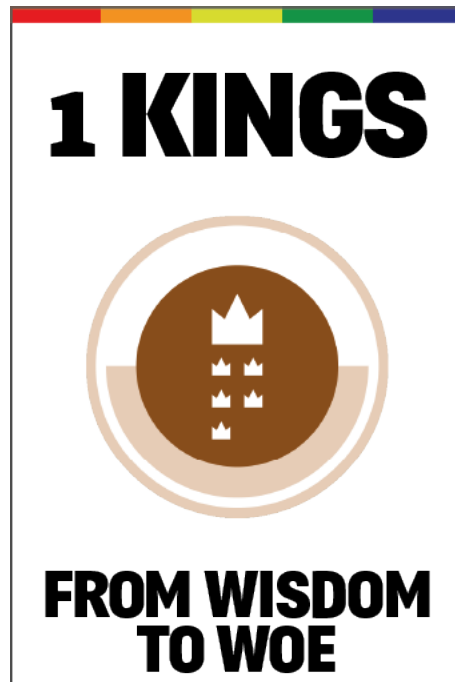




# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

1 Kings, and its counterpart 2 Kings, form the sequel to 2 Samuel. In 1 and 2 Samuel, Israel receive their first king – Saul, who was succeeded by David. Here, at the beginning of 1 Kings, we meet David at the end of his reign as he passes over the throne to his son, Solomon. Initially, Solomon makes for a wise and powerful ruler who amasses large wealth and carries much influence over the surrounding regions and their leaders. However, despite ‘having it all’, Solomon falls away from God and begins worshipping other gods, pulling the nation of Israel down with him. In the second half of 1 Kings we see the consequences of this fall from grace, as Israel fractures into two warring nations, each being led by their own kings who commit their own big mistakes.

As the title suggests, 1 Kings begins with the promise of faithfulness and provision from God and the bestowing of wisdom, power, and wealth to King Solomon, but ends with an unfaithful Israel falling from God’s favour. It is a reminder that God always fulfils His promises and that when He warns us, it is for our own benefit and salvation.

**Joanna Moss**

# Thursday May 28: 1 Kings 1-2

## God in the midst of a messy family

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

### What did I like about today's reading?

As David lies on his deathbed, he has a message for his son, Solomon. He begins with encouragement and good advice about staying close to God and following His commands, however it ends with instructions to kill – not quite the emotional farewell speech I was expecting. From David's language it seems that these are personal offences – 2 v.5, '*Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me*'. And the chapter ends with Solomon eliminating these two people as instructed, as well as his brother.

We will see throughout the book of 1 Kings this internal conflict, as Solomon and future kings attempt to (sometimes) follow God but also seek to do what they want and fulfil their own ideas of justice, without waiting on God first. Firstly, I think this shows how much we like to be in control and that sometimes we'd rather act ourselves and do what we think is right rather than waiting for God. It also reminds me of how complex human behaviour can be and that even as Christians, after committing to following Jesus we can still feel pulled towards other things (money, power, success, achievements, sex, beauty, popularity, etc.) that distract us from God and from following His will instead of our own.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

For me, it showed me God's grace, that even as people who are imperfect, unfaithful, and insolent, He still chooses to use us for his purposes and plans. David was a great man of God, unparalleled in his own time or since, but his home life was far from perfect and honestly quite messy. There was adultery, murder, deceit, rape, estrangement, and death – hardly the ideal family set up. And here at the beginning of 1 Kings we meet at family at odds: with brothers fighting over their father's crown and his previous wife. Yet, God is in the midst of this family, maintaining his promise to David and establishing a lineage that would lead to Jesus' birth 14 generations later.

It reminds me that God doesn't turn His back on our messy situations but that actually, He is right in the middle of them.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

I think I need to get better at sharing the parts of my life that I think are messy or difficult with God more. I think I have a tendency to want to fix a situation or relationship that has gone wrong myself, without letting God be a part of it. Instead, I want to be quicker at giving it to God and asking His advice and blessing first.

### Who am I going to share this with?

My uni friend Emma – as someone I have been sharing my faith with for a while, I want to hear her thoughts on this passage and also have her keep me accountable to doing what I've said.

# Friday May 29: 1 Kings 3-6

Solomon: the original Aladdin?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Solomon's God-given wisdom is one of main things that Solomon is remembered for, even today. As God declares that He will give anything that Solomon asks for, I can't help but wonder what I would have said if had I been in Solomon's shoes...

In his request, I think Solomon shows great humility here as he realises the challenge that lays ahead in ruling the nation of Israel and keeping himself and his people close to God. Instead of adopting a stance of arrogance and self-importance, he recognises that he needs God's help. I'm not sure if I could say the same of myself when challenges and responsibilities come my way.

Solomon's request is also for something that is beyond himself. He is asking for something that will benefit others more than himself. Yes, he will be wise, but it is so that he can serve his kingdom well and make good, godly decisions, in tough situations on behalf of his people. Solomon's prayer shows that his heart is in line with God's will and God chooses to bless him for that.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

That God loves it when we can admit our weaknesses and come to Him for help. Not because He needs us to validate His own power but because He loves to work with us, in relationship. It reminds me of a parent helping a child – the parent doesn't offer help to demonstrate their superiority over the child but because they delight in helping to teach and guide the child through the task.

When we ask God for help, we are bringing Him into our situation and allowing Him to work through us. Not only does this mean that we get to work with God as part of His Kingdom plan, but also that we can receive His power and wisdom and strength in what we are doing. Doesn't that sound like a much better way of doing life??

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

After thinking on this passage, I am reminded of a question from a book I read: *'If all of your prayers came true tomorrow, how much would the world be changed?'*. Just as I was challenged by that question on first reading, I feel challenged again. I want to ensure that my prayers become more Kingdom-focused – where I am praying beyond myself and my situation and in alignment with what God wants, rather than what I want. p

## Who am I going to share this with?

I have a friend, also called Joanna, who I meet for lunch once a week. She has such a heart for seeking and doing God's will and I want to encourage her in that and have us pray together for more of that.

# Monday June 1: 1 Kings 7-8

## An unfaithful nation and a faithful God

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

### What did I like about today's reading?

After Solomon finishes building the temple, a truly colossal structure, he prays over the temple and the people of Israel. This prayer is quite long and takes up most of chapter 8 but one of the things that struck me about it is how Solomon prays for his people. Solomon's prayer is almost prophetic as he describes their movement away from God, their capture into enemy hands and imprisonment in another country (8 v.46-53) – all of which would happen to Israel by the end of 2 Kings. He is brutally honest in his assessment of his people, *'Everyone sins, so your people will also sin against you'*, yet the truth in that statement, for the people of Israel and for us today, is undeniable.

But as Solomon describes this, he also pleads for and is expectant of God's grace and mercy and compassion over Israel. He is confident of God's promise to them, that they are His chosen people and that ultimately, God will restore and redeem them. It is in this prayer, as Solomon intercedes for his people and waits on the promises of God, that I see a glimpse of Jesus.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God's willingness to forgive and redeem us when we turn back to Him which also demonstrates the extent of His faithfulness to us.

When I think of all the times I have turned away from God and decided to go my own way, I am astounded by God's faithfulness to me when I am decidedly unfaithful to Him. We see this throughout God's dealings with Israel too. There is of course a cost to this forgiveness, and we see that in the offerings given by Solomon after his prayer. 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed and that's after an incalculable number were sacrificed earlier (8 v.5). That's a lot of animals and a lot of blood, but even this is still far less than what would be given for our sins through Jesus.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

Just as Solomon was confident and expectant of God fulfilling his promises, I want to be expectant of God's promises too. There is a song I found recently whose lyrics touch on this, referencing Ephesian 3:20 – that God is able to do abundantly more than we could ask or imagine. The gist of the following line says something like, *'did you think I was playing when I said this?'* which stuck with me because I think I sometimes believe that God's promises are too good to be true. But from the Bible, my own life and those around me, I know this isn't true and so I think I need to work at this letting this become something I know in my heart and not just in my head.

### Who am I going to share this with?

Every few months I meet with a group in Bath to pray over the students at both Bath Universities and the people from churches and Christian Unions who work with them. When we are next able to meet, I want to be able to share this with them and pray with expectation of God's abundance.

## **Tuesday June 2: 1 Kings 9-11**

### **Who's in your inner circle?**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Whilst reading today's chapters, I found it hard to reconcile the Solomon from chapters 1-10, to the one in chapter 11. Here was a man who had it all – renowned for his wisdom and knowledge, wealthy beyond anything Israel had experienced before, and in possession of great power and influence. Yet in chapter 11, he is ignoring God's direct warnings, going against God's laws, and instead pursuing the gods of his many, many, (1000? Seriously?!) wives. A decision which would lead to the division and desolation of the nation of Israel.

For me, this is a reminder that knowledge and wisdom, even if God-given are not sufficient to keep me close to God. As I work in academic research, I find I am most often in a culture where knowledge is prized and making a big, ground-breaking discovery is the dream. Yet, I cannot let this mindset spill over into my faith life. Like Solomon, we can be wise and able to discern God's will, but if we choose in our hearts not to follow it, then what is the point?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

It showed me that God really cares about who we are in relationship with, whether that's as a marriage or partnership or as friends.

God's insistence that Israelite kings should only marry woman from their own country may seem small minded by today's standards, but for that time it held an important purpose. We know that God places great value on relationship and the significance that comes with bringing two families together in marriage. In Solomon's case that meant bringing multiple religions together in one family, under one roof as each wife from a foreign land brought their own god into the marriage. As Solomon shared his life with these women he was influenced by their beliefs and their idols and in the end, he starts to worship these gods too.

Whoever we choose to share our lives with will influence the direction our lives take and how close we stay to God. Of course, that doesn't mean we should dump any friends who aren't Christians or who have differing views to us. But I think it's important to consider who our closest people are and how we can be influencing and encouraging each other's faith.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I know that at times, like Solomon, I can be stubborn and resistant to God and to doing what He tells me is best for my life. Sometimes, I just want to do what I want, even if I know it is not the best thing for me or my relationship with God. Which tells me a lot about my heart. I want to be better at trusting God and the purposes of His word. Just as God had a reason for insisting that Israelite kings should only marry Israelite woman, His laws and instructions have a purpose and benefit for me now, even if I can't see them right now.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Two of my close friends, one of whom is also a PhD student. As we are at similar life stages and in similar work environments, I want to be able to explore with them the parts of our lives where we are struggling to follow God's will and direction and why this might be.

# Thursday June 4: 1 Kings 12-14

## A kingdom divided against itself

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

### What did I like about today's reading?

What struck me from today's passage, is the attitude of the two new kings as it seems that both are very driven by power and being the one in control. From the way either is portrayed from 12-14, it is clear that neither of them is particularly concerned with putting God first and following his decrees. In Rehoboam's case, the son of Solomon, his arrogance leads him to take the advice of his peers over the advice of the palace elders concerning the grievances of his people. Instead of taking the opportunity to show compassion, encourage trust and rebuild community, as the elders advise, he decides to assert his dominance and power. And the nation of Israel divides.

Later on, Rehoboam assembles a large army in an attempt to win back the northern kingdoms by force. He is stopped by God's command but continues to fortify cities and remains at war with Jeroboam for the rest of his reign. All along he is pursuing his own agenda and ignoring God. He desires power and control but forgets to acknowledge that God is the only one in control.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

That God is not convinced by fake outside appearances.

Ahijah, a prophet of God, was not fooled by Jeroboam's wife's disguise and knew exactly who she was. And God was not fooled by the intentions of Jeroboam. Since his royal appointment by God, Jeroboam ruled by doing exactly what he wanted and only returning to God when he needed help or healing. His return to God wasn't driven by repentance but selfish need, and God's response to Jeroboam makes it clear what he thinks of this kind of heart attitude.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

I think it's fair to say that for most of us, letting go of being in control can be tricky. Personally, I know that I have a tendency to be a perfectionist which I see manifest itself in my work, in anything I create and in tasks or responsibilities I am delegated. I find giving over control to others hard as this means I have less control over the outcome. But as the old adage goes, being aware of something and actually doing something about it are two very different things.

I don't want to be afraid of letting go of control in my relationship with God. When I rationalise my feelings, I know it is foolish to worry about being in control because ultimately, I have very little control over anything in my life – something I think this lockdown has shown all of us. Instead, I know I need to embrace the truth that despite my attempts at control, God is the only one who was ever in control of it all anyway. And that by giving the outcome of everything I do over to God, I can freed from the worries and anxieties trying to be in control brings.

### Who am I going to share this with?

My Mum – as someone I know to be very wise and good with advice, as well as someone who likes to be in control, I want to ask her opinion on how she deals with this and also how she lets God help build the community she has made through her volunteer work.

# Friday June 5: 1 Kings 15-18

There is only one God of Israel

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Reading through the lineage of Israel's kings from chapter 15-17, it feels a bit like reading through a Game of Thrones book crossed with a soap opera. With all the killing, mass family murders and military coups, it's tricky to keep up with who's actually in power. Putting it altogether, I found it interesting that over the 41 years that Asa, one of the few good kings, reigned over Judah (the fragment of Israel left to David's ancestors), Israel went through a likely tumultuous time of 7 different kings, all of whom sinned greatly and refused to follow God.

And it's into the mess of Israel's sin and continual rejection of God that Elijah enters. God uses Elijah to speak truth to King Ahab and to Israel, and I love how blunt Elijah is with them. He is pushing them to make a commitment – do you follow Baal or God? Stop limping between the two and choose! It reminds me how good it is to have people around me who aren't afraid to speak God's truth into my life, especially in the moments where I need it most but want it the least.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It showed me God's immense power. In Elijah's test of my God vs yours (potential new game show idea?), I love how Elijah raises the stakes at each stage. First, he pits himself as one man against 400, then he gives the Baal worshippers a whole day to pray to their God and only the evening for himself, then he drenches his altar and the surrounding ground in water, saturating it to point that any fire would struggle to light and take hold.

And this leads to big finale as God's power and authority as the one true God is revealed to Ahab and the priests of Baal and they have no choice but concede that Elijah's Lord is God.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

We may not have golden calves or Asherah poles today, but I can think of several things that I sometimes put ahead of God, leaving my loyalty and commitment split. It reminds me of something Jesus said in Matthew 6, *'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other'*. In this instance, Jesus is referring to the love of money, but I think it works well for any idol we may acquire. And I know this is to be true as when I choose to keep different parts of my life from God, I can feel the tension it brings to my faith and relationship with God. As I walk with God, I want to be more aware of the little seeds of idolatry that start in my heart and more proactive at uprooting them before they affect my relationship with God.

## Who am I going to share this with?

Those that I am accountable with – I want to make sure that together we can be speaking truth into each other's lives, even when it's tricky and awkward.

# **Monday June 8: 1 Kings 19-22**

## **Finding God in the silence**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Joanna Moss:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Elijah's experience of God on Mount Sinai is one of my favourite stories in the Bible. Like any good story, it has an unexpected ending. The beginning of today's reading continues straight on from Elijah's dramatic revealing of God's power, yet Elijah's demeanor from yesterday to today's passage could not be more different.

Evidently, Elijah expected a different reaction from Jezebel and Ahab after the grand bonfire display and is surprised to receive a death threat instead of repentance. Things hadn't gone as Elijah had planned and instead of trusting it to God, Elijah runs away and lets fear and disappointment take over. I know I have done the same thing myself – when God has acted in a way I didn't expect, I have chosen to run from Him rather than to Him. This shows me that, just like Elijah in this moment, instead of actually trusting in God, I am trusting in who I think God is or should be.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

That God is always present and at work, it's just most often not in the way I expect.

Just as with God's appearance on the mountain, I often want God's response to be loud and obvious. I want to see sweeping change and instant answers, but God shows us that that's not how He works. As is so often with God's Kingdom, God works in the complete opposite way to what we expect. Firstly, He shows us that it is His quiet voice in the stillness that has the greatest power to bring change. And secondly, that it is when we perceive that nothing is happening that He is actually at work, as it is in the waiting and in the silence that God works on our hearts first before working in our physical situation.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I am not the most patient person; I would rather be doing than waiting. After all, waiting is a waste of time. However, I am keenly aware that God has a very different perspective on waiting and places a high value on patience. As I let God work on my impatient spirit, I want to better embrace silence and stillness in my quiet times with God. As much as I know that it is in resting and waiting that I can hear more from God, I want to be actually practicing this more often.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My brother and his girlfriend who are not Christian. As we (hopefully) have more conversations about who God is, I want to be able to share with them that the God of Bible is likely to be very different to who they think God is.