

# SMALL GROUP GUIDE



# KINGS & KINGDOMS

THE FIRST THREE KINGS OF ISRAEL



## CIRCLES 01/03: **KING SAUL**

The Old Testament books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles tell the story of Israel's early history and the reign of its first kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. Our journey begins with the prophet and judge Samuel, who listened to the voice of God's people and helped them select their first king. His name was Saul. However, Saul's reign was marked by failure, and his demise serves as a warning to us. As we explore his reign and failure, we will uncover two key warning signs to be aware of: selfishness and disobedience to God.

What is the best invention of all time? When imagining the pinnacle of human innovation, automobiles, engines, lightbulbs, and Snuggies all come to mind. While these inventions are marvelous, there is one that changed our daily routines within my lifetime: personal GPS. Thanks to the little supercomputer in my pocket, my phone will tell me how to get anywhere from anywhere. Step by step and move by move, an interactive map illuminates the perfect route. Do I need to find the best local donut? My phone will lead the way. Do I want to drive to California? A monotone computer voice will take me all the way across the nation. Do I need to figure out where I parked my car in a parking deck? The Maps app will take me directly to a dropped pin.

I cannot even remember how we got around before the GPS, so I asked my mother. She said, "We just followed signs."

"What signs?" I asked. Embarrassing, I know. Thanks to my trusty GPS, I generally ignore the signs posted all over the roads. The next day, I took time to intentionally study the signs on local highways. She was right. There are signs that tell you how to get everywhere throughout the city.

This got me thinking, what exactly do signs do? They point you in the right direction. A sign is only significant because it shows you something you need, something significant. Within itself, it's a boring piece of metal. If you were on your way to the hospital, you wouldn't stop at the big blue sign. No, you'd keep driving until you got to the ER. The sign just shows you where to go. If you were planning a trip to Panama City Beach, you wouldn't stop your car at the exit sign. You'd follow it to your destination.

We are about to embark on an abbreviated journey through the royal books of the Old Testament: Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. These books tell the story of Israel's early years as a nation. After a tumultuous period when tribal leaders called judges ruled, God's chosen people decided to anoint kings to rule. This era is like a yearbook of the biggest names in the Bible: Saul, David, and Solomon. Each of these men ruled as king,

but they were also signs—not literally but metaphorically. God used these flawed men to point His people to the perfect King named Jesus. As a sign points to a destination, each Israeli king points to God’s destiny for the world. A perfect King is coming. Everyone before Him merely points us in the right direction.

Our story doesn’t start with a king with a crown. It begins with Samuel, a prophet of God and a judge of Israel. He overheard rumors of grumbling in the city streets. Apparently, God’s people wanted a king like other kingdoms. While this sounds harmless, the news unsettled Samuel. Why? Because Israel already had a King. At this point, God was their King, and prophets like Samuel spoke directly to God to make decisions. Ultimately, cultural peer pressure got the best of them. 1 Samuel 8:4-5 explains, “All the elders of Israel gathered together and they came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now, install for us a king to govern us like all the other nations.’”

God called Israel to be set apart, but they rejected it. The line “like all other nations” breaks my heart. Israel had the perfect setup, but they wanted to be like everyone else. So they pushed and prodded until they got what they wanted. Through Samuel, they selected a ruler for their kingless country. His name was Saul, and we meet him in 1 Samuel 9. How did they decide to call upon Saul? It wasn’t his godly character, upstanding moral code, or military power. They picked him because he was tall and attractive. Seriously. In public polls, they reported that Saul was “as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else” (1 Samuel 9:2). Their shallow reasoning proved to be their undoing. God’s people just wanted to look powerful to everyone else, so they elected a good-looking king with a bad-looking reputation.

If Saul’s reign is a sign, then it’s a bright red warning sign. Bluntly, Saul was not a good king. His flaws could fill a filing cabinet. The majority of 1 Samuel’s account explains Saul’s catastrophic failure. According to theologian Tim Mackie, “You might have a tendency to become critical of Saul at times; you’ll probably feel sorry for him at times too. But slow down and be honest with yourself. If you’re open-minded, you’ll realize you likely have more in common with Saul than you’d care to admit. The whole point of exploring Saul’s failures is to warn us so we don’t repeat his mistakes.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Saul: The Tale of Self-Deception," The Bible Project, <https://bibleproject.com/blog/saul-tale-self-deception/>, accessed September 20, 2021.

While uncovering the unsettling story of Saul's reign and demise, we will see two warning signs that must be addressed.

### **Selfishness**

Saul was given a chance to make a big name for himself at the very beginning of his story. Israel was at war with the mighty Amalekite army. Israel was familiar with feuding with this nation, as they had already tried to wipe out the entire country a couple of times. Israel loathed them, and God promised to take vengeance for His people. If Saul could win the war, the nation would adore him.

God has very specific regulations for this battle though. They were to destroy everything (1 Samuel 15:1-6). They were not to take prisoners, steal their goods, or remove valuables from the land. Despite the clear instruction directly from God, Saul ignored it. He went into battle with vengeance and selfishness. The Israelites took prisoners, kept livestock, and looted the land for goods. To make matters even worse, Saul set up a monument in his own honor to commemorate the victory. Yes, Saul basically built a statue of himself to celebrate how awesome he was. Talk about arrogance.

Samuel, God's appointed prophet, fumed when he heard the news. With fire in his eyes, he pronounced, "You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!" (1 Samuel 15:26). Israel's grand experiment with human kings was off to a rocky start. Since Saul had rejected God, God had rejected Saul.

None of us are king to a nation at war, so how do we heed this warning? Easily. Listen to God and refuse to act out of selfish ambition. Whenever you face a decision, you can either do it God's way or your own.

Are things taking a long time to work out? God's way is patience, but our way is to take matters into our own hands. Do things God's way and wait on Him. When culture expects you to work yourself to an exhausted pulp, God's way is to take intentional time to rest. Do things God's way and take Sabbath seriously. Did someone wrong you? God's way is mercy, but our way is vengeance. Do things God's way and allow Him to work things out in His time. God's way is always harder than our own, but it's also always better. Heed Saul's warning and do everything God's way in God's timing.

Ultimately, Saul's selfishness set him up for God's rejection. However, there is another warning sign that made matters far worse.

## **Disobedience**

Samuel wasn't a shy guy. He marched up to the king and directly challenged his decision to loot the battleground. How did Saul reply? Did he own up to his actions? Did he weep in remorse? Did he give any of it back? Not at all. He projected by blaming other people. Refusing to listen to the nonsense, Samuel snapped, "Why then did you not listen to the voice of the Lord? And why did you rush upon the spoil and do evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1 Samuel 15:19).

After Samuel's confrontation, Saul replied, "I did listen to the voice of Yahweh and went on the mission he sent me, but the people took the spoil" (1 Samuel 15:21). Do you see the problem? Saul is now blame-shifting instead of just taking ownership of his foolishness.

Let's be honest. We all do this. When things go wrong, we blame everyone except ourselves. We can blame peer pressure, bad influences, or even a grumpy mood. While all of these may have a sliver of truth, we are responsible for ourselves. End of sentence. If we want to grow beyond selfishness and self-deception, we need to take ownership of our failures, flaws, and faults. Don't shift the blame. Shift your behavior. Don't point at others. Look to God.

As we said, all of Israel's kings point us to Jesus. This is particularly confusing in the example of Saul. The guy was selfish and self-deceptive. He refused to own his errors and literally built a monument to his own ego. Does it get any more opposed to the example of Christ?

What does Saul have to do with Jesus? Simple. Jesus is our unflawed King, brilliantly illuminated on the pitch-black backdrop of Saul's epic failure. Wherever Saul stumbles, Jesus thrives. The characteristics that made Saul untrustworthy are redeemed by Christ's consistency. When we are selfish, Jesus helps us be selfless. When we believe lies, Jesus is the truth. When we stumble, Jesus picks us up. That's our perfect King. Let's live in His Kingdom by following His lead.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What would you do if you were king for a day?

Q2: What stuck out to you from today's message?

Q3: What made Saul a bad king?

Q4: Saul's selfishness was his downfall. What can you do to protect yourself from selfishness?

Q5: What are some ways we blame others for our problems? How can we change that behavior?

Q6: How is Jesus a different kind of king than Saul?

Application: Take a look at the pitfalls of Saul and evaluate if any of these have shown up in your own life. What are some proactive ways you can fight off selfishness and disobedience in your life?

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

1 Samuel 1

1 Samuel 2

1 Samuel 3-4

1 Samuel 5

1 Samuel 6

1 Samuel 7

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLES 02/03: **KING DAVID**

King David is the most well-known individual in the Old Testament. His story spans hundreds of pages of Scripture, from 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2. That means he's the second most written about character in the Bible behind Jesus. Yes, David is a big deal, and his story is full of powerful lessons about how God fulfills His mission using unlikely methods. David's life and legacy were marked with countless bullies and adversaries though. These stories serve as reminders that God can use anyone, no matter how unlikely, to accomplish his will in their corner of the world.

People don't like bullies. It's as simple as that. We root for their defeat while praying for justice for those they target. When someone stands up to a bully, they are praised. When someone fights for the bullied, they are elevated. This is obvious in the story of Israel's second king. David defeated three bullies in his rise to power. Each defeat proves that God fights for His people even when the odds are stacked against them.

### **Bully 1: Goliath**

Unlike Saul, David's story has humble beginnings. His narrative begins when God tells the prophet Samuel to go find David's father, Jesse. God had selected one of his sons to be the next king of Israel. (1 Samuel 16:1-6). The timing could not have been more complicated though. David was just a teenager, and Saul refused to step down after God rejected him. That meant David had to prove his might while being the runt of his family. The perfect opportunity presented itself to David: a giant named Goliath was standing outside the city gates with a Philistine army behind him.

There is a scene in *The Avengers* where Loki, the villain, brags that he has an army at his disposal. Unfazed, Tony Stark announces, "But we have a Hulk." This was the mindset of the Philistines. They had Goliath, a nine-foot-tall super soldier from Philistine. He was tall, strong, and intimidating. His sheer size had the Israelite army shaking in his shadow. While every soldier retreated, a short shepherd named David walked to the front of the line.

Some decisions don't make sense. You don't pick a fight with a lion. You don't bike into oncoming traffic. You don't eat ribs on a first date. And you certainly don't send a scrawny shepherd to fight a giant. While the army focused on the size of their enemy, David focused on the size of His God. Saul was out of options, so he allowed David to enter an impossible battle. The commanders tried to give David some equipment to help him fight. They rummaged through their stuff to offer David a shield, a sword, some heavy armor, a couple of grenades, and a Black Hawk helicopter. (Okay, two of those were

made up.) David refused to wear the armor and take the weapons. He simply grabbed a few rocks and a leather slingshot.

The soldiers laughed, Goliath mocked, and Saul buried his face in his hands, but God got his point across. David ran into battle and launched a single rock toward the unprotected forehead of Goliath. Bullseye. The rock sunk into his skull, and Goliath fell to the ground like a demolished building. The Israelites cheered, and the Philistines retreated.

The story of David and Goliath is packed full of hope for us. Whenever you face an impossible battle, you have the God of the impossible on your side. Even if the giant is far too big for you to handle, it's a mere miniature to God. There is nothing too big for Him to handle, so you can walk into battle with your head high. God is on your side. No battle is too big for God.

David shattered everyone's expectations and brought home a big victory for God's chosen people. Undoubtedly, he was going to be a good king. However, it wasn't going to be easy. A new bully stepped into the ring to take down David and bite him in the ear. It wasn't an enemy soldier; it was his own king. The women of the city sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands!" (1 Samuel 18:7). Overcome with jealousy, Saul refused to forfeit his crown to David.

## **Bully 2: Saul**

The rest of 1 Samuel describes Saul's deep disdain for David. Young David has won over the hearts of the nation, and this makes Saul furious. His hatred for David transforms into a full-fledged assassination plot. Saul seeks to kill David to protect the crown. A twisted game of cat and mouse ensues. David flees the city, and Saul decides to murder the next king.

This story hits a climax in the desert of En Gedi. Three thousand soldiers march behind Saul. Soldiers bump into each other as the caravan suddenly stops. What is in front of them? Another army? David? A herd of cats? Nope, Saul has to use the bathroom. He dismounts his horse and escapes to a cave to "relieve himself" (1 Samuel 24:3).

The cave is pitch black compared to the desert sun, so Saul cannot see that he has stumbled into the wrong cave. David and his men are hiding from Saul in the shadows. Loyal soldiers grip their swords, ready to claim David's throne once and for all. David commands them to stand down while he slowly unsheathes his dagger. *Oh, this is personal*, they think. *David wants to do the job himself.*



David slides the knife toward Saul but doesn't draw any blood. He simply slices the edge of Saul's royal robe. After Saul is relieved, he exits the cave and is met by David and his men. Saul's jaw drops when David reveals the ripped piece of his robe. It's a lot of words, but basically David explains, "I could have killed you, but I resisted." In shock, Saul replies, "When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed?" (1 Samuel 24:19).

Who would do something like this? A man "after God's own heart," that's who. David had spent years in hiding because he was being chased by a bully king and his army. I am confident he wanted nothing more than to end things for good, but he refused. We should learn from David's example. Your temptations should never overshadow God's expectations. Conventional wisdom says to focus on yourself, fight for yourself, and justify whatever you do to get far in life. God says to obey Him, act mercifully, and respect everyone—even your bullies.

David continues to run. Saul continues to chase. It all comes to an end eventually though. Saul erupts into madness and is murdered by the Philistines (1 Samuel 30-31). After the tragic killing of Saul, the people of Israel find themselves on the same page. They want David to be king. Once again, without a conventional strategy, David has been thrust into power in an unconventional way. He simply waited on God, and things worked out beautifully for him. He goes on to establish the capital city of Jerusalem, begins preparation for the Temple, and proves himself a mighty military leader.

However, he still has one more bully to face. This one will prove to be the greatest of them all.

### **Bully 3: David Himself**

David is largely considered the best king in Israel's history. However, he had some serious skeletons in his closet. To put it simply, David abused his power after becoming king. He took advantage of his dear friend's wife. Then, David had his friend murdered to cover up his crime. Afterward, David fell into a manic season of guilt and grief.

Tragically, David allowed sin to consume him and finished his life much like Saul by giving a hit list on his death bed. Sure, he was a decent leader, but he was not the true king of Israel. That title belongs to one person: Jesus, the Son of David.

*Wait, did you just say “Son of David?” I thought Jesus was the son of Joseph.* It’s a lot to unpack. Jesus is referred to as the Son of David nearly a dozen times in the Gospels. Samuel, Isaiah, and Elijah all predicted that a perfect King would rise up from the lineage of David. Jesus was born in the same city as David. Jesus was from the same tribe as David. Jesus is the perfect culmination of Israel’s failed experiment with royal rulers.

David is not the perfect king because he succumbed to moral failure. Do you remember how we said that all the kings are simply signs pointing to Jesus? This is especially true in David’s life. He shared some serious similarities with the Messiah. David was a shepherd, and Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. David defeated the Philistines, and Jesus defeated sin and death. David hurt people, but Jesus heals people. Even in his failures, David’s life flashes like a sign saying, “The true King is coming!”

“Why is the Old Testament so full of sad and bad stories?” a student once asked me in eleventh-grade Religious Studies. Great question. It’s because the Bible wants you to know that you need a Savior, and any attempt to accomplish anything without God will end in failure. We all need a savior, and David’s life proves that.

God was able to use an imperfect king to accomplish His perfect purpose. Imagine what He can do in your life! Jesus will defeat your bullies; lean on Him. Jesus will heal your hurt; invite Him into your emotional journey. Jesus reigns with justice, so you do not need to seek vengeance. Jesus is the perfect King. He is both royalty and divinity. Serve Him. Seek Him. Worship Him. Follow Him. Kneel before Him.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What stuck out to you from this message?

Q3: What words come to mind when you think of King David? Why?

Q4: What lessons can we learn from the story of David and Goliath and David not harming Saul?

Q5: David was a good king, but he wasn't perfect. How did David fall short of perfection?

Application: Whether emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual, write down the metaphorical bullies you face. Cross out each circumstance and write "Jesus" in big letters next to it—reminding you that Christ is far bigger than any circumstance in your life.

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

1 Samuel 16

1 Samuel 17

1 Samuel 18

1 Samuel 19-20

1 Samuel 21-22

1 Samuel 23

1 Samuel 24

Do the following with each passage:

ASK— God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ— the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT— on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND— to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLES 03/03: KING SOLOMON

As we conclude our study on Israel's kings, let's talk about the third crowned king of Israel. He was David and Bathsheba's son and the ruler who successfully put Jerusalem on the international map. His name was Solomon.

We have been studying the books of First and Second Samuel. These pages tell the story of King Saul and King David. It's worth pointing out that these are only divided into two books because they were written on two different scrolls. The narrative is designed to flow together flawlessly, so it is really only one book with two divisions. Towards the end of Second Samuel, David grapples with his oncoming death.

Now we turn a couple of pages to the book of First Kings. This is where things start to get both compelling and complicated. While David's health was deteriorating, one of David's sons, named Adonijah, tried to sit on the throne. David was adamant about honoring God's covenant, so he leveraged his last days on earth to crown his son Solomon as the new king of Israel. The crown would stay in the line of David—all the way to Jesus.

“And behold, someone greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31). Jesus said this near the beginning of His ministry. While our response is, “Of course You are, Jesus,” these were fighting words to an ancient Israelite. Solomon built the Temple. Solomon wrote Proverbs. Solomon was the richest man to ever live. Jesus certainly had some big shoes to fill if He was going to make a claim like that.

Solomon was well-known for three things: his wisdom, his wealth, and his works. All of these traits are impressive, but they're merely sprays of Windex that help us see Jesus clearly.

### **Wisdom**

King Solomon took his faith seriously. 1 Kings 3 explains that he “showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places” (1 Kings 3:3). While worshipping on the mountaintop, a divine voice interrupted the peaceful sound of crackling fire upon the altar. God said to Solomon, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (1 Kings 3:5).

Solomon found himself at a fork in the road. He could ask for anything. What would you ask for in this situation? Maybe you'd request wealth, superpowers, or the ability to

speak to animals. Solomon's response is relatively shocking. He approached this question selflessly. He asked for wisdom so he could lead God's nation in the best way possible. His wisdom paid off though. As Solomon's life progressed, he wrote the "wisdom books" within the Old Testament of the Bible. Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes are monuments to Solomon's selfless request for wisdom.

Do you know why I love this story? Because Solomon's prayer directly benefited others. I hope your prayers do the same. If God were to grant you every request you've ever made, who would benefit? If the answer is you, then you may need to search your heart. It's my hope that your prayers bless others more than they bless yourself because that's wisdom in action.

In your life, wisdom will get you further than anything else. That means you should learn from Solomon and ask God for wisdom. Read the wisdom of Scripture every single day. Commit to practically living out your faith. All of these practices will help you grow wiser.

Solomon's supernatural wisdom came with some other benefits. Thanks to his renewed mind, Solomon achieved impressive wealth and an incredible work ethic. What can we learn from this? Instead of focusing on success, focus on learning. Knowledge and wisdom will be the best tools to achieve whatever God has for you.

### **Wealth**

No one had more stacks than Solomon. The guy was the Bezos of the Bible. It is estimated that Solomon would be valued at \$12 billion today. Think about all you could buy with that kind of money!

King Solomon's portfolio was impressive, but look at how he perceived it. In Ecclesiastes, he wrote, "So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere" (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11).

Solomon didn't let his wealth get in the way of his wisdom. He surveyed his accomplishments and counted all the amazing things he possessed but still concluded, "it was all so meaningless." He could look out his courtyard and see all his chariots; it was still meaningless. He could simply ring a bell to order whatever he wanted to eat



from a private chef, yet it was meaningless. People traveled from all over the world to see his house, but he still considered it meaningless.

It doesn't mean those things weren't valuable. Of course they were. They just weren't spiritually valuable. The only source of meaning is found in your Maker, not money. Who cares if you have a garage full of cars if you also have an empty soul? Who cares if you have a designer label on your bag if your daily routine feels meaningless? Whether you feel empty in a studio apartment or a million-dollar mansion, you still feel empty. Be like Solomon—reject the myth that more will make you happy. Look for true meaning, not more money.

## **Works**

What is Solomon best known for? He built the Temple of Israel: one of the most mesmerizing marvels in history. If you were to visit ancient Jerusalem, the largest structure by far would be the Temple in the middle of the city. This was the space where Israel worshipped, offered sacrifices, and celebrated their holy festivals.

Solomon's Temple represented a tangible intersection between God and His people. The Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's promises to Israel, was placed in the center of the building. Lavish pillars of gold and jewels towered around the Ark. Skilled artisans spared no expense by exporting wood from the finest forests and forging precious metals from the best refineries. While the lavish design was impressive, the focal point was in an exclusive room called the Holy of Holies.

No one could enter the Holy of Holies except the high priest. Terms and conditions got in the way though. He couldn't enter the room willy-nilly. It was only open one day a year—the Day of Atonement. For an ancient believer, this room was believed to be the closest you could get to the presence of God. King Jesus changed that though. When He died, the thick veil that divided the Temple split in half from top to bottom. Direct access to God was no longer limited to priests; it was now open to everyone. King Jesus tore down every barrier between you and God.

Speaking of Jesus, both David's and Solomon's stories give us a clear view through the window of Israel's future. When praying for the future Temple, one of David's prophets explained, "I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my

son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever” (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

Are you seeing this? David and Solomon serve as predecessors to our perfect King. This prophecy provides us with a clear look at Israel’s future. David will design the Temple, Solomon will build the Temple, but Jesus will establish God’s Kingdom on earth and bring God’s presence to all humanity. Jesus is the true King. Jesus is the eternal King. Every other sovereign ruler is just a sign pointing us back to the true Messiah. Jesus will sit on the throne forever.

God’s plan for the Temple is far grander than Solomon could even comprehend. If you were to visit Jerusalem today, you would only see one small wall that marks where the Temple used to be. It has been destroyed and rebuilt a few times, but now it lies in ruins. That shouldn’t be a source of sorrow, though, because God’s new building project looks far more like a subdivision than a single structure. Thanks to Jesus, every believer becomes a *temple*. You are a dwelling place for God Himself (Ephesians 2:19-22). Solomon’s life was just a blip on the radar of God’s overarching narrative.

When Jesus walked the streets of Israel, in the shadow of the great Temple, He announced, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15). With these powerful words, Jesus ushered in a new Kingdom that includes you and me. Jesus is our King, and we are His servants. The Kingdom of Heaven may be Jesus’s favorite topic to preach about, as the term appears over sixty times in the Gospels alone. Outside of fairytales, we struggle to relate to the language of kings and kingdoms. It seems rather medieval, right? However, that’s the message of the Bible. God created a new order where He reigns and we reign with Him.

What should we do in response? We must live as ambassadors to our flawless, sovereign, and just King. Carry the truth of the Kingdom to your city, school, and social spheres. When you do that, just like Solomon’s Temple, you bring a little slice of heaven down to earth. Jesus is King, and He allows us to help build His Kingdom.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: If God told you he would give you any gift you asked for, what would you request from Him?

Q2: What stuck out to you from this message?

Q3: What is the wisest advice you've ever been given?

Q4: What practical things can you do to grow in wisdom?

Q5: Solomon made the Temple, but God made you into a temple too. How should this change the way you live?

Q6: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." What do you think Jesus means by this claim?

Application: You are an ambassador to "the Kingdom of Heaven." That means you should find ways to carry the Kingdom with you. Ask for God to show you opportunities to do that this week.

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

2 Samuel 15

2 Samuel 18

1 Kings 1

1 Kings 2

1 Kings 3-4

1 Kings 5-6

1 Kings 7-8

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present.

Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.