

DAILY NOTES

Joshua-2 Chronicles

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These notes are a very simple aid to your daily reading as you make your way through historical books of the Bible. You'll find a simple reflection on each day's chapter followed by a short prayer in response. It is hoped that this will fuel your own prayers as you spend time with the Lord.

A suggested daily time with the Lord might look like this:

- **Read.** In our time with God, it seems right to let him speak first. Whether it's a chapter or just one line, it's all his word.
- **Reflect.** We want to understand what we read, and then think about what it says about God, us, life, and so on.
- **Respond.** Prayer based on what God has said to you through his word means that your prayers are shaped biblically.
- **Request.** God is glorified by our requests as we humbly acknowledge his power and grace.

If your daily time is very short, just pray. If you have a few minutes, read some of the Bible and pray. If you have a little more time, these notes will help you reflect on what you have read and respond to what God has said. If you have a few minutes more, think about how the notes meditate on the Bible passage. You may find that the written prayer doesn't quite match how the Scripture reading has spoken to you; in that case, pray your own response to what God has said.

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Daily Notes

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Joshua 1 – Strength and Courage to Obey

For Joshua, the new leader of Israel, the phrase ringing in his ears was clearly, “Be strong and courageous” (v6, 9, 18)! That command was intimately connected with obedience to God’s covenant (v6-9). Joshua was to be strong and courageous in the execution of all the commands God had given – to take, occupy, cultivate, and worship in the land. Obedience would guarantee success since that was what God had bound himself to in the covenant, and yet would still require significant effort for Joshua and the nation. Such is the mystery and privilege of doing anything for the LORD: Paul could say, “I worked harder than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor 12:10).

Heavenly Father, holy God, I see here how obedience and faith are intertwined. Forgive my faithless disobedience in failing to love others and failing to proclaim you. Give me strength and courage, trust and boldness, to obey all your good commands to your glory.

Joshua 2 – Covenant Kindness

The advance of Israel was clearly expected by the authorities in Jericho who were ready to defend their city as needed. Yet v11 makes it clear that their courage had gone, replaced by a terrible fear of the LORD. This is how God goes before his people, preparing and unnerving hearts. The New Testament celebrates Rahab’s faith (James 2:25, Hebrews 11:31), though we might well observe her outright lie to her own countrymen as being her act of faith. In fact, her deception matches the subterfuge of the spies. Her language in v12 hints at covenant community relationship – she is identifying herself with Israel. She has faith that God will lead Israel to take Jericho *and* show mercy to all who will come to him – even repentant prostitutes.

Gracious Father, it’s clear that you will extend grace and mercy to any sinner who comes to you in faith. This gives me confidence in the completeness of my own forgiveness, and great hope in evangelism: No-one is beyond your grace.

Joshua 3 – Immanuel

With the Jordan in seasonal flood, crossing it would have seemed impossible for those camped on its bank for three days. And yet, some of them had passed through the Red Sea as children with their parents. So this event cemented Joshua in their minds as the God-appointed replacement for Moses. Far more than that, though, it was clear that God would be true to his promise to go ahead of them to prepare their way for inheritance of Canaan. The ark of the covenant wasn't an idol, but it did represent both the presence of God and his covenant faithfulness to them. With Christ, our Immanuel, we pass through many difficulties with the assurance of his presence, knowing he will land us safely home.

Ever-present Lord, Immanuel, it is comfort beyond words to know that you are with me in everything, that you prepare the way ahead of me, and that you will keep me safe to the end. Forgive my independent heart, Lord, and help me to do your work in your strength.

Joshua 4 – Twelve Stones at Gilgal

Three words come to mind meditating on this chapter: Presence, dependence, and remembrance. The LORD is not distant from us when we work to do his works; he is Immanuel, with us on the mountain-tops and in the valleys. Equally, apart from him we can do nothing. He is the giver of help and strength, and to attempt spiritual endeavour cut off from the one who is Spirit is to be set up for failure and disappointment. These truths were brought home to Jesus' disciples at the last supper (John 15:4-8). We are quick to forget, so just as Joshua erected twelve stones as a memorial to all that God had done, so Jesus commanded us to remember him at his table – and to remain in him.

For all you have done, O God, you are to be praised and thanked forever. Thank you for your presence, to help and to guide always. Help me ever to grow in dependence on you – lead me to prayer often. Cause me to remember you, to keep from sin, ever in joyful obedience.

Joshua 5 – Out of the Wilderness

At long last, Israel had finally entered Canaan, the land promised to Abraham. But successful occupation and longevity in the land was subject to covenant faithfulness and obedience from everyone in the nation. The starting point had to be to catch up on circumcision, the sign of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. Celebrating the Passover was an appropriate recollection of God's redeeming grace, and the end of the manna ended the wilderness years and held great promise for the future. The enigmatic commander of the LORD's army serves as a reminder that God fights for his own honour, blessing Israel for covenant obedience but holding them accountable for sin (as in chapters 6-8).

Heavenly Father, you know me and all my failings. You are right to teach and discipline your children according to your good ways. Lord, help me remain true to you, serving you and doing all you have prepared for me to do for your glory. Lead me even today, Lord.

Joshua 6 – Circling Jericho

Why did God command the Israelites to march round Jericho for seven days? Three reasons: (a) Joshua is again seen as Moses' successor, ensuring that everything was done just as God commanded through him; (b) The manner of Jericho's fall was a powerful demonstration to Israel and other nations of God's supernatural actions to achieve his plans through his people; (c) As the grace to Rahab showed, there was ample clear opportunity for the people of Jericho to turn to the LORD. But their stubborn defence showed misplaced confidence in their own strength and idolatry. The seven trumpets of Revelation 8-11 echo the trumpets of the priests around Jericho, sounding calls to repentance to our own society as we witness to Jesus.

Gracious God, there are so many signs in the world that would cause people to turn to you, if only they knew to. Help me in my daily conversation to go beyond the problems and to point people to hope in Christ. Lord, lift my thinking and bless my speech.

Joshua 7 – Will He Get Away With It?

God had made it abundantly clear that his blessing to Israel was dependent on their obedience – all under covenant agreement. We've seen how God's laws were to be made known throughout the nation too. Achan knew it was wrong to take items devoted to destruction, but he thought he could get away with it. In taking the items, he was choosing to be identified with objects under God's curse rather than life under his blessing. The elaborate process is high drama! Why didn't God just simply point the guilty out? In grace, Achan was given time to come forward and confess, to be for God's mercy and compassion. Achan's silence until the end shows he hoped to get away with his crime. His is the fate of all who reject the gospel of repentance and faith in Christ.

Heavenly Father, it is humbling and heartwarming to know that your knowledge of my sin is complete, that your justice demands punishment, and that Christ's work covers all my sins now and forever. Forgive my deceptive heart, Lord, where I still try to harbour secret sin.

Joshua 8 – Covenant Community

Having failed utterly to take Ai in Chapter 7, success came under the sure hand of the LORD in Chapter 8. Every step is directed by God, and Israel's dependent obedience under Joshua is rewarded with a complete rout. The painful lesson of Achan's sin has been learnt by everyone. The whole-community commitment to God's covenant is renewed and emphasised by the spectacle of v30-35, an event commanded by Moses in Deut 11 on the plains of Moab. The letters to the churches in Rev 2 & 3 also call on churches to remove sin and those living in open rebellion from among them, calling them to repentance. It's sobering that our personal sin has a bearing on our church's witness and existence.

Holy Spirit of God, you have searched me and you know my inmost thoughts and desires. Convict me of my sin, and lead me in repentance and faith to Jesus, so that I might enjoy the loving face of my Father, to the glory of the Triune God.

Joshua 9 – Tricked!

In Deuteronomy 7:2, God commanded Israel to “make no treaty” with any of the nations of Canaan, lest the worship and witness of the LORD be diluted with idolatry. The Gibeonites didn’t know that, but they did know that Israel had wiped out Jericho and Ai. Fearing for their lives, they deceived Israel. Deuteronomy 20:11 allowed for inhabitants of distant cities to become Israel’s servants rather than be wiped out, and so Joshua was duped and a treaty made. As Balaam had been unable to curse Israel and resorted to seduction, the Gibeonites knew that war would be futile so opted for deception. Verse 14 shows that Joshua ought to have consulted the God of truth. We must love others, but without the naivety that will lead us to sin.

Holy, all-knowing God, you have been gracious to give us such lessons and examples in your word. Help me to be wise in all aspects of life, turning to you often, aware of the devil’s schemes to trip me up. Help me to see and flee the seductions and deceptions that would ruin me.

Joshua 10 – A Long Day

On the face of it, the 5-nation attack on the Gibeonites could be seen as an opportunity to have them wiped out, voiding the tricked treaty of chapter 9. But such treaties included clauses of mutual protection, so Israel were bound by treaty to help. The resulting destruction of the kings and their cities makes for tough reading for us. But Joshua wasn’t attacking for fun or gratuitous brutality: He was under God’s command. Why did the Canaanite nations need to be wiped out, rather than evangelised? Deuteronomy 9:5 makes it clear that it was an act of judgment, and judgment is always terrible. We shrink back, not feeling the wickedness of sin; God moves heaven and earth to bring justice.

Holy God, it is a spectacular and remarkable miracle to cause the sun and moon to stand still, to give extra daylight for Joshua to complete his mission for you. The miracle of the hours of darkness for Christ on that cross is even more remarkable: Thank you for that justice and mercy.

Joshua 11 – Hearts Hardened

Psalm 2 asks, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire against the LORD and his Anointed One.” While not always the case, we do get a startling answer to the psalmist’s question in Joshua 11:20. All the nations of Canaan worked together to raise an army to defeat Israel – and their hard hearts were, like Pharaoh’s in Exodus 9, a result of God’s judgment against them. The enemies of Christ conspired to have him crucified, and that event was Christ’s great victory instead of theirs. We take comfort, when surrounded by opposing and powerful evil, that no enemy can ever prevail against the LORD and his Christ.

God of refuge, my rock and high tower, thank you that I am secure in you forever. Give me a godly fearlessness to oppose all who oppose you, even in the normal conversations of life. Thank you that by your grace I am eternally secure in Christ.

Joshua 12 & 13 – Land Allocations

After the excitement of everything so far, much of the rest of Joshua is (to us) a rather dull record of land allocation. Yet these allocations represent the fulfilment of promise: First to Abraham so many centuries before, and later to Israel through Moses. The detailed descriptions of land allocation would be the basis of so much in the nation, such as inheritance laws, marriage, boundary stones, harvests, and so on. To us, there is the encouragement that when we step forward to take hold of all that God has promised, he is utterly powerful and faithful to keep his promises. Like Joshua’s Israel, that may well mean struggle against overwhelming opposition, but nothing can stand against God’s grace.

God of great and precious promises, how thrilling it is when you so visibly work through your people, fulfilling your promises as we take steps of obedience and faith. Help me to hear the call of this book of Joshua to be strong and courageous to obey you in everything.

Joshua 14 & 15 – Life-long Faith

Joshua and Caleb were the only two scouts sent out by Moses in Numbers 13 who had the faith in God needed to believe Israel could take Canaan from its incumbent nations. Only they remained of their whole generation, as promised by God. Caleb, aged 85, was finally in a position to claim the land promised to him. Yet even that land remained occupied, so we see that not only was he still of sound mind and body (14:11), but also undiminished in his faith in God to keep his promises. Those who have a life of faith, who constantly step out to take hold of all that God has promised, are usually those whose active faith enables them to continue to trust in God for everything.

Heavenly Father, how it must please you to see such faith that gives you honour as a good and promise-keeping God. You were faithful to Caleb all his life, sustaining and strengthening his faith in you. Lord, help me to be so strong and courageous in faith today, this week, and all of life.

Joshua 16 & 17 – Get On With It

Among the details of land allocations we can still see so much to encourage us – and to warn us. Legislation for Zelophehad's daughters (who had no brother, possibly jeopardising their father's inheritance) was given in Numbers 27 and 36. In Joshua 17 they step forward to take what the LORD had promised – and they received their inheritance. Surely, the LORD is good and faithful. At the end of Joshua 17, descendants of Joseph complain of too little land. The reasons for this are (a) they don't want to have to clear forest to reclaim land, and (b) they are fearful of the well-armed Canaanites in the valley. Their timidity is thankfully met with the firm faithful leadership of a man who knows God's will and strength: Joshua tells them to get on with it.

Heavenly Father, you are gracious indeed, lavishing your love on us in our adoption through Christ. Forgive me for the times I expect things in this world to be easier than they are. Help me to grow in faith, ever ready to trust you, stepping forward to do your work.

Joshua 18 & 19 – The Next Generation

Jacob's final blessing on his sons said that Levi and Simeon would be distributed among the other tribes (Gen 49:7). Between the censuses of Numbers 1 & 26, the tribe of Simeon reduced in number. Moses' final blessing in Deuteronomy 33 doesn't even mention Simeon. This all stems from Levi and Simeon's deceit and disproportionate, vengeful violence against the men of Shechem in Genesis 34. So in Joshua 19, Simeon are allocated two regions within the large inheritance of Judah. Though Levi had no *land* inheritance, they were restored by their zeal for God to the honour of his service. The faithfulness and zeal for God of our generation will surely affect the spiritual health of the next.

Lord God, you adopt us in grace person-by-person, and you obviously have no grandchildren. Yet I know that my zeal and faithfulness today will affect the next generation of your kingdom. Lord, keep me true and close to you in Christ. Spirit, compel my conscience to holiness.

Joshua 20 & 21 – Rest

After all the land and city allocations, Joshua 21:43-45 is the theological high point of the whole book. As God had promised Abraham, Israel had finally taken possession of the land. Throughout the book there have been hints at failure to occupy all of the land, and some enemies were subdued rather than wiped out. But such failure was always the result of the faithlessness of the people: The LORD had handed over everything when Israel had stepped out in faith. Crucially, "The LORD gave them rest" (v44). Whatever rest we enter into in this life, true rest with God remains ahead. Hebrews 4:8-11 highlights the temporary nature of Joshua's rest, reminding us to yearn for and seek the eternal rest Christ brings.

Lord Jesus, your great work of salvation has secured an eternal rest beyond anything I have ever known. Thank you for the prospect of being with you for ever, resting from fighting sin and temptation and guilt, knowing only the joy and peace of your presence. Help me to trust today.

Joshua 22 – Conflict Resolution

With Israel at rest in Canaan, the 2½ tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were released to return to their allocated land east of the Jordan river. Joshua is careful to remind them of their covenant obligations using the language of Deuteronomy (v5). The violent passion in response to the altar being built comes from a godly zeal based, in part, on a remembrance of Achan's sin in Joshua 7 – the sin of the 2½ tribes would affect the standing of the whole community before God. The resolution of the dispute satisfies everyone, since it is born out of a desire to preserve the true worship of the LORD for all Israel for the generations to come. Christians in disagreement might well benefit from such zeal and direct speech for God's glory.

Lord Jesus, your people often have disagreements where everyone thinks they're right. Give me a zeal for your kingdom, but also a humility to listen to others and to work to be at peace with your people. Help me to learn the depth of your forgiveness so that I might forgive others.

Joshua 23 – Remember

At the end of his life, Joshua gathered the nation together to deliver his final words. Like Moses before him, he knew that the people were the LORD's, so he had no desire for his own remembrance or legacy. His only concern was that Israel remain true to God. Again, like Moses, Joshua impressed on them the need to remember all that God had done, bringing them land and success as he had promised to do under his covenant. Joshua warned them that the covenant of blessing had another edge, too: Should Israel break the covenant with disobedience and idolatry they would experience the same covenant's curse. God won't be mocked; we take grace for granted at our peril.

Lord Jesus, I am quick to forget your grace and all your ongoing care and intercession for me. Forgive me, Lord, for when I lean on idols rather than instinctively turning to you. Spirit, keep me in Christ, in a godly walk, doing all your holy will for the Father's glory.

Joshua 24 – Covenant Renewal?

At the end of this book, Joshua laid out a clear choice for Israel: Worship the LORD who had so carried and blessed them from Abraham onwards or abandon him for pagan gods. We can't make others love God though we can certainly exhort them, leading to the beautiful confidence of v15: "As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD." The nation responded enthusiastically in covenant renewal, so that at the deaths of Joshua and Eleazar things seems to be in good shape for Israel. Sadly, the book of Judges will chart Israel's moral degeneration, reminding us that a local church is only ever one generation away from disappearing.

Holy God, you know how quickly we fall away from you and grow cold in our affections if left to our own devices. Thank you for the assurance I have in Christ that you will keep me to the end, and that it's by your grace alone that I can ever say, "I will worship the LORD."

Judges 1 – Destabilising Compromise

We saw in Joshua 19 that the tribe of Simeon was allocated land within the area assigned to Judah. So it might seem reasonable for Simeon to support Judah in further occupation of the land (v3). Yet that's not what God told them to do (v2). Their apparent success masked the destabilising compromise of all Israel, and it's no surprise to begin to read of failures creeping in for all the other tribes. It comes naturally to us to work at things under our own steam (and it's right to use the gifts God has given us) but we must be careful to obey him in everything without excusing disobedience and compromise by our pragmatism.

All-knowing and gracious God, you know how I make excuses and dream up caveats for myself, when what you require is whole-hearted obedience grounded in faith and love. Lord, give me boldness and strength to do your works today.

Judges 2 – Downward Spiral

This chapter sets the tone for the book of Judges – and indeed for the whole period between Joshua and Samuel. We're introduced to the repeating cycle: Israel abandoned the LORD, so in covenant justice he handed them over to enemies; they cried out to the LORD, and he provided a 'Judge' – a leader to deliver them from their enemies. After the Judge died, the cycle would repeat. Two things stand out: (a) It's not so much a repeated cycle, but more of a downward spiral. By the end of the book, Israel is a moral and spiritual shambles. (b) There's an overwhelming need for a saviour Judge who will save Israel and not die!

Holy Jesus, no wonder you told your disciples to remain in you. To sin and fall is always painful, and it's so easy to slip further away from the joy of knowing you and being in your presence. Lord Christ, help me to know you more and more, every day and forever.

Judges 3 – Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar

Of the twelve judges in the book, the first three appear here. Othniel is presented as a model of the cycle outlined in chapter 2. Yet while God is gracious, Israel cried out in misery rather than repentance so it's not a surprise to see them fall again after Othniel's death. Ehud is so unlike Othniel that he serves as a reminder of God's ability to work through the most unlikely of saviour. And the dark humour of the account is there for us to delight in and rejoice over the surprising wonder of so great a salvation. Shamgar is the first of six judges about whom we're told very little, but no work for the LORD is unseen or undervalued by him.

Lord Jesus, it's a delight to reflect on your work of salvation from such texts. How perfect is your work, how shocking – even foolish to the world! – and how totally and humbly executed. Lord, thank you that you rule perfectly; help me to serve you as I ought.

Judges 4 – Crushed Temple

If Ehud was an unlikely judge, Deborah is even more of a surprise. Barak was unwilling to obey a command from God, and his insistence that the prophetess went with him was a lack of faith that would rob him of the final prize. The battle was in a location that suited the enemy's iron chariots, but Israel were sure of success in following the LORD's command. The end of Sisera came at the hand of a non-Israelite woman, so that God was assured of glory throughout while the men of Israel fell short. As we recall God's promise to provide a saviour who would crush Satan's head (Gen 3:15), this shadow keeps hope alive that God has not given up on his people forever. We now have that secure in Christ.

Lord Christ, to many you seemed the least likely saviour and messiah, and of course to many you still do. Thank you for calling me to yourself and opening my eyes to see. Thank you that you used unlikely people like Ehud and Deborah to do your work – it encourages me to boldness.

Judges 5 – Blessed in Battle

When Sisera rode with his 900 chariots against Israel, victory must have seemed certain. But he was fighting against the LORD of heaven and earth! God caused rain, and the river Kishon flooded the plain, making chariots useless (v20-22). No wonder Sisera fled on foot. The battle was won by and for the LORD yet fought through Israelite soldiers in hard combat. Deborah's song celebrates the brave men who joined the battle (e.g. v14), but also draws attention to those who didn't. Reuben dithered (v16), Dan and Asher stayed at the coast, and the town of Meroz was cursed by the Angel of the LORD himself (v23). The LORD will always achieve all he plans to do, and we are blessed when we step forward to be useful to him.

Heavenly Father, you know how often I dither, shrink back, and make excuses rather than step forward in faith to serve and obey you in the world. Forgive me, Lord, and give me greater boldness to do all the works you prepare for me to do.

Judges 6 – Weakness

The chapter begins with the familiar cycle of idolatry, being handed over to enemies, and then crying out to the LORD. Israel were already a shadow of what they'd been under Joshua. The angel of the LORD went to the youngest son of a family in a weak clan in a small tribe and hailed him as “valiant warrior” (v12). Gideon truly was a weak man, but the LORD would call on him to do great things. First, however, God taught Gideon faith by giving him a relatively small yet undoubtedly dangerous task – destroying the Baal altar and Asherah pole. The fleece tests show how brittle Gideon's faith was. But shining through all is God's patience and grace, fulfilling his purposes to his glory through weak people.

Heavenly Father, this is all very encouraging. I feel weak and ill-suited to any kind of spiritual work, and yet it's clear that you are glorified in my weakness when I step out in faith's obedience. Teach me faith in the small things, Lord, so that I might be ready for bigger trials.

Judges 7 – Patient Nurturing

With 32,000 men in his army, Gideon had still needed the reassurance of the fleece to be confident enough to act. Since God had chosen Gideon in all his weakness, the LORD was gentle with his servant's feeble faith. Having reduced Gideon's army down to just 300 men, he then further encouraged Gideon by sending him into the Midianite camp to eavesdrop on the panicky fear among the enemy troops. Emboldened, Gideon engaged the enemy and then called for reinforcements to finish Midian off. Gideon was the agent, but the victory was the LORD's. Faced with our own challenges, we draw comfort from how much of this chapter is devoted to God's patient nurturing of Gideon.

Lord Jesus, your apostles were so faithless and headstrong for so long, yet you taught and refined them into your own likeness. You know my weaknesses and sinful tendencies, and your patient grace fills me with faith and hope. Lord, lead me on in your righteous ways.

Judges 8 – Whose Glory?

Questioned by the men of Ephraim (v1-3), Gideon misses the opportunity to give glory to God. As he progresses after the Midianite kings, the refusal of help from Succoth and Penuel draws a response that betrays a proud heart somewhat giddy with power. Certainly Gideon makes no reference to God in his endeavours. The idolatry of Gideon's ephod caps off his failures, living like a king as if his successes were his own. The nation's idol worship and abandonment of God is a natural result of Gideon's failure in spiritual leadership. When Christ, the King of kings, came to save us, he did so with a servant heart and an attitude that gave glory to God in everything. May our church leaders be modelled on him.

Lord Jesus, by grace you give your church seasons of encouragement and blessing. Forgive us, then, when we're tempted to steal glory that is wholly rightfully yours. Help me and our church leaders to serve with your own compassion, in active dependence on you, in your will.

Judges 9 – Not a Judge

Gideon declined the invitation to be king, but then lived like one. He named one of his sons Abimelech, which actually means "My father is king." In doing so, he passed on a deadly desire for power which drove Abimelech to carry out terrible atrocities. He was not a Judge chosen by God to bring deliverance to Israel. Abimelech was self-serving and power-hungry. The fate of those who perished in the Tower of Shechem sounds awful, and yet they were the very people who helped him rise to power. Danger isn't always "out there" in the world; it is often in our own hearts, in our own churches, seen in those who desire power without accountability, leadership without service.

Lord Jesus, your church is precious to you. Keep the wolves away, Lord, and help the leaders in our church to be servant-hearted and humble, serving you and your people in a way that reflects your own gracious heart.

Judges 10 – Why Should the LORD Save?

After two more Judges (Tola and Jair), the downward spiral of Israel continued. We're not told the land had peace any more; the oppression of Israel was as hearty as their complete abandonment of the LORD. When they did finally cry out, God challenged them to cry out to their 'other gods'. It's easy to become worldly and practice practical atheism, only returning to the LORD in times of trouble. German poet Heinrich Heine's last words are reported to be, "Of course God will forgive me; that's his job." But no-one deserves God's grace, compassion, or help: All have sinned. Yet he is compassionate and gracious, abounding in faithful love and truth, so we pray with humility, thankfulness, and praise.

Heavenly Father, I deserve no good thing from you, yet you lavish your love and mercy on me in adopting me at the cost of your Son's death. Forgive my tendency to take your grace for granted, and help me to remain close to you – far from sin and temptation today.

Judges 11 – A Terrible Oath

Just as Israel cried out to the LORD after rejecting him in chapter 10, so too they called on Jephthah for leadership after rejecting him. The LORD responded in weary compassion, but Jephthah for power. His letter to the king of the Ammonites showed a clear grasp of the nation's history under the LORD's hand, and his ultimate victory earned him recognition in the list of people of faith in Hebrews 11. And yet his rash vow revealed how little he knew of the nature of God himself: The LORD commanded against such sacrifices and there's no mention here of Jephthah's offering being acceptable to God. Moreover, if he had confessed his foolishness he could have cast himself on God's mercy. We must beware of covering sin with sin.

Heavenly Father, this is a heartbreaking account of unnecessary loss of life. Thank you that we have such a full revelation of your heart of compassion and forgiveness here in your Bible. Lord, prevent me from adding sin to sin; keep me true in confession to you.

Judges 12 – Shibboleth

After the earlier Judges, we were told that the land had peace for a number of years. By the time of Jephthah, the rescues (and rescuers) of Israel were becoming more flawed. Just as they did after Gideon's success, the men of Ephraim challenged Jephthah by complaining that they hadn't been involved. It all ended in the Shibboleth moment and the loss of 42,000 Ephraimite lives – another awful sign of the disintegration of the nation over time. Sadly, it's easy for churches to compete and feel envy for one another too, highlighting differences and looking for flattering comparison points. Yet we have one Father, are saved by one Saviour, indwelt by the same Spirit. If we lose sight of God, we also disintegrate.

Lord Jesus, you must surely grieve over all you see in your churches. Forgive me for my part in that. Help me to love both my church and other churches that love you but maybe do things a bit differently.

Judges 13 – Strange Nativity

No other Judge comes to us with such a nativity story. Such birth details are reserved for significant Bible moments, so our expectations are high. What makes Samson so special? The clue is in v1: Although Israel had been handed over to their enemies for 40 years, they didn't bother to call out to God any more. That God should appear so dramatically to Manoah and his wife shows a gracious intervention from our compassionate God, planned and worked out years in advance. At the end of Ruth, we'll see how God had worked in David's line generations before his birth. These imperfect saviour / rescuers all point forward to the perfect one whose work was planned in eternity.

Lord Jesus, holy and eternal Word of the Father, thank you for your work of salvation planned outside of time yet accomplished in gritty reality at Jerusalem. I know that likewise you have prepared works for me to do and I pray for the Spirit's help to do them in a way that pleases you.

Judges 14 – Honey from a Carcass

In some ways, Samson was a mirror to the nation of Israel. Born into such promise and expectation, his parents despaired when Samson wanted a wife from among the Philistines, the occupying and oppressive enemy of Israel. His reason was (literally) was that she looked “good in his eyes” (v4). The incident with the lion taught Samson himself the power of God’s Spirit in time of need. Would his wife be *his* honey from the carcass of a defeated Philistine nation, with victory won by the power of God? Sadly not, since Samson buckled under pressure and acted in grumpy vengeance. He was a deeply imperfect saviour for Israel, and yet over all this was the sovereign hand of God, working salvation.

Holy Jesus, King of kings, you are the perfect saviour and leader of your people. Thank you that your judgement will be true and just. Help me to live by the Spirit’s power in my life, dependent on the strength you give as I face difficult people, conversations, and tasks.

Judges 15 – Defeated at Heart

Samson’s antics with the foxes are wildly destructive, but the Philistine’s brutal murders are barbaric. Back in Chapter 1, Judah had proved to be valiant and successful in taking land God gave them, so to see their pathetic state in Chapter 15 is yet another indicator of how far Israel had fallen. Yet Samson’s victory at Jawbone Hill is a clear reminder that just one man empowered by the Spirit of God can prevail over any number of enemies. Perhaps Israel’s biggest enemy was unbelief, manifested in a defeatist attitude that Israel’s heyday was over and without hope of recovery. As we consider the world around us it’s easy to get despondent as if evil has won. Yet Christ’s victory over Satan and death is all our hope.

Saviour Jesus, our world is indeed a mess. Thank you for securing a perfect eternal reconciliation and a hope of eternal rest in you. Give me a cheerful heart to have confidence that you will continue to grow your kingdom, and that evil will not prevail. Keep me from temptation.

Judges 16 – Victory in Death

When something looked good in Samson's eyes, he would take it. He is a mirror to Israel, having been born with such hope and promise, dedicated to God, yet led astray so easily by his own desires. Samson knew he was flirting with disaster when he told Delilah false stories about the source of his strength. We are weak, and having put one foot down towards compromise we inevitably make it our standing foot, ready to step further in. We must avoid the first step to sin if we are to keep from the last. Samson was the last Judge in the book, though not a complete failure. In his death he did accomplish the beginning of the victory over the Philistines. How grateful we are to Christ our sinless king, whose death was utter victory.

Living Jesus, I know how prone to sin I am, blessed with the same Holy Spirit who gave Samson his strength. Teach and guide me in your ways, so that I will steer clear of temptation. Thank you for your perfect life, victorious death, and risen life applied to me by your Spirit.

Judges 17 – Vague Religion

There are a number of references to the LORD in this chapter, but only from the people's lips – the narrator doesn't mention him. Micah's mother's curse and blessing are both in the name of the LORD, but empty of any credible value. This is life with a vague religion, completely lacking in relationship with God. Micah took a young Levite backpacker into his house, delighted to have a Levite to serve as priest at his homemade shrine to the LORD – offensively rejecting the actual tabernacle system that God had given. He called the priest his father (v10) but treated him as a son (v11). Many pay similar lip service to God while treating him as one who is to serve us.

Gracious Father, you have revealed your great love and compassion to me and called me to living faith in your Son. You know I have friends and family who have vague ideas about you, church, and religion. Give me boldness to stand tall and hold firm to your truth, to point people to you.

Judges 18 – False Confidence

Back in Chapter 1, the Danites had failed to take the land allocated to them by God because of their sin and faithlessness. So in Chapter 18 we see them heading in a different direction, adding sin to sin. Along the way they pick up a Levite priest and Micah's idols, and find an unprotected region they can take. Micah's fate is pathetic: "You took the gods I have made" (v14), yet the Danites perceive their "progress" as blessing from the LORD despite a complete lack of submission to him. God made man, but people prefer manmade gods. Verses 30 and 31 show the grace and judgment of God: His tabernacle was still available providing a way for all who would come in the way given; exile would come after centuries of rejection of God.

Heavenly Father, I often unwisely look for signs of your favour in measures of success from this world, like health, financial security, numbers added to your church. Father, keep me humbly dependent on Jesus, obedient to your word, sanctified by your Spirit.

Judges 19 – Society Without Restraint

There are echoes of the angels' visit to rescue Lot from Sodom in this account. It seems that the sins that got Sodom destroyed were to be found among God's own people living in the Promised Land. If the man's regard for his concubine was despicable, her brutal treatment at the hands of the mob is heart-breaking, sad, and awful. Why did he cut her up and distribute her across the nation? Because neither he nor anyone else had any regard for God, his laws, or his rule, so the man appealed to the nation, society, and culture for a response. The God-less response he got is no surprise. The downward spiral of Israel was speeding up as they fell apart. One wonders how far our own nation might yet fall.

Living God, your word makes it clear that you grieve over your world in all its mess. Yet it's also clear that you hand us over to our sins in judgment. O God, give me a pure heart to live for you – straightness in a crooked world.

Judges 20 – Where's the Enemy?

Israel were to remain true to God and take full possession of God's promised blessing. Through Judges they spiralled downwards morally and spiritually, falling into disintegration and fearful of occupying enemy forces. By Chapter 20, their only reference to God was a pathetic attempt to get him to bless *their* plans – which was met with judgment and loss of life. Where all the Judges had failed to unite Israel against enemies, the man with his dead concubine managed to unite them internally as one against one of their own tribes. He did it through shock and being less than honest about his own involvement in her death. When we lose touch with God, we lose sight of who our real enemies are and begin to fight internally.

Holy Jesus, your church is so precious to you and yet we are so full of imperfection. Enliven your people, Lord, so that we will remain true to you, united around the truth you proclaim, rejoicing to serve, opposing evil where it truly lies. Keep me daily at your feet.

Judges 21 – Moral Collapse

The state of Israel at the end of Judges could hardly be further away from how it was at the start of Joshua. God had been true to his covenant promises both in blessing and in curse, yet the nation had drifted further and further from him. The decisions made in Chapter 21 to wipe out Jabesh-Gilead, steal its virgins, and later permit the Benjamites to kidnap 200 more are frankly ridiculous. The last verse of the book is damning. This is the downward spiral of any person, group, or nation that resolutely turns its back on God: We add sin to sin, making ever more awful moral choices, justifying our actions to ourselves, doing *anything* rather than turn in repentance to God.

Merciful God, if you counted our sins against us we could not stand before you. Thank you that you have halted that downward spiral in my life by grace. Help me to move ever upwards to you, growing in godliness and holiness every day.

Ruth 1 – From Famine to Harvest

After the exhausting and depressing cycles in Judges, Ruth comes to us as a breath of fresh air – even though it's set in the same times. The book's purpose is to remind us of God's sovereignty, both in our day-to-day lives and in his great plan of salvation. That matters because Naomi went through very real pain and loss just as we can expect to in life. It's a book of reversals, of covenant love, and hope, involving normal people used by the LORD in his plans for grace and blessing. We're reminded also of our personal choices and life-affecting decisions within God's sovereignty: As the three women stood on the road with Bethlehem ahead and Moab behind, it was a choice of the LORD's blessing ahead or dead gods behind. Gentile Ruth chose to enter God's covenant love.

Sovereign Lord, your plans and purposes span all of time and are wonderfully worked through the details of our lives. Help me, then, to keep in step with the Spirit and to be closely attuned to your will and plans, both for me and for those around me.

Ruth 2 – A Match Made in Heaven

God is abundantly generous and gracious, and his laws ensure that his goodness is worked out in and through his people. He cares for the poor, the foreigner, the widow – and Ruth was all of these. Boaz's harvest operation was clearly set up in a beautiful outworking of God's law, evident in his workers' care of Ruth even before Boaz arrived. Yet Boaz reflected the spirit of the law too, with a generosity and protection that went far beyond basic covenant obligations. The narrator delightfully points out "coincidences" and chance moments, making it clear that this was a match made in heaven. More, Boaz is a shadow of our perfect bridegroom Jesus, lavishing love on us forever.

Lord Christ, your love for me and all your people is displayed in your gracious work at Calvary. Thank you that by your grace I have entered into and experienced your love as the Spirit has worked life in me. Help me to display your abundant generosity and grace in my life.

Ruth 3 & 4

In Chapter 1, Ruth said to Naomi, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” In Chapter 2, Ruth came under the blessing of God’s people as his generous laws were worked out in the fields around Bethlehem. Chapter 3 mirrors Chapter 2 as the covenant blessings of God come closer still in the language of marriage and intimate love. Ruth, at Naomi’s prompting, becomes vulnerable at the feet of Boaz and yet her faith in him is grounded in his godliness before the LORD. Boaz’s wise negotiations are upright and true, securing for himself a wife of faithfulness. The brief genealogy is repeated in Christ’s lineage in Matthew 1:5, reminding us of the eternal purposes of God being worked out in the moments of our lives.

Lord Jesus, great Redeemer of your church, thank you for calling me into intimacy with you. Forgive me for my transactional approach to prayer, and help me develop the relationship with you that you saved me to enjoy. Help me to see you at work in all of my life.

1 Samuel 1 – Faith-filled Prayer

This book begins with an unremarkable but godly man and his two wives who went each year to worship and sacrifice to the LORD at Shiloh, the place where God’s tabernacle resided throughout the time of the Judges. The taunting of the barren woman, her heartache, and the concern of her husband make a sad domestic scene. Yet Hannah had faith. She took her pain, tears, and plea to God (v10-11), pouring herself out before him (v15). Such was her faith in God, her spirits revived after being in his presence. All she wanted was to have children and to be released from that culture’s disgrace, yet God’s abundant grace would provide a child who would ultimately shape the nation.

Sovereign Lord, your plans and purposes span the centuries to do us good, and yet they are worked out in our prayers and daily lives. Spirit, keep me prayerfully dependent, confident of your goodness and mercy as I bring my requests to you.

1 Samuel 2 – Ripples and Shadows

Psalm 113 celebrates how the LORD whose glory is above the heavens stoops down to raise the poor from the dust. It deliberately quotes Hannah's song (v8) as an example of his particular and spectacular grace. Births in the Bible usually denote important moments (though Samson's nativity highlighted Israel's lostness), and this Samuel would be the last Judge, eventually anointing God's chosen king, David. Psalm 113 was traditionally a Passover psalm, sung to praise God for hearing the misery of his people and then redeeming them from slavery. These shadows point us to the nativity of the Son of God, our Redeemer and Passover Lamb, heir of David's throne over God's people forever.

O God, your word says, "From the rising of the sun to its setting, let the name of the LORD be praised." Your care for us is richer and deeper and broader than we can take in, and our lives more woven into your plans that we can know. Help me to praise you as you glorify your name in me.

1 Samuel 3 – Here I Am

This the chapter where the dark days of the Judges really begin to turn towards light. There had been few visions (v1) and the priest's eyesight was failing (v2). Yet the lamp of God had not gone out in his tabernacle in Shiloh, and one night he called to Samuel. The message God gave Samuel was already known to Eli, so was in fact a lesson for the boy to learn to trust God by giving prophetic messages that people might not want to hear. Even more, the fact that the LORD came and *stood* there with Samuel (v10) would be a powerful reminder of who it was he would be serving. Our God is always with us, dwelling in us by his Spirit, so may we always be ready to say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

Lord Jesus, you have given us a message that sin-loving hearts don't want to hear. And yet you do call people to turn as the Spirit convicts hearts and gives life and faith. Help me to be as ready for service as that boy Samuel, and to serve you all my life as he did with boldness.

1 Samuel 4 – Ichabod

It's notable that the Israelites refer to the ark as "the ark of the LORD's covenant" (v3) when they agreed to take it from the tabernacle in Shiloh. They have so roundly abandoned the covenant that they scarcely pause to reflect on the presence of God at his tabernacle. They treat the things of God as a lucky charm, expecting success as if God himself was their puppet. The same spirit continues today with people wearing Christian emblems and popping along to the odd church event or service – it's little more than superstition. The poor woman's grief in childbirth was a true reflection of Israel's state. Only God is truly glorious, and his departure can only be disastrous.

Holy God, you who dwell in unapproachable light, immortal and invisible, thank you for revealing your glory to me by faith in Christ. As you are glorious in holiness, mercy and grace, help me remain close to you in joyful and reverent awe, never taking your care for me for granted.

1 Samuel 5 & 6 – Fear of God

Every culture in the world has some kind of religion, born of an innate human awareness of spiritual reality beyond all we can see. As for the Philistines, they had their god Dagon. The statue was no different on the ground without head or hands than it had been before – unable to see, hear, speak, or act. Faced with an awareness of the presence of the LORD, the true and living God, how did they react? They might have forsaken their idol and turned in repentance and faith, but they preferred to send him away by sending the ark back down the road. It's no surprise that people still prefer snack-spirituality rather than the abundant nourishment of the Christ of glory. Like those of Beth-shemesh, we must also revere the LORD.

Holy God, I know that it is good to have a healthy, reverent fear of your holiness and greatness. I also know that the Spirit is continuing his work of sanctifying me. Give me ever greater awe of you, so that I might praise you and live out the holiness you have bound me to in Christ.

1 Samuel 7 & 8 – Ebenezer Rejected

Once again, the highs and lows of Israel (and us) are on display. In Chapter 7 there seems to be genuine repentance and a turning to the LORD (v4). The tight chronological links from repentance to prayer to deliverance can hardly be missed, and establishing the stone of Ebenezer (“stone of help”) is lovely and appropriate. Chapter 8 reminds us of Eli and his wayward sons, hinting at trouble to come. God knows our hearts and motives, understanding the rejection of Samuel as a rejection of God’s own rule. Even when the cost of having a king was fully explained, the people still chose to reject God. The desire to be like the world around us undermines our faith, missing out on blessing.

God of help, hearer of prayer, gracious Father and Lord, you have watched over me and cared for me so very much. Forgive me for my faithlessness and desire to fit in with the world around me. Spirit, keep me in repentance and faith.

1 Samuel 9 – Sovereign Control

Given the chaotic ending to Judges, it’s no surprise that Benjamin was the smallest tribe. Saul was an insignificant man in a small tribe, though his physical stature would be just what Israel would look for in a king (v2). His search for his father’s donkeys feels sluggish and messy, and a series of events has him finally at Samuel in v14. The surprise is that we’re then told that God *sent* Saul to Samuel (v16) to be anointed ruler over God’s people, which Samuel did. God’s sovereign rule over our lives is hard to understand and totally humbling. Who knows what good he will do through us as we go about our lives? Notice that Saul was ruler, not king, over God’s people, commissioned to free them from the Philistines. Failure would cost him the throne.

Sovereign Lord of all, I have been aware of your hand on my life many times. It is reassuring, encouraging, and humbling. Forgive me my sins that must grieve you so much. Help me and use me in your kingdom. May I be a useful servant to you today.

1 Samuel 10 – Kingdom Authority

Samuel had anointed Saul in secret, but the time came for him to be publicly declared ruler of Israel. The people were volatile and picky, so the extended process of gathering everyone and then choosing by tribe, clan, and family ensured that there could be no challengers to the throne. For all that, when it came down to Saul he was hiding, reluctant to take up the kingship being thrust on him. Verse 25 is pivotal: Saul's kingship was not absolute rule without restraint; he was king over God's people, ruling subject to all the laws of the covenant already given, himself subject to the absolute authority of God above. If only our own world leaders had such awareness.

Lord Jesus, it is good that you are King of kings since you are perfect in goodness, knowledge, wisdom, and justice. Help me to embrace your rule over my life. Work in our world leaders too, so that they might know their accountability to you.

1 Samuel 11 – Saul Changed

The brutality facing the men of Jabesh-gilead hardly needs emphasizing – we naturally and rightly recoil. Yet such awful mutilation continues in some form or other in every sphere of modern warfare. The action of Saul was just and appropriate, bringing an end to the wicked violence. The remarkable thing for us is to notice the drastic change in Saul. In a short space of time, he's gone from hiding from responsibility (hidden among the supplies, 10:22) to being a powerful leader able to do great things for God. It's reminiscent of the change that came over Simon Peter at Pentecost. The difference for both men is the Holy Spirit of God in them, urging and strengthening them for the works given. Christian, the same Holy Spirit dwells in you and does not slumber.

Holy Spirit, Saul's effectiveness and victory are all to your glory. Forgive my timid and faithless heart, and teach me what it is to trust in your strength and purpose. Help me to love Jesus better and to be more like him. Help me to speak of him boldly to others.

1 Samuel 12 – Samuel's Speech

This is Samuel's last public speech. He has gathered the people and their new king, Saul, to address them as one. He reminds them of God's good kingship over them, rescuing them from Egypt and a string of other enemies, hearing their cries of repentance over and over. All this is to show that they have sinned against God by asking for a different king, and the thunder and rain confirmed his words. There is always hope, always grace, so Samuel instructs them to remain true to the LORD even as he promises to pray for them and to teach them (v23). The whole event is a beautiful example of clear and godly spiritual leadership. May our own church leaders be so godly.

Lord Jesus, great God and King, how perfect you are as you intercede for us before the Father and teach us through your Spirit-inspired word. Help your pastors to be more like you, so that all your people would delight to remain true to you.

1 Samuel 13 – Running Ahead of the Command

The situation for Israel seemed bleak, facing an enemy of overwhelming force, and having no proper weapons for battle. Yet we've seen such situation before (e.g. Gideon's 300 men) and know that if Saul is obedient to God then all will be well. He was commanded to wait for Samuel to receive instruction from the LORD (10:8), but on seeing his army deserting he ran ahead of the command and began offering burnt sacrifice. He was putting his trust in his army rather than the word of the LORD. His unbelief would cost him his dynasty, and prompted Samuel to announce the rise of another king (v14). Worst of all for Saul, Samuel left without further instruction from the LORD. It was silent judgment.

Heavenly Father, it's no surprise that your word tells us to keep in step with the Spirit. Your plans are perfect and your word is good, so please forgive me when I go my own way in my own strength. Help me to be patient in obedience every day.

1 Samuel 14 – The Pomegranate Problem

Back in 1 Samuel 9:16, God said that Saul would be the ruler of God's people to save them from the Philistines. Yet it was Saul's son, Jonathan, who struck the first blow (13:3), provoking the military situation we see in Chapter 14. Then, while Saul sat under a pomegranate tree, Jonathan and his armour-bearer stepped forward in faith towards the enemy. Still, Jonathan was careful to confirm that his actions truly were what the LORD intended (v9 & 10). When we know what the LORD wants (e.g. witnessing, loving, growing) we must take steps of faith, checking that we're in step with the Spirit as we go. We can't engage as disciples if we dither under a pomegranate tree.

Lord Jesus, you know my tendency to dither and delay. Forgive the cold selfishness of my heart, preferring comfort to the necessary and good activity required to witness, to love, and to grow. Help me in your work.

1 Samuel 15 – Denial of Sin

God makes no mistakes, though not all his actions bring him joy. Certainly the sin of the world provokes him to wrath and necessary judgment or discipline. His regret at Saul's kingship signified his sadness (v11). Saul's failure to carry out the LORD's command in full dominates this chapter. Confronted with his sin (v19), Saul's first reaction is denial (v20), though the reference to "the LORD your God" introduces an unhelpful and telling distance. When Saul does confess, he does so with justifying caveats (v24). His sorrow seems to be more about the loss of his throne and status than about his offence to God. We are no better. How often we deny our sin, then justify our actions, when we would do better to go to Christ in confession.

Lord Jesus, you know my sin. The Spirit searches my heart and knows all my rebellious, selfish inclinations. Forgive me my sins, please. Thank you that you are faithful and just to forgive. Help me to be true and repentant about the sins of my heart; help me to grow in holiness in you.

1 Samuel 16 – God Sees the Heart

Samuel was apprehensive about going to Bethlehem, fearing death from Saul. That might explain the fear in the men of Bethlehem, not wanting to come between Saul and Samuel. Yet the visit was divinely appointed to anoint young David. Samuel at first succumbed to the error of Israel when they chose Saul, looking at the outward appearance of Jesse's sons. As it happens, both Saul and David were good-looking men, but that is of no relevance to suitability for leading God's people (v7). The bridge from v13 to v14 is clear: The Spirit came powerfully on David and remained, but the same Spirit had departed from Saul for good. Jesus, Son of David, born in Bethlehem, is where we see God's own heart.

Saviour Jesus, you were ridiculed and despised by men and yet had the most perfect heart for God there can ever be. Forgive me for being so quick to judge on others' appearances; help me to discern hearts for you. Thank you that you will never remove your Spirit from your people today.

1 Samuel 17 – Getting Behind the Saviour

Before we get to David putting a stone in his sling, we're given quite a bit of detail about the circumstances of the battle, Goliath's taunting offer of combat, and how David came to be there. It's clear that he was still a boy even to his own family, which works to highlight the utter imbalance of the situation. This is not, however, a story of how we are to be like David. Rather, we are in the ranks of Israel, desperately in need of a saviour who will rise up and defeat our enemies – temptation, sin, and death. David crushing Goliath's head gives us a shadow of the great Son of David who came to put an end to the works of the devil. Jesus is already victorious over all our enemies; he is the one promised who would crush Satan's head (Gen 3:15).

Great Messiah Jesus, you have already conquered Satan and secured eternal life for all your people. Forgive me for trying to go into spiritual battles in my own strength. Help me to turn instinctively to you for everything that comes my way.

1 Samuel 18 – Opposite Fortunes

David must have marvelled at his change in fortunes, though his words to Goliath made it clear he knew his success was entirely from God. It seems almost everyone loved David, from the king's son and daughter to the public who sang of his triumphs. Saul must have been distraught at his own change of fortunes, and clearly saw that David's rise was a sad counterpart to his own demise. Other than some obvious rants caused by the spirit sent to him, Saul kept his animosity largely hidden, anticipating David's failure at the hands of the Philistines to be inevitable and fatal. But God's love for his people eclipses all opposition.

Heavenly Father, it is good to know that you are my ultimate protector, and that Christ will present me to you at the last day whatever comes along in this life. Keep me persevering in hope through all challenges, anticipating your presence, knowing and experiencing it daily.

1 Samuel 19 – Open Attack

The chapter begins quite well with Saul being persuaded by his son Jonathan to be gracious and thankful for David. But another of David's successes against the Philistines sparks another murderous rant. This time, Saul is more open, commanding his soldiers to kill David. David escapes and goes to Samuel (it is good to seek out the LORD's people in times of distress). When Saul's men follow David they're blessed to prophesy by the Holy Spirit – and even Saul himself is so blessed when he eventually goes there himself. Despite overt action against the LORD's anointed, David, the LORD makes it clear where the future of the monarchy lies.

Holy God, you protected David to fulfil your plans for your own glory, and your purposes are themselves glorious. Thank you that neither Saul, nor Pilate, nor Satan himself could ever thwart your plans. Thank you that by grace you have called me to yourself and united me to Christ.

1 Samuel 20 – Christ-like Love

We've already seen that everyone except Saul loved David. Jonathan's love, however, displays a beautiful Christlikeness. As the king's son, Jonathan was heir to the throne and would normally have been expected to oppose David. Instead, he gave up his royal privileges and clothed David with his own royal clothes, elevating David from shepherd boy to king-in-waiting (a status David already had from his anointing by Samuel). Christ left his heavenly splendour, emptying himself into humility and indignity so that we could become children of the living God, co-heirs with Christ himself. Unlike Jonathan, Christ remains king forever.

Gracious Saviour, I can't grasp the astonishing wonder that you, the eternal Word and Son, should step into your creation to live a human life. I thank you that you became like us so that we could become like you. Help me to love others and to honour them in your name.

1 Samuel 21 & 22 – New Low for Israel

The LORD desires "mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6), so the priest did well to give the holy bread to David. It was wise to confirm ceremonial cleanness too, lest holy food become lethal to unclean men. Jesus used this occasion for himself in Matthew 12, Mark 2, and Luke 6. David was then protected in enemy territory, but it was so unsettling for him that he has seven psalms from those days. Jesse, grandson of Moabite Ruth, was protected in Moab. The priests, however, were not protected from the wickedness of Doeg and were murdered in petulant cold blood at the command of Israel's king. What a dark day. By God's grace, a remnant survived and gathered to the LORD's anointed.

Wise and good God, truly awful things sometimes happen to your people in this unjust and wicked world. Thank you for your promises and assurances and the expectation that one day your perfect governance will be fully experienced. Until then, give me that good and gracious heart of your servant Ahimelech.

1 Samuel 23 – Lost Focus

Saul had been anointed ruler specifically tasked with freeing Israel from Philistine rule. Here in 1 Samuel 23, however, it's David who is going to rescue the town of Keilah from the Philistines after enquiring of the LORD to see if that was the right course. Saul had so lost touch with the LORD and his purposes that he was aiming his army against David and his men. The certain battle between them was avoided only by a direct plea to Saul to go and resolve a Philistine incursion (v27). When nations, organisations, and churches lose sight of who the real opposition is, they often resort to civil war and disintegration. We must keep our unity in the Spirit to serve one Lord together.

Living God, you know how prone we are to losing sight of you, of our spiritual warfare. Forgive me that I find it easier to speak and act against your own children than against evil in the world. Help me to battle against sin, and to fight for righteousness in Christ's name.

1 Samuel 24 – Patient Submission

Why didn't David finish Saul off in the cave? And why did he feel such remorse for cutting a corner off Saul's robe? David knew that God had anointed him to be king some day and it was an act of faith to wait for that day, rather than grasping it in his own time. Cutting the robe was a crude display of how he could take the throne whenever he wanted, which was quite out of step with the humility of waiting. So he was content to know that God would deal with Saul's injustices (v15) and gracious enough to swear protection (v20-22). This recalls the time when Satan offered Jesus all the blessings of the Messiah without the pain of the cross (Matthew 4), but Christ would not be diverted from obedience to the Father.

Heavenly Father, there are times when a way seems right to me, but I know I don't always think biblically or theologically. Help me instinctively to turn to you and your word when faced with decisions in life. Give me growing godly wisdom.

1 Samuel 25 – Kept from Sin

It's obvious that Nabal was as rude as he was foolish. His reply to David, denying basic hospitality and not repaying David's kindness, was awful. Yet David's reaction was equally awful, if not more so. He intended to wipe out all the men in Nabal's household (v22) which was vengeful, petulant, and disproportionate. We are often over-the-top in our responses to being wronged. The action of Abigail showed a beauty within, clearly motivated by wanting to protect David from carrying out an obvious evil; David would be king, and his reign mustn't be tainted by past sins (v30-31). We are eternally grateful for Jesus' perfect reign, and pray "lead us not into temptation" with expectant hearts.

Heavenly Father, Jesus taught us to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." I barely know how often you have done exactly that for me. I pray for the Spirit's help to be kept from sinning against you. Lead me into good paths and choices.

1 Samuel 26 – The Kingdom at David's Feet

This chapter reminds us of the cave episode in Chapter 24. Chapters 24-26 go together to show us David's growing understanding of his need for faith, patience, and restraint. He learned from Nabal that God will right wrongs and protect the promise of kingship to David. So v19 shows David's confidence that God will somehow bring justice against Saul (with a little godly creative thinking to aid the faith of his companion, Abishai). It was clear to everyone that David could have taken the kingdom, but also that he was waiting for the LORD's timing. It was also clear that he could no longer trust Saul, choosing not to return to him despite his contrition (v21). They never met again.

Lord Jesus, your timing and purposes are good and perfect. Give me wisdom, Lord, both to act when I should but also to be patient when that is needed. Help me to know your power at work and to encourage others with words and action based on experiential faith.

1 Samuel 27 – A Way That Seems Right

Given that Saul was anointed ruler to free Israel from the Philistines, it might have seemed odd for David to flee to Gath (again) in Philistine territory. He doesn't seem to have consulted the LORD, and indeed the whole chapter doesn't even mention God. David is living on his wits and shrewdness, and his scheming seems to be remarkably successful. It will lead to tensions when he's called on to attack Israel, but until then he must have been satisfied. And yet, the lesson from Chapters 24-26 was that he was kept from danger in Israel by God's providence, so perhaps going into Gath and Ziklag wasn't so wise. We must learn conscious dependence on the LORD.

Heavenly Father, you know how often I do things on my own without reference to you or your will. Forgive my desire for autonomy and help me to learn conscious and godly dependence on you. Thank you for this daily time with you.

1 Samuel 28 – Faithless Terror

Many psychics and mediums are money-making charlatans, but some – like the woman at En-dor – are the real thing. But since we only come to God through Jesus, mediums certainly won't be in touch with God but rather with demons – even demons masquerading as angels of light. Why did Saul go there? Because God didn't answer (v6) and Saul wanted to know what to do (v15). But really he knew what God wanted, which was to engage the Philistines in battle. The truth was that Saul was terrified. He had never entrusted himself to God before and was unable to pray "your will be done" when it came to his darkest hour. We can be thankful that in Christ's darkest hour, he destroyed the work and power of the devil in obedience to the Father.

Lord Jesus, it takes faith to be obedient, and by grace you train us in faith through difficult days and seasons of life. You know how hard it can be to pray "your will be done" so I ask for your promised help in time of need. Help me always to experience my union with you.

1 Samuel 29 & 30 – Strength in the LORD

It's hardly surprising that the Philistine commanders were suspicious of David no matter what assurances were given. Yet we see the providence of God too, since David and his men would be far from Saul on the day of his last battle (next chapter), freeing David from all culpability. That said, the situation at Ziklag was dire and mutinous. "But David found strength [literally, 'strengthened himself'] in the LORD his God" (v6). His trust in God was personal. We can strengthen ourselves in the LORD by remembering his providences and nature, and then putting one foot in front of the other in dependent prayerfulness, obedient to his will. The more we know Christ and spend time with him, the more we strengthen ourselves in him when we have need.

Holy God, your providential care over David is easy to see in these chapters. You helped and encouraged him personally, in his heart, by your good purposes. Thank you that your purpose for David was ultimately to bring us Jesus. Work your plans through me today.

1 Samuel 31 – A Battle is Not the War

Back in 1 Samuel 11, Saul was empowered by the Holy Spirit to deliver the men of Jabesh-gilead from Ammonite mutilation and humiliation. Here in 1 Samuel 31, those men now rescue Saul's mutilated corpse for honourable burial. It must have seemed a great day of victory for the Philistines, crowing over Saul's armour in their idol's temple. Yet we know that the LORD was at work throughout, and Saul's demise was a divine judgment. The promised messiah (anointed king), David, would soon emerge not only to be victorious in battle but also to lead Israel into true worship of the living God. Saul's awful death is a reminder to us of the reality of judgment, but also gives trust and hope that God reigns.

Heavenly Father, you are holy and just – and right to punish sin against you. Thank you for Jesus, taking the punishment I deserve. Help me to grasp the terrible reality of the judgment awaiting my unsaved family and friends so that I might witness with greater urgency and passion.

2 Samuel 1 – A Time for Grief

1 & 2 Samuel actually form a single book, though from here on the focus is wholly on David. The Amalekite thought he was bringing David good news: Saul was dead. He expected that to be so celebrated that it was worth lying and trying to claim merit. But David had had plenty of opportunity to take Saul's life himself and refused it, preferring to trust in God's timing. We might share the Amalekite's surprise: Why didn't David and his men receive the news with joy? Saul and his sons were kin, loved by David. More, as the king of Israel, Saul's demise would tarnish God's name in the idolatrous celebrations in Philistine temples. David grieved for Saul. God himself takes delight in the death of no-one.

Lord Jesus, I confess that I don't always grieve over the inevitable destiny of those who don't know you – though I clearly ought. Spirit, move my heart with Christ's own compassion. I'm surrounded by sheep without a shepherd; help me to lead them to Jesus.

2 Samuel 2 – The Rise of the King

David's first move towards the throne over Israel was to pray, asking the LORD for instruction. Such conscious dependence on God characterised his life and reign – a shadow of the perfect obedience of Jesus to the Father. David was to go to Hebron, the place Abraham had bought a plot of land to bury his wife in (Genesis 13:18), and there he became king of Judah in the south. Abner was Saul's cousin and very much part of Saul's command (it was Abner who brought David to Saul at the killing of Goliath, 1 Samuel 17). So Abner knew David was the LORD's anointed king and that opposition to David was opposition to God himself – doomed to failure. Tragically, Abner's rebellion cost others their lives.

Father, thank you for the perfect good rule of your Son. Thank you for his perfect obedience to you, and for crediting me with the righteousness he alone has earned. Help me to live out his kingdom reign in love and purity, even when people oppose it.

2 Samuel 3 – Power Struggles

There's so much politics in this chapter. When Abner slept with Saul's concubine it was (in that culture) a power grab for Saul's throne. Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, was incensed, though when Abner then chose to defect to David he undermined any power that Ish-bosheth might have had in Israel. David offered Abner peace, but then sought the return of Michal, Saul's daughter (and David's first wife) from Ish-bosheth, which undermined Abner's apparent authority. Joab's assassination of Abner in retaliation for his brother's death was unjustified because Abner had killed in battle – and then only after giving fair warning (2:22). The despicable murder was likely yet another power grab. For all this, David's power and reign was *given* to him.

Messiah Jesus, great God and King, you rule over all the presidents, kings, prime ministers and rulers of this world. All their political manoeuvring is subject to your ultimate authority and power. This gives us hope. Help me be true to your kingdom under secular government.

2 Samuel 4 & 5 – Throne Secured

The hold that Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, had on Israel was weak and fading, and his murder by Rechab and Baanah was hardly heroic. They expected David's delight as they claimed the LORD's victory (4:8), but in their public execution David was able to clear his own name of any involvement. The result is Chapter 5, a collection of records of events describing how David came to be king over the whole nation – Judah in the south and Israel (the other tribes) in the north. He finally ousted the Jebusites and set up Jerusalem as an ideal seat of national power. He also secured significant victory over the Philistines through careful obedience to the LORD. The cloud on this sunny day is in v13-16: Women were his weakness.

Lord Jesus, reigning in splendour, it's good to know that you are a king with no weakness of character, no flaws at all. Help me to me aware of my weaknesses, and to do right and put right every day in your name.

2 Samuel 6 – Holiness and Humility

God is holy. He is holy in himself, independent of creation. His holiness is the bright brilliance of his perfect love and beauty in his own being. Such a spectacular nature prompts immediate adoration and worship from any sinless creature (e.g. angels) in God's presence. To sinful creatures like us, his holiness is lethal. The ark of the covenant was holy by its proximity to the LORD, so Numbers 4 has careful instructions to protect people transporting it from death. Uzzah died because a lack of reverence for God's holiness led to slackness in obedience to God's law. Grasping this helps us worship as David did – astonished that such a God should ever dwell among us to bless us.

Holy God, so worthy of the worship of all Creation, spectacular in your glorious holiness, forgive me that I undervalue your holiness, even to the point of contempt. Gracious God, thank you for calling me into your holiness, into intimacy, and help me live in holiness today.

2 Samuel 7 – Son of David

This is one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible. David quite reasonably wanted to build a house (temple) for the LORD, a permanent structure to replace the tabernacle now that Israel were settled. But God said that it would be David's son who would build that house. Much more, God would build David a house, a dynasty of kings that would last forever (v16). David was floored, seeing that such a promise would be good for all humanity for all time (v19). That promise seemed lost by the time of Joseph, descendant of King David, Nazareth's carpenter, engaged to young Mary. So Jesus is the Son of David, the eternal King of kings whose reign is without end. "I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

Faithful God of covenant promise, neither the failings of your people nor the opposition of wicked unbelievers could halt your eternal plans for Christ. Thank you that Jesus is King of all, and that you will complete all your plans and purposes in him forever.

2 Samuel 8 & 9 – Power and Grace

The catalogue of victories in 2 Samuel 8 is impressive. David was decisive and ruthless, gaining victory over Israel's enemies and yet ruling with justice and righteousness (8:15). But in Chapter 9 we begin to understand what it means for Israel to have a king after God's own heart. David had bound himself by covenant to Jonathan and his descendants (1 Samuel 20:42), though he might reasonably have dispatched them as enemies. David's care for Jonathan's son Mephibosheth was far beyond what might come from a mere contract with terms and conditions: This was a covenant born out of love. So Christ binds himself in lavish grace to us, rescuing us from crippling sin to dine at his table.

Saviour Jesus, while I was dead in trespasses and sins, lost in idolatrous desires, you saved me in covenant love. Thank you for calling me to fellowship with you, experienced in part here, now, and yet holding such promise for the ages to come.

2 Samuel 10 – Diligence and Faith

We might think this chapter could be skipped, or replaced with something like, "David was successful in all his military campaigns." But there are two important lessons here: (1) While David's kindness to his men was commendable, we should be surprised that David sent Joab to lead the troops rather than go himself (v7). It might not seem much, but this drop in diligence would become a pattern that led to spiritual disaster in the next chapter. (2) Joab was a battle-hardened rogue of a man, but his rousing words to his brother in v11-12 are theologically robust and helpful: We are only ever instruments in the LORD's hands, and we must be responsive to his will as we step out in faithful service.

Messiah Jesus, I seek to do your will and yet I'm so like David, allowing compromise to creep in where I ought to be conscientious for you. Give me the spirit in Joab's words, ever ready to do your will, responsive to change as I see your will unfolding.

2 Samuel 11 – Catastrophic Sin

First a dereliction of duty, then an abuse of power, then exploitation of a married woman, and (in effect) murder to cover his tracks. What terrible actions from a man so blessed by God. Yet no-one jumps to such sin overnight. We've seen David's appetite for women (e.g. 5:13) and his tendency to send others to lead battles instead of going himself (10:7). Sin leads to sin as we try to deny and hide our wrongdoing, yet we only fool ourselves. God knows our actions, our secrets, our hearts. Fear of shame and punishment drives us to harden our hearts, when confession to God in heartfelt repentance is our only way to lasting peace.

O God, you know all the things in my heart of which I am ashamed – things I'd hate to be exposed to the people I care most about. Father, forgive my sin against you. Thank you that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, and for the full reconciliation you have granted.

2 Samuel 12 – I Have Sinned

Nathan's parable helps David see his own sin objectively for what it is. As we see David's compromise, temptations, and sin, and then piling on more sin, we hear the Spirit convicting us in equal measure: *You are David*. But where Saul made excuses, David owns his sin immediately: "I have sinned against the LORD" (v13). We do well to do the same. David murdered Uriah (v9) and the punishment for murder was death, but he would be spared that. Nevertheless, there would be consequences of sin and v10-11 form the background to the rest of the book. Having experienced God's grace, David prayed earnestly for the child until he died – a sombre sign of the sorrow to come. God is just and wise and good, and *his* Son died to take the punishment we all deserve.

Holy Father, I have sinned against you repeatedly, both unintentionally and intentionally. Father, please forgive me. Spirit, thank you for convicting me of my sin and leading me to repentance and saving faith. Lord Jesus, thank you for taking the punishment I deserve. Give me grace to humbly accept your good discipline in my life.

2 Samuel 13 – Rape and Murder (Again)

We saw how 2 Samuel 12:10-11 would be the background to the rest of the book, and immediately we see David's abuse of power, rape, and murder brutally repeated among his own offspring. Tamar was a godly, beautiful, gifted and hard-working young woman, but Amnon was frustrated because "it seemed impossible to do anything to her" (v2) – a truly chilling phrase. Jonadab proposed awful sin, and his shameful lack of integrity can't be overlooked. Absalom's premeditated murder was shoddy and wicked. David was furious over the rape and grieved terribly over the murder but did absolutely nothing to execute justice. How do the sins in our own lives entangle with others to cause terrible harm?

Lord Jesus, you will judge the earth with righteousness, putting all wrongs right, wiping every tear, bringing peace and restoration to all your people. In a world of rape and murder, lies and injustice, your reign brings me peace.

2 Samuel 14 – Conniving and Scheming

When Nathan told his parable to David, there was a clear and direct correlation between the parable and David's actions. The appeal in *this* woman's story (concocted by Joab) is for a son who seems to have inadvertently taken his brother's life. David extends royal mercy on the surviving brother and is then challenged to repeat extend it to Absalom who killed his brother Amnon. He does so, despite the lack of firm correlation: Absalom acted in planned, premeditated wickedness. Perhaps David's own sins have undermined his willingness to pass judgment, but his failure to rule with righteousness paves the way for disaster. We pile sin on sin; Jesus adds grace to grace.

Great God and King, in you there is no shadow or turning. Your throne is pure righteousness, goodness, wisdom, knowledge, and love. Help me to face up to my sins honestly, confessing all before you in heart-felt repentance. Father, please, forgive me now.

2 Samuel 15 – Masquerading Evil

Evil rarely jumps out at us. It creeps up, smiling, persuading, and cajoling. It often looks so reasonable and compassionate. Absalom's methods of controlling narrative and stealing hearts are still prevalent today in ethical issues of public policy. David knew that everything that was happening was a consequence of his own sin, and leaving Jerusalem was a shrewd way of preserving life in his own household as well as finding out who was still loyal to him. Sometimes, wisdom rolls with the punches. Yet David's trust was in God's righteousness (Psalm 3), so the ark was to remain in its place. He prayed for help expectantly and saw the appearance of Hushai as specific answer to prayer.

Heavenly Father, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Have mercy on our country, thwarting attempts to introduce laws that are contrary to your good ethics. Give me true wisdom and compassion for victims of evil.

2 Samuel 16 – Many Faces of Opposition

David had shown kindness to Mephibosheth out of covenant love for his father, Jonathan. Ziba was to serve Mephibosheth, maintaining his land. Ziba's account in 2 Samuel 16 is unlikely, but David had to act quickly and gave the land to Ziba. Ziba's kindness was a ruse: Should David succeed, he would have to recall Ziba's kindness; not going with David could win favour with Absalom. The cursing from Shimei was obviously far more open and explicit. Yet although Shimei's reasons for rage were wrong, David knew that the whole miserable situation was caused by his own sin and, therefore, the wearisome opposition was justified. In the light of Amner's rape of Tamar, Absalom's treatment of David's concubines is as shocking as it is shameful.

Lord Jesus, as you went around Galilee and Judea you were opposed by so many people – some openly, and others with sly intent. So it still is for your church under opposition today. I confess my sin before you again, and yet I ask for protection for your church for your name's sake.

2 Samuel 17 – Repent and Live?

Amid all the scheming and conniving in these chapters, we need to keep a close eye on what the LORD is doing. Verse 14 is a key bit of information: Through the self-seeking manoeuvres of sinful men, God was continuing to work his own purposes out. The promise of a lasting dynasty in 2 Samuel 7 stood firm, but it would not come through Absalom. It's quite possible that this was the realisation that had come to Ahithophel: It's futile to oppose the LORD. Yet Ahithophel made the same gross error that Judas did: They each took their own lives rather than cast themselves on the mercy of God in repentance and faith.

Holy God, you are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and truth. Forgive me, Lord, for the times I oppose you by going my own way in pride. Thank you that you will fulfil your good purposes in me.

2 Samuel 18 – Hanging on a Tree

Not a man in the army was unaware that Absalom was to be treated gently for David's sake. When a man found Absalom dangling from a tree by his hair, he wouldn't dream of harming him. Joab had no such qualms and killed him in cold blood. Was it because Absalom was a traitor to David? Perhaps it was to avenge Israel's 20,000 dead in this power-grabbing civil war? Or Joab might simply have been executing judgment for Absalom's murder of his brother (something David had failed to do). In a sense it doesn't matter. What matters to us is the constant reminder that while God disciplines those he loves, he also punishes those who work against him and his anointed.

Gracious God, there is no condemnation for those you unite by faith to the Lord Jesus. How I thank you! Lord, my desire is to keep in step with the Spirit, never to work against your purposes. Forgive me that I so often fail in this regard. Help me to live well for you today.

2 Samuel 19 – Kingdom Restored

David's grief for his son was like that of any father, no doubt amplified by guilt since all these events were precipitated by David's sins against Uriah and Bathsheba. Yet Joab was right to call David to his responsibilities of leadership as king. David then wisely won the hearts of the nation back, showing grace to those who'd cursed him and lied to him, and restoring Mephibosheth as before. David's love for Absalom had clouded his judgment: He would have been far more aggressive against any other challenge to himself as the LORD's anointed. And yet he also knew that all these troubles were from the LORD. Christ, our perfect king, loved his enemies also – enough to die for us.

Great God and King, Lord Jesus, it's clear how your reign surpasses that of even the best of kings. You gave your life for me, even as you grieve over my sin and rebellion against you. Help me to forgive those who sin against me.

2 Samuel 20 – The End and The Means

In the previous chapter, on his return to Jerusalem, David had appointed Amasa as commander over his army instead of Joab (19:13). Joab would have been livid. So as Chapter 20 closes the restoration of David's kingdom we see so much of what we've seen before: Treacherous scheming, revolt against God's anointed king, cold-blooded murder, women suffering from being objectified, and human 'wisdom' that is based on the end justifying the means. In David's night of passion with a married woman (Chapter 11), he sowed the wind and reaped a whirlwind of pain and damage. We give thanks (a) that God works good even through such human mess, and (b) that Christ our king rules with perfect goodness.

Holy Jesus, you know what it is to walk this earth, to see and suffer the wickedness of humanity. Help me to navigate this life with your own godly wisdom, to live in holiness, close to you and assured of the blissful perfections of your new creation to come.

2 Samuel 21 – Federal Sin and Atonement

The Gibeonites were the people who tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them back in Joshua 9. That covenant was made in the LORD's name, so for Saul later to attack the Gibeonites was to bring God's name into disrepute. As king and head of Israel, Saul's actions reflected on the whole nation, resulting in the 3-year drought. The execution of some of Saul's sons and grandsons atoned for the guilt on the whole nation – a reminder of the terrible cost of atonement for sin. The heartbreaking sight of Rizpah's grief cries out to us still: How many lives are affected and broken by *our* sin? To be "in Christ" is to be in his kingdom, under his federal headship, knowing that he himself has fully atoned for all our sins in his own death.

Lord Christ, these sombre events remind me of the mortal danger of my own sin, and I thank you that your death has atoned for all my sin. Yet I know how lives are still damaged by my sin. Please forgive me still, and help me to live your kingdom life now.

2 Samuel 22 – Reflective Praise

This song is repeated as Psalm 18. It was written towards the end of David's life and serves as a reflection on his reign. We might expect a biography of a king to draw attention to his great successes, but this song emphatically gives all the glory for all David's success to the LORD. David was the LORD's anointed, and he knew that it was only in that context that he could expect success. David's sins aren't mentioned because they were all his own doing and shame, and this is a song to glorify God. The Sinai-like language of God reminds us of who it is who hears *our* prayers, while the world-wide blessing of the final verses speak of the reign of our Messiah, Jesus.

Holy God, rock and refuge, giver of life and hearer of prayer, thank you that Jesus is the perfect Messiah King. It's my heart's desire to join David and look back over my own life with praise to you. Help me today to face everything with your help as part of a life lived for you.

2 Samuel 23 – Prophetic David

Where Chapter 22's song was a reflection on David's life, his song here in v1-7 is deliberately prophetic. Inspired by the Spirit and rooted in the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7, he speaks of a ruler to come who will rule in righteousness and in the fear of God. As we see this fulfilled in Christ we also see the glory of God in saving us by such an astonishing plan; yet we also see the fate of those outside Christ's covenant (v6-7). The impressive lists of valiant men end pointedly and poignantly with Uriah, a reminder of the great cost of David's life to others – and the grace of God to preserve his covenant promises.

Heavenly Father, your word makes much of Christ as the Son of David. Rightly so, since you are glorified as the patient and gracious God who works all things for the good of your people. Thank you that Christ's reign is so perfect, and help me to live under it.

2 Samuel 24 – Atonement in Jerusalem

The specific reasons for God's wrath against Israel aren't explained. Neither are we told why a census should be so foolishly sinful. In Psalm 20 (which is a prayer for the king), Israel celebrates God's name rather than military strength, which means a census taken by the LORD's anointed king displays unbecoming faithlessness in God himself. The ensuing plague cost 70,000 lives and was only lifted as sacrifice was made to atone for sin at a particular location in Jerusalem. Here at the end of the book our minds are brought to atoning sacrifice at Jerusalem, fulfilled once and for all for us by Jesus' own sacrifice. He is our perfect King, our God, our priest, our atonement, our life.

Holy Jesus, thank you for your great sacrifice, wholly atoning for all the sins of my life. Forgive me for the times I assess my strength before action without first remembering your strength and presence in me. Lord, forgive my unbelief, and grow a spirit of boldness in me for your work.

1 Kings 1 – Long Live the King

1 and 2 Kings form a single book, following immediately on from 1 and 2 Samuel. David, Nathan, and Bathsheba were in their prime back in 2 Samuel 11, but here they're much older – though David's treatment of women as objects seems little changed. 1 Chronicles 22 makes it clear that it was the LORD's will that Solomon be king after David, so Adonijah's throne grab is in opposition to God himself. Nathan needs no word from the LORD to act since his will is already known, so he cooks up a plan to galvanise the old, cold, complacent king into action. When we know the LORD's will, we should act on it. How good it is to serve a king who never tires through the ages.

Lord Jesus, it's good to know that Creation is a monarchy ruled by you. Forgive me that I fail to live wholly under your kingdom rule. Give me wisdom and discernment to know your will, and boldness, compassion, and love to do it.

1 Kings 2 – A Firmly Established Kingdom

And so the kingdom passed from David to Solomon. The new king was reminded of his covenant position and the need to obey everything in the law of Moses. He also executed a mixture of justice (most notably Joab) and patient grace (Abiatha, Shimei). In asking for David's concubine Abishag, Adonijah was really making another move for David's throne (just as Absalom took David's concubines in 2 Samuel 16). It is foolish and fatal to challenge the LORD's anointed king. Solomon will prove to be the high point of all Israel's kings, and yet even he will lose his way. Christ's kingdom is all perfection: Goodness, wisdom, power, justice, grace.

Lord Christ, as I look at the world leaders of our times I see open rebellion against you and your good rule. Nonetheless, help me to live by your kingdom even when that means I run into trouble or opposition. Help me to stand tall and hold firm to your rule for my life.

1 Kings 3 – Wisdom and Discernment

The opening lines about Solomon marrying Pharaoh's daughter sound an early alarm bell for his ultimate downfall. His meeting with God, however, was blessed. In asking for a receptive heart to judge the people well, he would be ruling with righteousness and justice just as God himself does. We are so often faced with moral shades of grey that defy simple black and white responses. Wisdom navigates through the mess of this world in a way that honours truth – demonstrated in Solomon's dealings with the two women and exemplified in Jesus' dealings with tricky situations in the gospels.

Lord Jesus, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in you. By grace, you have given me union with yourself. Give me wisdom and discernment to navigate this world when choices don't seem clear-cut, so that I might live well for you and make you known.

1 Kings 4 & 5 – A Taste of Heaven

Solomon had asked for wisdom to govern Israel, and Chapter 4 shows tremendous ability. His senior team led civil, priestly, and military organisations, and a large administration needed large provisions (4:20-28). The language of blessing extending to all nations (4:34), a people as numerous as sand by the sea (4:20), and security in all of Canaan (4:21) all recall the promised covenant with Abraham. This tiny foretaste of God's new Creation still has a big hole: The presence of God in their midst as a rightful community focus. Chapter 5 begins the crucial work of building a temple that is sufficiently spectacular for worship of the living God.

Lord Jesus, heaven must indeed be wonderful, but it can't be heaven without you. Help me to find peace and security in your presence, and to order my life consciously under your good rule. Thank you for the glimpse of the perfected new Creation your return will usher in.

1 Kings 6 – Lavish Expense

Societies often build lavish buildings and monuments to honour deities and heroes, and the temple Solomon built was as extravagant as any. The big difference here was that his temple wouldn't just be in God's honour: It would actually *house* his Presence among his people. No amount of expense could be too great. We note also that most Israelites would never see the temple's interior, so these chapters gave them insight and awe. If anyone is tempted to think the expense a waste, it's because they have too small a view of God. Likewise, those who considered Jesus' anointing with expensive perfume to be a waste (Mark 14:4-5) were blind to his deity and majesty.

Holy God, it is gloriously gracious that you choose to dwell among your people, and that you give us a way to come to you. Forgive my limited and domesticated understanding of your greatness. Help me to know you more, to see you bigger, that I might worship you as I ought.

1 Kings 7 – Goodness and Beauty

Despite the detail listed, any attempt to recreate the temple from these measurements soon highlights gaps. In fact, the details more favour the interior decoration and furnishings which were clearly extravagantly beautiful and ornate. This is despite the fact that most people would never see any of it. When God created the world he made it beautiful and filled it with goodness and beauty. How appropriate it is then that our worship reflect his glory back to God in extravagant delight. Even more, our daily acts of worship (praise and witness) are also for his glory – even when unseen by others.

Lord Jesus, you are always and eternally with me by your own good grace. Forgive me that my daily walk often fails to reflect your glory that you have revealed to me. In my daily life and in Sunday's gathered worship, help me to worship you for your own delight, and not for an audience of others.

1 Kings 8 – The Glory of God Among Us

This chapter is spectacular. After years in the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was finally placed in a permanent temple in Jerusalem. God had given his people rest and came to rest among them. The cloud's appearance was the same as at the tabernacle in Exodus 40 – a beautiful statement about the presence of God in all his unapproachable holiness. Solomon's prayer acknowledges the glorious omnipresence of God, while celebrating the fact that he hears prayers from heaven (v30, 59). He also asks for mercy for sinful Israel using covenant language (Lev. 26, Deut. 28). Where else is the grace of the infinite God brought to fellowship and dwelling among us but in Christ, God With Us?

Holy God, it is amazing that you call us to be with you, and that you make it possible by reaching down to us. Lord Jesus, you are our place of atonement and it is only through you that my prayers are heard in highest heaven. Forgive me for undervaluing prayer and time in your presence. Thank you that one day I will see your face; there will be no cloud.

1 Kings 9 – Integrity and Godliness 24x7

1 Kings 8 was a spiritual high for Israel. As the Holy Spirit dwells in us corporately (1 Cor. 3:16) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19), we also experience highs in his presence. For Solomon personally, that continued here in v1-9 as God met with him again, impressing on him the need for integrity and godliness (v4). The rest of the chapter then has Solomon doing his day-job of kingly activity: Foreign affairs, work-force management, engineering and construction projects. And yet it's precisely in these day-job activities that Solomon was to act with integrity and godliness. We dishonour the God who walks with us and dwells in us when we compartmentalise our lives, losing integrity and godliness.

Living God, you have united me to Jesus by faith and yet I compartmentalise my life, having parts of my life less touched by grace as I fail to war against temptation and sin. Help me to wholly enter in to who I am in Christ, a holy child of God.

1 Kings 10 – Queen of Sheba is Blessed

This chapter has Israel at its peak moment in the Old Testament – and yet still fatally flawed. The Queen of Sheba epitomises the foreign nations and rulers gathering to Israel's king for wisdom, paying tribute to Solomon and the God he served. We're dazzled by the gold and splendour, but the Queen was deeply affected by Solomon's wisdom and (more importantly) gave her own praise to God (v9). In Matthew 12:42, Jesus said that the Queen of Sheba would condemn those who failed to praise God in the presence of one greater than Solomon, even Christ himself. Jesus had no flaws and is our perfect king, but the last verses of this chapter show law-breaking compromise by Israel's king, against Deuteronomy 17:16-17.

Lord Christ, there are times when I allow apparent progress or success to cloud my judgment about what is right. I drift and compromise when I ought to guard my heart and affections. Lord, forgive me. Help me to meditate on you, to keep my eyes on you, and to walk in your ways.

1 Kings 11 – A Change of Heart

Although the writer of Kings has given us clues that all was not as secure as it could have been, Solomon's collapse in this chapter still takes us by surprise. In 1 Kings 3:3, we were told that Solomon loved the LORD – the *only* person in the Old Testament of whom that is said. But his love for his many foreign wives “turned his heart away” (v3). When we compromise and dabble with sin, our moral centre of gravity shifts away from God. Every step towards sin feels like it's only the first. If we are still to be faithful to God in our old age then we must walk faithfully with him every day. The opposition that rose against Solomon shows God's wise discipline while being true to his covenant promise.

Gracious, wise, and holy Father, you are perfect in integrity and holiness. I am far from what I ought to be. Father, I drift and dabble in darkness in my affections and twisted will. Spirit, make my heart straight in righteous desire so that I might remain close to Jesus in love and spirit.

1 Kings 12 – Disaster

This is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament – but for all the wrong reasons. Rehoboam's foolishness led to the division of the nation into Israel (most of the tribes) in the north and Judah (with Benjamin) in the south. The rest of 1 & 2 Kings traces them as separate nations. Notice Jeroboam's use of religion to wield power – something repeated by many regimes, cults, and (sadly) church leaders. His manmade worship actively prevented Israelites from going to Jerusalem as the LORD had commanded. False worship, even of the true God, is never acceptable: It's offensive in light of all God has given. Israel would never recover. We must remain true to Christ.

Heavenly Father, there are so many perversions of Christianity that lead so many astray. It's heartbreaking. Lord God, keep me true to the gospel as you have revealed it in your word: Saved by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, to your glory alone.

1 Kings 13 – Words of Warning

This is a strange chapter. At so many points we wonder why this or that happened, but most questions go unanswered. The biggest question of all *is* answered, however, loud and clear: The whole event was to impress on Jeroboam the danger of disobeying the word of God. He had the double witness of a cracked altar and a withered hand, added to the death of the disobedient (albeit tricked) man of God, yet still did not repent. He wanted God's good news (that he would be king of Israel) but not his good rule. Beware of that. We must also avoid the man of God's error of being better at applying God's words to others than to ourselves.

Living God, you have spoken to us clearly through your Son, risen from the dead, mighty to save. Your word graciously and clearly calls me to life in him, and I'm grateful for the Spirit's life-giving illumination so that I might see Jesus. Lord, keep me true to your word and will always.

1 Kings 14 – Kidding God?

Jeroboam was in a terrible family crisis. People will often turn to God at such times, or even turn to his people for them to intercede for them. Jeroboam wanted to keep God at arm's length, while simultaneously asking for his help. He wanted light in his dark place, but not for his path going forward. But God sees through all our kidology and masks, knowing and weighing us far more forensically than we do ourselves. For an unbeliever trying to manipulate God, this spells danger. For an open-hearted believer pursuing holiness, it's uncomfortable and reassuring in equal measure. Neither Jeroboam (Israel) nor Rehoboam (Judah) ever humbled themselves before God.

Lord Christ, it is reassuring that you know all my sinful desires and actions, for how else could I be sure of the completeness of your salvation? Forgive my foolish and pathetic attempts to deny or hide my sin, and lead me in your righteous paths every day.

1 Kings 15 – Sons of David

It's commonplace in 1 & 2 Kings to come to chapters like this, where brief descriptions are given of various kings in northern Israel and southern Judah. All the kings of Israel were bad, as were most of the kings of Judah. The records tend to say little of the ability to govern, but rather each king is weighed for their devotion to the LORD (or to other gods). Since our own eternal hope is bound up with Jesus, Son of David, we trace God's patience with interest. Abijam was not devoted to God (v3) but the LORD remembered his covenant with David (v4). Righteous Asa's shrewd business actually displayed a lack of faith in God, but God still preserved David's line for our sake.

Heavenly Father, I know I often repeat Asa's error, choosing to solve things in my own way in my own strength. Give me wisdom to use the gifts you've given me in conscious dependence on you, quick to give you all the glory in everything.

1 Kings 16 – Lower and Lower

From 1 Kings 15:25 and into chapter 16 we're following a succession of kings in (northern) Israel. Some take the throne in brutal coup; others take their father's reign. Some rule for decades; others just 2 years or 7 days. But all of them did evil, following the benchmark of the false worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan established by Jeroboam son of Nebat. Omri established a new capital city (Samaria) but his biblical obituary summarises him as evil. It all feels like Israel is at rock bottom, but the introduction of Ahab is a new low: Israel will turn to Baal worship. The rebuilding of Jericho epitomises contempt for the word of the LORD, while also highlighting its enduring power.

Heavenly Father, as I consider the moral standards of the leadership of this country, I see the same contempt for you and your word. Yet I know that you are reigning and bringing all things together for the good of your people. As a citizen of heaven by grace, give me wisdom to live well for you in this society.

1 Kings 17 – Grace Prepared

Elijah suddenly appears to us out of nowhere. While Israel slid from the false worship of the true God to worship of a false god (Baal), the LORD had been raising up a prophet in grace. In line with the covenant curses of Leviticus 27, King Ahab's Israel would learn what 3½ years with neither the blessing nor the word of the LORD would be like. The widow is an image of Israel at social, financial, and emotional rock bottom. Elijah being sustained by ravens meant he'd get to her at just the right moment of need. By raising the boy to life we are assured that God's word is powerfully life-giving and sustaining. Our covenant God is both patient and gracious.

Heavenly Father, your interventions in my life have been so perfectly timed. You are wise and good, patient and gracious. Help me to accept your disciplining with a humble, learning heart. Give me the simple trust of that woman to depend on you day by day.

1 Kings 18 – A Call to True Worship

It's tempting to see this chapter as a simplistic demonstration that the LORD is God and Baal is nothing. Certainly, since Baal was supposed to be a god of rain and fertility the 3½ year drought was a humiliation of Baal worship. But the fire from God for the burnt offering was only previously seen at key moments of tabernacle and temple dedication (Lev 9, 1 Chron 21:26, 2 Chron 7:1), and the twelve stones of the altar rather than ten is a crucial detail. This event is a call to the people to return to the true worship of the true God, abandoning both Baal and the golden calves. We, like those Israelites, face the binary choice of v21.

Living God, you are gracious to give us demonstrations of your power, and to do so in a way that calls us to return to you. Thank you for Jesus, the true and only way to come to you. Help me to see the empty idols in my life and to turn my heart to you.

1 Kings 19 – Covenant Undone at Sinai

At Carmel, Israel were invited by God to return to true worship and blessing. Ahab and Jezebel's rejection is a turning point in Israel – and the reason for the book slowing down to focus on Elijah. The LORD is tender towards his rejected prophet, knowing the rejection is keenly felt. Elijah is summoned 300 miles south, mountain to mountain, Carmel to Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai). It's a court scene at Horeb. Elijah states the case against Israel: They have utterly rejected God's covenant. Where the covenant was made, God declares judgment against Israel. There is more power in his words than in any wind, earthquake, or fire. Israel's end is sealed.

Lord Jesus, you once revealed your glory to your disciples in the presence of Moses and Elijah. You are glorified in your new covenant of grace, leading your people into rest, sealing promises with your blood. Thank you for such secure salvation.

Additional Note: Turning Point

Under Jeroboam, Israel rejected the rule of David's line. It would prove fatal. Apostasy comes one step at a time: We gauge the next step not in terms of where we have come from but from where we *are*. Each step alters our moral centre of gravity. Each step is the first step from where we are, which is why it feels so small and inconsequential. So Israel had their golden calves at Bethel and Dan – false worship of the true God. Then high places and Asherah poles crept in – adding worship of false gods. And finally under Ahab and Jezebel there was outright rejection of the LORD and an embracing of Baal worship, climaxing at Carmel. Such covenant rejection was matched by God's judgment at Horeb/Sinai. Grace was withdrawn. Israel were doomed from that point on.

1 Kings 20 Perfect Prophecy

The LORD was hugely gracious to Ahab. Not only did he rescue Ahab's Israel from the king of Aram, but he also sent a man of God to deliver prophecy in advance. Ahab could be in no doubt that it was entirely the LORD's doing. The Arameans had an unworthy, limited regard for the LORD, and their downfall was so that everyone would know that the LORD is God. The emphasis here is that everything the LORD says will happen must happen. But since Ahab had an unworthy, limited regard for the word of the LORD he cherry-picked the bits he liked and ignored the rest. When challenged about his sin, Ahab became "resentful and angry" (v43) when he ought to have become contrite and repentant.

Holy God, you are gracious to give us your words of prophecy and instruction in the Bible. Help me to be ever aware of my cherry-picking, so that I might submit wholly to your perfect will. Lead me to repentance and faith, certain of all your good work for me in Christ.

1 Kings 21 – Institutional Wickedness

Naboth was an innocent man. More than that, he was a godly man, since his refusal to sell his land wasn't out of pettiness but rather a desire to remain faithful to the LORD. Land belonged to the LORD and wasn't to be transferred (v3). The chilling observation about what happened next is that it was all done through official governmental channels. It was institutionalised wickedness, where rulers abused their power in opposition to God – and the godly vulnerable people suffered. Jesus likewise suffered at the hand of the ruling class of his day, and it's no surprise if we also find ourselves at the receiving end of godless government policy.

Mighty Christ, you rule with true glory and majesty, King of kings, with all human authorities accountable to you. It's clear from examples such as Ahab that wicked governments have ungodly individuals in key positions. So Lord, please, have mercy on this country's government.

1 Kings 22 – Full Disclosure

This is one of those chapters that raises many questions! Why did Ahab send for Micaiah if all he got was bad news? Why did Micaiah say the same as the other prophets to begin with? Was Ahab deceived by God? Micaiah probably knew that Ahab would do whatever he wanted, so that whatever Micaiah said would be ignored. And in fact the full disclosure Micaiah gave about the scene in around the LORD's throne should have jolted Ahab into a true fear of the LORD. In the end, Ahab's rejection of the word of the LORD would this time prove fatal following an "accidental" arrow. The contrast with godly Jehoshaphat could hardly be stronger.

Living God, forgive me that even with the full disclosure of your word so clearly laid out in the Bible I still sin in so many ways. Help me to take your word seriously, delighting as much in your instruction as I do in your promises.

2 Kings 1 – Man of God

1 & 2 Kings are a single book, and it's no surprise that Ahaziah should follow in the footsteps of his father, Ahab. Yet in sending Elijah to intercept Ahaziah's messengers, God was once again gracious to remind sinful Israel of his presence. The death of the two captains and their troops is shocking until we realise that they *share* the king's contempt of God. The first says, "Man of God, the *king* declares..." and the second, "Man of God, thus says the king..." – each speaking as if the king was a higher authority. The third captain feared both death and God – with good reason, seeing a hundred corpses on the ground. In Christ, however, although we may fear dying, death has lost its sting.

Lord Jesus, your resurrection demonstrates your utter dominion over all things in life and death. Our bodies are so fragile, I'm reminded of the wonder of the New Creation and a body raised incorruptible. Thank you, Spirit, for giving me a healthy fear of God and no fear of death.

2 Kings 2 – Where is the LORD?

This is the first time we've heard of Elisha since God's judgment on Israel was announced in 1 Kings 19. His request for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit is simply the inheritance share of a first-born son, so he's asking to succeed Elijah. Up to this point, the lone prophetic voice of Elijah has been "the chariots and horsemen of Israel" (v12), so Elisha's grief was very real anxiety for the future. But the LORD was with Elisha. The incident with the bitter water being "healed" is a reminder to Israel of the blessings of God's covenant. The death of idolatrous Bethel's boys is a covenant curse (Lev 26:21-22). So, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" With his people, always.

Lord Jesus, mentors and role models come and go, yet you are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, the shade at my right hand, my shepherd, my light. Thank you for your faithful help and care, your perpetual presence. Help me to do good; keep me from temptation.

2 Kings 3 – Grace and Purpose

Moab was east of the river Jordan, and its king rebelled against Israel after Ahab died. Ahab's son Joram wasn't quite as bad as Ahab in that he didn't worship Baal, but he upheld the hated calf worship of the LORD at Bethel and Dan. The coalition of Judah, Israel, and Edom was to enter Moab from the south but (ridiculously) they ran out of basic provisions *en route*. Joram blamed the LORD (v10, 13), demonstrating his complete lack of understanding and humility. Elisha was scathing towards Joram and only agreed to help because of Jehoshaphat (the king in David's line, through whom the line to Christ would come). God graciously provided both water and victory over the despicably wicked king of Moab.

Living God, it is surely in your gracious nature to give us far, far more than we deserve – and often even so much more than we ask. It is also encouraging to glimpse how you preserve your good purposes in answering prayer. This assurance keeps me praying.

2 Kings 4 – Elisha's "Type"

An important notion in understanding how the Old Testament points to Jesus is to look for 'types' – models or blueprints in the form of people or events that are fulfilled in Christ. As Elijah points to John the Baptist, Elisha is a type of Christ. Each of the miracles in 2 Kings 4 finds a counterpart in the life of Christ, though with Jesus everything is amplified and expanded. He gives the Spirit in abundance (not oil), raised the dead (physically and spiritually), declares food clean, and feeds the 4,000 and 5,000 to reveal that he is the Bread of Life. Noticing that Elisha always went towards pain in people, we come with thanksgiving to the God who came to us.

Gracious God, it's easy sometimes to read these ancient texts just as history. Thank you for the reminder that you still work in us and for us in Jesus, the one who came to save us. Help me to be useful in your hands, ever ready to move towards people in pain.

2 Kings 5 – Free Grace is Really Free

The young Israelite servant girl must have been devastated when taken from home by raiding Arameans. In the wisdom of God, her pain became tremendous and eternal blessing to someone else. This should give us pause for thought in our own troubles. When Naaman reached Elisha's house he was expecting religious ceremony and, in particular, an exchange of gifts – silver and clothing for healing. But God's grace is truly free, and all Naaman had to do was submit by faith in obedience to a command from God. He was an utterly changed man, seen in his bruised conscience over false god worship. Gehazi's great sin was to demean God's free grace with greed and deceit. Perhaps the greatest wonder is that all this was for a Gentile (Luke 4:27).

Heavenly Father, help me to have the wisdom to know when you need me to be like that servant girl. Help me also to revel in your free grace, not adding to it with religious duty. And help me to present your grace to others as truly free, not dependent on anything we do or give.

2 Kings 6 – Spiritual Sight

When Elisha caused the axe-head to float, it was both remarkable in its own right and another example of being a 'type' of the Saviour to come – one who could himself walk on water. In 2 Kings 5:16, Elisha spoke of the LORD "in whose presence I stand." Here in the siege of Dothan we glimpse something of what he experienced. Verse 16 is a comfort to any believer at any time, and Elisha's servant was blessed to see the truth of it with his own eyes. The Aramean soldiers had their eyes opened to mercy and grace in Israel. When Jesus was arrested, he spoke of being able to call on his Father for more than 12 legions of angels to rescue him (Matt 26:53), but he didn't. Our salvation is in his death.

Gracious Saviour, your word helps us see something of the true spiritual nature of the world around us. Yet we walk by faith, not by sight, so help me perceive fully the spiritual battle within me and around me all the time, fighting in the armour and weaponry you give.

2 Kings 7 – Good News

The previous chapter ended with grim scenes inside Samaria, the capital city of Israel, under siege from the Arameans. Now Elisha bursts into the scene with a declaration that seems too good to be true (v1) and indeed the captain can't believe it. Four diseased and socially excluded men then make the discovery of their lives – the Arameans have fled. We're told explicitly that this was the LORD's work (v6). The men realise "Today is a day of good news" (v9) – and good news is for sharing. But the good news of God's salvation is also judgment against those who oppose him (the Arameans) and who won't believe him (the captain). The same remains true of the gospel today.

Lord Christ, the angels announced good news to mere shepherds at your birth, just as these four men were first to learn good news at Samaria that day. Thank you that the Spirit has brought your good news and salvation to me. Help me, then, to share it with those around me.

2 Kings 8 – Kindness and Severity

We see here the gentle kindness of God, as well as his grief over the sin of humanity that results in judgment. The Shunamite woman's kindness to the prophet in 2 Kings 4 is met here with the LORD's kindness to her, sovereignly setting up a situation where she would not only be safe from drought but then also receive her livelihood back on her return. Elisha and Hazael were mentioned (with Jehu) in 1 Kings 19 in the context of God's judgment against Israel. While the king of Aram would not have died from his illness, Hazael ruthlessly killed him and took the throne. What he would do to Israel brought tears to Elisha's eyes, surely mirroring the pain of God even in just judgment.

Righteous Father, it is clear from your word that you delight no more in punishment than you do in the sin that demands it. Forgive my lack of meditation on what it cost for you to punish your Son in my place. Thank you that your particular grace still reaches individuals like me.

2 Kings 9 – Threads of Grace

The second half of Chapter 8 lines up the various people in certain locations ready for the events of Chapter 9. We might struggle to keep up with the names and places, but certain things stand out. First, recall 1 Kings 19 where God passed judgment on covenant-breaking Israel, saying that it would come through Elisha, Hazael, and Jehu. These events are part of the settled, righteous judgment of God. Second, we're told that the parentage of Ahab and Jezebel made its way into the royal families of both Israel and Judah, but Judah was to be preserved on account of David's line to Jesus. Lastly, judgment always relates to specific sins (v26), as it must if it is to be truly just. No sin goes unpunished.

Lord God, here again we see your perfect justice at work. No-one can deny your righteousness or your right to judge. You are greatly glorified with threads of grace throughout, preserving David's line all the way to Jesus. Help me to remember that my own salvation is bound up in texts like these, and to give thanks.

2 Kings 10-11 – Baal Down

Through Ahab and Jezebel, the royal families of both Israel and Judah had been infected with Baal worship. By the end of these two chapters, both the line of Ahab and the worship of Baal had come to an end. Jehu's brutality at Jezreel accomplished the judgment of God, though the end did not justify the means. Hosea 1:4 prophesies judgment to come on Jehu's descendants for such bloodshed. Athaliah's murder of her young grandsons in her grasp for power was also met with judgment. The young king was protected by the wife of a priest, and by such threads are the lines to David's heir kept open.

Heavenly Father, I know that at times I work to justify my desires and actions by appealing to outcomes, when really I knew I was wrong all along. Spirit, help me to put sin to death in my heart, mind, and will, and to live in holiness, righteousness, and godliness.

2 Kings 12 – Biblical Instruction

This chapter is pretty upbeat about Judah's king Joash until we hear of him giving away items to deflect an Aramean attack on Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 24 gives a fuller account, describing how Joash abandoned the worship of the LORD in favour of Asherah poles and other pagan idols. The key point is to understand where it went wrong, which we're told in v2. Jehoida was the faithful priest who had brought the child Joash to the throne. Jehoida instructed the king in the ways of the LORD. But once Jehoida died, King Joash no longer received biblical instruction and his abandonment of the LORD became inevitable. We know Christ through the Scriptures, so we must work to know them better.

Holy Spirit of God, you inspired and carried men along to write these words of Scripture. Keep me nourished in them, Lord, and show me more of Jesus day by day. Keep me in loving obedience to him, so that in him I might know and please the Father.

2 Kings 13 – Spiritual Ambition

The records of the kings of Israel and Judah follow set formulae, with varying amounts of detail added. For each, whatever else they did, the ultimate detail is their heart for the LORD. We should see ourselves likewise. When Elisha put his hands on the king's hands to shoot an arrow (v15-17), the image given was that when Jehoash shot at Aram, God would be working through his hands giving success. Jehoash was to strike arrows into the ground as he hoped to strike Aram, but stopping after just three arrows displayed a lack of spiritual ambition in what God might do. As we have union with Christ (he works through our hands, as it were), our similar lack of spiritual ambition is equally deplorable.

Holy God, you are still at work through your people for your glory and our good. It's humbling to think that in eternity all that will really matter from life today is my walk with you. Help me to love, to evangelise, to forgive – to live out my union with the eternal Son, Jesus.

2 Kings 14 – Kings, kings, kings

Jeroboam son of Nebat was the first king of Israel after the kingdom split. By instituting false worship of the true God with golden calves at Bethel and Dan, he became the benchmark for the idolatry and wickedness of all Israel's kings. We count 7 kings from Jeroboam to Ahab (with his Baal worship, and the covenant closure at Sinai with Elijah), and now 7 kings from Ahab to another Jeroboam. The next cycle of 7 will be catastrophic for Israel. As Bible readers, we note the prophet Jonah in v25, the same Jonah who went to Nineveh to preach judgment resulting in repentance. As the capital city of Assyria, the LORD would use it against Israel in 7 kings' time. His sovereign rule is stunning.

Heavenly Father, world events seem so chaotic with everyone doing what seems right in their own eyes. Your word reminds me over and over that you are sovereignly in control for your own honour and glory, and that you pour out blessing from compassion on us. You are to be praised.

2 Kings 15 – Relentless Rebellion

Azariah, king of Judah, was also called Uzziah. 2 Chronicles 26 gives him a fuller account, explaining why the LORD afflicted him with a skin disease. This chapter gives the impression of relative stability under the godly rules of Azariah and his son Jothan, very much contrasted with the treachery and murder taking place in Israel. Five Israel kings spanning perhaps 20 years or so are listed, four of whom repeat the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat (Shallum isn't charged with that, but he only lasted one month). Ominously, we read of the rising influence of Assyria, not least in the attack on Galilee. Israel is speeding towards judgment, clinging on to false worship.

Heavenly Father, you are patient and slow to anger, and yet we seem so relentless in our rebellion. If not for your compassion and intervention in my life, I would be caught up and swept away in the world's destruction. Thank you for including me in your heavenly kingdom under Christ.

2 Kings 16 – Damning Rejection

It's possible to read 2 Kings 16 and think of Ahaz as yet another faithless king in the book. But he was king of Judah, in Jerusalem, in David's line, so his wickedness jeopardises the line to Christ. 2 Chronicles 28 spells out his sin more clearly, but it's his rejection of God's grace and rescue promised in Isaiah 7 that is most condemning. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz in his hour of need, and Ahaz rejected help. Going to Assyria for help (offering a bribe of silverware from the LORD's temple) was yet further damning. The erection of a new altar, while keeping the old one for "guidance" (v15) was as wicked as it was laughable. Still, God's grace is not thwarted by evil.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you don't count our sins against us. Left to my own heart, I'd no doubt be as foolish as wicked Ahaz – yet you are relentlessly gracious to us. Thank you that while we were yet sinners in our greatest need, Christ died for us. Forgive me my sin against you.

2 Kings 17 – The End of Israel

And so we come to Hoshea, Israel's last king. He fell under Assyrian rule, conspired against them, and brought about the end of Israel and its capital city, Samaria. The people were deported and replaced, a displacement from which the northern tribes would never recover (and the root of division between Judea and Samaria in Jesus' day). This chapter is crystal clear that the exile was a direct result of Israel abandoning true worship of God. Over time, God repeatedly sent prophets to call Israel to repentance (e.g. Hosea, Amos – see v13), but v21-23 summarises Israel's determined rebellion. Exile was the final step of curse under God's covenant (Leviticus 26).

Holy God of covenant faithfulness, you will not be mocked or taken for granted. What happened to Israel is sobering. As I reflect on people I have known who once seemed so very much on fire for you but have since slipped away, please keep me close to you and use me as that prophetic voice of repentance to them.

2 Kings 18 – A Second David

While all the kings of Israel were bad, some of Judah's kings were moderately good. The description of Hezekiah is uniquely positive – he was like a second David (v1-8, especially v3). Like David, he wasn't perfect, and when he took the silver from the LORD's temple he displayed both naivety about the duplicity of Assyria's king and (worse) a lack of faith in God. When Assyria's army came to Jerusalem's walls, the spokesman recounted much truth about Assyria's victories and made big promises to the people if they would only surrender. But he overstepped the mark when he suggested that the LORD would be as impotent as gods of other nations. The chapter ends in high suspense.

Gracious Father, you are so patient with your weak and foolish children. Forgive me my sins, Lord, as you have promised to do. In times when faith is tested, give me strength. When tempted by enticing offers and stories, give me godly discernment.

2 Kings 19 – Take it to the LORD in Prayer

King Hezekiah makes his own spiritual progress in this chapter, and it's encouraging to ponder it. Faced with the Assyrian spokesman's words in the previous chapter, Hezekiah calls on Isaiah to pray to "the LORD your God" (v4). There seems to be a reprieve, but then a letter reiterating the Assyrian threat arrives in Hezekiah's hand. This time, he goes to God himself (not via Isaiah). In a beautiful image of true prayer, he literally lays his problem (the letter) out before the LORD. His prayer is God-honouring, clear, specific, and succinct. Most of all, his prayer is heard. The Sovereign God's words to Assyria are devastating and humiliating, as is the rout.

Gracious Father, listening God, compassionate and patient Lord, thank you that you hear me when I lay my concerns, worries, and burdens before you. Forgive me for seeking help in other places when I ought to honour you with such prayers.

2 Kings 20 – In Sickness and Health

The Bible often arranges events thematically rather than chronologically. Hezekiah's desperate near-death prayer in v1-11 very likely happened prior to receiving the letter in the previous chapter. A personal crisis led him to pray and taught him to take all his needs to the LORD. In this we see the LORD's kindness in giving Hezekiah his illness. This prayer is placed before the account of the visit from Babylonian envoys so that we will see a glaring contrast: 2 Chronicles 32:31 tells us that God withdrew from Hezekiah to test his heart. What we see is that in times of ease and safety, Hezekiah is far slower to seek God's presence and help.

Lord Jesus, we see over and over in your word how people will hurry to you in times of crisis but drift from you when life feels good. Forgive the tendency of my heart to wander. Help me to remain close to you, seeking your presence morning, noon, and night.

2 Kings 21 – A Pagan Generation

Manasseh's 55-year reign was disastrous for Judah. Some of his predecessors had worshipped the LORD in Jerusalem but left the pagan high places of worship intact. Manasseh brought pagan worship right into God's temple itself. The LORD alone is God - a jealous God, who does not room-share his temple. The problem with such a long reign is that the generation of Hezekiah who had seen and experienced the LORD's salvation was replaced by a new generation who knew nothing of it. Instead, all they knew was pluralistic pagan worship throughout Judah. Such national abandonment of God would lead to exile (v14).

Lord Jesus, it's often said that a local church is only one generation away from extinction. Help me and our church to nurture and encourage a next generation of believers. Keep us all true to you and your word in vital relationship with you daily.

2 Kings 22 – A King with a Tender Heart

Josiah was a godly king, very much a successor to David and Hezekiah. In the next chapter we'll read of a national programme of spiritual cleansing, and 2 Chronicles 34:3&8 spell out the chronology: The temple repairs and discovery of the book of the law came *after* the national reforms. It seems Josiah knew the need to return to true worship of the LORD, but it was only when he read the full gracious provision of the LORD in his covenant law that the full weight of Judah's sin hit home. His response was passionate, and through his prophetess Huldah the LORD noted Josiah's "tender" heart (v19) and would be gracious to him, though Judah's judgment was inescapable.

Lord Jesus, great God and King with a tender heart, I'm ashamed of my sins that have caused you such pain and offence. Thank you for your word which helps me know my sin. Thank for the Spirit who convicts my heart. May my stony heart grow in tender compassion to others and against sin.

2 Kings 23 – Temporary Reform

The catalogue of reforms carried out by Josiah was impressive in breadth and depth. He swept across all Judah and even into Bethel in Israel, and the destruction of the places of worship was utterly devastating. The cleansing at Bethel (v15-18) reminds us that false worship had been drawing the condemnation of God for centuries. We might expect such reform to be a pivotal change point for Judah, but the judgment of God had been pronounced. It would not come in Josiah's time in honour of Josiah's tender heart, but the speed with which the nation fell into idolatrous ways at the king's death reveals unchanged hearts. Christ, king forever, will bring complete and permanent reform.

Lord Christ, the reform in Josiah's day is a pale reflection of all you will do on the earth at your return. It is both comforting and awesome to think about the complete removal of all that is blasphemous, unworthy, and morally corrupt. Lord, help me be reforming my heart every day.

2 Kings 24 – History is Theological

The last days of Jerusalem are briefly told in chapters 24-25, though they form the backdrop of several of the books of the prophets. Jerusalem came under Egyptian rule in 609 BC when Josiah died. In 605, Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar's forces and young Daniel and others were sent to Babylon. Despite Jeremiah's warnings, further rebellion led to a much larger deportation in 597 which included the prophet Ezekiel. The third and final stage of exile comes in chapter 25. It's quite possible that the writer gives less detail here simply because his first readers would have remembered the events themselves. For them, and us, the critical comments are theological: The LORD is patient and gracious, but he won't be mocked.

Gracious, patient Lord, the whole world rejects you as surely and as completely as ancient Judah ever did. You are glorified in patience, just as you will also be glorified in judgment. Help me to repeat the works of your prophets in such times, pointing others to life and hope in you.

2 Kings 25 – Judgment and Grace

Jeremiah the prophet was in Jerusalem throughout the tumultuous final years of the city. His witness to Zedekiah fell on deaf, rebellious ears. The truth is that the Babylonian (Chaldean) invasion was an act of God's unstoppable judgment, so resistance was pointless. In 587 BC, the third and final stage of exile happened, and Jerusalem's walls and great temple were destroyed. The people were ejected from the Promised Land, just as the terms of the covenant promised. For Gedaliah's murderers to flee to Egypt is an awful undoing of the exodus. For all that, 2 Kings ends on a surprisingly hopeful note. Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah) is in Christ's genealogy at Matthew 1:11-12.

Lord God, your plans cannot be halted. Here in this chapter we see your judgment fall with utter certainty – a shadow of the great Day of the Lord to come. Yet we also see your determined grace, preserving the line to Christ, ultimately bringing salvation to me. Thank you for such comfort.

1 Chronicles 1-2 – God’s People, Ancient Roots

Once exiled to Babylon, the people of Judah spent 70 years there. They became immersed in the culture and many of their children spoke only Aramaic, not Hebrew. When they were allowed to return home to rebuild Jerusalem, the new generation had lost much of its sense of identity. The genealogy of 1 Chron. 1-9 spans history from Adam until after the return to Jerusalem. While we can’t make sense of every name, we can see the purpose of the book revealed across these 9 chapters. The placement of Judah’s genealogy in chapter 2 (ahead of the other tribes) highlights the audience for the book. The intention is to provide the returning exiles with a sense of identity as God’s people from ancient times.

Heavenly Father, I’m aware that my own salvation is bound up with those returning exiles and the preservation of your promises to bring a king, a son of David, to rule forever. Knowing that you chose me before the world began is dazzling given the precarious nature of human history.

1 Chronicles 2-3 – Blessing Under David’s Rule

Chapter 3 gives the genealogy of King David through to his descendants in Jerusalem after the exile. The writer will make much of David in the book, and the aim is to give the returning exiles both a sense of roots and an example of godly rule. David is held up as true to God and a conduit of blessing to God’s people, so that if the returning exiles are to be blessed they will do well to live in covenant faithfulness under a David-like king. In 4:9-10 we meet Jabez, whose name sounds like “He Causes Pain.” This one man prayed that he might be blessed rather than fulfil his name, and God blessed him. Our prayers are likewise heard by Jesus, Son of David.

Great God and King, Son of David, Lord Jesus, it is good to be in your kingdom and under your rule. Like Jabez, we don’t have to be what we were born to be. You bless us beyond imagination in your grace. Keep me praying, Lord, happy under your good rule.

1 Chronicles 5-6 – Dependence on God

There are two important points being made in these chapters for the returning exiles. First, 5:18-22 describes significant success for the 2½ tribes and attributes it to their trust in the LORD as they cried out in prayer to him. This is immediately contrasted with 5:23-26 where the same 2½ tribes were later exiled to Assyria for abandoning the LORD. The message to the returning exiles is clear. Second, Chapter 6 gives disproportionate coverage to the Levites, tracing the priestly line from Aaron in particular. This emphasises both the authority and the authenticity of the priests of the day, opening the door to blessing for the whole community under God.

Lord Jesus, you commanded your disciples to remain in you so that you would remain in them. Thank you for your faithfulness to your promises and to your people. Thank you that you are our eternal high priest, always interceding and advocating for me at the Father's throne.

1 Chronicles 7-8 – History: Relevant and Irrelevant

The writer of Chronicles used multiple sources for his genealogies (including Genesis and Numbers). Across these two chapters, the tribe of Benjamin appears twice – with all of Chapter 8 devoted to that one tribe. Compare that with the single verse dedicated to Naphtali (7:13) and the complete omission of Zebulun. For the returning exiles comprising mostly of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin, the detail of the other tribes was falling into history. For us, tracing the line of the coming Messiah, the continuity in Judah in particular is an element in our praise of God. And the darkness on Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee is now eclipsed by a “great light,” even Jesus himself (see Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7).

Gracious, Sovereign Lord, it's amazing to see in these genealogies your fingerprints in time in the affairs of generations. Thank you for keeping your promises. Help me to recall your faithfulness when I'm in times of doubt or need.

1 Chronicles 9-10 – Christ in All the Scriptures

The genealogies were to give the returning exiles their roots, an identity grounded in God's election and covenants. In re-establishing themselves in Jerusalem, they were to note the emphasis on blessings for dependent, faithful obedience and curses for disobedience. More, they would flourish best under a David-like king and a functioning system of worship with a faithful priesthood. So these genealogies then point us to Christ, our great eternal King and High Priest. This all explains the rather brief account of Saul and his sons, compared with the many chapters of 1 Samuel devoted to him. And so we choose Christ as our king, seeking life in his kingdom every day.

Lord Jesus, you are my perfect King and High Priest. In you I come to the presence of holy majesty. Before you I bow in appropriate worship. Thank you that your word continually raises my eyes, heart, and thoughts to you, helping me to keep everything in perspective.

1 Chronicles 11-12 – Glories of the Past

Imagine being among the returned Israelites reading these chapters in Jerusalem. Your nation has spent a humiliating 70 years in exile in Babylon, and you have been permitted to return home only at the decree of the Persian emperor, Cyrus. You don't have a king because you're just a province in the empire, though your Governor is at least of royal descent. The impact of these two chapters would initially be a yearning for the past, for days of valour and power. But there should also be two lasting responses: (a) A determination not to repeat the sins of the past that led to exile; (b) A longing for the fulfilment of 2 Samuel 7, and a king to reign over God's people forever.

Lord Jesus, hope for the future can only ever rest in you. If I am to keep from repeating sins, I can only do so with the strength you give by the Holy Spirit. Help me not to yearn for past glories, but to strive forwards by faith every day.

1 Chronicles 13-14 – Blessings to All Israel

An important thread throughout Chronicles is that of “all Israel” as the writer has two related aims: (a) To show that the nation was at its best when it was united as one, not divided into Israel (north) and Judah (south); (b) To encourage the returning Israelites towards inclusive unity, putting old divisions aside. This explains the emphasis on “all Israel” in the account of the failed attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Note also that the passion and enthusiasm of vibrant worship could not offset the sin of approaching God’s holiness in an unlawful and unworthy manner. The God-given military success of Chapter 14 shows how God continues to pour out blessing on his repentant children.

Gracious Father, how it must grieve you to see your church divided and beset by wolves. Help me, as part of my church, to worship you in spirit and in truth, mediated by Jesus, giving glory to you. Help me to love my church as you do.

1 Chronicles 15 – The Past, The Future

The ark of the covenant had been part of the original tabernacle at Sinai. It represented God’s covenant faithfulness, personal presence, and holiness. The writer stresses how it came to Jerusalem under the direction on King David and the carefully obedient supervision of the Levitical priests, again reminding his readers (the returning exiles) of the spiritual heights available to God’s faithful people. Michal is given as an example of spiritual deadness and joylessness. By the time of Chronicles’ writing, the ark had long ago been stolen away, lost to Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. But we must look forward. Christ is our king and high priest, our revelation of God’s covenant faithfulness, presence, and holiness.

Lord Jesus, great sacrifice of atonement, high priest and Immanuel, how gracious you are that I am united to you, the one in whom all heaven’s treasures of knowledge and wisdom reside. How astonishing it is that you are with me every moment of the day; help me live that today.

1 Chronicles 16 – Gathered Worship

The pattern of worship at God's tabernacle had changed little since the days of Moses, but this chapter signifies a huge change with the addition of organised music. We *feel* music so that what we sing becomes deeply embedded in us. The song here is a composite of Psalm 105:1-5 (looking back in grateful praise), Psalm 96:1-13 (looking up, calling the world to praise God), and Psalm 106:47-48 (looking forward, petitioning God for help). Jesus, our king, still calls us to gather to worship God. The pattern of the psalm in this chapter is still fitting, with Christ himself worthy of worship in his own being while mediating our worship of the Father. Let us never neglect his call to gather together for worship.

Lord Christ, it is good for us to gather to worship you. We have everything to thank and praise you for, and we grow as we see how worthy of worship you are in your own nature. Lead us to the Father's presence, so that we might know and adore him even as you do.

1 Chronicles 17 – Son of David, Eternal Reign

This chapter draws heavily on 2 Samuel 7, and together they form the theological framework for our own relationship with Jesus, our Messiah King. David was rightly concerned for God's honour now that he had a cedar palace but the ark of the God of all the earth rested in a tent nearby. The rest of 1 Chronicles charts the construction of the spectacular temple to be build by Solomon, but the promise of God in this chapter is of even greater importance. Here we read of a distant Son of David who will reign forever – unlike any manmade temple. Christ's disciples couldn't comprehend his death, *expecting* him to reign forever.

Holy Jesus, you have called me into your eternal kingdom over which you are the everlasting king. All else in my life will pass and fade away, yet you hold me in an unbreakable grip, and you promise me eternity with you. Spirit, work in me to live in joyful kingdom obedience.

1 Chronicles 18 – Organised in War

In the days of Joshua and Judges, Israel had failed to take full possession of the land. These chapters in 1 Chronicles describe military campaigns that extended and secured borders, had neighbouring nations bringing tribute, and raised wealth for the building of the temple (e.g. v8). The political, financial, and military stability David achieved would be needed for temple construction and commission. Yet his psalms make it clear that he knew all his success was from the LORD (v6, 13). That said, David worked hard in the LORD's strength, and the officials in v14-17 reveal a well-organised government. It is when we work for God that he works through us.

Heavenly Father, I know that you have prepared works for me to do. Give me grace, peace, and wisdom to serve you in every situation. Help me to be organised and deliberate in loving others and sharing your gospel, waging war on sin and temptation.

1 Chronicles 19-20 – Peace for Worship

Much of what we read in Chronicles has already come to us in Samuel and Kings, but it's often interesting to see what the writer has left out. These two chapters notably leave out mention of David's flaws – in particular his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah (compare 20:1 with 2 Samuel 11:1). The writer's focus is on demonstrating the completeness of David's campaigns: There was peace in the land, paving the way for construction of the temple. While our leaders will fail and some fall, nothing will hinder God coming to dwell among his people. We have confidence beyond shadow of doubt that we shall see Jesus.

Lord God, your word commands us to pray for peace so that we may worship and proclaim you freely. Help me not to squander the relative peace we have in this country. Have mercy, and bring peace to those corners of the world still torn apart in bloodshed.

1 Chronicles 21 – Place of Atonement

In 2 Samuel 24, we were told that the LORD was angry with Israel and that he stirred David's heart to call a census. But God does not tempt or entice us to sin, so here we see that he released Satan to entice David. As a military census, the count suggested a lack of faith in God's strength to fight for Israel – obviously sinful in view of the last of the last few chapters. As the plague swept through the people it was ultimately halted at the threshing-floor of Ornan, which David then bought and used for burnt offerings to the LORD. Fire from heaven demonstrated acceptable atonement. This would be the temple's location and works of the devil were called to an end.

Lord Jesus, you are the place of atonement at which the works of the devil are ended. As I sin and display faithlessness in you, forgive me. Spirit, work in me that I might put sin to death daily; help me to live life to the full in Christ.

1 Chronicles 22 – War and Peace

Chapters 22 to 29 are unique to Chronicles, covering material not in Samuel or Kings. The king is being shown as one who prepares for and prioritises the nation's worship of the LORD above all else – very much a picture of how Christ enables our worship in every way. The contrast here between David as a man of war and Solomon as a king of peace is illuminating: Peace and rest with God are his gift to give, and come only after enemies are defeated and removed. In this we see a shadow of the great Day of the Lord when Christ shall return and remove Satan, death, Hades, tears, crying, and pain. And we shall always be with the Lord.

Lord Jesus, you are the Lord of Peace, and you have a promised rest for your people eternally in your presence. I know you will one day remove all evil in the world, so help me now in my own spiritual battles against sin and temptation.

1 Chronicles 23 – Unseen Service

David knew that true worship needs more than just a building, however magnificent it might be. The next three chapters cover the many *people* needed to enable the nation's worship. Back in Numbers, the Levites were given the task of transporting the tabernacle, but as the ark came to rest in Jerusalem they were assigned important roles as workers at the temple. It was an honourable task, and we do well to thank God for those who enable our public gatherings at church today: Some stack chairs, some serve as welcomers, while others have less visible roles such as ensuring bills are paid, toilet rolls bought, light bulbs replaced. Anything enabling others to worship is worthy of thanks.

Lord Jesus Christ, worthy of our regular gathered worship as a local church, thank you for those who serve your people by ensuring everything is in place with no distractions. Show me how I can serve others in their worship and service, delighting to serve you in this way.

1 Chronicles 24-25 – Inspired Music

After all we read in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, it's no surprise to see details about Aaron's descendants, the priests. It provided the returning exiles a sense of continuity, identity, and authority to pick up the pre-exile systems of worship. We might be a little more surprised by the large numbers of musicians. Was this an indulgence of the (artistic) king? Not at all. It's clear that they were to prophesy and exalt the LORD (25:1, 2, 5), and we see the names of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun in the headings of several psalms. Even so, the musicians all had to learn their craft (25:7), as all musicians must. The role of singing in gathered worship has ancient roots.

Great and merciful Father, thank you for those in our church who dedicate time to enable us to gather in worship. Thank you for the joy of singing your praise with brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you most of all that it is Christ himself, our great High Priest, who leads us in worship to you.

1 Chronicles 26-27 – Primacy of Worship

These chapters conclude the description of how Jerusalem's government was organised. The gatekeepers were probably tasked with preventing unauthorised entry to the temple compound and seem to have been linked with Israel's military. Various secular roles are listed since much of the king's ongoing costs were met from his own land and wealth management rather than taxes. Mention of the census in 27:23-24 illuminates the events of Chapter 21. What is clear from these chapters is the focus on the centrality of temple worship of the LORD within David's reign – a clear signal to the returning exiles and to us as we centre every aspect of our lives on Christ.

Lord Christ, I can do no better with my time and energy than to worship you, whether in the gathered worship of your people or the scattered worship of daily life. Help me to do just that, being ever conscious of your presence, always delighting to delight you.

1 Chronicles 28 – David Commissions Solomon

Chronicles gives David more credit for the preparation of the temple's construction than the books of Samuel or Kings. As ever in Chronicles, there's a desire to demonstrate Israel's roots (e.g. v4) and continuity of blessing under godly rule and obedience (v8's commands are plural to the whole nation). We also see why David was not the one to build the temple (v3), but his plans were clearly extensive (v11-19). Although these are David's words, it is God's own faithfulness and covenant love that shine through. "Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you" (v20) – true for us all in the Lord's work.

Lord Jesus, you have given me commands to fulfil in your name – commands of love and witness. Thank you for your own perfect obedience to the Father, and help me Lord not to be afraid or discouraged but rather always to remember that you are with me.

1 Chronicles 29 – What’s in Your Hand?

This chapter has some of the Bible’s most profound teaching on how we regard our possessions. In v14-16, David prays to the LORD an acknowledgement that everything we have is the LORD’s; it was his before we were born, and it will be his when we are gone. To give to God is to give what is in his hand already. David calls on others to give to the LORD in v5, that they will “consecrate” themselves to the LORD. The Hebrew expression for “consecrate” here is literally “fill one’s hand,” so there’s a lovely play on words: As you empty your hands of belongings, you fill your hands (consecrate yourself) with the LORD. As that seems hard to us, v10-13 lifts our eyes to see the beauty of the LORD.

Eternal Father, words are too small to use to praise you, so I join with David in piling them up to recall your greatness, power, glory, splendour, majesty, and honour. Forgive me for thinking anything I can hold in my hands is as precious as worshipping you in Christ. Help me to consecrate all that I am to you.

2 Chronicles 1 – The LORD First

Chapters 1 to 9 of 2 Chronicles will take us again through the life of Solomon, though with a different emphasis from the early chapters of Kings. Once again we read of Solomon asking for wisdom to judge the nation, and the LORD graciously added so much more. Most of the material in these Solomon chapters will be about the construction of the temple, and our writer reminds us that true wisdom begins with humility and worship before the LORD. So it’s helpful to us to remember that the LORD’s invitation to pray is as open to us as it was to Solomon: “Ask: What should I give you?” (v7). Our hearts are more exposed to ourselves and to God when praying than in any other place or time.

Gracious, prayer-answering God, it is astonishing that you should bend your ear to the prayers of your people and bind your will to us. Help me to know you better, to grow in wisdom, and to serve you with true humility and love. Forgive any and all pretence in my prayers; heal my heart.

2 Chronicles 2 – Building Worship

The original tabernacle built by Moses followed careful and specific instruction from the LORD. Solomon's temple would retain the crucial features of the tabernacle, with added splendour appropriate to a permanent structure. Yet Solomon knew that not even highest heaven can contain the LORD (v6). Certain buildings hold special memories for us – places of baptisms, marriages, memorable sermons etc. and it's important to keep church buildings in good order, befitting gathered worship. Yet if we *need* a specific kind of building or décor to be able to worship God then we must question whether we're truly worshipping in spirit and in truth, or are our buildings actually idolatrous substitute glory?

Infinite God, Solomon was right to recognise that highest heaven – even all Creation – cannot contain you. How precious to know, then, that you are here with me in this moment. Help me to experience your presence always, and especially in the gathered worship of your people.

2 Chronicles 3 & 4 – The LORD Provided

Just as all human language falls short of describing the infinite majesty of God, so too no temple could ever have splendour enough to reflect his glory. Solomon understood this, creating a temple of astonishing expense and beauty (e.g. v6). There's a small but significant detail in v1 not to be missed: The temple was built on Mount Moriah. Back in Genesis 22, Abraham had been told to sacrifice his son Isaac in the mountains of Moriah. Abraham would have given his son, but the LORD provided a ram to be offered instead, and the place was named The LORD Will Provide. It's an apt place for the temple, but even more so as the place of crucifixion for the Lord our Saviour.

Great God of all provision, you have given us all we need for life and godliness. By the faith you have given we are saved, and by the Spirit's work you conform me to the likeness of Christ. Help me to learn contentment with such spiritual riches, trusting you for daily provision too.

2 Chronicles 5:1-6:11 – Descending Glory

This chapter draws heavily on the wonderful account in 1 Kings 8. With the ark in its final resting place in the temple, the glory of the LORD came down, God's presence both seen and hidden by the cloud. For a returning exile in Jerusalem, reading this would be heartbreaking. They knew that God's glory left the temple at the time of the exile because of Israel's sin (Ezekiel 10). They also knew that the rebuilt temple in Ezra was less grand and – crucially – did not experience the cloud presence of the LORD at its dedication. Christ's glory was glimpsed in the cloud at his transfiguration (Mark 9), seen clearly when we join him in the clouds at his return (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Holy Saviour, Lord Jesus, you are glorious in your very nature, worthy of honour and praise. Thank you for humbling yourself to humanity to save us. Forgive my small thoughts of you; help me to know you better, and to live my life in expectation and anticipation of being with you forever in your presence.

2 Chronicles 6:12-42 – Dwelling Among Sinners

This outstanding prayer is soaked in covenant language based on the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Solomon knew that humanity is inherently sinful and that Israel would inevitably sin. At such times, only the mercy of God can help us. It's notable that although the people are expected to pray towards God's presence in the temple, Solomon calls on the LORD to answer from heaven. He is acutely aware of the infinite power and reign of the LORD over all nations, and of the inadequacy of even Jerusalem's lavish temple to house him. It is humbling, thrilling, and sobering that such a God should come to dwell in us by the Holy Spirit.

Holy, infinite God, beyond all time and space, thank you for coming personally to me, lifting me from my dusty creatureliness, and raising me to be your child, united to Jesus and indwelt by the Holy Spirit himself. Help me to live conscious and worthy of who I am in you.

2 Chronicles 7 – Glimpses

Those Israelites who witnessed the temple filled with the glory of the LORD and saw fire from heaven consume the burnt offering were blessed indeed! It causes us to yearn for the day when we will see the LORD in his glory, as we bow down in his immediate presence – a glimpse of heaven. The LORD's words to Solomon are graciously grounded in the promises of the covenant. Where there is repentance before God, he is always ready to forgive and to restore. And yet the first readers of Chronicles, the returned exiles, would have been acutely aware of the awful outcome of regret following repeated sin and apostasy – a glimpse of hell.

Living God, you are gracious to reveal your glory to sinful people like me. You are gracious to forgive, and even more to give your Holy Spirit to bring me to repentance and faith. Help me to live for you in anticipation of seeing you.

2 Chronicles 8 – Blindspot

This chapter provides quite a glowing summary of Solomon's reign, listing building projects, public worship, and trade arrangements that combined to produce a country rich spiritually and materially. That the forced labour can be described as being "this way today" (v8) shows how the writer has compiled his book from multiple historical sources, since such forced labour was not in place after the exile. Solomon's decision to move his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, away from the areas of holiness in Jerusalem seems sensible and pragmatic, but it masks a heart problem. He has compartmentalised a section of his own heart away from the LORD. Sanctification of *most* of our lives is not enough.

Holy, omniscient Father, you know how I harbour sins in my heart, kidding myself that I'm ok because I'm doing satisfactorily in other areas of life. Open my eyes to my spiritual blindspots, Lord, and help me to make the difficult life changes that true repentance brings.

2 Chronicles 9 – How Good it Was

Where the books of Samuel and Kings spell out significant flaws in both David and Solomon, Chronicles portrays them only in the best light. From the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1-9 onwards we've been given a picture of Israel at its greatest when (a) ruled by a David-like king whose heart is set on worship of the LORD, and (b) true worship is enabled by a functioning priesthood. The visit of the Queen of Sheba highlights Israel being a blessing to the nations in line with their calling in Exodus 19. Subsequent chapters will describe the religious, moral, social, financial, and political collapse of the nation, causing Chronicles' readers to yearn for a return to godly rule and functioning worship.

Lord Christ, you are the perfect King and High Priest. Your rule is good, wise, and just, and you bring your blessing to all nations – even to me. You are to be praised. How gracious you are to allow me to know you personally, and to be my help and guide every day.

2 Chronicles 10 – Split

Drawing on 1 Kings 12, this chapter recounts the disastrous turn of events that saw “all Israel” split into the northern tribes (known as Israel) and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin (known as Judah). Was it Jeroboam's scheming, or Rehoboam's foolishness? Ultimately it was from God's hand, because of his anger at Solomon's apostasy (not recorded in Chronicles). Focus in the rest of the book will be on Judah, being both more directly relevant both to the first readers (the returning exiles) and to the line of covenant promise to David. With Rehoboam, however, we're shown that it's not enough simply to have a king in David's line – we need a king with David's heart for God.

Lord Jesus, you are the great and perfect king of your people. You are flawless in goodness, wisdom, and love. Your devotion to the Father is beyond measure or comprehension to us. In all this it is amazing that you are the one who died and rose again to save me, and I thank and praise you for your astonishing grace.

2 Chronicles 11-12 – Serve the LORD

The kingdom's split into Israel and Judah meant that people generally were forced to decide between true worship of the LORD in Jerusalem and false worship at Bethel and Dan's golden calves. The priests and Levites (who had no land inheritance) gathered to Rehoboam in Judah (v13-14), further emphasizing the spiritual and political division. What becomes clear in chapter 12, however, is that even having David's grandson on the throne and a consolidated Levitical priesthood in Jerusalem are not an automatic guarantee of prosperity. The king did not have absolute power; he was subject to the LORD. They discovered that it's better to serve the LORD than anyone else (v8).

Living God, you know how much I serve idols and gods in my own heart, seeking security and happiness in so many things that will ultimately pass away. Help me not to settle into empty religious habits, but rather to serve you personally, drawing on your strength every day.

2 Chronicles 13 – Outnumbered?

The battle lines drawn in this chapter are as much spiritual as they are military. Abijah's speech to Jeroboam are as much for Chronicles' readers as they were for Jeroboam's Israelite forces. How could Judah's smaller army hope to succeed against Israel's superior numbers hemming them in to front and rear? "Israelites, don't fight against the LORD God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed." As the priests blew the trumpets and Judah cried out to the LORD, they might have recalled Elisha's words to his servant, that "those who are with us outnumber those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). In the end, just one person with the LORD is a majority.

Lord Christ, I often feel overwhelmed as I try to contemplate the commands you have given: I fail to love as I ought; I'm slow to witness; I'm forgetful in prayer. Forgive me for attempting such spiritual things in my own natural strength. Help me to be useful in your hands, at the Spirit's impulse.

2 Chronicles 14-15 – Revival

Chapters 14-16 cover the life of Asa in much more detail than 1 Kings 15. In line with Chronicles' emphasis on the blessings of life under a David-like king and a functioning system of worship, we see here the overflow of godly rule to the people: God gave them peace. When Cush attempted an invasion, "Asa cried out to the LORD his God" (14:11) and they were delivered. Faithful Israelites from the northern tribes found blessing in Jerusalem. False idol worship was removed, and the whole of Judah enjoyed fellowship with God and even covenanted together to commit to him (15:15). We are not defined by the apostasy of earlier generations: Blessing is for all who will repent.

Gracious Saviour, it is comforting to realise that you are always compassionate and welcoming towards any repentant sinner, and that I am not defined by what I was before you saved me. Thank you for including me in the blessing of your peace, protection, and presence.

2 Chronicles 16 – Faithlessness and Rage

It doesn't matter who we are or how long we have trusted in the LORD, we must always be diligent in guarding our hearts. The previous two chapters show great blessing for Israel under Asa, but here we see a sad downfall. His appeal to the king of Aram would have taken planning and diplomacy – this was no spur-of-the-moment slip but rather a prologued lapse of faith. The LORD is gracious to point out our sin so that we might repent and be restored, but Asa's reaction is typical of many of us when our sin is called out: He was enraged (v10). As Asa's life drew to a close, he turned less and less to the LORD (v12). Small wonder Jesus commanded us, "Remain in me."

Lord Jesus, thank you that when I am faithless, you are faithful to your promises. Forgive me, Lord, that I am so quick to defend my actions rather than own up to my sin before you. May I remain in you, close to you, deep into my old age and for all time.

2 Chronicles 17 – Teachers Appointed

Jehoshaphat is given much more coverage in Chronicles than in Kings, and he's held up as a very positive example of a David-like king. The stand-out moment in this chapter is his initiative of sending men out throughout Judah to teach everyone "the book of the LORD's instruction" (v9). Relationship with God is not something to be outsourced or left to a few professional clerics; it is for everyone to know the LORD and to live in his ways, enjoying his blessing. Ephesians 4 describes how Christ has appointed apostles, prophets, and pastors and teachers "equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). We are always to be learning from him.

Lord Christ, your care for your church extends into every aspect of our lives. Thank you for giving us your word, and for equipping some to teach it well to us all. Give me listening ears, an obedient heart, and willing hands to do all that you teach.

2 Chronicles 18 – Do Not Love the World

This chapter is almost identical to 1 Kings 22, except that the bias here is more towards Jehoshaphat king of Judah rather than Ahab, king of Israel. Jehoshaphat is portrayed as godly, working hard to bring all Judah under God's blessing and rule. Ahab, married to Jezebel, worshipped Baal. That makes Jehoshaphat's promise of "I am as you are, my people as your people" (v3) and his subsequent partnership in war sound wholly unwise and unsound. Perhaps his suggestion that Ahab enquire of a prophet of the LORD might be somewhat evangelistic. In the end, there is disaster for Ahab and wrath for Jehoshaphat (19:1-3) for partnering with wickedness. Readers are meant to grasp the need for discernment and appropriate separation.

Lord Jesus, you have left us in the world though we are no longer of the world. We are in you, citizens of heaven. Give me godly discernment to engage with unbelieving people as your ambassador, without ever being tempted by or embroiled in the sin around me.

2 Chronicles 19-20 – We Look to You

In 17:10, we read that neighbouring nations didn't attack Judah because of a fear of the LORD – a protection given in response to Jehoshaphat's godly rule. Following his disastrous partnership with wicked Ahab, the LORD was angry with him (19:1-3). Jehoshaphat resumed his wise rule, establishing justice in the land (19:4-11), but God's wrath was worked out in the threat of invasion from a coalition of enemy nations (Chapter 20). Jehoshaphat's prayer is a picture of humility as the king gathered all the people together and prayed, "We do not know what to do, but we look to you" (v12). The salvation that came to them was unmistakably God's own hand and it's no surprise to read of singing and rejoicing. We are fools not to ask the LORD for help in times of need.

Heavenly Father, you are to be praised for your great love, patience, and compassion. Like Jehoshaphat, I'm capable of letting you down over and over, and yet you forgive with grace upon grace. Teach me the humility and dependence to say, "I don't know what to do, but I look to you."

2 Chronicles 21 – To No-one's Regret

This account of Jehoram's reign in Judah is somewhat longer than in 2 Kings 8 and has the highly unusual inclusion of a letter from Elijah. Elijah was prophesying in Israel, but the sins of Ahab's royal family had infiltrated Judah's. Where good kings in Judah enjoyed peace and honour, Jehoram's sin reaped rebellion and personal disaster. The manner of his death alone is a terrible warning against apostasy, and the fact that he died "to no-one's regret" is a devastating obituary. We are foolish to think that others are unaffected by our actions: When we do good through all of life, many others benefit; when we do evil, many suffer. We do well to "Hold on to what is good" in Christ (1 Thess 5:21).

Lord Christ, you are good and you do only good. It is a blessing to know and to serve you, to live under your good rule. Forgive me for the harm I have done to others through my sinful words, actions, and negligence. Help me to do good in your name.

2 Chronicles 22-23 – Providence and Faith

Ahaziah's reign was brief and wicked, heavily influenced by his evil mother Athaliah (22:3). After her son's death, Athaliah set about killing all her own grandsons in an attempt to seize power. Her wicked rule is one of the stand-out low-points of Israel's history. In the preservation of a single heir, the child Joash, we see two key Bible principles in tension: First, God's promise to provide an eternal dynasty in David's line cannot fail – and certainly won't be thwarted by wickedness such as Athaliah's. Second, the LORD works through the faithful bravery of his people. Jehoida the priest and his royal wife Jehoshabeath risked their lives to keep God's promises alive.

Sovereign Lord, you command all things for your own honour and glory and the good of your people. Give me boldness and wisdom to do the works you have prepared in advance for me to do, and greatly bless others through me for your glory.

2 Chronicles 24 – Bold Godliness Speaks Out

Chronicles comes last in the ordering of books in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is likely that that was the case in Jesus' day. It is also likely, then, that the Zechariah stoned here in 2 Chronicles 24 was the one mentioned by Jesus in his condemnation of Israel's religious authorities in Matthew 23:35. The way Joash turned from the LORD following the death of the godly High Priest Jehoida seems shocking, and yet it's not so surprising that he should fall once he ceased to be fed by the word of God. The subsequent stoning of Jehoida's son (possibly grandson) was idolatrous wickedness from an ultimately God-less king. Jesus' words show that the LORD remembers sin against his people.

Lord Jesus, your word says that your holy people will be vindicated in their steadfast devotion to you on the day of your return. It is good to know that your rule is unchangeably good, wise, and pure. I pray for the boldness of Zechariah to stand out for you.

2 Chronicles 25 – Off the Rails

Here we have another king who appeared to be godly to begin with but then lost his way. When Amaziah listened to what the man of God said (in v7-8), his obedience wasn't easy and even led to trouble from disgruntled Israelites: Amaziah was to learn not to enter into coalition with Israel. His success over Edom was clearly from God, so why Amaziah should then seek and take Edom's gods to worship is hard to fathom (v14). When he foolishly challenged Israel to battle he did so on his own, totally without the LORD's support. Doomed to failure, Amaziah was taken prisoner and held by Israel. Once released, he was stoned to death by some of his own people for his apostasy.

Living God, our hearts are prone to wander from you. Left to my own devices, and without your presence or word, I'm sure I would have drifted into unbelief long ago. Thank you that you are faithful. Help me to draw ever close to you, and not to run away under my own steam.

2 Chronicles 26 – Almost Fatal Arrogance

It's quite possible that Uzziah became king while his father Amaziah was imprisoned in Israel (25:23). He was immeasurably blessed to have a "teacher of the fear of God" (v5) and his long reign was marked by success. Sadly, he became the third king in a row to have a good kingship turn bad, this time when the king went to offer incense at the temple. Only priests were to do that, and it was indeed brave of the priests to take a stand against the king. Standing there, firepan in hand (v19), he was a moment from death for such ungodly arrogance. His leprosy was a mercy, reminding readers that we must remain faithful to the LORD throughout our whole lives.

Heavenly Father, the three kings in these chapters remind me how important it is to be true to you all my life, day by day. Today then, Lord, forgive me my sins against you and help me to know you and the grace you give in Christ.

2 Chronicles 27-28 – Choose Your King

Throughout Chronicles, the writer has demonstrated the blessings on Judah under a David-like king and a functioning system of worship, and the curses that come when the LORD is abandoned. These two chapters spell that out again at a time when the northern tribes of Israel were finally being dismantled under Assyrian rule. Readers are being forced to ask what king of king we'd like to serve, and how might we come under the LORD's blessing. Above all, we see the relentless grace of God sending a prophet to prevent further sin and to introduce grace (28:15). Ahaz thought his trouble came from the gods of Damascus, so he worshipped them (28:23) instead of the true, disciplining God.

Messiah Jesus, perfect king given to us for perfect rule, forgive me that so often I still prefer to go my own way instead of yours – as if I could possibly know better. Help me to live for you and serve you in every aspect of my life.

2 Chronicles 29 – Open the Doors

We begin several chapters on the reign of Hezekiah. The book of Kings barely mentions the religious reforms we read of here, once again illustrating the emphasis we've seen in Chronicles of the blessing from God when we serve a David-like king. King Ahaz had shut the temple doors and led Judah to match the pagan idolatries of Israel and the other nations. Hezekiah opened the doors and commissioned repairs. He galvanised the priests and Levites for the cleaning and restoration of the temple to make it ready for service. His speech in v3-11 makes it clear that their obedience is not so much demanded by the king but needful for proper worship of the LORD. The chapter ends in rejoicing.

Gracious Jesus, you are the one who opened the doors to heaven itself, who cleanses us and sanctifies us for worship in the Father's presence, being worthy of worship and adoration in your own right. Thank you that you revive my heart for worship and are always ready to receive me.

2 Chronicles 30 – Passover and Grace

This lovely chapter continues the spiritual revival of Judah under Hezekiah as he calls the whole nation to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. It is especially lovely that such grace was extended to anyone in Israel who had escaped the Assyrian deportations (v10-12). The priests and Levites were badly unprepared, and many of the people who participated were ceremonially unclean which was forbidden by law. Yet God is truly gracious, extending mercy to all who come to him by faith (v18-20). Jesus would later quote Hosea 6:6 to those who prioritised formal religion over love for God and humility of heart (e.g. Matthew 9:13). Like the previous chapter, this one also ends in rejoicing.

Saviour Jesus, great Passover Lamb of your people, it is sobering and thrilling that you see my heart. You know all my pride, all my self-deception, all my sinful desire – and it is you who works to cleanse and sanctify me by your presence and grace. I thank and praise you, Saviour and Lord.

2 Chronicles 31 – Mutual Encouragement

The emphatic covenantal connection between vibrant worship of the LORD and his abundant blessing on his people continues, seen this time in overflowing storerooms of offerings from the nation in provision for the priests and Levites. There's an important principle here for today's churches, worked out in a virtuous cycle: The priests and Levites were well provided for, enabling them to fulfil their duties of sacrifice, justice, and teaching with no concerns over material wellbeing. That meant that the nation was spiritually nourished, leading to grateful, joyful offerings of praise to the LORD. Spiritual leaders and those led work together for mutual encouragement in the LORD.

Lord Christ, thank you for the leaders you have placed in our church. Thank you for their leadership and teaching, their care and example. May your people be blessed by a growing knowledge and experience of you, generously and joyously contributing to the work of your kingdom.

2 Chronicles 32 – The King and Kingdom Blessing

The account in 2 Kings 18-20 follows Hezekiah's predicament relating to Assyria in more personal terms than we read here. The events of the taunting of Assyria's commander are set here in a frame of a Jerusalem who had experienced blessing under the LORD and were therefore inclined to trust their king. While there are passing remarks about Hezekiah's failings (v25, 31), the overwhelming picture is of a David-like king who led his people to covenant-faithful worship of the LORD, which in turn drew the promised blessings of abundant provision and protection. He is yet another reminder to Chronicles' first readers (the returning exiles) and its latest (us) of the blessings of God's kingdom rule.

Messiah Jesus, you have both called us and enabled us to come into your kingdom. Indeed, the Spirit has reoriented my spiritual desire to serve you and to know you. Forgive my foolish wrongdoings, Lord, and keep me true to you in thought, word, and action.

2 Chronicles 33 – Personal Revival

Back in 2 Kings 21, Manasseh's 55-year reign clearly led Judah into such complete apostasy from God that their rejection by God was inevitable (2 Kings 21:14). That picture is carried over to this chapter (e.g. v6, 9). It comes as a surprise, then, to read of Manasseh's repentance and prayer in chains, and the LORD is glorified in his grace. So we notice: (a) However comprehensive our sin and abandonment of God, he will always hear prayer offered in true humility and faith – and he will sometimes take us to a very dark place specifically so that we will pray. (b) Though the king turned to God, the people were less than wholehearted. Faith can't be outsourced to godly leaders.

Heavenly Father, you are perfect in wisdom and kind in discipline, leading us through the pain of confession and repentance to the joy of Christlikeness and peace. Forgive me my sins against you, Lord, and help me to grow closer to you myself.

2 Chronicles 34 – Wholesale Reform Needed

It's possible that Josiah's reforms began when he was so young because of guidance from the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah (based on chronology). The extension of the reforms into northern Israel was probably an indication of weakening Assyrian domination. What is clear is that although his father Manasseh had turned to the LORD in later life, it was too late to turn Judah round as a nation: Wholesale reform was needed, though even Josiah's efforts didn't change hearts in the longer term. Above all else, the discovery of the book of the covenant is most significant, not least in explaining the covenantal basis of ultimate exile.

Holy God, you are gracious to give us your word for us to read. We have these narratives that remind us of how you work through your people, and how we in turn are repeatedly rebellious. Teach me your word, Lord, and help me to know it and live by it for you.

2 Chronicles 35 – Passover and Failure

In Hezekiah's day, the priests and Levites had prepared Passover sacrifices for the people due to ceremonial uncleanness (Chapter 30), and the practice seems to have continued into Josiah's time. It's not certain why Josiah had to command the Levites to put the "holy ark" in the temple, but it was an important element of the restoration of true worship; it should never have been removed. Josiah's death, following such a whole-hearted devotion to the LORD, surprises us and would have rocked Judah. Jeremiah even composed a mourning song. Egypt's King Neco was heading north, past Judah, to aid Assyria against a growing Babylonian empire. His message to Josiah (v21) seems genuine, which explains Josiah's death as punishment for tragic rebellion.

Lord Christ, so many of these kings did so much good in your honour and for the great blessing of your people, only to fall away into error. Thank you that you are eternally the same. I pray for the Spirit's help to keep me faithful to you day by day to the very end.

2 Chronicles 36 – Not The End

Some of Judah's most tumultuous years are compressed into a chapter that gives the barest details. Chronicles was written for the returning exiles, for whom the events of the exile were all too well-known, so the thrust of the book has explained why they were exiles and how they must now live to enjoy God's blessing. The book of Jeremiah gives us rich detail about Jerusalem's final pre-exile years, including a promise that the exile would last 70 years (v21, Jer 29:10). The final verses are repeated as the opening of the book of Ezra, describing the return from exile in Babylon. So God's word is true and faithful: He keeps his covenant (in blessing and in curse), calls us to repentance (v15), and keeps all his promises to us.

Holy God, this book of Chronicles vindicates all your actions towards your people and also exposes our hearts as idolatrous and bent away from you. Thank you for your relentless grace, for your word that calls me to repentance and faith, for your patience and forgiveness. Lord God, keep me near you every day.

