

Today's Light July—September 2018

The following material is linked to the July—September issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about 45 minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions as needed and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

To subscribe to *Today's Light*, contact Concordia Publishing House via e-mail at magazines@cph.org, via phone at 1-800-325-3040, or via fax at 1-800-490-9889.

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July Week 1 Discussion Questions

July 1–8, 2 Samuel 1–12

1. What is David's attitude toward King Saul (2 Samuel 1)? David called Saul "the Lord's Anointed." What ideas are associated with this term (1 Samuel 2:10; 9:16; Matthew 1:17)? If we thought of those who serve in governmental offices in the same way that David did King Saul, in spite of the difficulties David had with Saul, how would our world be different? What blessings come to us as we think of Jesus as God's Anointed?
2. What words of Abner (2 Samuel 3:9, 17) show that he knew of God's promises regarding David? Do you think Abner did what he did because he believed these promises? How are we like Abner, in many respects? Rather than "repay the evildoer according to his wickedness" (2 Samuel 3:39), how does God deal with our sin (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:8–11)?
3. What do you understand about the meaning of the events in 2 Samuel 4–5? How do you apply them to your own walk with the Lord? Where do you see God's Law? What evidence of God's grace can you identify?
4. What made the ark so important to David and Israel (2 Samuel 6:2)? What similar symbols do Christians have today? How do Christians show their honor and reverence for God by the way they treat these symbols?
5. In what sense was David's dynasty an eternal one? Read specific verses from 2 Samuel 7 aloud as you answer. In what ways were God's promises to David (2 Samuel 7) fulfilled in Jesus? List as many as you can as you work through 2 Samuel 7.
6. David asked the question, "Is there not still someone . . . that I may show the kindness of God to him" (2 Samuel 9:3)? What was the situation and what did David do? What is the benefit of thinking of the kind things you do for others as "showing God's kindness" to someone? To whom might you or your group show the Lord's kindness?
7. Review 2 Samuel 11–12 together with "The Life of David—A Cast of Important Characters." Which characters are familiar to you? What lessons does the list hold for you? Would you consider David a success or a failure as a king? As a father? As a husband? Explain.

July Week 2 Discussion Questions

July 9–15, 2 Samuel 13–22

1. Notice David's reactions to the events described in 2 Samuel 13. When are you most likely to say, "Maybe it will go away"? What does David's life say to you about the wisdom of ignoring problems? What options has God in Christ opened to you instead?
2. Although the woman has not described God's justice accurately, what way has God devised "so that the banished one will not remain an outcast" (2 Samuel 14:14)?
3. In the midst of Absalom's revolt, what evidence is there in 2 Samuel 16–17 that God was providing help to David? What implications does this have for us?
4. How did the Lord use General Joab to maintain King David's throne? See 2 Samuel 19:1–7. What makes it hard for you at times to listen to godly advice? Why do we need to cultivate relationships with people who tell us the truth?
5. Of what does the word "again" in 2 Samuel 21:15 remind us? In what ways is this a picture of our lives as Christians?
6. Of which of his experiences might David be thinking when he describes the Lord as his rock, fortress, shield, and horn of salvation (2 Samuel 22:2–3)? Based on your own deliverances by God, what words would you use to describe the Lord?

July Week 3 Discussion Questions

July 16–22, 2 Samuel 23–1 Kings 8

1. What are the “last words of David”? (See 2 Samuel 23:1–7.) What encouragement is given to us in these words?
2. As you’ve read the books of Samuel, you have no doubt noticed that the holy writers chose which events to record. For example, not every important event in David’s life appears in the sacred record. 2 Samuel 24 acknowledges the contributions of men who supported David in his career; some of their exploits are interesting, but they are only peripheral to salvation history. Rather, the important task of Scriptures is to record “salvation history.” Choose one or two events that you’ve read and explain how God was at work in them to bring the Messiah, our Savior, into the world.
3. As you read 1 Kings 1–2, note who is involved in the coup to seat the next king of Israel and who is involved to ensure that Solomon becomes king. What do those involved in the coup do when the coup is thwarted? What do you think Solomon’s words to Adonijah, “Go to your house,” mean to Adonijah? How do these words compare with the words of Jesus to the thief on the cross who asked to be remembered (Luke 23:39–43)?
4. Reread Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 3:4–15. What especially strikes you about this prayer? Have you prayed, as Solomon did, for an “understanding mind”? What blessings would come to you and others from the gift of an understanding mind?
5. The building of the temple, described in 1 Kings 5–6, was the crowning achievement of Solomon. Where in Psalm 72—a psalm of Solomon—do you see echoes of King Solomon’s reign? Where do you see the eternal, gracious dynasty of our Lord Jesus?
6. In his prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:23–53), what is Solomon’s basic plea for the people? See especially verses 28, 30, 34, 36, 39, and 50. When is this same plea present in our church services and in our own prayers? Include this plea in your closing prayers today.

July Week 4 Discussion Questions

July 23–29, 1 Kings 9–18

1. Have you ever given advice to someone because you sensed that they were headed in the wrong direction? What elements of this are in God's reply to Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 9:3–9)? What did God really want Solomon to do? Does He want the same of us (John 8:1–11; Romans 6:13; 15:13)?
2. How do you account for Solomon's downfall? What warning is there for us in 1 Kings 10–11?
3. Compare the history of Solomon's son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12) with Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes (2:18–20). Did Solomon have premonitions about his son? What is the best attitude for Christian parents to take regarding the Christian education of their children?
4. Think about the reason Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:25–33). In what ways are we sometimes tempted to a "convenient Christianity"? What was God's reaction to this "convenient Christianity" (1 Kings 13:1–10)?
5. "Provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger." All too often this phrase appears in 1 Kings 15–16. What caused God's anger? The one bright spot is the reign of Asa, who ruled forty-one years (1 Kings 15:9–24). What did Asa do? For what was Asa commended by the writer of Kings?
6. What lessons might we learn from the story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7–24)?

July Week 5 Discussion Questions

July 30–31, 1 Kings 19–22

1. What accounts for Elijah's discouragement in 1 Kings 19? When are you most prone to discouragement over the state of Christ's church? How has God "whispered" to you in His Word? How do we sometimes look for God in the wrong places—the wind, fire, or earthquake?

2. Asa's son Jehoshaphat succeeded him on the throne of Judah and also did "what was right in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 22:43). He wasn't perfect. What faults does the writer of Kings mention (1 Kings 22: 43, 48; 2 Chronicles 20:35–37)? Both Asa and Jehoshaphat are examples of people whom Luther described as both saint and sinner. How are you both saint and sinner? Pray Luther's prayer in the words of the hymn "To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All" (*LSB* 613).

August Week 1 Discussion Questions

August 1–5, 2 Kings 1–5

1. Read 2 Kings 1. What is the question that dominates this chapter? Restate the question in your own words to make it applicable to our day. What was the difference in approach to Elijah of the third captain as compared to the first two captains? What lesson is there in this situation for us (Psalm 32:3–7)?
2. The term “passing the mantle” goes back to 2 Kings 2:13 (see especially the NKJV). Each generation of believers and leaders must take up the mantle anew. What challenge is this to us today? What assurances do we have?
3. Describe the four miraculous things God did through Elisha in 2 Kings 4. What do these four events tell us about our God?
4. In 2 Kings 5, we find a wonderful example of witnessing to one's faith. Who was the faithful witness? Who came to faith? What was Jesus' commentary on this history? See Luke 4:24–27.

August Week 2 Discussion Questions

August 6–12, 2 Kings 6–15

1. How many developments in 2 Kings 6–7 can you identify as gifts of God's grace? Identify them. How is each one an assurance to you that God is trustworthy and cares for His people?
2. In spite of the evil present in the land, God did not destroy Israel because of the promises He had made to David (2 Kings 8:19). What promises had He made (2 Samuel 7:14, 16, 29; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 18:28; 132:17; Acts 13:33–34; Hebrews 1:5)? Why are these promises and their fulfillment important to us?
3. Describe the punishment God gave to Ahab's and Jezebel's family (See 2 Kings 9–10). The message to Israel and Judah was that God does punish sin and evil. When did God carry out the punishment for our sins (Isaiah 53:3–9; Matthew 27:45–50)? Pray the prayer of the hymn, "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (*LSB* 420).
4. How did the adults in Joash's young life help him (2 Kings 11)? How did this help relate to the ideas mentioned in these passages: Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Proverbs 1:7; 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:14–17? How might the members of your group foster the Christian education of young people today?
5. Read 2 Kings 13:14. In the context of this chapter, where do true strength and assurance reside?
6. Read the article "Resurrection in the Old Testament." Then read several of the passages that refer to resurrection. What recurring refrain in 2 Kings 14–15 indicates Israel was dead in their sin? Why are these instances of resurrection significant – for Old Testament people and for us?

August Week 3 Discussion Questions

August 13–19, 2 Kings 16 – 1 Chronicles 3

1. Compare 2 Kings 17 with Proverbs 14:34. Explain how the Proverbs passage is a commentary on the decline and fall of the northern kingdom of Israel? How did the kings of Israel set an example for the people? What is the message of 2 Kings 17 for us today?

2. The defeat of the Assyrian army of King Sennacherib is a wonderful story of deliverance (2 Kings 19). What role did prayer have in that miraculous event? How can we apply the lesson about prayer today?

3. Two questions come up with respect to Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1–16): Do you know the rest of the story? What is repentance? Find the rest of the story regarding Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:1–20. What brought about a change of heart in Manasseh? What is repentance? What is the difference between being sorry and being repentant?

4. Reread 2 Kings 22–23 and comment on the reforms under King Josiah. What were these reforms and what initiated them? While all the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were evil, that was not the case with Judah. Note some of the changes that took place with changes in leadership in the southern kingdom. Note especially the reforms of Josiah, who evidently continued the reforms begun by Hezekiah. How are these changes both a warning and a comfort for believers today?

5. In the face of the removal of many people from Jerusalem and the destruction of the city described in 2 Kings 24–25, what hope do you find in the way King Jehoiachin of Judah was treated in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30)? See also Matthew 1:1, 11–12, 23; Matthew's name for Jehoiachin is Jeconiah.

6. Read the introduction to 1 Chronicles in your *Today's Light* booklet and then read 1 Chronicles 1–3. Then go ahead and try it—make a genealogical diagram that includes all those names. It makes you wonder what the purpose of the Chronicler was. One purpose for sure was that he wanted to trace the promise of the Messiah through to King David. Notice some of the names in this listing that are also in the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Talk about some of the achievements of these people. The Chronicler cared enough to record this information. God cared even more that He keep the promise of a Savior that He had made first to Adam and Eve, then to Abraham, and has continued His faithfulness to us as He provides His Word, the Sacraments, and people to teach His Word in our own time. With members of your group praise God for those who have taught God's Word to you.

August Week 4 Discussion Questions

August 20–26, 1 Chronicles 4-18

1. The prayer of Jabez, made famous in a book from 2000, appears in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10. What were the two petitions Jabez makes in this prayer? A more accurate translation of the Hebrew for verse 9 than many Bibles provide is “Jabez was more honored than his brothers.” Since the Chronicler is reporting about all the clans and where they were to settle in the first part of 1 Chronicles, why would he record Jabez’s prayer and the fact that God answered his prayer? Did God answer Jabez’s prayer because he was more honorable than his brothers? Why does God listen to and answer our prayers (John 16:23)?
2. In what way is the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 1–9 more than simply a list of names? How can we rightly call it “holy history”?
3. In 1 Chronicles 10–11, the writer emphasizes that David became king over all Israel. What evidence does the Chronicler use to indicate David ruled over all? Why did David refuse to drink the water that had been brought to him (1 Chronicles 11:15–19)? Remember that the Chronicler is writing for people who are returning to Jerusalem after they have been in captivity in Babylon. Why is all this history necessary for them? What is its benefit to us?
4. As the ark was moved to Jerusalem in both the aborted procession described in 1 Chronicles 13 and the second procession described in 1 Chronicles 15–16, Psalm 118 was probably sung. Read together Psalm 118. Identify verses of the psalm that would be especially meaningful to a people returning from exile, working to reestablish themselves in Israel, and preparing a more permanent place for the ark to reside. Martin Luther loved verse 17 of this psalm. Which verses are especially meaningful for you? Explain your choice.
5. Find evidence in 1 Chronicles 14–16 that David functioned as king, priest, and prophet. How is Jesus your Prophet, Priest, and King in ways that are even greater than David when he served Israel? See the references in “Zoom In” for August 25.
6. Reread 1 Chronicles 18:14. This verse places a stamp of approval on David’s activities described in previous chapters and sets the stage for the accounts of the conquests of the next chapters. Why, in spite of the many failings of David we have read about, is this verse appropriate as a description of his life? Psalm 51 will help answer the question.

August Week 5 Discussion Questions

August 27–31, 1 Chronicles 19–29

1. What seems to have started trouble between David and Hanun, the king of the Ammonites (1 Chronicles 19:1–9)? Say the Eighth Commandment and its explanation from Luther's Small Catechism with your group. What was the result of this violation of the Eighth Commandment? When we speak ill of our neighbors and friends, what may be some of the effects? As a person redeemed by Christ Jesus, what do Christians do as they speak of others (Proverbs 31:8–9; Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; Ephesians 2:8–10; 4:15–16, 25)? Pray for strength to do this through Christ in your closing prayers.

2. God assured the Roman Christians, through Paul, that He makes all things turn out for the good of His people (Romans 8:28). How do the events of 1 Chronicles 21 make this same point? What part does Christ play in this scene? See 1 Chronicles 21:17 and Romans 5:6 and Romans 8:33–34.

3. The worship of the one true God, Yahweh, was to be the focus of Israelite life. In 1 Chronicles 23–24 the Chronicler records many of the tasks that were to be performed by the Levites “for the service of the house of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 23:28). Identify several of these tasks. Evidently the worship of the Lord took place morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, and on festival occasions. How does the Church reflect this worship pattern today? What helps are available to us for worshiping “morning and evening to thank and praise the Lord” (1 Chronicles 23:30)?

4. What was the purpose of God's promise to Abraham to multiply the people of Israel to be as many as the stars in the sky (Genesis 22:17)? Mention some instances when leaders in Israel attempted to do God's work for Him and preserve the Promise. What assurance is there in 1 Chronicles 27:23 for us?

5. What inspiration might we find in the record of the gifts for the temple (1 Chronicles 29:1–9, especially verse 9)?

Extra. What in the readings for July and August did you find especially memorable and meaningful for your life?

September Week 1 Discussion Questions

September 1–2, 2 Chronicles 1–3

1. The devotion for September 1 speaks of seeking the Lord where He may be found. Where is that? In what other places do people today sometimes seek Him? Why are the results of that search less than satisfactory?
2. Explain the meaning of the name Yahweh, the LORD. Choose a psalm in which this name figures prominently. (Most English translations indicate this Hebrew word by printing LORD in capital letters.) What new insights do you gain from the psalm by paying special attention to the use of God's covenant name?

September Week 2 Discussion Questions

September 3–9, 2 Chronicles 4–13

1. Which two pieces of furniture in the temple foreshadowed Christ's cross? How?
2. What brought the queen of Sheba to visit King Solomon? (See 2 Chronicles 9:1–12.) What does this demonstrate regarding the LORD's attitude toward people who were not descendants of Abraham?
3. How would the words you have read this week from 2 Chronicles have encouraged this book's original audience? How did these words encourage you?
4. In your opinion, what two or three factors made the division of David's kingdom almost inevitable? Explain.
5. Which king in this week's readings most impressed you (either negatively or positively) in his service for the LORD? Where do you see the LORD'S work in that king's life?
6. Notice especially those kings who did right in God's eyes. What blessings did it bring them and the nation? How does this apply to governments in our day?

September Week 3 Discussion Questions

September 10–16, 2 Chronicles 14–25

1. Reread 2 Chronicles 18:1–27. How did Micaiah meet the test of a true prophet as outlined by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:14–22?
2. Jehoshaphat began his prayer with praise (2 Chronicles 20). Explain why he did that, given the fact that Judah faced an immediate and potentially disastrous emergency. What clues does this give you about the role of praise in your own prayer life?
3. Put Psalm 1:1 into your own words to explain its meaning. How does the life of King Ahaziah illustrate this verse?
4. Why did Judah rejoice so fully when Joash the boy-king came to power? (See the devotion for September 15 and 2 Chronicles 23:13, 21.)
5. What do you suppose led King Amaziah to add the gods of Edom to his worship of Yahweh? Where do you see the tendency toward adding other “gods” in your own worship life? How is the “folly” of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18) the only remedy for this?

September Week 4 Discussion Questions

September 17–23, 2 Chronicles 26–35

1. Share with one another a time when you were “marvelously helped” by the Lord till you were strong (2 Chronicles 26:15 NKJV). Your notes on the devotion for September 17 may help you.
2. Which words of Psalm 46 most encouraged you this week? Share in your group. Then pray this psalm together before you leave today.
3. How would you distinguish between guilt and shame? How does Christ's cross free you from both?
4. How did God speak to ancient Judah? With what result? How does God speak to us today? With what result?
5. Where do you see God at work in your life today, purging and cleansing? In what ways is this a work of His grace? How can remembering God's grace help when the process hurts?
6. Why do Christians need to hear both Law and Gospel in our daily walk with Jesus? What does each, by God's grace, do for us?

September Week 5 Discussion Questions

September 24–30, 2 Chronicles 36—Ezra 10

1. Think about Judah's return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. What is miraculous about this from your point of view? What eternal purpose of God lay behind it?
2. Skim the devotion for September 27 (Ezra 6). What specific prayers of intercession could you offer for those in authority in your church today? What could you pray for those in authority in your nation? Make a list and include your thoughts as part of today's closing prayer.
3. The devotion for September 28 (Ezra 7-8) talks about the purpose and meaning of life and of all history. What evidence do you see that people in our society are searching for meaning but failing to find it? When do you sometimes ask yourself, "What's the point?" How does your relationship with Christ give your life meaning?
4. Explain Ezra 9:4. What application do you see in these words and in Ezra's prayer (9:6–15) for your own life?

Leaders Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific, factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

July Week 1 Leaders Notes

1. In 2 Samuel 1 David considers Saul to be God's Anointed; Saul is the person chosen by God to serve as king. No matter what the situation, David feels God's chosen one should be treated with honor and respect; nothing should be done to harm him. Since God is the one who chose Saul, David feels that it is especially important to honor and respect him. Answers will vary with respect to how members of your group feel our world would be different if we thought of people who serve in governmental offices as God's appointees, but a higher degree of respect and honor would be evident. The word "Christ" [Greek] and the word "Messiah" [Hebrew] both mean "the Anointed One." Ultimately, Jesus is God's Anointed One. Jesus was appointed by God to be our Savior; for this appointment and because He fulfilled all things necessary for our salvation, He is due our highest honor and respect. As we honor Christ in all that we do, we honor Him as Savior and Lord and receive God's promised blessings.

2. Abner refers to "what the LORD promised him on oath" (2 Samuel 3:9). Abner helped transfer Israel to David, not because he believed the promises of God, but because he was offended by Ish-Bosheth's accusation (2 Samuel 3:6). Like Abner, we often act in treacherous ways toward God. Rather than give us the punishment we deserve, God's Son Jesus was punished for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5); Christ died to justify the ungodly and to reconcile us to Him (Romans 5:6, 10).

3. In 2 Samuel 4–5 the holy writer describes David's becoming king after a seven-year war with Saul's son Ish-Bosheth that followed Saul's death. The Law is evident in David's pronouncement of the death penalty upon the brothers Racab and Baanah, who had murdered Ish-Bosheth. God's grace is evident in David finally becoming king—as God had promised—and in David's victory over his enemies. "The LORD God Almighty was with him" (2 Samuel 5:10).

4. The ark was the earthly throne of Israel's God and represented the Lord's kingship and rule over both Israel and King David. It reminded the people of God's presence among them. Today the cross and the altar in Christian churches serve the same function. Christians honor God by placing the cross and the altar in central places in their churches, by caring for them, and by treating them with respect (bowing to the altar, for example).

5. While David wanted to build a house—a temple—for the Lord, the Lord wanted instead to "build a house"—a dynasty—for David. That dynasty is an eternal one, because the King—Jesus—is our eternal Savior. This is good news for us. Encourage the group to refer to specific verses from 2 Samuel 7 as you talk about this Davidic dynasty.

6. David wanted to show kindness to any descendants of Jonathan, but he did not know if any of them were still living. When he learned that Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, was still living, David returned all of Saul's property to him, took him into the palace as a guest, provided meals for him, and arranged for people to farm Mephibosheth's land. Thinking of the kindnesses we show to others as "showing God's kindness" to someone reminds us that our good works proceed from God's kindness that He gave to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose from the dead that we might have

pardon for all sin.

7. Answers will vary. It might be a good idea to take a few minutes to run through the list and comment on the various characters. The leader may wish to have a Bible dictionary available to look up further information on some of the people. Be sure to make applications and note what might be learned from the strengths and weaknesses of these people. Also note God's judgment and grace in their lives. The question regarding David as a king, father, and husband calls for an opinion on the part of participants. Probably most people would consider David a success as a king, but something of a failure as a father and a husband. Evidently his responsibilities for the kingdom took precedence over his responsibilities in his own household. The incident with Bathsheba, coupled with all the problems he had with his sons, point to an absentee father and husband whose neglect led to several different tragedies.

July Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. Answers will vary. The devotions for July 9 and 10 take up these issues. Except for being furious about it, David did not deal with Amnon in any way (2 Samuel 13:21); perhaps his own failures made him feel incapable of speaking with Amnon about his sexuality. David seems not to have shown displeasure over Absalom's murder of Amnon either. Discuss the options for dealing with problems that are mentioned in the devotions for July 9 and that are available to us.
2. Through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross God has devised a way that those banished from His presence by their sin may be brought back into His presence. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). See also the explanation of the Second Article in Luther's Small Catechism.
3. During this critical time God provided several people to meet David's needs. Ziba brought provisions. Hushai became a spy who acted on David's behalf. Other people helped get messages from Hushai to David. Others provided food (2 Samuel 17:27–29). God frequently uses others to care for His people. Perhaps He has used members of your group in this way. Discuss this possibility and thank God for His gracious gifts to us given through others and for the opportunity to serve.
4. At several critical junctures the Lord used Joab to give King David good advice. One of these instances is recorded in 2 Samuel 19:1–7. Let group members discuss factors that make it difficult for us at times to listen to godly advice. This might include such things as our feelings of self-sufficiency, our pride, and our low opinion of others who are trying to advise us. Still, we do need to cultivate relationships with people who tell us the truth because at times our own sinfulness blinds us to the truth that we need to know in order to obey God and serve Him well. Let the group discuss this as time will allow.
5. The word "again" at the beginning of 2 Samuel 21:15–22 reminds us that the Philistines were a constant thorn in the flesh, the perennial enemy of God's people. Just as David and the nation of Israel constantly had to fend off these foes, we need constantly to be on guard and fend off the attacks of Satan, who will never let up as long as we live. Yet, as God gave His people protection, He also protects us in our spiritual warfare. Refer to Ephesians 6:10–18.
6. Since David often hid in the rocks when he was pursued by Saul and his men, David would think of the Lord as being a strong and safe place of refuge. Similarly, strong fortresses and shields were also important to David for safety and protection; God provided both for him. David also knew his sin; only in God was there forgiveness and peace. God was the strength ("the horn") for his salvation. Jesus, David's descendant, is our strong Savior and defender against sin, death, and the devil.

July Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. David's "last words" are not his final utterance (see 1 Kings 2:1–10), but they are his last psalm, a last will and testament of sorts. In 2 Samuel 23:1–7, David recognizes what a high privilege it has been to serve as leader of God's people. The words are encouraging for us because they remind us how God keeps His promises, protects His believers, and defeats those who oppose Him and His people.
2. Answers will vary. Participants may think of passages such as 2 Samuel 7. It is important to keep in mind that God controls history and He controlled what the sacred writers would record. The last portion of 2 Samuel 24 gives the history of David's purchase of land from Araunah on which he built an altar. This land later became the site of the temple at Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 22:1; 2 Chronicles 3:1).
3. Joab and Abiathar supported Adonijah, who wanted to be the next king. Nathan, the prophet, Bathsheba, Benaiah, and Zadok the priest worked to ensure that Solomon would succeed David on the throne. When Adonijah's coup attempt was countered with the crowning of Solomon as king, Adonijah's support evaporated. When Solomon told him to "Go to your house" (1 Kings 1:53) it must have been a relief to Adonijah; he would not be imprisoned or beheaded for his attempted coup. The thief, too, must have been relieved and overjoyed at Jesus' words that he would have a home in heaven. This relief and joy is ours also, for we have been forgiven our sins through Christ and are assured a place in heaven (2 Timothy 4:18; Titus 2:14).
4. Solomon's prayer is a beautiful example of selfless prayer. Rather than asking for personal advantages, he prayed for the good of the nation. In response to God's gift of salvation through His Son we will want our prayers to reflect Solomon's desire to serve others, and we will ask for personal gifts that glorify God and are of service to others.
5. Have participants read Psalm 72, noting specific passages that echo the reign of King Solomon and the eternal, gracious dynasty of Jesus Christ. Notice that many of the words cannot apply to Solomon, but can only apply to Jesus, as when, for instance, Solomon declares of the king: "May he have dominion from sea to sea . . . to the ends of the earth. . . [may] all nations serve him" (Psalm 72:8–11).
6. Solomon's recurring plea is that, whenever the people of Israel sin (He anticipated that it would be often), the Lord would act with mercy and forgive their sin and restore them to being His people. Christian people today, in their worship, ask forgiveness from God in the confession of sins. In the Lord's Prayer we ask that God would "forgive our trespasses." In repentant faith we know that for Christ's sake God forgives us all sin (Psalm 103:12; Matthew 9:2; Acts 3:19).

July Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. God clearly spelled out for Solomon that he was to live with integrity and uprightness, to obey God's commands. When Solomon did this, God promised to establish His royal throne over Israel. If Solomon or his sons failed, God warned that He would "cut off Israel from the land" (1 Kings 9:7) and reject the temple. God wants us to obey His commands also, for He knows that is best for us. Paul urged the Roman Christians to offer themselves "as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13) and prayed that "by the power of the Holy Spirit" they would overflow with hope (Romans 15:13).

2. Solomon's downfall was clearly related to his marrying too many foreign wives and then allowing them to lead him into participating in the worship of idols. While Solomon retained the worship of the true God, that worship was tragically compromised. An obvious application is in the situation of mixed marriages in which Christians compromise their faith. Solomon also seems to have been enamored by riches and possessions. Compromising our faith can happen in many situations, and we all need to pray that God will keep us steadfast in the faith.

3. In Ecclesiastes 2:18–20, Solomon speaks of working hard only to leave one's accomplishments in the hands of another: "I must leave it to the man who will come after me." Solomon may well have had premonitions about Rehoboam. Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 give direction to everyone: fear God and keep His commandments and leave other things to God. Teach the Good News of salvation in Jesus faithfully to family members. None of us knows the future, but as we pass God's Word on to the next generation, we know that it will bring blessings and faith, including among our family and loved ones.

4. There are a number of reasons Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:25–33). The king feared that the temple in Jerusalem would pull the hearts of his people toward the king in the south and toward a reuniting of the kingdom. Obviously this would result in his being dethroned, and Jeroboam was unwilling to live with that possibility. Consequently, he made worship of the Lord more "convenient" for his people by setting up centers of worship apart from Jerusalem—one in the northernmost part and one in the southernmost part of his kingdom. Let group members talk about how we are sometimes tempted to a "convenient Christianity". Stress the obvious fact that we would not want to put stumbling blocks in anyone's way. There is nothing inherently "Christian" about having a muddy church parking lot or a lack of proper heating and cooling in our places of worship. Yet the basic teachings of Christianity drawn from Scripture cannot be changed in order to make the faith more palatable to those who insist that such changes would aid evangelism. Unfortunately, Jeroboam did not heed the warning of God's prophet (1 Kings 13:33). Pray that we heed the message of God's Law, repent in faith, receive God's forgiveness in Christ, and live in faithfulness to God's Word.

5. God's anger was caused by the failure of the various kings to do as He had commanded Solomon to do: "Walk before me . . . with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you" (1 Kings 9:4). Asa "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" and "wholly true to the LORD all his days" (1 Kings 15:11, 14). Include in your prayer a petition that all members of your group might receive the strength of the Spirit to serve God faithfully in response to His love and forgiveness given to us in His Son.

6. The Lord used Elijah and the widow at Zarephath to advance His work in the northern kingdom. God miraculously provided for them and raised her son back to life. In this way, He kept His work alive in a time of widespread unbelief. The Lord also wants to use us in His kingdom, even though we may feel that our service is insignificant compared

with that of others. In grace, He invites us to have a part in the work He is doing on earth to teach and proclaim the Gospel to all people.

July Week 5 Leaders Notes

1. After the LORD's great victory on Mt. Carmel, Elijah apparently was convinced that the Northern Kingdom was returning to God—only to learn that wicked Queen Jezebel was seeking his life for killing the prophets of Baal. Elijah felt he was the only one left to serve God; on top of that, his enemies were seeking to kill him. Yet God told him that there were still 7,000 left who had not fallen into idolatry. At times, we may become discouraged not only with our own weakness of faith, but also with the seemingly lost cause of the Gospel in this wicked world. But God reminds us that His Word is still effective (see Isaiah 55:10–11). Let us not look for God's voice in the wrong places—the noise and show (wind, fire, earthquake) of worldly wealth and success. Rather, let us find comfort in the gentle whisper of His unfailing Word.

2. Jehoshaphat, like all of God's people, was both saint and sinner. He did not always follow God's commands; he entered into a treaty with King Ahaziah rather than depend on God for His protection. The writer of Kings, however, mentions that he did “what was right in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 22:43). We too fall into sin, but cleansed by Jesus' blood, God makes us His saints. Pray Luther's prayer for forgiveness and peace.

August Week 1 Leaders Notes

1. The question that appears several times in 2 Kings 1 is an important one: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" (2 Kings 1:3, 6, 16). We might ask: Is it because the true God is not worshipped by many people in the United States (Canada) that you are looking for help in so many other places: eastern religions, drugs, constant entertainment, or Satanism, to name a few? The third captain approached Elijah with humble submission (2 Kings 1:13–14). When we approach God in humility and repentance, He will forgive our sin for Jesus' sake (Psalm 32:5, 7; Acts 3:19).
2. As Elisha took Elijah's mantle (cloak), so the prophetic work passed on to this new spokesman for the Lord and true faith. Today's generation of Christians and Christian leaders has received the mantle from the generation that has gone before it. Along with sharing the Gospel through missionary work, the greatest challenge each new generation faces is to pass it on to the next generation. Training the young in the truths of God's Word is not an option. It is a must. We accept this challenge with the confidence that God's Word is powerful. God has worked through His Word for thousands of years and will continue to bring people to saving faith as long as the world endures.
3. Through Elisha God provided funds for a woman to pay her debt and sustain her and her family, He gave a son to a Shunammite woman and then restored him to life, He removed the "death in the pot" from some cooked food, and He fed one hundred men using twenty loaves of freshly baked barley bread. In all of these events God showed that He is a God who cares about people and provides for their needs. Several of these miracles are pictures of miracles Jesus did in His own ministry, especially as He fed five thousand people with a few loaves of bread and some fish (Matthew 14:13–21) and as He raised a young man from the dead (Luke 7:11–17). He does the same for us, as we confess in the explanation of the First Article, "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." Most notably, God saves us from eternal death through His Son Jesus.
4. The young Israelite servant girl witnessed to the true God of Israel and His prophet Elisha. Naaman came to faith. Jesus used this piece of history to show the people of His day that saving faith was not limited to the Israelites. Indeed, when those who have God's Word reject it, God will move it elsewhere and bring others to faith.

August Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. By God's grace and power, an axe head was recovered from the Jordan River, the soldiers of Aram were made captives in Samaria, and later while besieging Samaria, they were sent fleeing in panic and their camp was plundered. In each instance God relieved a concern of his people and provided protection for them. In the case of the borrowed axe head, losing one meant a time of bondage to replace it since they were very expensive. By making it float, God saved the companion of the prophet from spending time as a slave. In other instances God's people were saved from the threat of the Aramean army and famine. In these times of stress, God again showed that He cares for His people and acts to deliver them. Point out to the participants that Old Testament miracles did not occur regularly, but were especially evident in times of great upheaval (e.g., the Exodus from Egypt) or in times of national crisis and widespread unbelief (e.g., the days of Elijah and Elisha). We can find reassurance in the miraculous events from sacred history as they demonstrate that God always watches over His people, preserves them, and uses everything for their eternal good.

2. God had promised David that He would keep His lamp burning in Israel. This was a reference to the promise that Messiah would be born in David's family. Other expressions of this same promise involve the picture of God building a house (dynasty) for David that would last forever (2 Samuel 7:11–16) and God keeping a lamp burning in Israel (2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 18:28; 132:17). These pictures are also used in the New Testament (Acts 13:33–34; Hebrews 1:5). They are an assurance to us that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah and our Savior from sin.

3. God used Jehu to punish Ahab and Jezebel for the evils they had committed against God's people, including Naboth. Rightfully we should each receive the punishment for our sins, as did Ahab and Jezebel, but Christ Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins in our place. He substituted Himself into our place so that we would not suffer the eternal punishment we deserve. Thank Him for His sacrifice by using the words of the hymn, "Christ, the Life of All the Living".

4. Jehosheba, Joash's aunt, his nurse, and Jehoida, the priest, saved Joash from being murdered by Athalia, his grandmother. They protected him by hiding him in the temple for seven years, all the while caring for him and educating him. When he was seven they engineered his ascent to the throne of Judah. All of the Scripture passages, in one way or another, urge us to teach children God's Word, to nurture their faith, to give them Christian training, to provide Christian education for them, as did Timothy's mother and grandmother. Perhaps your group can, in some practical way, assist in the Christian education of the children you know. Plan a way and pray for the Lord's help and guidance as you carry out this important mission.

5. Because of its sin, the northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrians and taken into exile, where it was eventually lost from history. All of the kings of Israel were ungodly and set a terrible example for the people. Only in the Lord was there assurance and strength. At one point God provided a deliverer for Israel (2 Kings 13:5), but they continued their sinful ways of worship and living. During Israel's continual oppression by Aram God had mercy on them and cared for them because of the promise He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2 Kings 13:23). Unfortunately, Israel did not repent or live under the covenant as the Lord's people. True strength and assurance lie not in earthly military might or wealth but in God. Jesus is the only source of comfort and assurance for time and for eternity. That is as true today as it was in ancient Israel. Pray that the Lord would make each of you His faithful people.

6. The recurring refrains "the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places" (2 Kings 14:4, for example) and "he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kings 14:24, for example) indicate Israel was dead in sin. Only through God's power could they be resurrected, as was the man who touched Elisha's dead body (2 Kings 13:21). Only through God's power are we resurrected from our sin and restored to life (Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:12–23).

August Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. Israel's persistent sin was a disgrace. They worshipped the gods of the people who lived in the land before they arrived. They did not obey the First Commandment. Their worship practices were despicable (2 Kings 17:7–17). The kings permitted and participated in this worship. This unfaithfulness led to the downfall of Israel. For us, 2 Kings 17 is a call to faithfulness to God and His Word. In Christ, God will deliver us from the hand of our enemies (2 Kings 17:39).

2. Hezekiah's prayer played the key role in the deliverance of Jerusalem. Hezekiah prayed: "O LORD our God, save us, please, from [the Assyrians'] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone" (2 Kings 19:19). Notice that Hezekiah prayed for the glory of God's name. Then the prophet Isaiah followed that prayer with a prophecy that the Lord would defeat the Assyrian army, and He did. Never underestimate God's power to defeat evil and defend His people. In Christ He has defeated sin, death, and the devil. Take all your cares to Him in prayer!

3. According to 2 Chronicles 33, when Manasseh and the people refused to listen to the warnings of the Lord's prophets, the Lord Himself used Assyria to call Manasseh to repentance. Manasseh was taken as a prisoner to Assyria and humiliated. In his distress he prayed to God for deliverance. Later he was allowed to return to Jerusalem. He immediately acted to rebuild the walls and make Jerusalem better able to withstand attack. He also got rid of the images and altars to false gods that he had erected earlier and reinstituted worship of the Lord in the temple. It seems that Manasseh was repentant of his unfaithfulness and idolatry. A person might be sorry, but unrepentant. Repentance involves not only sorrow for sin, but it also includes faith that sin is forgiven for Jesus' sake and the living of a life of good works (Matthew 3:8). Your group may want to review and discuss questions 273–276 in Luther's Small Catechism in relation to this topic.

4. The finding of the Book of the Law (either part or all of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch) led to the reforms under Josiah. These reforms included a renewing of the covenant and the elimination of idolatry and the practices and artifacts connected with it, such as the removal of altars, spiritists, and mediums. Indeed, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 23:25). God's Word is powerful, and when read and applied it brings great changes for good. The changes from one generation to the next in the rule of Judah were startling. Following the evil Manasseh and Amon came the godly Josiah, only to be followed by his wicked son Jehoiakim. This is a warning lest we think that because we have the Word of God, our descendants will always have it as well. On the other hand, it is a comfort to realize that no matter how bad things are, through the power of God's Word there can be change and reform.

5. Evil-Merodach, the new king of Babylon, released King Jehoiachin from prison and provided residence for him in the palace. Here is a message of hope. Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:1, 11–12). In the midst of despair God still works to keep His promises, as He does even today. He is present in Word and the Sacraments. He sends His angels to protect us. He has promised to be with us to the end of time (Matthew 28:20). God is with us (Matthew 1:23).

6. Explore the genealogical records in 1 Chronicles 1–3, Matthew 1, and Luke 3 as you have time. Matthew provides the most concise record of Jesus' ancestry and thus the promise of God through the ages. Encourage members of your group to tell about people who have taught them God's Word. Ask, What message from God's Word do you most remember that this person taught? In your closing prayer thank God for all the people that have taught His Word to members of your group and your families.

August Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. In his prayer Jabez prays that God would give him more land and that God would keep him from harm so that he would have no pain. God did not answer Jabez's prayer because he was honorable or more honorable than others. God listens to and answers our prayers "for Jesus' sake," as we often pray and as John indicates (John 16:23). Set in the context of a record of the land settlement of Israel, the Chronicler may have noted this prayer as one common to all the people, including those in the clan of Judah, who wanted more land. The Chronicler also may have had a sense of humor, since Jabez's mother bore him in pain, he was named "Pain," and now he asks that he have no pain.

2. Far from being a mere listing of names, the genealogies of the early chapters of 1 Chronicles are a holy history. They are a record of people who played a role—some major and some less well known—in the story of salvation. More than that, they are a reminder to us that while the world may not pay much attention, the Lord is recording our names in His book of life! (See Revelation 3:5.) Ask participants to comment on the lists in Chronicles, perhaps pointing to names that they recognize or have comments or questions about.

3. To assure the returning exiles that they were returning to the land God had promised and following in the line of David, the Chronicler first recalled David's legitimate rise to the throne because the Lord "turned the kingdom over to David" (1 Chronicles 10:14). Several times the writer uses the term "all Israel" or similar terms (1 Chronicles 11:1, 3, 4) to indicate that all of Israel supported David's rule and that he ruled over all of them, not a divided kingdom. Leaders from all the tribes of Israel are mentioned as being people who served in David's government. If the returning exiles were to survive, they too needed unity. Doing as God had commanded them, as David had done, would provide a basis for a renewed unified nation founded on the promise God had made to Abraham and David. These accounts again assure us that God works constantly to fulfill His promises and that Jesus is the promised Messiah who is our Savior.

4. Encourage members of your group to share their thoughts about favorite verses in Psalm 118 and indicate its connection to 1 Chronicles 12–13. Psalm 118 is often described as a song of thanksgiving for deliverance. In it the psalmist credits God with victories in battle (v. 13) and asks the Lord's blessing as the people enter the gates of Jerusalem (v. 19–20). As Luther noted, the psalm has many references to things that the Lord has done for His people. The triple refrain (Psalm 118:2–4), "His love endures forever," echoes the refrain in Psalm 136, which recalls the deliverance God gave to Israel at the time of the Exodus. The psalmist also thanks God for the help He has given (Psalm 118:7). Even chastening is a reason for thanksgiving (Psalm 118:18). The Lord provided salvation for His people (Psalm 118:21). Those rejected have been raised up (Psalm 118:22). Jesus referred to this verse and indicated that it was referring to Himself; He was rejected in His crucifixion, but God made Him Savior of all.

5. In 1 Chronicles 14–16 David, as king, made treaties and led Israel into battle. He also functioned as a priest, preparing a place in Jerusalem for the ark and offering sacrifices

at its dedication (1 Chronicles 15:11–14, 27; 16:2). As prophet he prepared a psalm for the celebration (1 Chronicles 16:7–36). The Lord Jesus is our High Priest, who made the ultimate sacrifice of His perfect life for the sins of the world (see Hebrews 7:26–27); He is our Prophet, who proclaims the good news of salvation (see John 6:68); He is our King, who rules over the universe now and forever (see Matthew 28:18–20). Refer also to the passages in the August 25 “Zoom In.”

6. In spite of David's many failings, he had faith in God and His promises. That's why 1 Chronicles 18:14 declares that David “administered justice and equity to all his people.” As the book of Hebrews says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). In Psalm 51 David recognized his sins, repented, and looked to his Savior God for forgiveness and healing.

August Week 5 Leaders Notes

1. Not realizing that David was returning a kindness to Hanun's family for a kindness Hanun's father Nahash had shown to David, Hanun, responding to suspicious doubts planted by his advisors, had David's representatives humiliated and expelled (1 Chronicles 19:4). In the Eighth Commandment Luther reminds us to speak well of our neighbor rather than slander or tell lies about him. As a result of this slander, a long war between Israel and the Ammonites began that resulted in the annihilation of the Ammonites (1 Chronicles 20:1). Speaking ill of others can bring no good. Redeemed through the sacrificial life and death of Jesus, we bring honor to His name by defending those who need help, speaking privately with those who are sinning in some way, loving others by rejoicing in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6), "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Pray for the strength to do this at the conclusion of your study.

2. Probably in an effort to determine the size and strength of his army, David ordered a census. The order was part of a thought pattern building in Israel that believed their successes in battle were due to their own armed might rather than God's grace and mercy. God was angered by David's order (1 Chronicles 21:7) and set out to punish the people. David, however, pleaded with God that he and his family be punished rather than all the people (1 Chronicles 21:17); his pleading is a picture of Christ serving as our high priest and pleading for us before His Father (Romans 8:33–34). See also Hebrews 7:26–27 and 1 John 2:2. While David did not suffer in the place of Israel (God simply stopped the angel's sword.), Christ suffered and died for our sins on the cross (Romans 5:6). It was on the site of Araunah's threshing floor, where David pleaded for the people, that the temple was eventually built.

3. Some of the tasks that assisted worship included serving as officials and judges. Specifically, Levites served as gatekeepers, musicians, caretakers for the temple and its equipment, preparers of bread and wafers, leaders in conducting worship, and servants doing similar tasks. Today the Church follows a worship pattern similar to that of Israel as it follows the Church Year pattern of festival observances. To assist us in morning and evening worship the Church has prepared Morning and Evening Prayer Services, Matins and Vespers Services, as well as shorter forms for worship at these times. See also the section for Daily Prayers in Luther's Small Catechism. Sing a morning or evening hymn as part of your worship today.

4. God's promise to Abraham was meant to assure him that God would supply what was needed to keep His promise of providing a Messiah; he and Sarah would have a child, even in old age. In 1 Chronicles 27 the writer uses this promise to assure Israel that the Lord will supply the means to protect Israel if that is needed. They would not need to worry about having enough soldiers to protect the people or the Promise. Abraham, Rebekah, and David are examples of people who thought they needed to help God so that His promise could be kept. God will keep His promises in His own time and in His own way, as He did in sending the Savior at just the right time (Galatians 4:4).

5. Following the example of their leaders—beginning with David himself—the people gave generously to the temple fund. They gave because they were thankful for all that God had done for them. "All things come from you," they said (1 Chronicles 29:14). God's gifts to us, especially as He has given them through our Savior, Jesus Christ, who died and rose for our salvation, are an inspiration to us today as we undertake various projects—from education to missions to buildings—for the Lord's work.

Extra. Answers will vary. As we look back over the historical books we've covered with

this issue of *Today's Light*, there is so much to warn, inspire, uplift, and strengthen us. We will want to emphasize the work of God and His salvation history as it points to Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior!

September Week 1 Leaders Notes

1. People today sometimes try to find God in nature, inside their own hearts, and in numerous other philosophies and activities. The results of searching for God in that way are always unsatisfactory because He has revealed Himself in our Savior. God has promised to come to us in His Word and in the Sacraments. All other avenues lead only to dead ends.
2. The name Yahweh, the LORD, means "He who is" (for the origin of the name, see Exodus 3:13–15). For His people, the LORD means in essence "He Who Makes the Good Thing Happen." Let participants suggest the psalm they have chosen and comment on the insights they gain by paying close attention to this covenant name by which our God has revealed Himself to us. (See the devotion for September 2.)

September Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. The devotion for September 3 clearly answers this question. Refer participants to that reading if necessary.
2. The queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon because she had heard of his wisdom and the glory that God had given Israel under Solomon. The fact that this foreign dignitary traveled to Jerusalem shows that our Lord has always drawn people from every nation on earth to Himself. He clearly wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of His Son, Israel's Messiah—and ours!
3. The original audience of 2 Chronicles included former exiles who had returned to Judah. Have volunteers comment on the encouragement that the readings from 2 Chronicles would have provided for this original audience. For one thing, the people would have seen the glory that God had given His people back in the days of Judah's early kings. The prayer that King Solomon prayed would have been especially significant, because it would have assured the former exiles of the forgiveness that God freely gives to every penitent sinner. Let volunteers comment on the words from 2 Chronicles that most encourage them.
4. Let volunteers comment. You may refer your group to the devotion for September 8. The section "Get the Big Picture" explains some of the factors that led to the rift between the tribes in the north and the tribes in the south.
5. This question calls for an opinion on the part of group members. Encourage participants to mention the king and to explain why they chose the person they did. Ask, "How did the LORD work in that king's life?"
6. In spite of what many might argue today, the attitude of government leaders toward the LORD, whether of devotion or indifference, is reflected in the well-being of the people—spiritually and in other ways as well. You may refer participants to Proverbs 14:34.

September Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. The words of Micaiah came to pass. This established that he was indeed a true prophet. Although what he had to say was not popular (or, in today's parlance, "politically correct"), he spoke the truth.
2. King Jehoshaphat began his prayer with a prelude of praise. For several verses the king extols God's goodness and power, especially His covenant with His people. Even though the nation was in an emergency situation, this praise would have helped the people remember the greatness and love of God. Such reflection puts all problems into the proper perspective. No problem is too big, too catastrophic, too difficult for our Lord "who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8)!
3. Let participants paraphrase the first verse of Psalm 1. Ask for several responses to make certain everyone understands the meaning of the words. The life of King Ahaziah illustrates this verse perfectly. This idolatrous king imported the disobedience and unbelief from Israel (the Northern Kingdom) into Judah (the Southern Kingdom) (notice in 21:6 how his father Jehoram had married King Ahab's daughter—another fallout from King Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab). Thus Ahaziah left a legacy of spiritual death. The king walked in the counsel of the ungodly, following in the footsteps of the wicked. In this way his rule and its outcome illustrates—negatively—the truth of Psalm 1:1.
4. Joash was so welcomed in the kingdom of Judah because he was the only remaining heir in David's line (notice how Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah had tried to wipe out the Messianic line in 22:10). The red cord of salvation had become a slender thread, but the covenant-making God kept that thread of His promise from breaking. That's why the godly in Judah rejoiced so fully when King Joash was crowned. The line of the Messiah had been preserved!
5. This question calls for speculation on the part of the participants. If members of your group need help, refer them to the devotion for September 16. Let them also comment on the tendency to add other gods to our trust in the Lord. We may rely on a healthy investment portfolio, the degree we have earned, the family that God has given us, or our own innate abilities—on many false gods, depending on the specific life challenges we face. But anytime we fear, love, or trust anything above the Lord God, we commit the sin of idolatry just as surely as King Amaziah did. In Jesus we find forgiveness and the power to obey God and to worship Him alone.

September Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. Allow enough time for all participants to share an experience. Today God still marvelously helps His people. His love for us in Jesus makes us strong.
2. Let participants share words from Psalm 46 that help them. You may decide to use the words of this psalm as your closing prayer today.
3. Let participants wrestle with the distinction between guilt and shame for a few minutes. Guilty feelings grow out of wrongdoing, moral culpability, and personal responsibility for particular sins. The feeling of shame centers not so much on specific actions we have taken, but rather on a sense of personal inadequacy, a feeling of being less than or inferior to a set standard. Another way of saying this would be that guilt refers to what we have done, while shame refers to who we are. Christ's cross frees us

from the punishment we deserve because of our sinful actions and from the shame of original sin. We need no longer cower in God's presence; in Jesus we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). This new identity can greatly encourage someone bowed down by a load of either guilt or shame.

4. The LORD spoke to ancient Judah through His prophets. Again and again He sent His prophets, but the people often did not listen. Today God speaks to us through His Word and in the Sacraments. Let participants comment on the results of what He says to them personally in His means of grace. Avoid letting the group confess the sins of the culture. Rather, let them personalize this question; share both Law and Gospel with one another.

5. This question calls for the sharing of experiences in participants' own lives. Be sure everyone understands that God works in our lives by grace to purge and cleanse us. That cleansing flows from the blood that Jesus shed on Calvary. God often uses difficulty to drive us to Christ's cross, where we can recognize more and more our deep need for God's saving work in our lives. Suffering itself is never a means of grace, but the Word to which we cling in suffering always is. When we remember God has come to help and not to harm us, we are enabled to trust Him—even when the process of growth in grace hurts.

6. This question refers to the cardinal doctrines of Law and Gospel. Refer participants to the devotion for September 24 for a clear explanation of what each of these elements of God's Word accomplishes in us by His grace.

September Week 5 Leaders Notes

1. Let volunteers express their opinions. Refer group members to the devotion for September 25 if they need more help.

2. Work together to create a list of petitions the group can pray for those in authority in your congregation and in your country. Keep this list close at hand and plan to use it as part of today's closing prayer.

3. This question calls for opinions on the part of the participants. All around us we see evidence that people in our society are searching for meaning but not finding it. The rampant problems of alcoholism and drug abuse, the high suicide rate among our young people, the terrible busyness that marks the lives of many individuals all indicate that people scurry back and forth looking for something that will fill their heart, something that will satisfy them. Let group members share times when they themselves ask the question "What's the point?" Share such times from your own experience. Then lead group members in a discussion about how Jesus Christ gives our life meaning. We know who we are—God's children. We know why we are here—to bring God glory, especially by witnessing to others about the love that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus and His cross. And we know where we are headed—eternal life is ours now, and we will live with our Father in the mansions of heaven forever!

4. The devotion for September 29/30 explains Ezra 9:4. Let participants comment on the deep contrition that Ezra experienced and on his prayer of confession. We, no less than Ezra and his people, have well deserved God's punishment now and forever. How thankful we can be for our Father's grace in Jesus!