

June 11-17

Week 24

In the first four days of this week, we will read Wisdom literature.

Pay special attention to the instructions on how to read Ecclesiastes, one of the most difficult books in the Bible.

On day 4 we will also come to the end of Solomon's reign and the end of the united kingdom as we transition to Act 2, scene 6 in God's story, "Kings and Prophets: God Divides the Kingdom People."

From this point there were two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and we will read about the kings of each. We will find that all kings of the north were bad, and the kings of the south were a mixed lot, some bad and some good.

You will notice that when compared to 1–2 Kings, 2 Chronicles focuses especially on the southern kingdom of Judah and is not as negative about King David's less than stellar descendants.

Day 1

Read Proverbs 27-29

Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 71

Many of the proverbs today continue the pattern of giving short pairs of sayings. Chapter 27 offers general statements for wise living. Chapters 28–29 contrast the righteous and the wicked.

Yet at times in Proverbs we see longer passages like the one found in 27:23-27. Meditate on this passage. Aspects of life left unattended are eventually unproductive. This applies to business, of course, but analogies can also be drawn to relationships.

You may not have a flock, but to what do you need to pay attention so that you are aware of its condition?

Day 2

Read Ecclesiastes 1-6

Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 72

On its surface Ecclesiastes seems a depressing book and is one of the most difficult to read in the Bible. It was written by an Israelite king who referred to himself as “the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1).

Ecclesiastes emphasizes that life is “vanity,” or a vapor. “Vanity” does not mean worthless. Rather it focuses on the transience of life. It is so temporary and fragile, and passes so quickly. Like the wind, you can’t control the passage of time.

Death offers perspective. If you think you are wise, rich, or significant in any way, realize that death puts you on the same level with the most common person. Only God matters (see Ecclesiastes 2:25; 5:1-7).

In which of your personal gifts or attributes are you tempted to trust instead of trusting God?

Day 3

Read Ecclesiastes 7-12

Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 73

Begin today's reading with the conclusion, Ecclesiastes 12:12-14. Then go back and read chapters 7–12.

What does this section say about God and how God puts the futility of life in perspective?

How might we read this section in light of the coming of Christ and the resurrection?

Day 4**Read 1 Kings 10-11; 2 Chronicles 9; Proverbs 30-31****Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 74**

Today we read about both the glory and the disgrace of Solomon. Because of God's gift of wisdom, Solomon attracted attention from the Queen of Sheba. Ironically, Solomon's wisdom did not guard his heart against inappropriate attachment to his many wives and their gods, who had come to him through his interaction with surrounding nations.

Notice that his downfall came "when Solomon was old" (1 Kings 11:4) through a violation of the covenant with God, so this part of the story must be read in light of the covenant. In a sense his success, which resulted from the gift of wisdom from God, resulted in his turning away from God.

Proverbs 31, on the other hand, celebrates the gift of a good wife who fears the Lord.

Husband, do you celebrate your wife?

How are you responding to God's gifts today?

Is your heart softening or hardening toward God?

Scene 6**Kings and Prophets: God Divides the Kingdom People**

After just three kings – Saul, David and Solomon – and about 120 years, the united kingdom split in two.

The Southern Kingdom came to be known as the Kingdom of Judah, comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This kingdom lasted about another a little over 300 years. The kings were a mixed lot, some bad who took the people into idolatry; and some good, who returned the people to the worship of God. The Southern Kingdom eventually became totally corrupt and went into captivity to Babylon in a series of invasions between the years 605 and 586 BC.

The Northern Kingdom came to be known as the Kingdom of Israel, made up of the other 10 tribes. This kingdom lasted only about 200 years. The kings were all bad, taking the people almost immediately into permanent idolatry. The Northern Kingdom was conquered and went into captivity by the cruel kingdom of Assyria about 720 BC.

Day 5

Read 1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10

Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 1

Today we move from the united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon to a kingdom divided into north and south. Read today's passages on three levels.

1. Read from the standpoint of God as the main character. Ask yourself what he was accomplishing. He was bringing about judgment on the house of Solomon.
2. Read from the standpoint of the history of the nation of Israel. This was a critical point in its history, when the united kingdom divided into northern and southern kingdoms. Sin has devastating consequences.
3. Read on the level of human interaction. These chapters present a brilliant example of rank foolishness.

To whom do you look for advice? Do you have wise counselors in your life?

Do you grasp how your foolish decisions affect the lives of other people?

Day 6

Read 1 Kings 13-14; 2 Chronicles 11-12

Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 2

Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam failed to follow the Lord, and we read about the end of their reigns in today's narratives. First Kings focuses on the judgment against Jeroboam, to whom God said, "You have flung me behind your back" (14:9) but then concludes with Shishak's coming against Rehoboam and the kingdom of Judah.

When reading the strange story of the man of God's death, found in 1 Kings 13:11-34, keep in mind two things.

1. The man of God, though deceived, chose to disobey the direct command he had received from the Lord.
2. First Kings 13:33 tells us the judgment against the man of God was also meant to be a sign to Jeroboam, but the king ignored it: "Even after this, Jeroboam did not repent."

Since 2 Chronicles focuses on Judah's kings, Rehoboam is the focus of the 2 Chronicles reading. God softened his judgment against Rehoboam when the king repented.

How do you think about the relationship between sin and its consequences? Is there anything about which you need to humble yourself before the Lord today and ask forgiveness?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 24

Unlike his father David, Solomon did not stay true to the Lord. In his last years, he forsook the wisdom that marked his early reign. His folly bore the bitter fruit of the kingdom's division after he died. Ecclesiastes may be his last composition, in which Solomon reflected on what he had learned from life: all that a person can accumulate and experience and achieve is without profit and pointless unless one has lived in fear and obedience to God.

Prayer/Meditation

Heavenly Father, it's hard to understand how one you gifted with so much wisdom, wealth, and power could stray so far from your pathway. I want to scream, "How could Solomon have been so stupid!" Yet in my heart I know that without your grace I also will drift away from you. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, in whom I find ultimate wisdom, for as Jesus said of his own wise teachings, "Something greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31). Amen.
