

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Historical Books II

**1 AND 2 KINGS, 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES,
EZRA, NEHEMIAH**

WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD



Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Printed with Ecclesiastical Permission and Approved for Private or Instructional Use

Nihil Obstat: Rev. Msgr. Kevin Michael Quirk, JCD, JV
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: + Michael J. Bransfield
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston [West Virginia]
May 13, 2013

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, call 800-325-9521
www.liguori.org

Copyright © 2013 William A. Anderson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

p ISBN: 978-0-7648-2134-9

e ISBN: 978-0-7648-6840-5

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of The Redemptorists. To learn more about The Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14 / 6 5 4 3 2
First Edition



Contents

Acknowledgments 5

Note to the Reader 6

Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* 7

***Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading) 9**

How to Use This Bible-Study Companion 12

A Process for Sacred Reading 13

Group-Study Formats 14

Introduction: Historical Books II 17

Lesson 1 The First Book of Kings (I) 21

Group Study (1 Kings 1—3) 21

Lesson 2 The First Book of Kings (II) 29

Part 1: Group Study (1 Kings 4:1—13:10) 30

Part 2: Individual Study (1 Kings 13:11—22:54) 40

Lesson 3 The Second Book of Kings (I) 54

Part 1: Group Study (2 Kings 1—3) 55

Part 2: Individual Study (2 Kings 4—8) 60

NOTE: The length of each Bible section varies. Group leaders should combine sections as needed to fit the number of sessions in their program.

Lesson 4	The Second Book of Kings (II)	68
	<i>Part 1: Group Study (2 Kings 9—11)</i>	69
	<i>Part 2: Individual Study (2 Kings 12—25)</i>	75
Lesson 5	The First Book of Chronicles	87
	<i>Part 1: Group Study (1 Chronicles 1—14)</i>	88
	<i>Part 2: Individual Study (1 Chronicles 15—29)</i>	93
Lesson 6	The Second Book of Chronicles (I)	102
	<i>Part 1: Group Study (2 Chronicles 1—8)</i>	103
	<i>Part 2: Individual Study (2 Chronicles 9—16)</i>	106
Lesson 7	The Second Book of Chronicles (II)	112
	<i>Part 1: Group Study (2 Chronicles 17—21:3)</i>	113
	<i>Part 2: Individual Study: 2 Chronicles 21:4—36:23</i>	116
Lesson 8	The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah	128
	<i>Part 1: Group Study (Ezra 1—10)</i>	129
	<i>Part 2: Individual Study (Nehemiah 1—13)</i>	134
About the Author		143



Note to the Reader

IN THE BOOKS OF THIS VOLUME, some sections contain genealogies, specific details for worship, plans for construction of the temple, lists of commanders and warriors, and priestly duties. These were of interest to the readers of the Bible at the time the authors wrote their text, but they can be confusing, tedious, and less important to current readers. This current text will summarize these sections, but they will not be followed by a *lectio divina* reflection. The reader may wish to skip these sections in the Bible and read, instead, the summaries found in this book to gain a familiarity with the details that connect one segment of the story with the segments that follow.



Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson also has a second section except for the first for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Bible study isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us, and God gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. In an address before the Pontifical Biblical Commission shortly after his election, Pope Francis stressed that the Church's life and mission are founded on the Word of God, which is the soul of theology as well as the inspiration of all of Christian existence. A study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 16 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book

for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.
3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the Historical Books II and realize how these books offer spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote and edited the historical books, they didn't simply link random stories about the events of the Israelite community—but rather, placed them in a context that often stressed a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

NOTE: Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of Historical Books II, the book is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 7 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers 1 Kings 4 through 22. The study group reads and discusses only 11 through 13:10 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on 1 Kings 13:11 through 22:54 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the first format on page 14. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the second format on page 14, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio divina* (see page 9) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves

readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 9.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Historical Books II" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: Historical Books II" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance.

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Historical Books II

Read this overview before the first session.

A number of legends enrich the storied life of Saint Patrick, a saint known for his influence in converting the people of Ireland to Catholicism. Among the stories about Saint Patrick, one depicts the saint as ridding Ireland of all its snakes. As Ireland currently has no snakes, the story of Patrick's power over the crawly creatures seems feasible, but not very believable. The story, however, could be a symbolic message of Patrick's success in Ireland. When Patrick first arrived in Ireland, it was infested with paganism, often portrayed by some writers and artists with images of snakes. Since Patrick drove paganism from Ireland, it could be said that he symbolically drove snakes from Ireland.

In the historical books, the reader meets some of the major heroes and villains of Old Testament history. Just as the stories of Patrick's ridding Ireland of snakes ought not to be taken literally, so scholars concede that the contents of these books must be understood in the context of salvation history as a whole. The accounts are a result of many centuries of collected writings, oral traditions, and idealistic structuring of the historical situations and people mentioned within the text. The basic message and characters presented may be historical, but some of their exploits are highly embellished to teach a message about God's dealings with the kings and the people.

As is the case with other Old Testaments texts, the historical books are the product of several authors and editors who wrote at different times in history. The final writing and editing of the books took place around the

sixth or fifth century before Christ, long after the events described took place. They are meant to be primarily a theological presentation, not an exact recounting of historical facts.

Deuteronomistic History

The Deuteronomistic History includes the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and the Book of Deuteronomy. These books share a common emphasis centered on the need for the people to remain faithful to the covenant established between God and the Israelites. If the nation remains faithful to God's covenant, God will protect Israel and lead it to be victorious in battles. If the nation abandons the covenant, God will abandon Israel and allow other nations to plunder and conquer this nation established by God. Although we use the term *author* or *editor* throughout the book, as previously noted, these historical books were passed down orally from generation to generation, to eventually be recorded by many writers and editors.

Historical Context

Throughout the Old Testament, we read about the successes and tragedies endured by the Israelites. Besides invading the Promised Land, the Israelites themselves became victims of massive invasions throughout their history. After the death of Solomon, the Israelite kingdom divided into two, with the ten northern tribes forming the kingdom of Israel, and the two southern tribes creating the kingdom of Judah.

Around 721 BC, the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom, conquered the people, and sent many of them into exile in other captured countries. Likewise, they introduced those who remained in the land to those from captured countries that they might intermarry with the survivors. In doing so, the Assyrians deduced that they were protecting themselves against rebellions, since the people who intermarried could not always trust each other.

Members of the ten tribes of Israel forced into exile did not form communities in other countries and thus became absorbed by the people of these countries. As other countries swallowed them up, they became known to history as "the lost tribes of Israel." Some of the Israelites who

escaped from the invading Assyrians fled south to the kingdom of Judah, bringing their stories and traditions with them.

A number of Assyrians settled in Israel, especially in its capital, Samaria. With them they brought Assyrian gods and idols, and soon discovered that the remaining Israelites worshiped the one God of Israel. Being a superstitious people who feared offending any of the gods, the new inhabitants of the land not only worshiped their own gods, but began to include the God of the Israel in their worship. But over the next few centuries, many of them would be worshiping the God of the Israelites exclusively.

This mixed nation of Assyrians, Israelites, and other nations later became known as Samaritans. Because of their mixed ancestry and their practice of worshiping outside of Jerusalem, the Jews of Judah mistrusted and hated them. Their hatred can be clearly seen in the gospel narratives as Samaritans refused to give Jesus food because he was heading for Jerusalem. Jesus antagonized the Jewish audience of his own day by making a Samaritan the hero of some of his stories.

The rising Assyrian power frightened the kings of Judah, especially after they witnessed the capture of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. During the following century, the Jews would find themselves caught in the power struggle between the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians. Around 587 BC, the Babylonians had gained the upper hand and invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, dragging 10,000 or more people into exile, among them a large number of its professional and skilled inhabitants. They would be in exile in Babylon for more than fifty years before they would be allowed to return home. During the exile, the people of Judah kept their faith alive by sharing stories and messages gleaned from their life in Judah. Many of these stories were passed on orally, while some may have been written down.

Throughout their tragic history, the people recognized their punishment as resulting from their failure to remain faithful to the covenant. They needed to return to God, but each time they seemed to be turning back to the Lord, they would begin to worship the foreign gods of the countries they conquered.

1 and 2 Kings

1 and 2 Kings, like the books of Samuel, were originally a single book later divided into two by the Septuagint translators. The stories cover the period from the death of King David to the Babylonian captivity of Judah in 587 BC. Although obedience to the law of the Lord became a centerpiece of Israelite history, it is applied more stringently in the Books of Kings. When kings worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, they receive praise, but when they allow worship to take place outside of the Temple, or allow for idol worship, they face inevitable punishment from God. The success or failure of a king depended not on his management and military skills, but on his obedience to the covenant. Within the history of the kings, the reader meets two of the greatest prophets in Scripture, namely, Elijah and Elisha, sent by God to challenge the kings and the people to be faithful to the covenant.

Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah

1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah appear to be the work of a single author or editor, called the Chronicler. The books of Chronicles show a deep concern for dates, genealogies, temple liturgy, the priesthood, and the Davidic kingship of David. Like the books of Kings, the Chronicles were originally one book until the Septuagint translators divided it into two.

The name *chronicles* means “things omitted,” which is a reference to their content. The books review much of the material found in the books of Kings and expound on it, with a greater emphasis on liturgical and cultic concerns. The books picture David as a devout Israelite, majorly concerned with the construction of a temple and all it entails.

Ezra and Nehemiah

The Book of Ezra opens with the decree of Cyrus allowing the people of Judah to return home from Babylon to build the temple. The Book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah asking his master, King Artaxerxes, to allow him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. Central to the Book of Nehemiah is the extended reading of the law of Moses for the people. The Books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah do not belong to the Deuteronomistic History.



LESSON 2

The First Book of Kings (II)

I KINGS 4—22

Thus King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And the whole world sought audience with Solomon, to hear the wisdom God had put into his heart” (10:23–24).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Context

Part 1: 1 Kings 4:1—13:10 From chapters 4 to 10, the Deuteronomistic author writes about the administrative and constructive skills of Solomon and the wealth and strength of the Israelite nation. Chapters 11 to 13:10 describe the end of Solomon’s reign and the final and lasting split between the tribes of the north (the kingdom of Israel) and the tribes of the south (the kingdom of Judah). Rehoboam, a son of Solomon, became king after Solomon and chose to tax the tribes of northern Israel more heavily than his father had done. This incited the ten northern tribes to rebel against him. Jeroboam became king of the kingdom of Israel, while Rehoboam remained as king of the kingdom of Judah. To avoid the need for the people to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship, King Jeroboam of Israel established two sites for worship in the northern kingdom. A prophet predicted that the altars set up by King Jeroboam would lead to destruction for the nation.

Part 2: 1 Kings 13:11—22:54 The Lord sent a prophet to challenge Jeroboam’s rejection of the Lord, but the prophet was punished because he did not follow God’s commands. A list of kings and their exploits follow upon this split of the two kingdoms. In the northern kingdom, Elijah was

the great prophet sent by the Lord who confronted Jezebel and King Ahab, who is eventually defeated by the king of Aram.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (1 KINGS 4:1—13:10)

After privately reading chapters 4–10 in the following commentary or in the Bible, participants in the study group will be prepared to begin the session with 1 Kings 11:1.

Chapters 4–10. *The reader may choose to skip these pages in the Bible and read the following commentary. See Note to the Reader, page 6.*

Solomon's kingdom became the largest and most powerful kingdom in the history of Israel. Because of the vastness of his reign, Solomon had to establish an organized government to manage the kingdom. He named priests, scribes, a leader for the army, governors, a master of the palace, and a manager for the forced labor that would be used for his many projects. The forced labor could consist of slaves or a number of people from among the tribes who were chosen to work for a period of time on the construction sites.

Solomon chose twelve governors and divided the land into twelve districts, placing each governor over a district. Each district had the duty of supplying food for the king and his household for one month each year. Due to the enormous demands to feed the hundreds of people in the king's household for a month, the governors had to place a heavy burden on the people in their charge. Solomon had 40,000 horses for chariots and 12,000 horsemen, all needing provisions which the people had to provide.

Solomon's reputation for wisdom spread to other kingdoms. He uttered 3,000 proverbs and wrote a 1,005 songs. His wisdom included knowledge of all the plants and beasts of the area. Since Solomon lived in a peaceful era, he had time to give his attention to building a house (temple) for the Lord. By this time in history, the Phoenicians had moved into the land that was once the land

of Canaan, and their culture had a great influence on the type of temple Solomon constructed. Unfortunately for the Israelites, the gods of the Phoenicians would also lure some of them away from worship of the one true God and lead the Lord to abandon the support provided in the past.

When Hiram, the king of Tyre, heard that Solomon had been anointed king, he agreed to cut down cedars in Lebanon for the building of the temple. His plan was to bring the trees to the sea and make them into rafts that could be dismantled at whatever landing Solomon designated. In return, Hiram would receive from Solomon enough wheat for his household and approximately 2,000 gallons of hand-pressed olive oil every year. A large portion of the people's olive oil that came from the oil presses had a good portion of debris in it, but hand-pressed oil meant the oil Hiram received would be pure and free of debris.

Solomon's workforce was massive. He sent to the construction sites forced laborers from all over Israel in groups of 10,000 men a month. The governors had the duty of providing men from their area for forced labor. Solomon had 70,000 men to do the carrying needed and 80,000 stonecutters in the mountains with 3,300 supervisors in charge of the workers. Large blocks of stone quarried from the mountains served as a foundation for the Temple.

In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began to build the house of the Lord, which took seven years. Because of the sacredness of the Temple, they could not use any iron tools. The author describes the individual areas of the temple, including a porch, windows and lattices, the lowest story, an entrance to the middle story, the inside walls and flooring, and a cedar roof. It was an enormous structure. During the construction, the Lord again promised to be with Solomon and his family if he remained faithful.

In the innermost part of the temple, Solomon set up an inner sanctuary to house the Ark of the Covenant and built a cedar altar there. He covered the whole area with gold, including the altar. In the innermost part of the Temple, the holy of holies, where the ark

would be housed, he had his workers place two large images of cherubs, which would flank the placement of the ark. The author tells us that the building of the house of the Lord took seven years, while the building of the house of Solomon, the palace, took thirteen years.

Solomon gathered the leaders of the people and the people of Israel in Jerusalem for the dedication of the Temple. The priests and Levites brought the ark and all the sacred vessels with them, and Solomon, along with the people, offered a large number of sheep and oxen to be sacrificed. The priests placed the Ark of the Covenant in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, now known as the holy of holies. When the priests left the house of the Lord, the cloud filled the Temple, symbolizing the Lord's presence.

Solomon blessed the people, praising the Lord as the one who is faithful to the covenant and praying that his descendants would always remain as kings of all Israel. He prayed that the sinner who comes before the Lord in the Temple and does not repent be punished, but the one who does repent be acquitted. He also prayed that if the Israelites are defeated because of some sin and seek a return to the Lord, that the Lord will forgive them and return the land to them. If there is no rain or famine, he prayed that the Lord forgive the people's sin and bless the land. He continued by praying for blessings on foreigners, for those about to enter battle, and for all who come to the Temple petitioning for help, and he begged the Lord to listen to the Israelites whenever they prayed.

Solomon reminded the people that they must be totally devoted to the Lord by remaining faithful to the Lord's precepts and commandments. The king offered 22,000 oxen as a communion sacrifice to the Lord. The people celebrated for seven days, and on the eighth day, Solomon dismissed them and they returned to their tents. These seven days coincide with the seven-day Jewish Feast of Booths.

That night, the Lord appeared to Solomon, informing him that the Temple would be the place for making offerings and sacrifices. The Lord promised that any natural disaster or pestilence that falls upon the people because of their sinfulness will be forgiven if they

humble themselves and pray, turning from their evil ways. Then the Lord will hear the prayers prayed in the Temple. In the vision, the Lord accepted the Temple as the Lord's house and consecrated it, promising that his heart and eyes would always be upon the Temple.

The author has the Lord repeat again the gift that Solomon's offspring will continue to serve as king as long as they remain faithful, but if they do not remain faithful, then the Lord will uproot the people from the land, and the Temple will be rejected by the Lord. When people see the destruction of the land and the Temple, they will ask why the Lord has done this, and the answer will be that the people had abandoned the Lord. Although the events described here pertain to the time of Solomon, the author of this portion of the Book of Kings is writing after the Babylonian invasion of the kingdom of Judah, which devastated Jerusalem and the Temple.

After twenty years, during which time Solomon built the Temple, he built up cities given back to him by the King of Tyre, who had received them earlier from Solomon in payment for the timber and gold received from the king (1 Kings 9:10–14). The King of Tyre was not satisfied with the condition of the cities and returned them to Solomon. In the meanwhile, Solomon conquered and built up other cities. He conscripted men from the nations he conquered and forced them to work on these cities. Since the Israelites were Solomon's warriors, he did not use them for forced labor in these conquered cities.

Solomon continued to remain faithful to the Lord, following all the prescriptions of the Law and using David's division of the people as David commanded. His work on the Temple and cities was successfully accomplished, a sign that the Lord was with him. Solomon built a fleet of ships used for commerce.

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's reputation and traveled to Jerusalem to test him with subtle questions. A large entourage, along with camels bearing spices, gold, and precious stones, accompanied her. She discussed with Solomon all that was on her mind, and Solomon answered her questions with his exceptional wisdom and knowledge.

When the queen experienced Solomon's wisdom and saw the house he built, the food at his table, his waiters, his cupbearers and their attire, and the burnt offering he sacrificed in the Temple, it took her breath away. She expressed her astonishment at what she saw, saying that she heard about Solomon and did not believe all she heard, but as she now witnessed all he had done, she declared that what she heard was not even half of what she observed. She blessed his household and the Lord, the God of Solomon, whose love of Israel made him king to reign with judgment and justice. The Queen of Sheba gave him a large quantity of gold, spices, and precious stones. The abundance of spices was far more than anyone had ever given Solomon. Solomon gave the queen all that she desired and asked for, which amounted to more than she brought to the king. She then left for her own country.

Solomon continued to prosper and become more powerful. He received an overwhelming abundance of gold each year, along with the tolls and gifts from the kings of Arabia who visited him. His shields were made of beaten gold, his throne was ivory, his footstool gold, and his drinking and eating vessels also were gold. Since silver was considered as nothing in Solomon's time, nothing was made of silver. Once every three years, the fleet from Tarshish would come with gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys.

The whole world sought audiences with Solomon to experience the wisdom God had given him, and they all brought their yearly tribute, valuable gifts in abundance. Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses, chariots, and 12,000 horses. Silver became common as stones in Jerusalem.

Read aloud 1 Kings 11:1—13:10.

11:1–43 Threats to Solomon's Kingdom

Solomon loved many foreign women whom the Lord forbade the Israelites to take as wives or concubines. The Lord feared these women would turn the hearts of the Israelites to a worship of their gods, which is what happened

to Solomon. He built places of worship for the gods of these women, which included the gods of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. The Lord previously appeared to Solomon twice and warned him not to abandon the covenant, and now, as a result of Solomon's rejection of the Lord by worshiping other gods, the Lord proclaimed that Solomon's kingdom would be torn away from him.

Although the kingdom would be torn away from Solomon's descendants, the Lord added that for the sake of David, Solomon's father, it would not happen during Solomon's lifetime. Also, for the sake of David and Jerusalem, the Lord promised not to take away the whole kingdom from Solomon's descendants.

The Lord then raised up rivals against Solomon, including a man named Hadad and another named Rezon. Hadad, as a young boy, had escaped from a slaughter of his nation during an invasion by Joab, David's commander. He escaped to Egypt, and when he heard that David and Joab were dead, he wanted to return to Judah to avenge his family. A man named Rezon escaped a slaughter of his tribe by David and led a marauding party against Solomon. Both Hadad and Rezon harassed Solomon's armies as long as Solomon lived.

Solomon had a servant named Jeroboam who rebelled against him. At an earlier time, Solomon noticed that Jeroboam was a competent and hard worker, so he made him an officer in charge of a group of forced laborers.

One day, Jeroboam met a prophet named Ahijah, who was from Shiloh, which was a principal place for worship before David captured Jerusalem (1 Samuel 1:3). The prophet removed his new coat, tore it in twelve pieces, and told Jeroboam to take ten for himself. The prophet said the Lord revealed to him that ten tribes of Israel would be torn away from Solomon's kingdom and only one shall remain for the line of David because Solomon had turned his back on the Lord and was worshiping foreign gods. In reality, two tribes belonged to the south, namely Benjamin and Judah. Perhaps the author points only to one because the larger and more powerful tribe of Judah eventually absorbed the tribe of Benjamin.

The Lord revealed to the prophet that the kingdom would be taken from Solomon's son and given to Jeroboam. Like Solomon, Jeroboam must remain faithful to the Lord and follow the Lord's commands as David

did. The prophet told him if he remained faithful, the Lord would build a lasting house for him, which means that Jeroboam's descendants would follow him as kings of the northern tribes. Solomon, apparently aware of the prophecy, attempted to have Jeroboam killed, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he remained until the death of Solomon. Solomon reigned for forty years, and his son Rehoboam succeeded him as king.

12:1–25 A Divided Kingdom

Rehoboam went to Shechem, which was the major city of the northern tribes where the Lord and the people renewed a covenant and where stones were erected as a witness to what took place there. All of Israel came to make Rehoboam king.

Upon the death of Solomon, Jeroboam safely returned to Israel from Egypt and became the spokesman for the northern tribes. He promised Rehoboam that the northern tribes would remain as his faithful servants if he lifted the harsh servitude and taxes imposed on them by Solomon. For Solomon had taxed the northern tribes heavily, a tax which included provisions as well as hundreds of thousands of workers for forced labor. The southern tribe of Judah did not have to pay these taxes.

Rehoboam wisely asked for three days to consider the request and sought advice from the elders and the young men who grew up with him. The elders advised him to lighten the load, explaining that the favorable response would lead the northern tribes to be his servants forever. The young men, however, advised Rehoboam to assert his authority and to tell the northern tribes that he will exact more from them than his father, and that his father beat them with whips but that he will beat them with scorpions. This reference to scorpions may be a reference to a more vicious type of whip.

As the Lord and the prophet Ahijah predicted, the northern tribes rebelled when Rehoboam returned to them with this news, and they made Jeroboam their king. They renounced all connections with David and his offspring. The unity of the northern tribes with the south was fragile under the reigns of David and Solomon, but now the complete break finally took place. They knew David and Solomon had favored Judah, the land of their birth, so with no links to Judah, they could totally break away from the Davidic monarchy.

King Rehoboam placed Adoram in charge of the forced labor in Israel. When he went to the northern tribes of Israel to perform his duties, the people of Israel rebelled and stoned him to death. Rehoboam, who was away from Judah at the time, had to flee back to Jerusalem. With the final split between the northern tribes and the southern tribes, Rehoboam continued to reign over the kingdom of Judah in the south, while Jeroboam reigned over the kingdom of Israel in the north. The kingdoms of Judah and Israel would now have separate lines of kings, which is the focus of the first and second books of Kings.

Upon Rehoboam's return to Jerusalem, he assembled an army to wage war against the kingdom of Israel, but a prophet tells them that the Lord brought about the split and they must not enter into battle with the kingdom of Israel. All the people of Judah obeyed the word of the Lord. In this passage, the prophet did mention the tribe of Benjamin as being one of the two tribes of Judah.

12:26—13:10 Jeroboam's Cultic Innovations

Jeroboam feared that if the people kept going to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, they would eventually reunite with the kingdom of Judah and kill him. To avoid this, he made images of two golden calves and established places for sacrifice in Bethel in the far south of the northern kingdom and Dan, which is in the far north of Israel. He established his own priesthood from among men who were not Levites. The calves may have been an image of a type of footstool or mount for the one true God, but the Deuteronomistic author, who favors the southern kingdom, speaks of the golden calves as idols. Sanctuaries had existed in Bethel and Dan in past episodes of the Israelite people.

The story of Jeroboam and the northern kingdom has many similarities to the Book of Exodus. Just as the Lord hardened the heart of the Pharaoh in Egypt so that he would not listen to Moses, the Lord likewise hardened the heart of Rehoboam so that he would not listen to the advice of the elders. The Israelites in Egypt were enduring forced labor, and the people of the northern kingdom were likewise enduring this under Solomon. When the people complained about the burdens of forced labor, Pharaoh increased their burden. Likewise in the northern kingdom the people complained

to Rehoboam, and he threatened to make their burden and suffering even greater than they had endured under his father. Jeroboam came from Egypt, just as the Israelite nation came out of Egypt to begin their sojourn in the desert. Jeroboam, like the Israelites in the desert, made golden calves as a centerfold as the people worshiped the Lord.

Jeroboam, realizing the importance of feasts for the people, established a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, similar to the feast of Tabernacles that was celebrated in the seventh month. The author of the passage mentions that Jeroboam chose the date arbitrarily, meaning it had no significance for the people of the south. On that day, Jeroboam offered a sacrifice at Bethel.

The Lord sent a man of God, meaning a prophet, from Judah to Bethel where Jeroboam was burning incense at the altar. The man of God prophesied against the altar, declaring that Josiah, a descendant of David, would slaughter the false priests, and as a sign from the Lord, the altar would be destroyed and the ashes on it scattered. When Jeroboam heard the prophecy, he stretched out his hand toward the prophet and shouted, “Seize him.” Immediately his hand withered so that he was unable to withdraw it. In the same way that his hand withered, so would his hold on the kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam begged the prophet to entreat the Lord “your God” to restore his hand. The phrase *your God* seems to show that Jeroboam still believed there was more than one god. The prophet healed Jeroboam’s hand, and the author adds that the altar was destroyed and the ashes scattered as a sign that the man spoke for the Lord. This happened at a later age. The episode shows the weakness of the King of Israel before the man of God, indicating the Lord is still king of all Israel.

Jeroboam invited the man of God to eat and drink with him, perhaps to make amends, but the prophet responded that the Lord ordered him not to eat or drink with Jeroboam and not to return the way he came. He departed by another road and did not go back the way he came. Ironically, the prophet comes from Judah, another sign that the author of the text is biased for the southern kingdom.

In an earlier passage, when Rehoboam, the king of Judah, and his army planned to attack the northern kingdom, they received word from

a prophet that the northern kingdom had the approval of God. When an earlier prophet spoke to Jeroboam predicting he would be king, he told him the Lord would give his family a lasting kingdom as long as Jeroboam remained faithful to the Lord. Because of Jeroboam's sin, the man of God in this passage showed that the Lord no longer approved of Jeroboam.

Review Questions

1. Why did the tribes of the north so quickly split from the southern kingdom?
2. How do the events of the split between the northern and southern kingdoms resemble the Exodus story? Can you list some comparisons?
3. What led Rehoboam to choose to follow the advice of the younger men in placing hardships on the tribes of the north?
4. Why does the Lord offer support to the northern kingdom of Israel?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 9)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of the Bible, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 9 for further instruction.)

Threats to Solomon's Kingdom (11:1–43)

Solomon lived in a highly superstitious era when people feared insulting any of the gods. He rationalized that he could worship other gods and still have the support of the God of Israel. The warning for us is that we, too, must remain faithful to the one true God and that our greed, lust, and other sinful ways are not acceptable to the Lord.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

A Divided Kingdom (12:1–25)

Jesus tells the story of a man who owes a large sum of money to his master. He falls before his master and begs for forgiveness of the debt rather than face punishment. The master, who is God, forgives the man, but the man goes out and throttles another man who owes him far less. When the master hears about this, he punishes the man he forgave earlier. In the same way, God expects us to deal with others in the way God deals with us. Rehoboam's failure to forgive as the Lord forgives led to a punishment that would divide Israel into two kingdoms.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Jeroboam's Cultic Innovations (12:26—13:10)

Jeroboam not only sinned by establishing places of worship for the people of the north, but he was rejecting worship in the Temple of Jerusalem, which the Lord had consecrated and designated as the central place for worship. In this way, he acted as though he were as powerful as God.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (1 KINGS 13:11—22:54)

Day 1: The Fall of Jeroboam (13:11—14:20)

When an old prophet in Bethel heard about the man of God who warned Jeroboam about the altar he built, he directed his sons to saddle his donkey so he could go after the man. Upon reaching him, he invited him to return with him to eat and drink, but the man told him that the Lord had ordered him not to go back to eat or drink. The prophet told the man of God that he too was a prophet and falsely convinced him that an angel of the Lord had sent him. The man of God innocently returned with the prophet. While the two were eating and drinking, the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought the man back, and the prophet suddenly cried out that the man of God would not be buried in the grave of his ancestors because he had disobeyed the Lord's command.

A short time after the man of God left the prophet's home, word came to the prophet that the body of a man was sprawled out by the roadside with a lion standing beside it. The prophet, presuming that a lion had mangled the body of the man, rode out and found the donkey and the lion standing next to the body of the man of God. Since it would be unusual for a lion to stand beside a dead body and a donkey without eating the man and the donkey, the scene implied that the Lord was protecting the body of the man of God.

The prophet took the body of the man of God back to the city and buried him in the prophet's own grave. Because he believed that all the Lord spoke to the man of God concerning the destruction of the altar at Bethel and all the temples of Samaria would be fulfilled, he ordered his sons to bury the man of God with respect. The message of this story showed that even prophets would be destroyed if they disobeyed the Lord.

Despite the warnings given to Jeroboam, he still refused to repent, appointing his own priests for the places of worship from among those who requested the position. They were not Levites, the tribe selected by the Lord to be priests.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In the story of the man of God who returned with the prophet to eat and drink, the Scriptures continue to illustrate the cunning way evil works in the world. The man who posed as a friendly prophet actually led the man of God to sin against the Lord by deceiving him. The Lord chooses each one of us for a particular mission in life, but in fulfilling our mission, we must remain faithful to all that the Lord commands.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: Kings of Judah and Israel (14:21—16)

Jeroboam's son became sick, and Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah, who first predicted that Jeroboam would be the king of the northern kingdom. Jeroboam's wife took some bread, cakes, and honey as a gift for the prophet. Before she arrived, the Lord told the prophet that Jeroboam's wife would come to him in disguise to consult him about her son who was sick.

When Jeroboam's wife arrived, the prophet, who was now blind, invited her in, addressing her as "wife of Jeroboam," which informed her that her disguise did not work. The prophet told her that the Lord had bitter news for her to bring to Jeroboam. He told her to tell Jeroboam that the Lord tore the kingdom of David away from Judah and gave it to Jeroboam and his descendants for as long as they remained faithful to the Lord. The Lord, however, declared that Jeroboam was not as faithful as David. The prophet accused him of doing more evil than all who came before him, making for himself other gods and molten images and casting the Lord behind his back. The accusation that each king performed deeds more evil than those who went before him will be repeated often in the history of the kings of Israel.

As a punishment for Jeroboam's sins, the Lord informed the prophet that all the males of Jeroboam's family would be cut off and that his house would be burned as dung is burned, a lowly way of speaking of Jeroboam's house. Dogs will devour those of Jeroboam's family who die in the city, and birds will devour those of Jeroboam's family who die in the country. The prophet informed Jeroboam's wife that Jeroboam's son would die when she went into the city, which happened the moment she crossed the threshold of her house.

The prophet also predicted the unsettled future of the northern kingdom, portraying it as a reed tossed about in the water. The history of the kingdom of Israel will be like that reed in the water, and Israel will be plucked out and scattered beyond the river, a reference to the Assyrian invasion of the kingdom of Israel in 721 BC. The Lord will punish the people for the *asherahs*, that is, images of the false female fertility gods, and for the sins of Jeroboam and the sins he caused the people to commit, a reference apparently to the ongoing worship of false gods begun by Jeroboam. Jeroboam reigned for twenty-two years, and his son Nadab succeeded him.

While Jeroboam was sinning against the Lord as king of the northern kingdom, the king and people of Judah angered the Lord even more by their sins, worshiping false gods and practicing all the abominations of the people whom the Israelite nation conquered. The king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and stole many of its treasures, including the golden shields cre-

ated under Solomon. King Rehoboam replaced them with bronze shields, which the guards on duty at the entrance of the royal house held and carried when the king went to the house of the Lord. The Book of Kings says very little about Rehoboam, who reigned seventeen years.

In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam's reign in Israel, Abijam became king of Judah and reigned for three years. Although he sinned as his father did, the Lord did not take the kingdom of Judah away from him for the sake of David. The two kingdoms continued to war against each other. Just as Rehoboam used to fight against Jeroboam, so Abijam continued to battle with Jeroboam.

In the twentieth year of King Jeroboam of Israel, Asa became king of Judah and reigned for forty-one years. During his first two years as king, he had to contend with King Jeroboam. Unlike the kings before him, he was like David and did what was right with the Lord, casting the pagan priests from the land and removing all the idols made by his ancestors. He went so far as to depose his grandmother from the role of queen mother because she made an abominable object for *asherah*, the female mother-goddess, that he destroyed.

Nadab, son of Jeroboam, became king of Israel in the second year of King Asa of Judah. Nadab sinned as extensively as his father and lost his kingship when Baasha led an uprising and defeated Nadab, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ahijah that the house of Jeroboam would lose its right to the kingly line. In the third year of Asa, king of Judah, Baasha became king for twenty-four years and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, following the sinful ways of Jeroboam. Once Baasha became king, he killed the entire house of Jeroboam.

Jehu, a prophet sent by the Lord, prophesied that the house of Baasha would be burnt up and his house would follow the fate of Jeroboam. The Lord declared that the dogs would devour those of Baasha's line who die in the city and the birds will devour those who die in the field, a prophecy similar to that leveled against Jeroboam by the prophet Ahijah (14:11). It was apparently a common curse against those who turned against the Lord.

In the twenty-sixth year of Asa, Elah, son of Baasha became king of Israel for two years. His servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, killed Elah in the twenty-seventh year of Asa, king of Judah, and succeeded

Elah as king. He killed the entire household of Baasha, sparing no one, as predicted by the word of the Lord because of the sins of Elah. This ended the line of Baasha.

When word of the rebellion of Zimri reached Omri, the commander of the army of the kingdom of Israel, he led all of Israel in a rebellion against Zimri. When Zimri realized that Omri, who had the stronger army, captured the city in which he resided, he went into the citadel of the king's house and burned it down over him. His suicide came as a result of his unwillingness to walk in the way of the Lord.

In the midst of these rebellions, the kingdom of Israel became divided in two after the death of Zimri, with some following a leader named Tibni, and others following Omri. Omri reunited the kingdom of Israel by defeating Tibni. Omri became king in the thirty-first year of Asa and reigned for twelve years. He bought the mountain of Samaria and established the city of Samaria, but he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, worse than any of his predecessors. Like others before him, he followed the sinful ways of Jeroboam and provoked the Lord to anger by his support and worship of idols.

Ahab, the son of Omri, became king of Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa, king of Judah. Like leaders before him, he followed the sinful ways of Jeroboam, and he did even worse when he married Jezebel, a daughter of the king of the Sidonians. As a result, Ahab began to serve Baal and worship him, the central idol of Jezebel and her clan. Now, besides the temple and altar to the golden calves at Bethel, Ahab established an altar in Samaria to Baal.

When Joshua destroyed Jericho at the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land, he placed a curse on the man who would attempt to rebuild the city of Jericho, at the cost of his firstborn when he laid its foundation and the cost of his youngest son when he set up its gates (see Joshua 6:26). During the reign of Ahab, Hiel from Bethel rebuilt Jericho, laying the foundation at the cost of his eldest son and setting up gates at the cost of his youngest son, thus fulfilling the curse leveled by Joshua on the man who would rebuild Jericho.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The punishments endured by the unfaithful kings of the kingdom of Israel portray the Lord as a jealous Lord who refuses to tolerate the worship of false gods. The kings and people made a covenant with the Lord, and the Lord expected them to remain faithful to the covenant if they wanted God's help. The struggles of the kings and people of the kingdom of Israel teach us the importance of remaining faithful to a covenant made with the Lord.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: The Story of Elijah (17—19)

The intriguing story of Elijah the prophet begins abruptly with Elijah predicting to Ahab that the Lord had decreed that there would be no dew or rain except at the word of Elijah. Elijah was a prophet of the kingdom of Israel who identified himself as a *servant of the Lord*. In the story of Israel's kings, the Lord already demonstrated the power of the God of Israel over false idols and the punishment of the kings who worshiped these idols. The story of Elijah presents the prophet as a servant of the Lord who entered into conflict with Baal, the major false god.

The Lord directed Elijah to travel to an area east of the Jordan, to the Wadi Cherith, an unknown wadi to modern readers. A wadi is a riverbed that fills up with water in a time of rain. The Lord cared for Elijah by providing the water Elijah needed for survival in the Wadi Cherith and by sending ravens to him each morning and evening with bread and meat. The scene is reminiscent of the scene in the Exodus where the Lord provided meat and bread for the Israelites during their desert journey under the leadership of Moses (see Exodus 16:8). The difference is that the Israelites in the desert received meat and bread only once a day, while Elijah received both twice a day.

When the wadi dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to Zarephath, which is within the kingdom of Israel and a stronghold for Baal worship. At Zarephath, a widow, whom the Lord had commanded to feed Elijah, was

picking up sticks to prepare something to eat for herself and her son, using the last of their flour and oil. She stated that after they ate, they would have nothing left and would therefore die. Elijah predicted that after she prepared a cake (bread) for him and later prepared bread for herself and her son, her flour and oil would not dry up to the day the Lord sends rain on the earth. After she did as Elijah directed, she and her household had enough to eat for a long time.

Sometime after this, the son of the woman became sick and died. The woman questioned why Elijah had done this, asking whether her son died as a result of some guilt from her earlier life. Elijah took her son to an upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed. He prayed, asking if the Lord intended to afflict the widow by killing her son. Stretching himself on the child three times, he begged the Lord to allow breath to return to the child. The child began to breathe, and Elijah took him and presented him to the widow.

The story illustrates the power of the God of Israel who controlled nature by bringing a drought over the land and feeding Elijah with meat brought to him by ravens. It also demonstrates the Lord's power over life and death in raising the widow's son to life. In the end, the widow proclaimed that Elijah was truly a man of God and that he spoke the word of the Lord.

In the third year of the drought, the Lord instructed Elijah to visit Ahab so that the Lord may end the drought. Ahab, like many of the Israelites, apparently saw no contradiction in worshiping both Baal and the Lord of the Israelites. To them, the Lord of the Israelites was one god among many. The Baal worshipers believed Baal was the one who controlled the rain. The message of Elijah to Ahab about the Lord controlling the rain would be a message about the power of the one true Lord over Baal.

The famine in Samaria was so severe that Ahab summoned the master of his palace, named Obadiah, to go with him to find grass and water to keep the horses and donkeys alive. Ahab went alone in one direction, while Obadiah went alone in another. Obadiah, who revered the Lord, previously hid and fed a hundred prophets in two caves when Jezebel was killing all the prophets. While seeking grass and water for Ahab's animals, Obadiah met Elijah, who directed him to go and report to Ahab that Elijah had arrived.

Although Obadiah knew how powerful Elijah was, he asked why Elijah wanted to send him to instant death at the hands of Ahab. He pointed to his deeds of saving two groups of fifty prophets each in two caves at a great risk. He now feared that the Spirit of the Lord would carry Elijah away, and when Ahab did not find Elijah, he would kill Obadiah. Elijah swore that he would show himself to Ahab.

Ahab came and accused Elijah of being a disturber of Israel. Elijah, in turn, accused Ahab of disturbing Israel by following the ways of his fathers in forsaking the Lord and worshiping Baal. Elijah challenged Ahab to call all of Israel to Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah who eat at the table of Jezebel. Ahab accepted the challenge and did as Elijah requested.

Later, as the people came to Elijah, he reproached them, asking how long they were going to straddle the line between the Lord of Israel and Baal. The people, not wishing to offend any of the gods, remained silent.

In the presence of the prophets of Baal, Elijah requested that two young bulls be brought. They were to cut one into pieces and place it on the wood, but start no fire. He allowed the 450 prophets to choose whichever bull they desired. Elijah prepared the other bull and placed it on his pile of wood. He then directed the 450 prophets of Baal to call upon Baal to start the fire. From morning till noon, they called upon Baal to hear their plea, and from noon until the usual time set for offerings, they slashed themselves until blood gushed over them. Elijah taunted them, saying that Baal may be busy, on a journey, or asleep. At the end, there was no sound, no one answering or listening.

Elijah then repaired the destroyed altar of the Lord, built an altar with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and dug a large trench around the altar. After arranging the wood, he cut up the young bull and placed it on the wood. Three times he directed the people to pour water from four stone water jars over the offering. When the time for offering the sacrifice came, Elijah called upon the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel to answer his prayer so that all people would recognize the power of the God of Israel and that Elijah was the Lord's servant. The Lord sent fire down to devour everything, including the stones, dust, and water. The people fell prostrate, crying out that the Lord is God.

Elijah then had the people seize the prophets of Baal and bring them to a wadi, where Elijah slaughtered them. Elijah told Ahab to go up and to eat and drink, which would be a sign of celebration, since there was the sound of rain. Ahab did as Elijah directed, and Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel, crouched down in prayer, and seven times sent his servant to look out over the sea. When the servant saw a cloud the size of a man's hand, Elijah sent a servant to instruct Ahab to mount up and go before the rain stopped him. When the rain began to fall, Ahab rushed off in his chariot toward a town named Jezreel, but Elijah, through the power of the Lord, girded up his garments and ran past Ahab as far as Jezreel.

Instead of receiving news that Elijah had convinced Ahab and Jezebel that the Lord of Israel is the one, powerful God of all, Jezebel threatened Elijah's life when she heard what he had done to the prophets of Baal, saying she would enact the same on him. Elijah fled into the wilderness and sat under a tree, brooding to the point of asking for death.

Elijah soon fell asleep, but he suddenly awoke, startled, when a messenger bade him to arise and eat. He found a cake and a jug of water at his head, which he ate and drank. Elijah laid down a second time, but the angel of the Lord again directed him to eat and drink so that the journey would not be too much for him. Strengthened by the food and drink, Elijah walked forty days and forty nights to Horeb. The northern tribes called the mountain on which Moses received the commandments Mount Horeb, while the southern tribes referred to this same mountain as Mount Sinai.

Elijah took shelter in a cave, and the Lord asked him why he was there. He answered that he was always zealous for the Lord, but the Israelites destroyed the Lord's altars and killed the prophets so that Elijah was the only prophet left, and they now sought his life. The Lord directed him to go out and stand on the mountain, telling him that the Lord will pass by. There was at first a strong and violent wind crushing the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. An earthquake followed the wind, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Fire followed the earthquake, but the Lord was not in the fire. When a light, whispering sound came, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went to stand at the entrance of the cave.

The Lord gave three orders to Elijah. God told him to anoint Hazael as king of Aram, anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha as a prophet

to succeed him. Elijah was instructed that he will live only long enough to fulfill the third of these three. Elisha will later fulfill the first two.

Elijah met Elisha as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. When Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha, an invitation to discipleship, Elisha asked Elijah to allow him to go and kiss his family, promising that he will then go with him. Elisha showed his complete change of life by slaughtering his oxen, using the plowing equipment for fuel to boil them, and feeding the meat to the people. He then went off as a servant of Elijah.

The story of Elijah contains events similar to those found in the Book of Exodus. Elijah journeyed forty days and forty nights, just as the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness. He went to Mount Horeb, which was also known as Mount Sinai, where Moses met with the Lord. And Elijah met the Lord on the mountain as Moses did. When Moses met with the Lord, there were winds, earthquakes, and fire, but Elijah did not find the Lord in the wind, earthquake, and fire, but in a light, silent sound. Elisha became a servant of Elijah as Joshua became a servant of Moses.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Elijah had to confront the evil of idol worship, and his confrontations brought him pain to the point of leaving him depressed. But the Lord blessed him just when he was at his lowest point and provided for his physical, emotional, and spiritual needs by granting him food and drink and appearing to him on Mount Horeb. The Lord does not promise us that we will have an easy life if we remain faithful, but we trust that the Lord will support us as God supported Elijah in his darkest moments.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: The Story of Ahab (20—22)

When the king of Aram sent messages to Ahab, the king of Israel, he told him that all of Ahab's silver, gold, wives, and children were his, meaning he expected to easily defeat the army of Israel. The king of Israel agreed to surrender, but the king of Aram sent a later message saying that not only

would he take the silver and gold, wives and children, but he would ransack the land of Israel and take whatever he believed to be valuable. The elders advised Ahab not to give in, and Ahab sent the messengers back with his refusal to surrender, saying that one who puts on the armor should not boast like the one who takes it off. In other words, boasting about winning a battle before the battle begins is not as good a boast as the one who can boast while taking it off, that is, the victor. Ahab fought the king of Aram and defeated his army.

The king believed the reason Ahab won was because their God was a God of the mountain. He decided to attack them on a plain, but the army of Ahab defeated them again. The king of Aram sent messengers to Ahab, seeking peace and promising to return all the cities his father took from the Israelites. In response, Ahab addressed the king of Aram as a brother, which means he accepted a truce with him.

A prophet, who convinced a man to wound him, disguised himself with a bandage over his eye. He told King Ahab that in the thick of a battle, he received orders to guard a man who was apparently a prisoner. In ancient times, when a person allowed someone he guarded to escape, he had to become a slave of the one who captured the person or pay an impossible amount of silver in recompense. The prophet in disguise told the king that at a time when he was preoccupied, the man disappeared. The king told the man that by his own words, he had sentenced himself to a life as a slave or to pay the impossible price, which he was not able to pay.

The prophet then removed the bandage and the king recognized him as one of the prophets. The prophet stated that the Lord decreed that the king would pay for the life of the one the Lord had put under the ban, namely, Ben-hadad. The Lord commanded he be killed, but instead of killing him, Ahab made a truce with him. The king became upset and angry and set off for Samaria.

A man named Naboth possessed a vineyard Ahab wanted, since it was next to the king's palace, but Naboth refused to sell it to him. Ahab pouted like a child, turning away and refusing to eat. When Jezebel questioned why he would not eat, he told her about his desire for the land and Naboth's refusal to sell it to him. Jezebel mocked him, directing him to act like a king and to be cheerful and eat. She promised to get the vineyard for him.

Jezebel then wrote a letter in Ahab's handwriting and sealed it with the king's seal. She sent the letter to the elders and nobles who lived in the same city as Naboth. In the letter, she instructed them to proclaim a feast and place Naboth at the head of the people, which they did. Opposite Naboth sat two previously chosen scoundrels who accused Naboth in the presence of all the people of cursing God and the king. As a result, the crowd escorted Naboth out of the city and stoned him to death. The elders and nobles sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead.

When Jezebel received the news of Naboth's death, she told Ahab to take possession of the vineyard since Naboth was now dead. Ahab headed out to take possession of the vineyard. The Lord sent Elijah to confront Ahab as he entered the vineyard. Elijah reported that the Lord asked if Ahab, after murdering, would now take possession of the land. The Lord predicted that the blood of Ahab would be licked up by the dogs in the same place they licked up the blood of Naboth. The prediction stated that because Ahab acted evilly and led Israel into sin, the Lord would bring evil upon him by cutting off every male belonging to Ahab, whether a slave or free, just as the Lord did to the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha.

Besides predicting that the blood of Ahab would be licked up by the dogs, the Lord had a more dreaded prediction for Jezebel. The prediction that dogs and birds would devour the offspring of Jeroboam and Baasha had already been predicted for them, and the Lord now cursed the offspring of Ahab in the same manner. None of the offspring is named when the curse is given, but the author explicitly states that the dogs will devour Jezebel. Because of the Israelites' high regard for the body, being deprived of a proper burial was a horrifying curse. The author declares that no one committed evil as badly as Ahab, who was urged on by his wife, Jezebel. In reality, the story of Ahab was a story of conflict between Elijah and Jezebel, the real power and evil behind the reign of Ahab. Ahab's weakness allowed her to become the center of Ahab's story.

Upon hearing these words about his death, Ahab repented, tearing his garments and putting sackcloth over his bare skin, fasting, and demonstrating his humility. When the Lord saw how Ahab humbled himself, the Lord told Elijah that evil would not be brought on the house of Ahab during his lifetime, but during his son's time.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined Ahab, the king of Israel, to fight against the king of Aram. The king of Judah asked the king of Israel to seek the Lord's word concerning the battle. Ahab gathered 400 prophets who urged the kings to attack, that the Lord would deliver Aram into the power of the king of Israel. King Jehoshaphat then asked if there was another prophet of the Lord they could consult, and the king said there was a prophet named Micaiah who always prophesied evil against the king of Israel.

When Micaiah came before the kings with the warnings from the messenger sent by the king that he should join with the other prophets by prophesying victory, he echoed the prophecy of the 400 prophets who had spoken earlier. The king of Israel ordered him to tell the truth, so he prophesied that the Israelites would be scattered, like a sheep without a shepherd, and the prophet urged them to go back home.

Micaiah told of a strange vision in which the Lord, seated on a throne surrounded by the whole host of heaven, asked who would deceive Ahab so that he would go and fall before the enemy. One came before the Lord and agreed to deceive the king by becoming a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets, so the Lord sent him. In anger, the king of Israel sent Micaiah back to Amon with word that he should be put in prison and fed scanty rations of bread and water. Micaiah responded that if they return safely, then the Lord did not speak through him.

The king of Israel disguised himself and had the king of Judah remain in his robes to protect himself from being killed. The king of Aram wanted to kill only the king of Israel, not the king of Judah. In the midst of the battle, a random arrow severely wounds the king of Israel. The randomness of the arrow hitting the least protected part of Ahab between the joints of his breastplate showed that the Lord was fighting with the king of Aram against Ahab. Ahab's charioteers took the dying Ahab out of the battle, propped him up until he died, and his blood flowed to the bottom of the chariot.

After the death of the king, some of his men washed out his chariot at the pool of Samaria. The dogs licked up his blood. Because Ahab prostituted himself by worshiping foreign gods, the Lord tarnished his memory by having the dogs lick up his blood and prostitutes bathe in the pool where some of his blood went.

The author returns to the story of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who became king in the fourth year of King Ahab, king of Israel. He reigned twenty-five years. Like Asa, his father, he did what was right in the Lord's sight, although he did not do away with the sacrifices on the high places where incense was burned. Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel, which is the reason he was willing to join with the king of Israel against the king of Aram. Apparently the truce did not erase all mistrust, for when Jehoshaphat built a fleet of ships, he refused to allow Ahab's successor to put his men on the ships along with the men of Judah. The ships, however, were destroyed and never sailed.

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat. He provoked the Lord by walking in the way of his father and worshiping Baal.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Ahab showed that a king could easily become a victim of his own greed and weakness. He pouted like a child when he could not have a vineyard he wanted, and he was controlled by the ruthless Jezebel who worshiped the false god Baal. For Ahab, his own desires became more important than his service to the Lord. Life for all people is a continual struggle between seeking to serve the Lord while being drawn to fulfilling one's own selfish desires.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. What does the story in chapter 13 about the prophet who went back and ate and drank in disobedience to the Lord's command tell us?
2. What message is generated by the downfall of the kings of the northern kingdom?
3. How does the end of the drought as predicted by Elijah prove the power of the God of Israel over the false god Baal?
4. What makes Jezebel such a famous person in the Bible?
5. Why was King Jehoshaphat willing to join forces with the king of Israel against the king of Aram?