All Israel hears of it and stands in awe, “because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him.”

The kingdom well-ordered (4:1–4:34)

Chapter 4 steps back to show the fruit of that wisdom across the whole kingdom — officials appointed, provisions organized, and a people who “ate and drank and were happy” under a reign of peace. Solomon’s wisdom is described as surpassing all others, and people came “from all the peoples” to hear him. The private discernment in the courtroom becomes public flourishing across the land.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “AN UNDERSTANDING MIND”

Solomon asks for a *lēb shōmēa* (לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ) — literally a “hearing heart” or “listening heart.” In Hebrew the *heart* (*lēb*) is not the seat of feeling but of thought, will, and discernment — the center of the person. And the wisdom he seeks begins with *listening*. Before he can judge rightly, he must be able to hear — to hear God, and to hear the truth beneath what people say. The whole scene with the two mothers turns on exactly this: Solomon hears what is underneath their words. Biblical wisdom, this passage quietly insists, starts not with speaking but with listening.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 3:7–9 — Solomon's prayer: "I am but a little child... Give your servant therefore an understanding mind."

1 Kings 3:26 — The true mother: "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death."

1 Kings 3:28 — The people's response: they "perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to do justice."

CROSS-REFERENCES

Wisdom's beginning (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Tradition credits much of Proverbs to Solomon; here we watch the man live out what the book teaches — wisdom rooted in reverence, not cleverness.

Ask and it will be given (James 1:5). "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God... and it will be given him." Solomon's dream is the Old Testament picture of this New Testament promise.

A greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42). Jesus points to the Queen of the South who came for Solomon's wisdom, then says, "something greater than Solomon is here." The wisdom given at Gibeon points beyond itself.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

Where does true wisdom come from? The two-mothers story has been treasured across every branch of the church, but traditions have drawn from it in slightly different keys.

The Wesleyan reading, our home base, sees in Solomon's prayer a model of the humility that grace produces. Wesley taught that all genuine wisdom is a gift of God's grace, not a human achievement — and Solomon's "I am but a little child" is precisely the emptied posture into which grace pours. Notice, too, that the wisdom is given *for the sake of others*: to govern, to judge, to serve. In the Wesleyan vision, holiness is never private; it always bends outward toward the neighbor.

The Catholic and Orthodox traditions have long read Solomon's wisdom as a foreshadowing of Christ, the true Wisdom of God, and even of Mary, sometimes called the "Seat of Wisdom." The Reformed tradition emphasizes that Solomon's discernment displays God's own wisdom breaking into human affairs — "the wisdom of God was in him" — a gift that magnifies the Giver.

For all their differences, every tradition lingers on the same astonishing thing: that the truest love in the story is the willingness to *let go*. The real mother proves herself not by clinging but by surrendering. That is a wisdom the world rarely understands — and one the cross would later make its center.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist. Let the passage press on wherever it presses.

AS WOMEN

Solomon's wisdom begins with a listening heart — the willingness to hear before speaking, to discern what lies beneath the surface. So much of the wisdom women are called to exercise, in homes and workplaces and friendships, is exactly this quiet, listening kind: reading the room, hearing the ache under the complaint, knowing when to speak and when to hold still. Where in your life is God inviting you to a more listening heart? And what gets in the way — hurry, fear, the urge to fix?

AS MOTHERS

The true mother is revealed by her willingness to let her child go rather than see him harmed. This is the hardest and holiest paradox of mothering: that love sometimes proves itself by releasing rather than grasping. Every mother eventually faces smaller versions of this — loosening our grip so a child can grow, choosing their good over our own claim on them. Where are you being asked to hold your children more openly? What would it cost you, and what might it give them?

AS DAUGHTERS

Solomon, given everything he could want, asks to be able to tell good from evil. It is the prayer of someone stepping into adult responsibility and feeling the weight of it — “I do not know how to go out or come in.” Most of us know that feeling. Where do you most need discernment right now — a decision, a relationship, a fork in the road? What would it look like to bring that, honestly, to God as Solomon did: not asking for the outcome you want, but for the wisdom to see clearly?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: If God said to you tonight, “Ask what I shall give you,” what is your honest first answer — and what do you wish your answer were?

Going deeper:

1. Solomon asks for a listening heart to discern good and evil. How is that different from the kind of “wisdom” the world usually prizes? Where have you seen the two come apart?
2. The true mother is known by her willingness to give her child up. Why do you think Scripture makes surrender, not possession, the mark of real love here?

3. The narrator warns us, even in Solomon's best hour, about the “high places” and the Egyptian marriage. Why include the shadow now? What does it teach us about how compromise takes root?

4. Solomon's private act of discernment became public flourishing for a whole people. Where have you seen one person's wisdom or integrity ripple outward to bless many?

To close: Name one situation this week where you could ask, before anything else, for a listening heart. What might change if you did?

Next week: *Building and dedicating the Temple, and Solomon's great prayer (1 Kings 5–8).*

Week 3 — A House for the Name

1 Kings 5–8 · Building and Dedication of the Temple

Where We Are

Wisdom given, wisdom proven — now wisdom builds. These four chapters are the summit of Solomon's reign and, in a sense, the summit of the whole Old Testament story so far. For four hundred years God had dwelt among a wandering people in a tent. Now, at last, a permanent house is raised for His Name in Jerusalem. This is the moment David longed for and was not permitted to see; his son completes it.

These chapters can feel dense — cubits and cedar, gold and cherubim. Do not get lost in the measurements. What matters is the meaning underneath them: a holy God choosing to dwell in the midst of His people, and a king who, at the height of his power, falls to his knees in one of the most beautiful prayers in Scripture. The center of gravity this week is not the building. It is the prayer.

FINDING YOUR FOOTING IN THE DETAILS

Chapter 5 — Solomon partners with Hiram, king of Tyre, for cedar and skilled labor.

Chapter 6 — the Temple is built over seven years; God promises to dwell there *if* Solomon keeps His commandments.

Chapter 7 — the furnishings, and Solomon's own palace (which takes thirteen years — a detail worth noticing).

Chapter 8 — the Ark is brought in, God's glory fills the house, and Solomon prays and blesses the people. This is the heart of the week.

Walking Through the Passage

The work begins (5:1–6:38)

Solomon secures cedar and cypress from Hiram of Tyre and organizes an immense workforce. The Temple rises over seven years, built of finished stone — so that “no hammer or axe or any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built” (6:7). In the middle of the construction account, God speaks a conditional promise (6:11–13): He will dwell among His people and never forsake them *if* Solomon walks in His statutes. The *if* hangs over everything that follows.

Furnishings — and a telling comparison (7:1–7:51)

The Temple takes seven years; Solomon's own palace takes thirteen. The narrator does not comment, but the numbers speak. Chapter 7 details the bronze pillars, the great “sea,” and the golden furnishings — beauty poured out for the house of God. Everything is prepared for the one thing still missing.

Glory fills the house (8:1–8:21)

The Ark of the Covenant is carried into the Most Holy Place, and “a cloud filled the house of the LORD... for the glory of the LORD filled the house.” The presence is so overwhelming the priests cannot even stand to minister. The God who cannot be contained by heaven itself has chosen to meet His people here.

Solomon's great prayer (8:22–8:66)

Then Solomon kneels, spreads his hands to heaven, and prays. He marvels that God would dwell on earth at all — “will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house!” He asks that God's eyes be open toward this place, and that He hear and forgive when His people pray toward it — in famine, in defeat, in exile, even the foreigner who comes from afar. It is a prayer soaked in mercy and in hope for restoration. He ends by blessing the people: “The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers.”

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “TO PUT HIS NAME THERE”

Again and again these chapters speak of God putting His *shēm* (שֵׁם) — His “Name” — in the Temple. This is a careful theology. God does not say the Temple *contains* Him; Solomon himself insists it cannot. Rather, God places His *Name* there — His revealed presence, His character, His accessibility to His people. The Name is how a hidden God makes Himself findable. The Temple is not a cage for God; it is a meeting place, an address where a covenant people know they can turn and be heard.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 8:10–11 — The glory fills the house: “a cloud filled the house of the LORD... for the glory of the LORD filled the house.”

1 Kings 8:27 — Solomon's wonder: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth?”

1 Kings 8:57–58 — The blessing: “The LORD our God be with us... that he may incline our hearts to him.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

David's longing (2 Samuel 7:1–5). David wanted to build the house and was told his son would instead. Solomon's Temple is a promise, decades old, coming to fruition.

A temple not made with hands (Acts 7:48–50; John 2:19–21). Stephen and Jesus both point past the building: God does not finally dwell in houses made by human hands. Jesus calls His own body the true temple. Solomon's wonder — can God dwell on earth? — finds its deepest answer in the Incarnation.

You are God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” The glory that filled the house now fills God's people.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

What is the Temple for us now? Christians have always read Solomon's Temple as pointing beyond itself — but toward what, exactly, the traditions accent differently.

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, draws a straight line from the glory filling the Temple to the Spirit filling the believer. Wesley's whole vision of the Christian life — God's presence indwelling and transforming the ordinary person — is Solomon's Temple made personal. If the glory of God once filled a house of cedar and gold, how much more does He desire to fill and sanctify a human heart? The Temple becomes a picture of what grace does in us.

The Catholic and Orthodox traditions have rich theologies of sacred space — the church building as a place where heaven and earth meet, echoing the glory-filled Temple, and the Eucharist as the abiding presence of God among His people. The Reformed tradition tends to stress that the Temple always pointed forward to Christ, in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” — the building was a shadow; He is the substance.

All agree on Solomon's central wonder: that the God whom the highest heavens cannot contain *wants* to dwell with us. The whole Bible is, in a sense, the story of God making a home among His people — tent, then temple, then Christ, then the church, and finally the new creation where “the dwelling of God is with man.”

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist.

AS WOMEN

Solomon prays that God would “incline our hearts to him.” The whole point of the Temple was relationship — a place to be heard, forgiven, and met. It is easy for faith to become about doing and building and managing; the Temple existed for *presence*. Where in your life have you traded being with God for doing for God? What would it look like this week to simply turn toward Him, as Solomon told the people to turn toward the house, and expect to be heard?

AS MOTHERS

Notice the quiet detail: the Temple took seven years, Solomon's own palace thirteen. What we build reveals what we treasure. Mothers build homes — not just houses, but the invisible architecture of a family's life, its rhythms and its faith. What are you building, and for whom? If someone read your days like the narrator reads Solomon's building projects — counting the years you gave to each thing — what would the numbers say about what you treasure?

AS DAUGHTERS

Paul says our own bodies are now the temple of God's Spirit — the glory that once filled a house of gold now dwells in ordinary people like us. That is a staggering dignity, and one many women struggle to believe about themselves. Do you live as though you are a dwelling place of God? What would change in how you treat yourself — your body, your worth, your inner voice — if you took that seriously?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: Is there a place — a church, a room, a spot outdoors — where you have most felt the presence of God? What made it holy to you?

Going deeper:

1. Solomon insists God cannot be contained by the Temple, even as he builds it. How do we hold together the truth that God is everywhere and the value of particular holy places and practices?
2. The conditional “if” of 6:11–13 hangs over the whole account. What do you make of God tying His presence to obedience? Is that threat, invitation, or both?
3. Solomon's prayer keeps returning to forgiveness — for famine, defeat, even exile. Why do you think mercy, not grandeur, is the dominant note of the dedication prayer?

4. If your body and life are now God's temple, what does it mean to keep that dwelling place hospitable to Him?

To close: Solomon blessed the people, “The LORD our God be with us.” Where do you most need to know God's presence with you in this season?

Next week: *The Queen of Sheba, the height of Solomon's glory, and the compromises that begin to undo him (1 Kings 9–11).*

Week 4 — Glory and the Divided Heart

1 Kings 9–11 · The Height of Splendor and the Beginning of the Fall

Where We Are

This week we stand at the peak and watch the descent begin. Solomon's fame spreads to the ends of the known world; the Queen of Sheba travels a thousand miles to see it and leaves breathless. Gold, wisdom, peace, prestige — Israel has never had more. And then, quietly and devastatingly, it all begins to come apart. Not through war or disaster, but through the slow erosion of a divided heart.

These chapters hold together the two truths that make Solomon's story so haunting: he was the wisest man who ever lived, and it was not enough to save him. The same king who prayed so beautifully at the Temple ends this week worshiping foreign gods on the hills outside Jerusalem. For all of us who have known better and done otherwise, Solomon's fall is not a distant cautionary tale — it is a mirror.

THE TURN IN THREE MOVEMENTS

The warning (chapter 9) — God appears to Solomon a second time and repeats the “if”: obey and endure, turn away and be cut off.

The glory (chapter 10) — the Queen of Sheba, staggering wealth, and fame surpassing all the kings of the earth.

The fall (chapter 11) — the foreign wives, the turning of Solomon's heart, and God's word that the kingdom will be torn away.

Walking Through the Passage

A second warning (9:1–9:28)

God appears to Solomon again, as He had at Gibeon. This time the message is sober: if Solomon and his sons walk faithfully, the throne will endure; but if they turn to other gods, Israel will be cut off from the land and the Temple itself will become “a heap of ruins.” The blessing and the warning are laid out side by side. Solomon has been told plainly what is at stake.

The Queen of Sheba (10:1–10:29)

Then comes the visit that has captured imaginations for millennia. The Queen of Sheba comes “to test him with hard questions,” bearing spices, gold, and precious stones. Solomon answers everything; nothing is hidden from him. She is overwhelmed — “the half was not told me” — and blesses the LORD who set Solomon on the throne “to execute justice and righteousness.” A foreign queen sees, more clearly than Solomon himself soon will, that the wisdom is a gift meant for justice. The chapter closes in a golden haze: silver as common as stones, ships bringing treasure, unmatched splendor.

The divided heart (11:1–11:43)

And then, chapter 11: “King Solomon loved many foreign women.” Seven hundred wives, three hundred concubines — political alliances sealed in marriage — “and his wives turned away his heart.” He builds high places for their gods, Ashtoreth and Molech and Chemosh, on the hills near Jerusalem. “His heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.” God raises up adversaries, and through the prophet Ahijah announces that the kingdom will be torn from Solomon's son — though for David's sake, one tribe will remain. Solomon dies, and the crack in the kingdom is set.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “WHOLLY TRUE”

The verdict on Solomon is that his heart was not *shālēm* (שָׁלֵם) with the LORD — not “wholly true,” not *complete*. The word shares a root with *shālôm*, peace — wholeness, integrity, everything in its right place. Solomon's tragedy is not that he stopped believing in the LORD; it is that his devotion was *divided*, shared out among many gods and many loves. A heart that is *shālēm* is undivided, single, whole. This is the very thing the great commandment asks: to love God with *all* your heart. Solomon loved Him with part.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 10:6–7 — The Queen of Sheba: “The half was not told me; your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report.”

1 Kings 11:4 — The turn: “His wives turned away his heart... his heart was not wholly true to the LORD.”

1 Kings 11:11 — The verdict: “I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

The king's warning, foretold (Deuteronomy 17:16–17). Long before Solomon, the law warned that Israel's king must not “acquire many wives” or excessive gold and horses, “lest his heart turn away.” Solomon breaks each command in order. The tragedy was written into the law as a danger centuries earlier.

Something greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42). Jesus recalls the Queen of the South who sought Solomon's wisdom — and says a greater wisdom now stands before His hearers, one that will not fail.

The undivided heart (Matthew 6:24). “No one can serve two masters.” Solomon is the Old Testament's most powerful illustration of what Jesus states as a law of the soul.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

How could the wisest man fall? Solomon's collapse has troubled and instructed the church for two thousand years, and the traditions read it with one voice on the essentials.

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, finds here a sober confirmation of one of Wesley's deepest convictions: that no spiritual height, no past experience of grace, secures us automatically for the future. Wesley taught that we can “fall away” — that the Christian life is a walk that must be continued, not a status once achieved. Solomon is the great warning against presuming on grace. Gifts, wisdom, even a genuine encounter with God at the Temple did not make him immune. The heart must be kept *shalēm*, whole, day by day. This is why Wesley placed such weight on ongoing devotion, accountability, and “watching over one another in love.”

The Reformed tradition reads Solomon's fall as a display of human depravity even at its most gifted — and points to God's faithfulness in preserving one tribe “for David's sake,” grace persisting through human failure. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions emphasize the peril of disordered loves: Solomon's sin was loving good things (wives, alliances, peace) in the wrong order, above God, until the lesser loves crowded out the highest.

The shared lesson is unsparing and hopeful at once: the greatest gifts cannot substitute for a whole heart — and even after such a fall, God keeps His promise to David alive. Judgment and mercy travel together, as they will through the rest of the book.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist. This is tender territory — the passage is about the slow, ordinary way good people drift.

AS WOMEN

Solomon did not fall in a day. His heart was turned gradually, love by love, compromise by compromise, until the man who prayed at the Temple was building altars to other gods. Drift is quiet. Where might your own heart be slowly dividing — not through dramatic rebellion, but through small accommodations, competing loves, things that have crept in and taken more room than they should? What would it look like to notice the drift while it is still small?

AS MOTHERS

The relationships closest to us shape our hearts more than anything — for good and for ill. Solomon's downfall came through those he loved most. This is not a warning against love, but a call to be honest about influence: the people and things we let closest to us will bend us toward God or away from Him. What influences are you allowing to shape your heart and your home right now? And what are you modeling for your children about keeping first things first when everything competes for the top spot?

AS DAUGHTERS

The Queen of Sheba saw clearly what Solomon's wisdom was *for* — “to execute justice and righteousness” — even as Solomon was losing sight of it. Sometimes an outsider sees our gifts and their purpose more truly than we do. What gifts has God given you, and are you using them for their intended purpose — or letting them serve lesser ends? Who in your life sees you clearly and could help you keep your gifts pointed the right way?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: Solomon's fall was gradual, not sudden. Where have you seen — in a life, a marriage, a faith — how slowly and quietly drift can happen?

Going deeper:

1. God warned Solomon twice, plainly, about exactly the sin he committed. Why do you think warning, even from God, so often isn't enough? What does it take for us to actually change course?
2. The problem was a *divided* heart, not an unbelieving one. Why is a divided heart so dangerous — and so easy to live with?
3. A foreign queen praised Solomon's God more clearly than Solomon lived for Him. What does it mean when outsiders see the beauty of our faith more clearly than we're living it?

4. Even in judgment, God keeps one tribe “for David's sake.” Where do you see mercy woven through the consequences in this chapter — and in your own story?

To close: What is one “first love” you want to protect and keep whole this week, before other loves crowd in?

Next week: *Rehoboam's folly, the kingdom torn in two, and Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kings 12–14).*

Week 5 — A Kingdom Torn in Two

1 Kings 12–14 · Rehoboam's Folly and Jeroboam's Calves

Where We Are

The judgment announced against Solomon now comes to pass — and it comes, as judgment often does, through entirely ordinary human choices. No army invades. No plague strikes. A new king simply makes a proud, foolish decision, and a kingdom that took generations to build splits down the middle in an afternoon. By the end of these chapters, the people of God are two peoples: Israel in the north, Judah in the south, and they will never be whole again.

This week introduces a pattern that will run through the rest of 1 and 2 Kings: king after king “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” It can feel bleak. But watch for the countercurrent — the persistent word of God through His prophets, and the thread of mercy that refuses to let the story end. Even in division, God is not absent. He is working, warning, and preserving a future no one can yet see.

HOW THE KINGDOM SPLIT

Rehoboam — Solomon's son, who inherits the united kingdom and loses most of it through arrogance.

Jeroboam — the servant Ahijah foretold; he leads the ten northern tribes away and becomes the first king of Israel (north).

Judah (south) — keeps Jerusalem, the Temple, and the line of David.

Israel (north) — ten tribes, but no Temple — so Jeroboam builds his own worship, with fateful consequences.

Walking Through the Passage

The folly of Rehoboam (12:1–12:24)

The northern tribes come to Rehoboam with a reasonable request: lighten the heavy yoke your father laid on us, and we will serve you. The older counselors advise him to speak kindly and win their loyalty for life. The young men he grew up with advise him to answer with a boast: “My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs... I will discipline you with scorpions.” Rehoboam chooses arrogance over wisdom — and ten tribes walk away. “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.” One prideful speech undoes a kingdom.

Jeroboam’s calves (12:25–12:33)

Jeroboam, now king of the north, faces a problem: the Temple is in Jerusalem, in the rival south. If his people keep going there to worship, their hearts may return to Rehoboam. So he makes a calculated, disastrous choice — two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan, and tells the people, “Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” He invents his own priesthood and festivals. Political survival is placed above faithfulness to God, and it becomes “the sin of Jeroboam” that shadows every northern king who follows.

The man of God and the prophet (13:1–13:34)

A strange, sobering story follows: a man of God confronts Jeroboam’s altar, is told by God to eat nothing and return by a different road, and is then deceived by an old prophet into disobeying — and dies for it. It is a hard chapter, but its point is sharp: the word of God is to be obeyed exactly, even when a plausible voice offers a reason to bend it. Obedience is not negotiable, even for prophets.

Judgment on Jeroboam’s house (14:1–14:31)

When Jeroboam’s son falls ill, he sends his wife in disguise to the aged, blind prophet Ahijah — the same prophet who once promised him the kingdom. Ahijah knows her at once and delivers a devastating word: because Jeroboam “has done evil above all who were before you,” his house will be cut off. The child dies as she returns home. The chapter closes with Rehoboam’s own failures in the south. Both kingdoms, north and south, have begun badly.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “LISTEN / OBEY”

When the elders urge Rehoboam to *listen* to the people, and throughout these chapters when kings fail to *listen* to God, the word is *shāma*ʿ (שָׁמַע) — the same root as the great *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel.” In Hebrew, to truly hear *is* to obey; there is no gap between listening and heeding. Rehoboam’s tragedy and Jeroboam’s are the same at the root: they would not *shāma*ʿ. They heard the words — wise counsel, divine command — and did not let them land. Real hearing, this book insists, changes what we do.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 12:7 — The elders' wise counsel: “If you will be a servant to this people... they will be your servants forever.”

1 Kings 12:13–14 — The fateful choice: Rehoboam “forsook the counsel... of the old men” and answered harshly.

1 Kings 12:28 — Jeroboam's calves: “Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

The golden calf, again (Exodus 32:4). Jeroboam's words at the calves almost exactly echo Aaron's at Sinai. The oldest sin of the wilderness returns, now built into national worship — the past is not automatically escaped.

Pride before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Rehoboam is a living illustration of the proverb his own father may have written.

The value of counsel (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” Rehoboam had good counsel and refused it.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

How do we read a story of national division? These chapters are less contested doctrinally than most, and the traditions read them together as sober history with enduring lessons.

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, is especially attentive to the human freedom running through this tragedy. Nothing here is fated; at every turn, a real choice is made. Rehoboam *could* have listened. Jeroboam *could* have trusted God to keep his people rather than manufacturing false worship to keep his throne. Wesley's theology takes human decisions with full seriousness — grace is offered, but it can be refused, and the refusal has real consequences. This is the Bible's honest account of how sin works: not usually as dramatic villainy, but as a series of self-protective, faithless choices that quietly compound.

The Reformed tradition holds these human choices together with God's sovereignty — Ahijah had *foretold* the division, so even human folly serves God's declared purpose without excusing the folly. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions draw out the danger of *expedient religion*: Jeroboam's calves are worship reshaped for political convenience, a perennial temptation to remake God in a form that serves our own ends.

The shared warning is Jeroboam's: how easily worship can be bent to serve something other than God — security, power, comfort — until it is no longer worship of Him at all. And the shared comfort is that even here, God keeps speaking, keeps sending prophets, keeps preserving David's line. The story is dark, but God has not gone silent.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist.

AS WOMEN

Rehoboam had wise, experienced counsel available to him — and chose instead the voices that flattered his pride and told him what he wanted to hear. Whose voices are you listening to? We all curate an inner circle, consciously or not. Are the people closest to you those who will tell you the hard, true thing, or those who will echo what you already want? Where might you need to seek out wiser counsel and actually *shāma* — hear it enough to act on it?

AS MOTHERS

Jeroboam's sin became “the sin of Jeroboam” — a pattern inherited by generation after generation of northern kings. The compromises we make can become the well-worn paths our children walk without thinking. What patterns are you passing down — in how your family worships, handles conflict, treats money, tells the truth? Which do you want to hand on, and which do you need to interrupt so they don't simply repeat in the next generation?

AS DAUGHTERS

The man of God in chapter 13 knew exactly what God had told him — and let a plausible, persuasive voice talk him out of it. How often do we know the right thing and then find someone, or some reasoning, to give us permission to bend it? Where in your life do you already know what God is asking, and are looking for a voice that will let you off the hook? What would it take to simply obey the thing you already know?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: Rehoboam lost a kingdom with one proud speech. When have you seen a single decision — yours or someone else's — change everything?

Going deeper:

1. The elders offered servant-leadership; Rehoboam wanted to dominate. What is the difference between leading by serving and leading by force — and where do you see that difference play out in ordinary life?
2. Jeroboam built false worship to protect his power. What are the modern versions of “convenient religion” — faith bent to serve something else?
3. The word *shāma* means hearing that becomes obedience. Where is the gap in your life between what you've heard and what you've done?
4. Even in this dark chapter, God keeps sending prophets and keeps David's line. Where do you find evidence that God has not given up, even when things are unraveling?

To close: Name one wise voice you could deliberately draw closer this week — someone who will tell you the true thing.

Next week: *A rapid succession of kings and the rise of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 15–16).*

Week 6 — The Rise of the House of Ahab

1 Kings 15–16 · A Parade of Kings and the Coming Storm

Where We Are

This week can feel, at first glance, like the hardest to love in all of 1 Kings — a rapid parade of kings, most of them wicked, cut down in coups and conspiracies. Names come and go: Abijam, Asa, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri. Do not worry about keeping them all straight. Read this week the way you would watch storm clouds gather — the individual clouds matter less than what they are building toward. And what they are building toward is Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen whose war on the worship of the LORD will dominate the rest of the book.

Two things reward attention in these chapters. First, the narrator's steady moral verdict on each king — a drumbeat of “he did what was evil,” with a few bright exceptions. Second, the way God keeps His promise to David even as the northern dynasties rise and fall like waves. The contrast between the two kingdoms — one anchored to a promise, the other churning through violence — is the quiet argument of the whole week.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE KINGS

Abijam & Asa (Judah, south) — Abijam walks in his father's sins, but Asa is one of the bright spots: he “did what was right” and removed idols.

Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri (Israel, north) — a violent churn of kings, each overthrowing the last; Zimri reigns just seven days.

Omri (Israel, north) — a strong, ruthless king who founds Samaria and a lasting dynasty — and does “more evil than all who were before him.”

Ahab (Israel, north) — Omri's son, who marries Jezebel and outdoes even his father in evil. The storm has arrived.

Walking Through the Passage

Two kings of Judah (15:1–15:24)

The chapter opens in the south. Abijam reigns briefly and badly, yet “for David's sake” God keeps a lamp burning in Jerusalem — the promise persists despite the man. Then comes Asa, and the narrator's tone lifts: Asa “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD,” put away idols, and even removed his own grandmother from her position as queen mother for making an abominable image. His heart “was wholly true to the LORD all his days.” After so many failures, Asa is a breath of clean air — proof that a faithful king was possible.

Chaos in the north (15:25–16:22)

The northern kingdom, meanwhile, tears itself apart. Nadab is assassinated by Baasha, who wipes out the previous dynasty — fulfilling the prophecy against Jeroboam — then does evil himself. Elah is murdered by Zimri while drunk. Zimri reigns seven days, then burns the palace down over himself when the army turns against him. The north has no anchor, no promise to steady it — only ambition devouring ambition.

Omri and the arrival of Ahab (16:23–16:34)

Out of the chaos rises Omri, a capable and brutal king who builds the city of Samaria and establishes a dynasty — and does more evil than anyone before him. Then his son Ahab takes the throne, and the narrator signals that a new depth has been reached: Ahab marries Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, serves and worships Baal, builds a temple and altar for Baal in Samaria, and “did more to provoke the LORD... than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” The chapter ends with an ominous note about rebuilding Jericho at the cost of a builder's sons — defiance of God's own word. The stage is set for Elijah.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “A LAMP”

God preserves David's line as a *nîr* (נֵיר) — a “lamp” in Jerusalem (15:4). It is a tender, quietly hopeful image. In the ancient world a household kept a lamp burning through the night; to “have a lamp” meant the family line, and the light of life, continued. Amid the darkness of these chapters — murder, idolatry, dynasties rising and falling — God keeps one small flame alight for David's sake. It does not blaze; it does not dominate. It simply refuses to go out. Much of God's faithfulness in Scripture looks like this: not fireworks, but a lamp that will not be extinguished.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 15:4 — The lamp: “For David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem.”

1 Kings 15:11, 14 — Asa's faithfulness: he “did what was right... the heart of Asa was wholly true to the LORD all his days.”

1 Kings 16:30–31 — Ahab: he “did more evil... than all who were before him” and “took for his wife Jezebel.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

A lamp for David (2 Samuel 21:17; Psalm 132:17). “I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.” The lamp of chapter 15 draws on a rich promise-image running through Israel's memory and songs.

The wholly true heart (Deuteronomy 6:5). Asa's heart was “wholly true” — the very thing Solomon lost. The great commandment to love God with all the heart echoes behind every verdict in these chapters.

Jericho's curse (Joshua 6:26). Joshua's ancient curse on anyone who rebuilds Jericho is fulfilled in 16:34 — a chilling sign that under Ahab, God's word is openly defied.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

What do we do with the endless verdicts? These chapters raise a question the whole book presses: what does it mean that God “judges” kings, and how do we read a narrative so full of moral evaluation?

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, reads the narrator's relentless “he did what was evil” / “he did what was right” not as cold bookkeeping but as a moral seriousness born of love. Wesley believed deeply that our choices matter — that God takes our lives seriously enough to hold them to account, and that this accountability is itself a mercy, because it means our lives have real weight. Notice, too, where the tradition draws hope: in Asa, and in the lamp. Amid the wreckage, faithfulness was possible (Asa did it), and God's grace *persisted* (the lamp burned). Wesleyan theology holds both the reality of judgment and the persistence of grace without letting go of either.

The Reformed tradition emphasizes God's sovereign faithfulness to His covenant with David, unbroken by the worst of kings — the lamp burns because God swore it would. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions read the contrast between the anchored south and the churning north as an enduring picture of the difference between a life ordered around God's promise and a life ruled by ambition and appetite.

The shared encouragement is the lamp. In our own dark seasons — personal, national, ecclesial — God's faithfulness may not look like a blaze that fixes everything at once. Often it looks like a small flame that simply will not go out, keeping the future open until the light can grow. Elijah is coming; but first, the lamp.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist.

AS WOMEN

Amid a parade of failures, Asa stands out simply by being faithful — doing what was right, day after day, “all his days.” Faithfulness is rarely dramatic; it is mostly the quiet accumulation of ordinary right choices. In a culture that celebrates the spectacular, do you undervalue steady, unglamorous faithfulness — in yourself and others? Where is God calling you simply to keep doing the right thing, without applause, over the long haul?

AS MOTHERS

Asa was so committed to God that he removed even his own grandmother from power for her idolatry — faithfulness that reached into his own family and cost him something. Sometimes the hardest place to stand for what is right is inside our own family systems, against people we love. Have you faced a moment where loyalty to God and loyalty to family pulled against each other? How do you love your family *and* refuse to go along with what you know is wrong?

AS DAUGHTERS

The lamp burned “for David's sake” — God's faithfulness to one generation became mercy to the next. You, too, may be living in the light of a lamp someone kept burning: a praying grandmother, a faithful parent, someone whose steadiness blessed a future they never saw. Whose faithfulness are you living in the light of? And whose future might your own quiet faithfulness be a lamp for — even if you never see it?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: This chapter is full of people chasing power and losing everything. What does the world tell us will make us secure — and how does that compare with what these chapters show?

Going deeper:

1. The north churned through kings while the south was steadied by a promise. What is the difference between a life built on ambition and a life anchored to something larger than itself?
2. Asa is a rare bright spot. What made his faithfulness possible in such a dark time — and what can we learn from it?
3. The “lamp” is God's faithfulness that refuses to go out. Where in your life or family history have you seen a lamp that simply kept burning?

4. Ahab “did more evil than all before him,” partly through the influence of his marriage. How do our closest relationships escalate or restrain the direction of our lives?

To close: Name one ordinary act of faithfulness you can keep up this week — one lamp you can keep burning.

Next week: *Elijah arrives — the ravens, the widow of Zarephath, and the fire on Mount Carmel* (1 Kings 17–18).

Week 7 — Fire and a Handful of Flour

1 Kings 17–18 · Elijah, the Widow, and Mount Carmel

Where We Are

After chapters of failing kings, the camera turns — suddenly and completely — to a prophet. Elijah bursts onto the scene with no introduction, no genealogy, no backstory. He simply appears before Ahab and announces a drought, then vanishes. For the rest of 1 Kings, the story belongs less to kings than to this fierce, faithful, deeply human man of God. The struggle is no longer merely political. It is a naked contest for the soul of Israel: will the people serve the LORD, or Baal?

This is the dramatic high point of the book, and it holds two very different kinds of scenes side by side. There is the public spectacle — fire falling from heaven on Mount Carmel before all Israel. And there is the private, hidden miracle — a starving widow's jar of flour that does not run out. The book insists we need both: the God who answers with fire on the mountain is the same God who provides a handful of flour in a poor woman's kitchen. For this group, that second story may be the one that stays with you longest.

THREE SCENES, ONE GOD

Fed by ravens (17:1–7) — God sustains Elijah by a brook, bread and meat brought by birds.

The widow of Zarephath (17:8–24) — a starving Gentile mother, a jar that never empties, and a son raised from death.

Mount Carmel (18:1–46) — the showdown with the prophets of Baal, fire from heaven, and the breaking of the drought.

Walking Through the Passage

Fed in the wilderness (17:1–17:7)

Elijah declares to Ahab that there will be neither dew nor rain except by his word — a direct challenge to Baal, who was worshiped precisely as the god of storm and rain. Then God sends him to hide by the brook Cherith, where ravens — unclean birds — bring him bread and meat morning and evening. Before Elijah confronts a nation, God teaches him to depend, day by day, on provision he cannot control. When the brook dries up, the lesson deepens.

The widow of Zarephath (17:8–17:24)

God sends Elijah to Zarephath — in Sidon, Jezebel's own homeland — to be fed by a widow. But when he finds her, she is gathering sticks to cook a last meal for herself and her son before they starve. Elijah asks her, astonishingly, to feed him first — and promises that her jar of flour and jug of oil will not run out until the rains return. She trusts, and it is so; “the jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty.” Later her son falls sick and dies, and in her grief she turns on Elijah. He carries the boy upstairs, cries out to God, and the child is restored — the first resurrection in Scripture. “Now I know that you are a man of God,” she says.

The contest on Carmel (18:1–18:46)

In the third year, God sends Elijah back to Ahab. Elijah summons all Israel and the 450 prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel and puts the question bluntly: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The test is set: two altars, two sacrifices, no fire lit — the God who answers by fire is God. The prophets of Baal cry out all day; they cut themselves; nothing happens. Then Elijah repairs the LORD's altar, drenches it with water three times, and prays a short, quiet prayer. Fire falls, consumes everything — sacrifice, wood, stones, water — and the people fall on their faces: “The LORD, he is God.” The drought breaks; rain comes at last.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “LIMPING BETWEEN”

Elijah asks how long Israel will keep *pōsēchîm* (פִּסְחִים) between two opinions — a vivid word meaning to limp, to hobble, to hop back and forth on unsteady legs. It pictures someone trying to walk on two paths at once, lurching between them, committed to neither. Ironically, the same root describes the frantic “limping” dance of the prophets of Baal around their altar. Elijah's charge is not that Israel has rejected God outright — it is that they are trying to keep both, wavering, hedging their bets. The call is to stop hobbling and stand on one foot: choose. A whole heart, again — the book's great theme — now demanded out loud, on a mountaintop, before all Israel.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 17:14–16 — The promise to the widow: “The jar of flour shall not be spent... until the day that the LORD sends rain.”

1 Kings 18:21 — The challenge: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions?”

1 Kings 18:38–39 — The fire falls, and the people cry, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

CROSS-REFERENCES

Jesus and the widow (Luke 4:25–26). In His first sermon, Jesus points to this very widow — a Gentile, outside Israel — as a sign that God's mercy reaches beyond the expected boundaries. Her story is a scandal of grace, and Jesus knew it.

The prayer that changed the weather (James 5:17–18). “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours,” James writes — and yet his prayer stopped and started the rain. The New Testament holds Elijah up not as a superhuman but as an encouragement to ordinary pray-ers.

Choose this day (Joshua 24:15). “Choose this day whom you will serve.” Elijah's Carmel challenge is Joshua's ancient call renewed for a wavering generation.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

Fire on the mountain, flour in the kitchen. The church has always held Elijah in high honor — he appears with Moses at the Transfiguration — and the traditions draw out complementary riches from these chapters.

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, is drawn to two things here. First, the *decision*: Elijah's “how long will you limp between two opinions?” is exactly the kind of call to whole-hearted commitment that stands at the center of Wesleyan spirituality — the refusal of a lukewarm, hedged faith, the summons to a heart wholly given. Second, the *widow*: Wesley cared intensely for the poor and saw the gospel's power most clearly among the overlooked. That God's great miracle of provision happens not in a palace but in a destitute foreign woman's kitchen — and that her small act of trusting obedience is the hinge — is deeply Wesleyan. Grace meets us in our poverty, and asks for the little we have.

The Catholic and Orthodox traditions treasure Elijah as a model of the contemplative and prophetic life, and read the raising of the widow's son as a foreshadowing of resurrection. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the sovereignty and singularity of God dramatized on Carmel — the LORD alone is God, and He alone answers by fire.

Hold the two scenes together, as the book does. The same God who thunders on Carmel bends low over a widow's failing flour and a dying child. His power and His tenderness are not two different things. The God worth choosing — the one Elijah calls Israel to stop limping toward — is both.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist.

AS WOMEN

The widow was asked to give her *last* meal first — to act in faith before she could see any provision, from a place of genuine scarcity. Sometimes faith asks us to give or trust from our emptiness, not our abundance. Where is God asking you to step out in trust before you can see how things will work out? What is the “handful of flour” you're afraid to let go of — and what might God do with it if you did?

AS MOTHERS

The widow faced every mother's deepest fear: watching her child suffer, and then die, powerless to save him. In her grief she cried out honestly, even angrily. God met her there — and restored her son. This story does not promise every child will be spared; it does show a God who enters a mother's worst grief and is not driven away by her raw honesty. What fears do you carry for your children? What would it mean to bring those fears — and even your anger and grief — honestly to God, as she did, rather than hiding them?

AS DAUGHTERS

Elijah's question cuts to the quick: “How long will you go limping between two opinions?” Most of us know the exhaustion of trying to walk two paths at once — keeping our faith while hedging our bets, wanting God but also wanting to keep our options open. Where are you limping right now, unwilling to commit fully one way or the other? What is the “whole heart” decision God may be inviting you to make — and what makes it so hard to stop hobbling and choose?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: Which scene grips you more — the fire on Carmel or the flour in the widow's kitchen? Why do you think that is?

Going deeper:

1. Before Carmel, God spent three years teaching Elijah to depend on daily provision he couldn't control — ravens, a widow's jar. Why might God prepare us in hidden, humbling ways before any public moment?
2. The great miracle of provision happened in a poor foreign widow's home, not a palace. What does it say about God that He works so often in the small and overlooked places?
3. “How long will you limp between two opinions?” Where do you see modern versions of trying to serve two masters, hedging our bets with God?

4. The widow's honest grief and even anger didn't push God away. What does that teach us about bringing our real feelings to God?

To close: Elijah's short, quiet prayer brought fire; the prophets' frantic efforts brought nothing. What might it look like to trust God more and strive less this week?

Next week: *Elijah's collapse and the still small voice, the call of Elisha, and Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 19–22).*

Week 8 — The Still Small Voice

1 Kings 19–22 · Collapse, Calling, and the End of Ahab

Where We Are

We come to the end — though, as with all of 1 Kings, it is really a beginning. Last week Elijah stood triumphant on Carmel, fire falling at his prayer. This week we find him a day's journey into the wilderness, sitting under a broom tree, begging God to let him die. The mightiest moment of his life is followed immediately by his lowest. It is one of the most honest portraits of exhaustion and despair in all of Scripture — and one of the most tender pictures of how God meets us there.

These final chapters gather the book's great themes and carry them forward: the God who whispers as well as thunders, the passing of the mantle to a new generation, the terrible cost of a stolen vineyard, and the death of the king who “sold himself to do evil.” 1 Kings does not tie itself up in a bow. It ends mid-story, with Elijah's work unfinished and Elisha waiting in the wings — the road running straight on into 2 Kings. We end this study where the book ends: in the middle of God's long faithfulness, with the story still unfolding.

THE FINAL MOVEMENTS

The broom tree and the whisper (chapter 19) — Elijah's collapse, God's gentle care, and the still small voice; the call of Elisha.

War with Syria (chapter 20) — Ahab wins battles he does not deserve, and squanders the mercy.

Naboth's vineyard (chapter 21) — Jezebel's judicial murder of an innocent man, and Elijah's word of judgment.

The death of Ahab (chapter 22) — a lying spirit, a true prophet ignored, and a “random” arrow that finds its mark.

Walking Through the Passage

The broom tree and the whisper (19:1–19:21)

Jezebel vows to kill Elijah, and the prophet who faced 450 enemies on Carmel now runs for his life and collapses in despair: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life.” What God does next is remarkable for its gentleness. No rebuke. First, sleep. Then an angel with warm bread and water — twice — “for the journey is too great for you.” Only then, at Horeb, does God speak. A great wind, an earthquake, a fire pass by — but the LORD is in none of them. Then comes “a still small voice,” a low whisper. God meets His depleted servant not in spectacle but in stillness, gives him honest work still to do, and — crucially — tells him he is not alone: seven thousand have not bowed to Baal. Elijah then calls Elisha, who leaves his plow to follow. The future is provided for.

Mercy squandered (20:1–20:43)

Ahab, improbably, wins two victories over Syria — God grants them so that Ahab will “know that I am the LORD.” But Ahab spares the defeated king Ben-hadad for political advantage, against God’s will, and a prophet confronts him: you have let go the man I devoted to destruction. Ahab goes home “vexed and sullen.” Even undeserved mercy does not turn his heart.

Naboth’s vineyard (21:1–21:29)

Ahab covets a vineyard belonging to Naboth, who rightly refuses to sell his ancestral inheritance. Ahab sulks like a child. Jezebel, contemptuous of such weakness, engineers Naboth’s death: a rigged trial, false witnesses, and a good man stoned so a king can have a garden. Then Elijah appears with one of Scripture’s most fearsome words of judgment against Ahab and Jezebel both. And then — astonishingly — when Ahab humbles himself, God relents from bringing the full disaster in Ahab’s own days. Even for Ahab, repentance moves the heart of God.

The arrow that found its mark (22:1–22:53)

Ahab goes to war again, this time with Judah’s king Jehoshaphat. Four hundred prophets promise victory; only Micaiah, the lone true prophet, foretells disaster — and is thrown in prison for it. Ahab disguises himself in battle to cheat the prophecy, but “a certain man drew his bow at random” and struck him between the pieces of his armor. Ahab dies as the sun sets; the dogs lick his blood, exactly as Elijah had said. The word of the LORD, ignored and defied, comes to pass. 1 Kings closes here — with the story of the kings, and of Elijah and Elisha, still running on.

HEBREW WORD STUDY — “A STILL SMALL VOICE”

The famous phrase is *qôl dēmāmâ daqqâ* (קול דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה) — literally something like “a sound of thin silence” or “a low whisper.” It is almost a paradox: the *sound* of *silence*. After the wind, earthquake, and fire — all the dramatic manifestations Elijah might have expected — God comes in a stillness so quiet it can barely be called a sound. The lesson is not that God is never in the spectacular (He was, on Carmel), but that He is not *only* there, and often not *chiefly* there. The exhausted prophet who had seen fire fall needed, most of all, a whisper.

God tends to the depleted not with more fireworks but with quiet, presence, and a word spoken gently enough to require listening.

Key Verses to Read Aloud

READ THESE TOGETHER

1 Kings 19:4 — Elijah's despair: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life."

1 Kings 19:11–12 — The whisper: "the LORD was not in the wind... and after the fire the sound of a low whisper."

1 Kings 21:19 — Elijah's word to Ahab over Naboth: "Have you killed and also taken possession?"

CROSS-REFERENCES

The prophet like Elijah (Malachi 4:5; Luke 1:17). Scripture promises Elijah will come again before the great day of the LORD; the New Testament sees that spirit in John the Baptist — and Elijah himself appears with Moses beside the transfigured Christ.

Rest for the weary (Matthew 11:28). "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The God who fed Elijah bread and let him sleep is the same Lord who offers rest to the exhausted.

Coveting and its harvest (Exodus 20:17; James 1:14–15). Naboth's vineyard is the tenth commandment made flesh — covetousness, unchecked, giving birth to death, exactly as James describes.

From the Tradition

FROM THE TRADITION

The God of the whisper. These closing chapters have comforted and challenged Christians for centuries, and the traditions gather around their central image with striking unity.

The Wesleyan tradition, our home base, treasures the broom-tree scene as one of Scripture's great pictures of how God deals with the human soul. Notice the order of God's care: rest, then food, then — only later — a word. Wesley understood that grace meets us as whole persons, bodies as well as souls; the angel's warm bread is as much a means of grace here as the whisper at Horeb. And notice the gentleness. The Wesleyan vision of God is neither harsh nor sentimental but tender and restorative — a God who does not shame the collapsed prophet but feeds him, corrects the distortion in his despair (“I, even I only, am left”) with the truth that seven thousand remain, and hands him meaningful work and a successor. Even Ahab's late repentance moving God to relent fits the Wesleyan heart: mercy is always available to the genuinely humbled, right up to the end.

The Catholic and Orthodox traditions have long read the still small voice as a foundational text for contemplative prayer — God most deeply encountered in silence and stillness rather than noise. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the unfailing certainty of God's word: from the “random” arrow that fulfills prophecy to the passing of the mantle to Elisha, God's declared purposes cannot be thwarted by kings, armies, or despair.

As we close, hold the book's final note: God is not finished. Elijah's work continues in Elisha; the seven thousand are still faithful; God's word still runs ahead of every king. 1 Kings ends not in resolution but in ongoing faithfulness — which is, after all, where each of us still lives.

For Our Lives

These are starting points for our conversation, not a checklist. This is gentle, personal territory — the passage is about exhaustion, despair, and the God who meets us in them.

AS WOMEN

Elijah crashed hardest right after his greatest triumph — depleted, alone, convinced he was the only one left. God's response was not a lecture but rest, food, presence, and truth. Many women know that particular exhaustion: pouring out, giving everything, then collapsing in a depletion that whispers lies about how alone and how finished we are. If you are in a broom-tree season, hear the order of God's care — rest first, then nourishment, then a gentle word. What would it look like to let God tend to you like that, rather than pushing on empty?

AS MOTHERS

God told Elijah, in his despair, that he was not alone — seven thousand others remained faithful. Despair shrinks our vision until we believe we are the only one carrying the weight. Mothers are especially prone to the lie that it all depends on them, alone. Where has exhaustion narrowed your sight until you feel you're the only one? Who are the “seven thousand” God might want you to remember — the people who share the load, the community you don't have to carry things alone within? And what do you model for your children when you let yourself receive help and rest?

AS DAUGHTERS

God met Elijah in a whisper, not the wind or fire he might have expected — which meant Elijah had to grow quiet and attentive to hear Him at all. We often look for God in the dramatic and miss Him in the quiet: the ordinary day, the still moment, the low voice under the noise. How is your listening? Where might God be speaking to you in a whisper you've been too busy or too loud to hear? What would you have to quiet in order to catch it?

For Reflection & Discussion

FOR REFLECTION

To open: Elijah's lowest moment came right after his highest. Why do you think collapse so often follows our biggest efforts — and have you experienced that?

Going deeper:

1. God tended to Elijah's body — sleep and food — before speaking to his soul. What does that say about how God cares for us as whole people, and about how we care for ourselves and others?
2. God was in the whisper, not the wind, earthquake, or fire. Where have you been looking for God in the dramatic while He's been speaking in the quiet?

3. Even Ahab's late, partial repentance moved God to relent. What does that tell us about the reach of God's mercy — and about hope for the people we've given up on?

4. 1 Kings ends mid-story, with the work handed on to Elisha and seven thousand still faithful. As we finish, what does it mean that we, too, live inside a story of God's faithfulness that is still unfolding?

Looking back: Over these eight weeks in 1 Kings, what has stayed with you most? What is one thing you want to carry forward?

The story continues in *2 Kings* — Elijah's ascent, Elisha's ministry, and God's long faithfulness carried on. May it be, if you wish, the road you take next.