



**KINGS,  
PROPHETS,  
& A DIVIDED PEOPLE**

**10 PART STUDY OF 1 KINGS**

**DR. GARY YATES**

## How To Use This Study

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This study in 1 Kings is designed primarily for small-group study and is divided into ten sessions. Each lesson covers an assigned portion of the book with an overview of that section. This is not a detailed commentary on the selected passages but gives an overview of key ideas, themes, parallel passages, and theological connections to the rest of Scripture. In the week leading up to each lesson, each member of the study should read the passage that is the focus of the study and the lesson overview. Leaders and students use the same material, but the leader may want to consult a commentary or Bible survey covering 1 Kings for more detail and information. The group meeting will be the time for discussing the reflection questions at the end of each lesson and discussing application and how to put the message of the lesson into practice. One of the specific benefits of studying 1 Kings is that we come to a greater understanding of the story of salvation history that runs through the entire Bible and how the stories of these kings ultimately lead us to Jesus who is the ideal David and the son of David who completely fulfills the promises that God made to David of an eternal kingdom that would extend over all nations and peoples. We pray that it will be a blessing to you and your group as you study together

# 1 A Summary of Israel's History

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Read: 2 Kings 17:7-23

This passage is a summary of Israel's history and why the story of Kings ends in failure and disappointment.

## Why Study Kings, Is It Not Just Ancient History?

The books of 1 and 2 Kings might seem like a collection of ancient stories about long-dead rulers, but they hold significant relevance for us today. They provide valuable insights into:

- The Nature of God: We see God's faithfulness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty throughout the narrative.
- The Consequences of Disobedience: The books illustrate the dangers of turning away from God and the importance of obedience to His commands.
- God's Covenant Faithfulness: Despite the failures of Israel's kings, God remains committed to His promises, particularly the Davidic covenant.
- The Role of Leadership: Kings explores the impact of leadership, both good and bad, on a nation.
- The Importance of the Word of God: The actions and words of the prophets highlight the centrality of God's word.
- The Bigger Story: Kings is not an isolated story. It is a crucial part of the Old Testament narrative, pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ.

## Time Frame and Historical Background of Kings

To understand the books of Kings, it's essential to place them within the broader timeline of the Old Testament:

- Primeval History: (Genesis 1-11)

- Patriarchal History: (Genesis 12-50)
- Exodus and Conquest: (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua)
- Era of the Judges: (Judges, Ruth)
- United Monarchy: (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11)
- Divided Monarchy: (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17)
- Exile and Postexilic Era: (2 Kings 18-25, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)

1-2 Kings covers approximately 410 years of Old Testament history, starting with the end of David's reign (around 970 BC) and concluding with the release of Jehoiachin from his imprisonment in Babylon (562 BC). The books can be divided into three main periods:

- End of David's Reign/Reign of Solomon (971-931 BC) (40 years)
- Kingdom of Israel and Judah (931-722 BC)
- Kingdom of Judah and Fall/Exile (722-586 BC)

The final form of the books of Kings was likely written around 550 BC, shortly before the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. The abrupt ending of the book reflects this context.

## Theme of Kings

The overarching theme of 1 and 2 Kings is: “The apostasy (unfaithfulness) of the people of Israel and Judah, and their kings, led to the judgment of exile. (See 2 Kings 17:7-20)”

## Purpose of the Books of Kings

The books of Kings serve several key purposes:

- To Explain Why the Exile Took Place
  - Israel and Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.
  - Judah and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.
  - Kings provides a historical and theological explanation for these devastating events, highlighting the people's and their kings' disobedience to God.
- To Give an Account of the Individual Kings Who Reigned Over Israel and Judah
  - The books chronicle the reigns of the various kings, both good and evil, who ruled over the divided kingdoms.

- It shows the consequences of their actions and their impact on the nation.
- Three kings are presented as particularly noteworthy: Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah.
- The standard for assessing each king was their faithfulness to God and obedience to His covenant. The writer of Kings often downplays the significant accomplishments of kings who were evil in God's eyes, emphasizing that their spiritual state took priority over their political or military achievements (e.g., Ahab, Jeroboam II).
- To Show the Working Out of God's Covenant with David and God's Enduring Commitment to His Promises
  - Despite the failures of the house of David, God remained faithful to His covenant promises.
  - The story of Kings ultimately points forward to Jesus Christ, the ideal Son of David, who would fulfill all that God had promised.
  - God's faithfulness is evident in how He "kept a lamp" burning for the house of David, repeatedly showing mercy even when they were undeserving.
  - **The Davidic Covenant:** The foundation for God's enduring commitment is laid out in 2 Samuel 7:12-14.
  - God's unconditional promise to David: God promised David that his offspring would reign forever.
  - The condition in the covenant: God's blessing of David's descendants depended on their obedience to God's commandments.
  - The Davidic covenant was related to the Mosaic Covenant: The king was not above the law but was obligated to obey it, just like every other Israelite (see Deuteronomy 17:18-20).
  - The Davidic covenant was related to the Abrahamic Covenant: The military victories and effective administration of the kings would help Israel possess and maintain the land that God had promised to give them.
  - What ultimately happened: God removed the throne/kingdom from David's line temporarily but would still fulfill his promise that David would have an everlasting throne and kingdom.
- To Explain the Role of the Prophets in the Working Out of Israel's History

- The Word of God, as delivered by the prophets, is presented as more significant than the accomplishments of the kings. This emphasis is consistent throughout 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.
- The central section of Kings highlights the ministry of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 13).
- Other prominent prophets in Samuel-Kings: Samuel, Nathan, Ahijah, Isaiah.
- The prophets played crucial roles:
  - They appointed kings or announced that kings would be removed from power.
  - They confronted kings for their sinful ways and unfaithfulness to the Lord.
  - They announced key events in Israel's history and revealed God's plans for His people.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. Why do Christians struggle with the Historical Books of the Old Testament when reading and studying the Bible? How has the lesson reminded you or helped you to see in a new way why the books of 1-2 Kings are important for the church today?
2. What is the primary focus of these books: moral lessons and examples for us to follow/avoid or the story of how God is at work in fulfilling his plan of salvation and redemption? Is it valid for us to look for both as we read these books?
3. Based on Deuteronomy 17:14-20, what is the difference between the world's ideal of what constitutes an effective leader and God's model for faithful leadership? Why do you think that most of the kings of Israel and Judah chose to live by the world's model of leadership than God's and what were the consequences of that choice? What are some key lessons about leadership that we can learn from this book?
4. How do we see the story of salvation moving forward as we read 1-2 Kings? How do we see something hopeful in a story that is characterized by so much failure?
5. Idolatry and a general disregard for the Lord's commands and instructions through the prophets were the primary reasons for Judah's downfall. How does idolatry today affect the church in remaining faithful to God and fulfilling its mission?
6. What are 2-3 key figures or concepts that you want to learn more about as we study 1-2 Kings together?

# 2

## How the Story of Kings Leads Us to Jesus

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Read: Genesis 49:9–12; Numbers 24:17–19; 2 Samuel 7:1–17

It's a common thought that Israel having kings was somehow outside of God's perfect will. We often hear that they rejected God as their true king when they demanded a human ruler. While there's truth to that sentiment, the story of kingship in the Bible is far more nuanced and deeply intertwined with God's ultimate plan for humanity. In fact, tracing the narrative of kings in the Old Testament reveals a path that ultimately leads us to understand Jesus as the ultimate King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Let's begin by considering humanity's original role in God's creation. In Genesis 1:26–28, we read:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”*

Here, we see that humanity was created in God's **image bearers** over creation. Think about the significance of the word "*image*." In the ancient Near East, kings would often erect statues of themselves in conquered territories as a symbol of their rule and authority. These statues represented the king's presence and power. Similarly, humanity, created in God's image, was meant to represent God's authority and rule over His creation. Our role was to care for and govern the earth as God's representatives. Therefore, the concept of human rulers serving *under* the ultimate rule of God is not inconsistent with God's original design.

However, when humans rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, this divinely intended human kingship went rogue. Instead of ruling *under* God, humanity began to seek to rule

*instead of God, trying to take God's place and define good and evil on their own terms. This desire for autonomous rule has plagued humanity ever since.*

## Despite this rebellion, God did not abandon His plans.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God's plans and promises for Israel to have a king. These human rulers were intended to be the instruments that God would use to bless His people and fulfill His covenant promises to them.

- Genesis 17:6: *"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."*
- Genesis 49:9-10: *"Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."*
- Numbers 24:17-19: *"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel... A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy all who remain of the city."*

These prophecies point towards a future where kings would arise from Israel, suggesting that kingship was not an afterthought but part of God's long-term plan. Furthermore, God even gave specific instructions for Israelite kingship. He didn't just say, "Have a king." He laid out guidelines in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**, indicating that while He would allow them a king, their king ruling under the Lord would be distinctly different from the powerful and often oppressive kings of the surrounding nations.

*"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be one of your own people. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses, wives, or great wealth for himself, so that his heart will not be led astray. When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and so that he will not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over Israel."*

Notice the limitations God placed on the Israelite kings. They were not supposed to accumulate **horses, wives, and wealth** in excess. These were common symbols of power and self-reliance in the ancient world, and God wanted Israel's king to remain dependent on Him. Crucially, the kings were to live and rule by the “book of the law,” constantly reminding that they were under God's authority and accountable to His standards.

This brings us to a crucial question: Wasn't kingship outside of God's will for Israel? How could Israel have a human king when God was their king?

This tension is evident in passages like **Judges 8:22-23**, where after Gideon's victory, the Israelites said to him, "*Rule over us—you, your son, and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.*" Gideon's response was, "*I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you; **the Lord will rule over you.***" Gideon seemed to recognize that God was Israel's true king.

However, was Gideon sincere in his protest? Some scholars suggest that his later actions, such as creating an ephod that became an object of idolatry (**Judges 8:24-27**), might indicate a subtle desire for influence and recognition that contradicts his initial statement. Gideon has a son named Abimelech (“my father is king”), collects a harem, and leads Israel in ways that are selfish and oppressive.

The conflict becomes even clearer in **1 Samuel 8:5-9**. The elders of Israel came to Samuel and said, "*Look, you are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, **such as all the other nations have.***" The Lord's response to Samuel is telling:

*“Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”*

The Lord specifically states that in asking for a king *like all the other nations*, Israel had rejected God as their king. The problem with their request is reflected in verse 5: “*We want a king **such as all the other nations have.***” Their desire stemmed from a longing to be like the surrounding pagan nations, seeking security and power in a human leader rather than trusting in God's direct rule.

God, in His sovereignty, allowed them to have the kind of king they wanted. 1 Samuel 9:2 describes Saul, their first king, as *"an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others."* He was tall and imposing, fitting the image of a powerful ruler that the people desired. God gave them the kind of king they wanted: **one who looked like the kings of the nations.**

However, God had His own plans within this seemingly rebellious request. He would ultimately choose his own king for Israel, a king after His own heart. As 1 Samuel 13:14 states, *"But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."* This man was David.

This whole story is a powerful reminder of the greatness of God's wisdom, mercy, and grace. Even out of Israel's sinful request, motivated by a desire to be like the world, God would weave His redemptive plan. He would take this seemingly negative turn and use it specifically to bring a King who would ultimately bless Israel and bring salvation to the nations.

God would work through the family of David to bring the promised King and Savior. He made a covenant with David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12–15:

*"When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. My love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. "*

In this profound covenant, God promised to establish David's throne forever and declared, *"I will be his father, and he will be my son."* This adoption language is significant. The Davidic kings were meant to be God's representatives and vice-regents, ruling on His behalf, just like Adam was intended to at the beginning.

However, history shows us that the sons of David largely failed to live up to this high calling. The problem was that they were often more like the kings of the nations—accumulating power, wealth, and wives—than the kings that God truly wanted for His people, kings who would rule with justice and righteousness under God's authority.

Ultimately, God ended the Davidic dynasty, at least in the immediate sense, when Babylon captured Jerusalem in 586 BC. For nearly 2500 years now, there have been no Davidic kings reigning in Jerusalem. This might seem like the end of God's promise, but it wasn't.

Throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament, God promised that He would restore the kingdom of David and would send the ideal Davidic ruler.

There are around two dozen passages in the prophets that speak of this future king, a Messiah who would reign in righteousness and bring lasting peace. Consider just a few:

- Hosea 3:5: *"Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his bounty in the last days."*
- Micah 5:1-2: *"Now muster your troops, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*
- Isaiah 9:6-7: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."*
- Isaiah 11:1-2: *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord."*
- Ezekiel 37:24: *"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees."*
- Jeremiah 23:5-6: *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior."*

These prophecies paint a picture of a future king from the line of David who would not fail like his ancestors. He would be righteous, just, and would establish an everlasting kingdom.

Ultimately, God's promises to David would find their complete and perfect fulfillment in Jesus as the son of David.

When all of David's sons before Him fell short of being the ideal king and the perfect "son of God" in their role as God's representatives, God sent His own Son, fully God and fully human, to be a Son of David and to fulfill all the promises He made.

We see this clearly in the New Testament. For example, in **Luke 1:32-33**, the angel Gabriel tells Mary about Jesus:

*"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

And later in **Luke 1:68-74**, Zechariah prophesies:

*"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham..."*

Jesus truly **restores** the kingship that was originally given to **humanity** in God's image. He is the ultimate image bearer, the perfect Son of God, and the rightful heir to David's throne. He reigns not with earthly power and might like the kings of the nations, but with justice, righteousness, love, and sacrifice. He is the King who perfectly embodies God's will and brings salvation to all who believe in Him.

The story of kings in the Old Testament, with all its triumphs and failures, ultimately points us to the perfect King, Jesus Christ, who reigns forever. It reminds us that while human rulers often fall short, God's promises are steadfast, and He has provided the ultimate King who will establish a kingdom that will never be divided or destroyed.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. Was it God's will for Israel to have a king? What passages seem to suggest that it was God's plan for Israel to have a king and what was the problem behind the people's request for a king in 1 Samuel 8? Was it simply kingship or something more specific?
2. Why does the Old Testament seem to reflect a negative and skeptical attitude about human kingship? What are the specific problems with human kingship that emerge as a result of the Fall and human sinfulness?
3. What are the central features of the Davidic covenant? What is the unconditional aspect of the covenant and the conditional aspect? How do the details of this covenant ultimately lead us to Jesus?
4. What do we learn about the working out of the Davidic covenant from the story in 1-2 Kings? What does this story reflect about the character of God in relationship to his covenants? What is significant about the statements in Kings that God "left a lamp for David?"
5. How do the OT prophets show us God's continuing commitment to the Davidic Covenant? What do we learn from them about the future fulfillment of God's covenant promises?
6. How are the kingship of Adam, David, and Jesus ultimately related to each other and how is this kingship connection important to the working out of God's plan of redemption and salvation?

# 3 Lessons from a Messy Succession

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## Read: 1 Kings 1-2

1 Kings 1-2 chronicles the turbulent transition of power following the death of King David and the ascent of his son, Solomon, to the throne. As we unpack these events, we'll uncover valuable lessons about leadership, ambition, the unseen hand of God, and how these ancient narratives ultimately point us towards Jesus.

## 1 Kings 1-2: Documenting the Transition from the Death of David to the Reign of Solomon

These opening chapters of 1 Kings serve as a bridge between the established reign of David and the dawning era of Solomon. It's a story filled with human drama, political maneuvering, and the subtle yet undeniable presence of God working behind the scenes.

### 1 Kings 1:1-5: David at the End is Only a Shell of His Former Self

Our passage opens with a poignant image of King David in his old age. Let's consider the stark contrast presented here:

- Unable to keep himself warm, feeble, and frail (contrast Deut. 34:7 and Moses): The once vibrant and powerful king is now physically diminished. Think back to the description of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:7: "*His eyes were not weak nor his natural vigor abated.*" This contrast highlights the natural decline of even the most remarkable individuals and underscores the frailty of human strength.
- Unaware of what is going on, fragmented family, conflict for the throne: David seems detached from the unfolding events, perhaps due to his physical state. Simultaneously, his family is fractured, with different factions vying for influence and the coveted throne. This paints a picture of instability and unrest at the heart of the kingdom.
- The story of David and Bathsheba is a turning point in David's life back in 2 Samuel: It's crucial to remember the significant turning point in David's reign marked by his sin with

Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). This act had profound and lasting consequences for David, his family, and his kingdom.

- David's Rise (2 Sam 1-10)
- David's Sin (2 Sam 11-12)
- David's Demise (2 Sam 12-22)
- Between 2 Samuel 12 and 1 Kings 1, Nathan, Bathsheba, and Solomon are never mentioned, and now they are back and in the middle of this story and everything that happens here. The reappearance of these key figures – the prophet Nathan, Bathsheba (Solomon's mother), and Solomon himself – signals a shift in the narrative focus towards the issue of succession. Their involvement highlights the behind-the-scenes efforts to secure Solomon's claim to the throne.

### The Issue of Succession to the Throne: Adonijah and Solomon

The central conflict in 1 Kings 1 revolves around the question of who would succeed David as king. Two primary contenders emerge:

- Adonijah: David's older son, who, in the absence of a clear declaration from David, takes matters into his own hands and orchestrates a public display of his claim to the throne.
- Solomon: David's younger son, whom God had chosen, and David had promised would be his successor.

### Where is God in the Middle of This Time of Transition?

This is a critical question to consider.

- God had made it clear through Samuel that Saul was to be the first king of Israel and then that David was to take the place of Saul. We see God's direct intervention in establishing the monarchy.
- We don't see God directing as clearly here, and what we mostly see is human intrigue, conspiracy, and David directing events to guarantee that Solomon would be the king. In this transition, God's guidance appears less overt. Instead, we witness human actions – ambition, alliances, and royal decrees – shaping the course of events. This raises the question of how God works in the midst of human agency.

Let's examine the actions of the key players:

- Adonijah and his conspiracy (1 Kings 1:5-9): Adonijah, confident in his birthright, gathers support from influential figures like Joab (the commander of the army) and Abiathar (a priest). He stages a public feast and proclaims himself king without David's knowledge or consent. This act is one of rebellion and a blatant disregard for God's will and David's intentions.
- Bathsheba and Nathan and their working behind the scenes (1 Kings 1:11-27): Recognizing the danger Adonijah's actions pose to Solomon's rightful claim and the stability of the kingdom, Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan act decisively. Nathan advises Bathsheba to approach the ailing King David and remind him of his promise to make Solomon king. Nathan then corroborates her account, presenting a united front to influence David's decision.
- David's decisions and directives: The passage emphasizes that David had promised the throne to Solomon. We don't see this in Samuel but note 1 Chronicles 22:5-10. This passage in Chronicles provides crucial insight, revealing God's specific designation of Solomon for the task of building the Temple and David's recognition of this divine choice. David, prompted by Bathsheba and Nathan, finally intervenes and commands that Solomon be immediately anointed king.

### The End Result: Solomon is Anointed as King, and There is Great Celebration That Israel Has a New Ruler (1:38-40)

David's decisive action leads to Solomon's public anointing at Gihon, orchestrated by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet. The joyous celebration that follows signifies the acceptance of Solomon as the rightful successor and brings a sense of resolution to the immediate crisis.

Even in God's Apparent Inactivity, We Can See the Will of God Being Carried Out and God Directing the Passing of the Torch from David to Solomon.

While God's direct voice isn't as prominent in this narrative, we can discern His guiding hand in several ways:

- Fulfillment of the covenant promise in 2 Samuel 7:12-15: God's promise to David that his lineage would continue to rule over Israel finds its continuation in Solomon.
- The Lord had a special love for Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24-25): The naming of Solomon as "*Jedidiah*," meaning "*beloved of the Lord*," underscores God's favor towards him.

- David's choice of Solomon is the result of God's choice (1 Chronicles 22:9): As highlighted earlier, 1 Chronicles clarifies that David's selection of Solomon was in accordance with God's plan.
- Note that we have both a priest (Zadok) and a prophet (Nathan) involved in the anointing of Solomon. This joint involvement of key religious leaders signifies divine approval and legitimacy for Solomon's kingship.
- Often in Scripture, we have to see God working out his plans and purposes behind the scenes like we have here. This passage serves as a powerful reminder that God's sovereignty often operates through human actions and circumstances, even when His direct intervention isn't immediately apparent.

### Solomon Establishes His Throne (1 Kings 2): How Do We Assess His Character in Light of the Bloodshed and Violence?

Chapter 2 shifts our focus to Solomon consolidating his power. While Solomon was largely passive in the initial maneuvering that led to his ascension (contrast with Adonijah), he now takes decisive action to secure his reign. This raises complex questions about the nature of leadership and the use of power.

Let's look at David's final instructions to Solomon:

- David's first piece of advice: Walk in obedience to the Lord your God, to keep his statutes and his commandments and his ordinances and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. (1 Kings 2:1-4) David's primary counsel to Solomon is to remain faithful to God's law. He emphasizes that true success and stability are rooted in obedience.
- David's second piece of advice: *“Deal with Joab and Shimei according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace... But deal with Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim. He cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what to do with him, and you must bring his gray hair down to Sheol with blood.”* (1 Kings 2:5-9) David instructs Solomon to address past injustices committed by Joab and Shimei.
  - Put to death Joab (the violent acts he had committed earlier): Joab, despite his military prowess, had a history of insubordination and violent acts, including the murders of Abner and Amasa. David recognizes the threat Joab poses to the stability of Solomon's reign.

- Put to death Shimei (had cursed David during the revolt of Absalom): Shimei's public cursing of David during a time of great vulnerability was an act of treason and disrespect to the divinely appointed king.
- Solomon's actions with Adonijah: Initially, Solomon spares Adonijah's life. However, when Adonijah later requests Abishag (David's concubine), Solomon perceives this as a veiled attempt to further his claim to the throne and has him executed.
- Solomon's actions with Abiathar: Abiathar, the priest who supported Adonijah, is not executed but is banished from Jerusalem, fulfilling a prophecy against Eli's house (1 Samuel 2:27-36).
- Solomon's actions with Joab: Solomon, following David's instructions, has Joab executed for his past crimes.
- Solomon's actions with Shimei: Solomon initially shows leniency towards Shimei but, when Shimei disobeys his command to remain in Jerusalem, Solomon has him executed.
- Assessment of Solomon's character: How do we reconcile these seemingly harsh actions with the wisdom for which Solomon would later become famous?
  - We see him acting with restraint and mercy. He initially gives opportunities to both Adonijah and Shimei to avoid death. He also shows restraint in banishing Abiathar rather than executing him.
  - We see him doing what is necessary to establish his kingdom and preserve order and stability in the land, not merely as a despotic ruler who will do anything to silence his opponents.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. What do we learn from the way that the text depicts the end of David's reign? Why does his kingdom end in this way and how do we see these events as a consequence of David's earlier actions?
2. How do you assess the characters of Adonijah, Bathsheba, and Nathan and the roles that they play in the royal succession that takes place at the end of David's life?
3. What do we learn about the sovereignty of God from the ways that events unfold in 1 Kings 1-2? How do we see human choices and God's sovereignty working together in

these chapters to accomplish God's plans and purposes? Why does God seem to be in the background of the events that transpire in these chapters?

4. How do 1 Kings 1-2 reflect God's commitment to fulfilling the promises of the Davidic covenant?
5. How do we see evidence of God's mercy and grace in the choice of Solomon to be David's successor and the next king of Israel?
6. How do we assess Solomon's character in light of his violent actions against his opponents when he takes the throne? What do we have to be careful of when reading these stories from a New Testament perspective?

# 4 Solomon: Israel's Ideal Ruler

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## 1 Kings 3–9 and Psalm 72

Solomon's reign as David's successor represents both a golden age and a significant turning point in Israel's history. This lesson will explore his accomplishments in establishing his kingdom and building an empire but will also look at Solomon as a “new Adam” who carries forward the story of salvation history and who reflects the ideal of how Israel was to be a light to the nations.

## Solomon as Israel's Ideal King

For a significant portion of his reign, Solomon embodied the aspirations of the Israelite people for a strong, wise, and prosperous leader. Let's explore some of the key aspects that contributed to this perception:

- Ideal in his rule and building of an empire (1 Kings 4:20-28): Solomon inherited a stable and expanding kingdom from his father David. He consolidated this power, extending Israel's influence through strategic alliances and trade. His reign was marked by peace and prosperity, allowing for significant internal development.
- Ideal in his wisdom (there was no other king like him) (1 Kings 3:1-28; 4:29-34): God himself blessed Solomon with extraordinary wisdom. The famous story of the two women claiming the same child (1 Kings 3:16-28) exemplifies his insightful judgment and understanding of human nature. His wisdom became legendary, attracting visitors from distant places seeking to learn from him.
- Ideal in his pointing foreigners to the greatness of *God* (1 Kings 4:34/ 1 Kings 10 and the visit of the Queen of Sheba): Solomon's wisdom and the splendor of his kingdom served as a powerful testimony to the greatness of Israel's God. The account of the Queen of Sheba's visit (1 Kings 10) highlights how his reputation drew foreign dignitaries who recognized the divine favor upon him and his nation.
- Solomon's influence here reflects the working out of the idea in Exodus 19:5 that Israel's mission was to be “*a holy nation*” and “*a kingdom of priests.*” Israel enjoyed

the blessing of being God's chosen people and nation, but this privileged position was not just for their benefit. They were also to be a "*priestly nation*" that would serve as mediators between God and the nations. As priests, they would mediate God's blessing to the nations (for this role of a priest, see Numbers 6:23-24) and they would lead the nations to know and worship the one true God. The Queen of Sheba does not just come to praise Solomon's greatness and glory; she acknowledges the goodness and greatness of the Lord as well (see 1 Kgs 10:9).

- Deuteronomy 4:6-8 also reflects on how God would use Israel to draw and attract the nations to him: "*Keep them [God's commands] and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*" When Israel obeyed the Law, it would show the nations the righteousness and holiness of the Lord in a way that would make them want to live under his rule and by his rules. The blessings that Israel would experience when they obeyed the Lord's commands would also make the nations want to share in those blessings as well.
- The nations would come to Israel to learn of the greatness of the Lord; in the NT, the church goes to the nations to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples. The Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon is an illustration of how this was supposed to work. The primary problem in the Old Testament was that Israel was often more interested in following the gods of the nations than leading the nations to worship the Lord as the one true God.
- Ideal in his building of the temple (1 Kings 6-7): Solomon's most significant achievement was his construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This sacred structure became the central place of worship for Israel, fulfilling his father David's long-held desire. The Temple was the Lord's earthly dwelling place and a reflection of his heavenly throne.
- Ideal in his prayer and devotion to God (1 Kings 8): The prayer Solomon offered at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8) acknowledged God's sovereignty, prayed for forgiveness and guidance, and dedicated the Temple as a house of prayer for all nations. This act demonstrated a deep devotion to God and a desire for his blessings upon Israel. Solomon's prayer also acknowledges the specific circumstances and situations that should lead the people to pray to God at the Temple. They can turn to God whenever they need him and even when they have experienced his discipline and judgment for their disobedience:

- *When they have wronged their neighbor and need to make things right (8:31-32)*
- *When they have been defeated in battle (8:33-34)*
- *When they are experiencing drought (8:35-36)*
- *When they are experiencing famine, plague, or crop failure (8:37-40)*
- *When there are foreigners who have heard of God's fame and want to know more (8:41-43)*
- *When they are going to war against their enemies (8:44-45)*
- *When they are in captivity in a foreign land (8:46-51)*

## Solomon as a New Adam

One of the storylines that we read about through the Bible is how God is carrying his plan of salvation forward by raising up new Adams until we finally get to the perfect new Adam in Christ. The “new Adams” throughout the Old Testament bring blessing and the furtherance of God’s kingdom plans, but they all fail in that role in some significant way. In Genesis, Noah is a new Adam connected with the new creation, but he had a fall in a vineyard that is like Adam’s fall in the garden. Abraham and the people of Israel are a corporate new Adam. God had told Adam to “*be fruitful and multiply*,” and God had promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore. Like Adam as the “*image of God*,” Israel was God’s firstborn “*son*” (Exodus 4:23). Adam had served as a priest in the Garden of Eden in God’s presence, and Israel became a “*kingdom of priest*.” God had instructed Adam that he would serve as God’s royal “*image*” in Genesis 1:26, and the dominion given to the house of David would help to restore the dominion given to Adam, but the kings of the Davidic line like David and Solomon failed to live up to the ideal, and that ideal would only be fulfilled in Jesus. This might be for some of us a new way of looking at the story of salvation history in the Bible.

The biblical narrative subtly draws parallels between Solomon's reign and the idyllic state of Adam in the Garden of Eden to show how Solomon reflects the ideal but still ultimately falls short of the second Adam that Israel and all of humanity needed. Consider these connections:

- Solomon builds the Temple that is described like a garden (1 Kings 6:18, 29): The intricate carvings of plants, flowers, and trees within the Temple evoke the lush imagery of the Garden of Eden.
- Israel becomes numerous people (1 Kings 3:8; 4:20). We can connect this to the creation mandate to “*be fruitful and multiply*” in Genesis 1:26-28: Under Solomon's peaceful rule, the population of Israel flourished, echoing God's command to humanity to fill the earth.
- Solomon knows plants and animals (1 Kings 4:33; 10:25), like the wisdom of Adam who names the animals in Genesis 2: Solomon's extensive knowledge of the natural world mirrors Adam's initial understanding and naming of the creatures.
- Solomon's gold and riches (1 Kings 10:14) recalls the gold and precious stones of the Garden (Genesis 2:11-12): The abundance of wealth during Solomon's reign echoes the precious resources found in the Garden of Eden.
- Solomon called by God to judge between “*good and evil*” (1 Kings 3:9, 28) (See Gen 2:9; 3:5, 22). “*Tree of knowledge of good and evil.*”: Solomon's divinely granted wisdom to discern right from wrong connects to the knowledge of good and evil in the Genesis narrative.
- Under Solomon, Israel experiences peace and rest that is also recalled in garden-like terms (1 Kings 4:25): The tranquility and security enjoyed by Israel under Solomon's rule resonate with the peace and harmony of the Garden.
- These parallels suggest that Solomon's early reign held the promise of a restored Edenic blessing for Israel, a time of divine favor and flourishing.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. What do we learn about Solomon's character from his request to the Lord in 1 Kings 3:3-15?
2. How does the prayer for Solomon in Psalm 72 parallel Solomon's request of the Lord in 1 Kings 3? What are the ideal qualities of a godly ruler reflected in Psalm 72 and how do we see Solomon demonstrating these ideals in his reign as a king?
3. How does the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10 reflect the way that God wanted Israel to influence the nations and lead them to a proper understanding of the one true God?

4. What do the parallels between Adam and Solomon add to our understanding of the role of Solomon in the biblical story? How do we see this particular theme pointing us to person of Jesus as Messiah and a son of Adam?
5. What are some key lessons about prayer that we learn from Solomon's model prayer at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8? What do we learn about God's relationship to the Temple?

# 5

## Solomon: Israel's Greatest Disappointment

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Read: 1 Kings 11; 1 Samuel 8:11-18

Our previous lesson focused on Solomon's accomplishments and achievements, recognizing why he was considered an ideal king in many ways. But the story of Solomon in Kings also forces us to recognize the depths of his failures and the profound disappointment he ultimately became. As we examine Solomon's failures, we'll consider the timeless warning found in James 1:8: "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways," a verse that tragically encapsulates Solomon's later years.

### Solomon and the Seeds of Failure

Despite his promising beginnings, Solomon's life took a tragic turn. The seeds of his downfall were sown even during his seemingly successful years. Solomon's divided heart ultimately led to his ruin.

- Do we see anything negative in the story of Solomon's great wisdom in 1 Kings 3:16-28? While the outcome of the judgment is just and demonstrates Solomon's wisdom, the situation itself hints at potential societal issues. The fact that two women, possibly prostitutes, are engaged in a dispute over this living child seems to suggest underlying social and moral failure within the kingdom, even during Solomon's early reign.
- Solomon had many great building projects (including the temple), but Solomon also reflects the negative qualities of oppressive rulers like the Pharaoh of Egypt. See 1 Kings 5:13-18; 9:15-23 and note the large number of provisions that Solomon received from the people (1 Kings 4:20-28). Samuel's earlier warning about the burdens that kingship would place on the people of Israel were tragically realized under Solomon's reign (see 1 Samuel 8:11-18). While the Temple was a glorious achievement, its construction, along with Solomon's other extensive building projects, came at a significant cost to the people. The forced labor and heavy taxation imposed on the Israelites mirrored the oppressive practices of rulers like the Pharaoh, from whom they had been liberated.

Note the following ways in which the Bible often reflects an ambiguous attitude toward the Temple:

- Nathan's prophecy minimizes the significance and importance of the Temple to the Lord (see 2 Samuel 7:5-7)
- Solomon concedes at the dedication of the Temple that it is an insufficient and inadequate house for the Lord (1 Kings 8:27)
- Like the kings themselves, the Temple will not be able to keep the people from continuing their sinful ways (1 Kings 8:46-48)

Though the Temple was God's house and a place of worship, its close association with the king and his palace also meant that the Temple could be used to promote the king's own personal and political agendas. It would become a symbol of national power and prestige, and the kings beginning with Solomon failed to promote the kind of exclusive worship that the Lord desired from his people.

## Solomon's Negative Qualities

Solomon's later years were marked by a clear departure from the principles God had laid out for Israelite kings. His choices directly violated divine commands:

Solomon's violation of the rules for kingship. In Israel kings were not supposed to acquire:

- Large amounts of **horses**. Deuteronomy 17:16 warns against acquiring many horses, especially from Egypt, as it could lead to reliance on military might rather than God.
- Large numbers of **wives**. Deuteronomy 17:17 cautions against multiplying wives, as it could turn the king's heart away from the Lord.
- Large amounts of **silver and gold**. Deuteronomy 17:17 also warns against excessive accumulation of wealth, which could lead to pride and self-reliance.

## The Paradoxes of Solomon's Life

Solomon's life is full of stark contradictions, highlighting the tragedy of his decline:

- Solomon loved **the Lord** (3:3), BUT Solomon also loved **many foreign women** (11:1). His initial devotion to God was tragically compromised by his affection for women from nations that did not worship the Lord, directly disobeying God's commands. Even from the beginning of Solomon's story, we see him in 1 Kings 3:1-3 making an ill-advised marriage alliance with Egypt.
- Solomon collected proverbs and wise sayings (4:32), BUT Solomon also collected **foreign wives and their gods** (11:3). Despite his renowned wisdom, Solomon foolishly

allowed his foreign wives to introduce their deities into Israel, even building altars for them.

- Solomon was devoted to the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy (59 references to the book in the prayer in 1 Kings 8), BUT SOLOMON largely ignored **the specific commands regarding the conduct of kings** (Deut. 17:14-20). His deep understanding of God's law did not translate into obedience in key areas of his leadership.

### Solomon's Final Apostasy (1 Kings 11:9-13)

The culmination of Solomon's failures was his blatant turning away from the Lord to worship the gods of his foreign wives. This act of apostasy was a profound betrayal of his covenant with God and had devastating consequences for his kingdom. God declared that the kingdom would be torn away from his son, leaving only a portion for the sake of David and Jerusalem.

## Solomon's Sin and the Story of Israel

Can David and Solomon reverse the problem of persistent sin and rebellion in Israel's history?

- Israel in the Wilderness under Moses: 3 Major Rebellions
  - The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)
  - Kadesh Barnea and the refusal to go up to the land (Numbers 14)
  - Baal worship and immorality with the women of Moab (Numbers 25)

Deuteronomy 29:3-4 They had seen the great acts of the Lord but still didn't have a heart to follow him.

- Israel under Joshua and the time of the Conquest

A brief time of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord that leads to Israel taking possession of the land of Canaan, but the question will be if they will remain faithful so that they might remain in the land and enjoy the fulness of God's blessing (see Joshua 8:30-35; 24:1-28)

### The era of the Judges and Israel's spiritual apostasy

- The recurring cycle of sin, foreign oppression as judgment for sin, cry to God for deliverance, and God raising up a deliverer for Israel (Judges 2:11-19)
- The underlying causes: everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes and there was no king in the land (Judg. 17:6; 18:1). Judges is an apologetic for why Israel needs a

king to provide the kind of leadership that would enable the people to be faithful to the Lord.

### The era of the United Monarchy

- Saul is unfaithful to God (1 Chronicles 10:13-14—Saul “*broke faith*” with the Lord and did not obey his commands or seek his guidance). The Lord rejects Saul as king (1 Samuel 13, 15) and he is not the man for the job. Saul’s life and leadership in many ways repeats the failures that we see from the judges in the previous era.
- David is different from Saul in how his heart is oriented toward God (1 Samuel 13:14: 16:7), but David’s life of faithfulness is still blemished by an act of great sin (2 Samuel 11-12)
- Solomon has wisdom, great gifts for leadership, and establishes an empire. He reflects the ideal in the way that he leads many from the nations to acknowledge the greatness of the Lord, but Solomon himself turns away from the Lord.
- There is a downward trajectory after Solomon that reflects the failure of kingship in Israel to produce a godly and faithful nation. There is a division of Solomon’s kingdom in the aftermath of his apostasy against the Lord (1 Kings 12) that leads to the decline of both Israel and Judah and their exile in the land. Solomon’s reign is a watershed moment, and Solomon’s sin has a lasting negative impact. Our sinful choices affect so much more than just ourselves. Solomon had a great opportunity that he wasted because of his own sinful and selfish desires and aspirations.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. Why did the rules of kingship in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 focus on the acquisition of horses, wives, and gold and silver? What do these three things have in common that led to this warning? How was kingship to be different in Israel from the kingdoms and peoples who lived around them?
2. How do we reconcile the way in which God blesses Solomon with wealth (cf. 1 Kings 3:13; 10: and the warning that kings were not to accumulate large amounts of gold and silver? How could a king use the blessing of wealth in a way that was honoring to God? How would you assess Solomon’s use of wealth in 1 Kings 10:14-22?
3. How do we see Solomon embodying the negative aspects of kingship that the Lord had warned Israel about through Solomon (see 1 Samuel 8:11-18). What are the dangers of Solomon beginning to build an empire for Israel and what are the ways

that even the temple could be misused by kings for their own agendas rather than those of God?

4. How do we see both positive and negative qualities in the story of Solomon with the two women and the dispute over the baby in 1 Kings 3?
5. What were the key factors that led to Solomon's downfall and what practical lessons can we learn from the cautionary tale about Solomon's moral and spiritual failures? How do we keep from being the kind of "double-minded" people that James warns us about? What are the leading causes of spiritual doublemindedness in our culture?
6. How do we recognize the beginning of spiritual compromise in our lives?
7. How does the story of Solomon's life parallel what we see about Israel in passages like Judges 3:1-6 and Nehemiah 9:1-5? How did these marriages ultimately lead Israel astray? Do we see other leaders in the Old Testament who spiritually compromised as a result of making the wrong kinds of marriage alliances?

# 6 The Judgment of a Divided Nation

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Read: 1 Kings 12–13

Division and disunity are a constant threat to God’s people in the story of Israel. Two and a half tribes remain on the east side of the Jordan while the others take possession of the Promised Land. At the beginning of Joshua and Judges, the tribes of Israel are fighting a united battle to conquer the land, but by the end of Judges, the tribes are fighting an unholy war against each other. David reigns over a divided Israel for the first seven years of his reign before the nation unites in support of his kingship. And now in Kings, we have the division of the United Kingdom into two separate entities. We will examine the theological and political reasons behind this split, the key players involved, and the long-term consequences for God's people. We will also see how this event relates to God's covenants and promises.

## The Ideal of Unity for Israel as God’s People

The blessing of unity for God’s people (Psalm 133)

*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity  
It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!  
It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.”*

The promise of the reunification of Israel and the reversal of the division which takes place in 1 Kings 12-13 (Ezekiel 37:15-22)

*“The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel*

*associated with him.’ And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. And when your people say to you, ‘Will you not tell us what you mean by these?’<sup>19</sup> say to them, “Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand.” When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, then say to them, “Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.”*

## The Division of Israel

The once-unified kingdom of Israel, which had reached its zenith under King Solomon, was about to fracture. This division was not a sudden occurrence but the result of a complex interplay of factors, both spiritual and political. The division resulted in two kingdoms:

- The Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes)
- The Southern Kingdom of Judah (tribe of Judah and part of the tribe of Benjamin who remain loyal to the house of David)

### Reasons for the Division

- **Theological Reason: Solomon's Apostasy**
  - The primary *theological* reason for the division of Israel was the apostasy of King Solomon. 1 Kings 11:29-33 clearly states that God was punishing Solomon for turning away from the Lord and worshipping other gods. Solomon, despite his wisdom, had been led astray by his foreign wives, who influenced him to build altars and worship pagan deities. This blatant violation of God's covenant set the stage for divine judgment.
- **Political Reason: Rehoboam's Foolishness**
  - The *political* reason for the division can be attributed to the unwise decisions of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor. When the people of Israel, led by Jeroboam, petitioned Rehoboam to lighten the heavy tax burden and forced labor imposed by Solomon (1 Kings 12:1-5), Rehoboam sought counsel from two groups:

the older, experienced advisors who had served his father, and the younger men with whom he had grown up.

- The older advisors recommended a policy of kindness and service, suggesting that if Rehoboam would listen to the people and address their grievances, they would remain loyal (1 Kings 12:6-7). However, Rehoboam rejected this prudent advice and instead heeded the counsel of the younger men. They advised him to respond harshly, asserting his authority with threats and increasing the people's burdens (1 Kings 12:8-11).
- Rehoboam's arrogant and dismissive response (1 Kings 12:13-14) proved to be a fatal mistake. He demonstrated a complete disregard for the needs and concerns of the people. This act of folly triggered a rebellion among the ten northern tribes, who rejected Rehoboam's rule and crowned Jeroboam as their king.
- This account serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of seeking wise counsel and the dangers of arrogance and poor leadership.

## The Davidic Covenant and the Division

The division of the kingdom provides a dramatic illustration of the dual nature of the Davidic Covenant, which God had established with King David. This covenant, found in 2 Samuel 7, contained both unconditional promises and conditional stipulations (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-15).

- **Unconditional Promise:** God made an unconditional promise to David that his lineage would always rule. God promised that David would always have a "lamp" in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:36). This meant that even if individual kings were unfaithful, the line of David would endure.
- **Conditional Stipulation:** The covenant also included a conditional aspect: the blessings of the kingdom were contingent upon the obedience of David's descendants. God would bless them if they followed His commands.
- **Punishment for Disobedience:** The division of the kingdom was, in part, a consequence of disobedience. God reduced the kingdom that belonged to the house of David. Ten tribes were taken away, leaving only the tribe of Judah (and part of Benjamin) to remain loyal to the Davidic line.
- **God's Faithfulness:** Despite the disobedience of Solomon and Rehoboam, God remained faithful to His unconditional promise. The southern kingdom, though smaller, continued to be ruled by David's descendants. God's continued faithfulness is seen in:

- The survival of the Davidic kingdom in the south.
- God's maintaining a "lamp" for David, ensuring that his line would not be extinguished (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19).
- Successive Generations of Disobedience and God's Grace
- The books of 1 and 2 Kings document a pattern of repeated disobedience among the kings of both Israel and Judah. David sinned, Solomon turned to idolatry, Rehoboam did evil, and Abijam, Rehoboam's son, also did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Yet, despite this persistent and continuing disobedience, God, in His grace and faithfulness, allowed the Davidic kingdom to continue.

### King Jeroboam: The First King of Israel

Jeroboam played a pivotal role in the division of the kingdom.

- Background: He was a capable servant of King Solomon, overseeing his workforce.
- Promise of a Kingdom: The prophet Ahijah promised Jeroboam that he would rule over ten tribes (1 Kings 11:29-39). God offered Jeroboam the opportunity to establish a lasting dynasty like David's, *conditional* on his obedience (1 Kings 11:38).
- Target of Solomon: Jeroboam became a target of King Solomon (11:40), fleeing to Egypt, highlighting a parallel to David's experience with Saul.

Tragically, Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, led his people into apostasy. His actions had profound and lasting consequences. The subsequent kings of Israel were often judged based on whether they followed "the sins of Jeroboam."

- Reason for Apostasy: 1 Kings 12:26-27 reveals that Jeroboam's primary motivation was a lack of faith and trust in God's promises. He feared that if the people of the northern kingdom continued to travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, their allegiance would eventually return to the southern kingdom of Judah and to the Davidic line.
- Nature of his Apostasy: Jeroboam's apostasy manifested itself in four specific ways:
  - Making two golden calves (1 Kings 12:28): This was a direct violation of the Second Commandment, which prohibits the creation of idols and "images" for God (Exod. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8; cf. Exod. 34:17; Lev 19:4; Num 33:52; Deut. 27:15)
  - Setting up sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:29-30): This violated the principle of centralized worship that God had established in Deuteronomy 12, which mandated that sacrifices and worship for the people at large should only take place

at the place God would choose (later revealed to be Jerusalem). These cities were at the northern and southern ends of Jeroboam's kingdom.

- Appointing non-Levites as priests (1 Kings 12:31): This was a violation of God's law regarding the Levitical priesthood. God had designated the tribe of Levi for priestly service (Deut. 18:1-8; cf. Num 3:5-13).
- Designating his own feast/festival days (1 Kings 12:32): This usurped God's authority to determine the times and seasons of worship, as outlined in the Law (Lev 23; Deut. 16).
- The Significance of the Golden Calf: the calf is most likely associated with a representation of the Lord, and not other gods. The claim of Aaron and Jeroboam, "these are your gods" employs the plural Elohim that can be used to multiple gods or to God himself (1 Kgs 12:28; Exod. 32:1-5). The bull was a common symbol for deity in the ancient Near East and signifies both strength and fertility. The calf likely serves as a pedestal for the Lord as the invisible rider of the calf. The Lord allowed for the cherubim imagery at the Tabernacle and Temple (see Exod. 25:10-22) to serve as a pedestal for the throne of the Lord but not the calf. God's people are to worship the Lord solely on his terms, and the association with a bull/calf or any other image not prescribed by the Lord diminished the greatness and glory of the Lord (see Ps 106:19-23). Valid imagery was allowed in Israelite worship but not imagery that directly associated God with idolatrous images or false gods.
- The Long-Term Effect of Jeroboam's Sin: Our actions have consequences beyond even our own lifetime and can even affect multiple generations for good and bad. All the future kings of Israel except two are condemned for continuing or not departing from Jeroboam's corrupt worship practices (1 Kgs 15:26, 30, 34; 16:2, 19, 26, 31; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:31; 14:24; 15:9, 18).

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. How do we see pride, arrogance, and ego influencing the division of the kingdom of Israel and how do we see these factors at work in the divisions and disunity of the church today?
2. What lasting negative consequences would the division of Israel and Judah have for the rest of OT history and how did this division impact Israel's calling and mission from God to be a light to the surrounding nations in pointing them to the one true God?

3. What are the special blessings that come from God's people living in unity and how can we be used by God to promote the right kinds of unity in the church today as the body of Christ?
4. What do we learn about the character of God in his dealings with the house of David in the division of the two kingdoms? How does this become a major theme in the rest of the book?
5. What were the primary reasons behind Jeroboam's decision to construct separate sanctuaries for Israel's worship rather than the Temple in Jerusalem? Why was this such a serious issue and how did this specific act set in motion the ultimate downfall of Israel as a nation? In light of the judgment that had resulted from Aaron constructing a golden calf for Israel to use in worship, what would have influenced Jeroboam to use this same object for Israel's worship? What did the golden calf represent and why was the Lord insistent that Israel not use "images" in their worship? What lessons can we learn that apply to our worship of the Lord today?
6. As you look at the list of the kings of Judah and Israel, what do you think were the major contributing factors to a majority of the kings doing "evil" rather than what was "right" in God's estimation? How might the world's measure of success vs. God's standards be a contributing factor?

# 7 Kings, Prophets, and Lions

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## Read: 1 Kings 13-14

The story of a “man of God” from Judah who courageously condemns Jeroboam’s altar only to be deceived by an old prophet in Israel and eaten by a lion as punishment for his disobedience to God’s directive raises a series of theological and ethical issues:

- Why did the man of God, who so clearly delivered a message from the Lord, ultimately disobey what seems to be a minor instruction?
- What was the real motivation of the old prophet in lying to the man of God?
- Why did God allow the man of God, who appeared to be faithful, to be killed by a lion? What does this tell us about God’s justice and purposes?
- What are the criteria for discerning the difference between true and false prophets?
- How does the interaction between the prophet from Judah and the prophet from Israel reflect the broader relationship between the divided kingdoms?
- What is the significance of the specific prophecies made in this passage and their subsequent fulfillment?

## The Role of Prophets in Israel’s History:

This story confirms what we have already seen in Israel’s history. The prophets are the “*king makers*” in Israel, and the prophets shape the history of Israel in many ways more than kings.

- Samuel and Saul: Samuel not only anointed Saul as the first king of Israel but also later declared God’s rejection of him due to his disobedience, a pivotal moment that reshaped the early monarchy. The Lord directs Samuel to anoint David as Saul’s replacement.

- Nathan and David: Nathan announces God’s covenant with David, confronts David concerning his sin with Bathsheba, and plays a significant role in the selection of Solomon as David’s successor.
- Ahijah to Jeroboam: Now, here in our text, Ahijah’s prophecy directly foretold the division of the kingdom (1 Kgs 13:31-39) and specifically anointed Jeroboam as the king over the ten northern tribes, a historical turning point that permanently altered the political landscape of Israel. Ahijah also subsequently announces the demise of Jeroboam’s house and dynasty because of Jeroboam’s establishment of the apostate sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 14:9-16)

### 1 Kings 13–14 Highlight the Prominence and Power of the Prophetic Word

Two prophets of the Lord are prominent in 1 Kings 13-14—the “*man of God*” from Judah (ch. 13) and Ahijah who prophesies further against Jeroboam (ch. 14). The phrase “*word of the Lord*” or similar expressions appear 11 times in these two chapters (See 13:1, 2, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 26, 32; 14:18). What does this emphasis highlight:

- Divine Authority of the Prophets’ Message: The messages being delivered are not mere human opinions or interpretations but carry the direct authority of God himself.
- Truth and Reliability: The narrative consistently portrays the word of the Lord as something that comes to pass, reinforcing its truthfulness and the reliability of God’s promises and warnings.
  - Immediate fulfillments: the altar splitting, and the ashes poured out (13:3-5) and the healing of Jeroboam’s withered hand in response to the man of God’s prayer (13:6)
  - Fulfillments within a generation: the prophecy of judgment against the house of Jeroboam and the death of Jeroboam’s son (14:9-17)
  - Fulfillments at a time in the more distant future: prophecy of Israel’s future exile in 722 BC (14:15-16) and the birth of King Josiah (13:1-2) and the role he would play in defiling the altar of Jeroboam at Bethel approximately 300 years later, as recorded in 2 Kings 23:15-20. The announcement of Josiah’s birth this far in advance signifies his importance to the message of 1-2 Kings!
  - The remarkable accuracy of the prophecies reveals to us God’s sovereign control over history and the truthfulness of the prophetic word as revelation from God.

The prophets were direct messengers of God, speaking on his behalf.

This gave their words immense weight and authority, even over kings who held earthly power. They served as God’s voice, offering guidance, correction, and often warnings,

acting as the spiritual conscience of the nation. Confrontations between prophets and kings will become a recurring storyline in Kings and the Hebrew Bible.

- The Man of God and Jeroboam: the severe cost of disobedience

God demands complete and total obedience to his commands, and there are severe consequences when his people and servants disobey.

- The severe cost of Jeroboam's disobedience: Jeroboam defied the word of the Lord by establishing his own centers of worship in Dan and Bethel complete with golden calves, appointing priests who were not from the Levitical line, and altering the timing of religious festivals. These actions were in direct violation of God's commands regarding centralized worship in Jerusalem.

Even the miraculous withering of Jeroboam's hand in response to the man of God's prayer, an act of divine mercy, did not lead to the king's repentance. He was determined to follow his own way rather than God's and brought destruction upon himself and his family.

- The severe cost of the man of God's disobedience: He delivered the word of the Lord to the king but also himself directly disobeyed God's explicit command to not eat bread or drink water in Bethel and not to return by the same way he came. He disobeyed this direct instruction by accepting the invitation of the old prophet and partaking in food and drink in Bethel. Even those used by God in significant ways are not exempt from the consequences of disobedience to God's direct and explicit commands.

The significance of death by lion: This man of God's death is connected to the threat of the covenant curse of attack by wild beasts in Leviticus 26:22 (see also 1 Kings 20:35-36 and 2 Kings 2:23-25 for other related examples)

What had happened to the man of God should have been a warning to Jeroboam but note 13:33.

- The Man of God from Judah and the Old Prophet from Israel (1 Kings 13:11-32)

The interaction between the man of God and this prophet is the most enigmatic aspect of this passage. How do we assess the prophet's character and his motivations for what he does?

Possible motivations to consider cultural expectations of hospitality, curiosity about the prophet from Judah, jealousy of an outsider intervening in his region, a desire to test the

man of God's obedience, a misguided belief that he had a superior authority, or even shame or regret for not confronting Jeroboam himself.

Is he a true or false prophet: he claims to have received a word from the Lord through an angel that comes true when the man of God is killed, but his message contradicts the original clear and prior command God had given to the man of God, which raises questions about the source of his prophecy and his integrity.

Why does this old prophet play a role in the death of the man of God through his deception, yet then honor him, mourn his death, and desire to be buried with him? This seems deeply contradictory. Possible explanations: genuine remorse and regret for his actions, a belated recognition of the man of God's true faithfulness and connection with God, a fear of the consequences of his own deception, or a combination of all of these.

We perhaps get some insight into his character by looking at two biblical parallels: the story of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 and the story of Balaam in Numbers 22. In 1 Kings 22, Micaiah briefly deceives Ahab and a "lying spirit" from the Lord influences the false prophets to deceive the king. Does this suggest the possibility that the old prophet might have been a messenger from the Lord testing the man of God.

There is also a parallel to the story of Balaam in Numbers 22, who also faced obstacles with his donkey and was ultimately enticed to go and speak where God had initially forbidden him. Does this parallel suggest the possibility of the man of God having ulterior motives in going to eat with the old prophet?

- The story of 1 Kings 13 as a possible parable for the relationship between Israel and Judah

The prophet from **Judah** speaks the true word of God.

The prophet from **Israel** is not called to confront Jeroboam about his idolatry. Are there no true prophets in Israel willing to confront King Jeroboam? Perhaps recalls the story of Amos who is sent from Judah to prophesy against Israel at a later time (see Amos 1:2; 7:10-17)

The prophet from **Judah** experiences death outside his land because of the influence of the prophet from Israel. Judah ended up in exile because they committed the same sins and idolatry that Israel had committed (see 2 Kgs 17:13-20).

The prophet from **Israel** wishes to be buried with the man of God from Israel. The only hope of the Northern Kingdom for the future is associated with its connection to Judah, the house of David, and the temple in Jerusalem. This desire for burial together could

symbolize the Northern Kingdom's ultimate hope for restoration and a future tied to the Davidic line, the Temple in Jerusalem, and a reconciliation with Judah.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. What do we learn about the character of God in this story and what he expects from his faithful servants?
2. How should we deal with the troubling aspects of the story related to the death of the prophet? Do you feel when reading the story that the prophet was treated unfairly by God? What are good things to keep in mind when trying to assess these types of difficult stories?
3. Why do you think that the faithful “man of God” felt compelled to disobey the clear directive he had received from God? What are pressures that cause us to compromise our faithfulness to the Word or that lead us into disobedience even when we know what God wants or expects from us?
4. How do you assess the character of the old prophet in Israel? Should we view him as a faithful prophet doing what God has called him to do or a deceiver who causes the death of the faithful “man of God?”
5. What does the story of the “man of God” and the old prophet teach us about the relationship between Judah and Israel? Do you think there is validity in reading this story as teaching a parable about Israel and Judah—what in the text specifically helps you to decide?
6. What do we learn about the faithfulness of a true servant of God from the story of Ahijah in 1 Kings 14?

# 8

## Ahab, Elijah, and the Prophetic Showdown on Mt. Carmel

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### Read: 1 Kings 16–18

Dynasties are short-lived in Israel. The dynasty of Omri for four generations and of Jehu for five generations are the longest ones. Omri also established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Kingdom. His son Ahab (853-841 BC) has the dubious distinction of being the vilest king in Israel due to his marriage to the Tyrian princess Jezebel and her promotion of Baal worship in Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33). This apostasy takes Jeroboam's apostasy even further. In many ways, Ahab was a successful political and military ruler. Ahab's involvement with a coalition of kings who withstood the Assyrians at the Battle of Qarqar, but the writer of Kings does not mention or credit Ahab's accomplishments—all that matters is his disloyalty to the Lord.

### Ahab's sin in leading the nation to worship Baal.

We see Israel worshipping the Canaanite deity Baal as early as the time of Moses in Numbers 24. The allure of this fertility god was the promise of rains that would bring agricultural bounty and economic prosperity. The Baal Epic in Canaanite literature portrayed Baal in this manner:

- Baal is the storm god who defeats Yam (god of the sea) and the forces of chaos.
- Baal is declared king over the gods because of his victory.
- Baal is a storm god who rides the clouds and brings rain and fertility.
- Baal dies at the end of the agricultural season and must go down to the underworld (under the control of the Canaanite god of death, Mot)
- Baal is rescued from the underworld by Anat, the Canaanite goddess of warfare as the agricultural season begins.
- Baal is also frequently associated with Asherah, the Canaanite mother goddess of fertility.

## The Focus of Elijah's Ministry

To confront the sinful ways of Ahab and Jezebel and to call the people back to exclusive devotion to the Lord. The prophets Elijah and Elisha take center stage in the book of Kings (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13), and the prophetic word is more powerful than the political and military authority of the kings. These stories should be understood as polemic against Baal worship and highlight the idea that God is the true source of life and not the Canaanite gods of fertility that are unable to deliver on their promises.

- Drought in Israel—no rain for three years when they worship the storm god, Baal.
- Elijah provided for by brook/takes care of widow in territory of Baal.
- Miracles involving fire and water (Baal is the god of
- Miracles involving the provision of food.
- Prophets bring the dead back to life because the Lord is the Creator and has power over life and death. In contrast, Baal is subject to the power of the god of death (Mot) when he goes down to the underworld.
- Baal is the “Rider of the Clouds,” but the OT says that it is the Lord (Ps 68:4). Note how Elijah is taken to heaven in a fiery chariot.
- See Psalm 29 for a hymn praising the Lord as the God who demonstrates his power in the storm and who speaks in the thunder (not Baal)

Israel's turning away from the Lord to Baal reflects the working out of what is described in **Jeremiah 2:12-13**

*“Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”*

On the inability of the fertility gods to carry through on what their adherents follow, see **Hosea 8:7** (no crops) and **9:11-16** (no conception and children).

## The Feeding Miracles of Elijah and Elisha

The Lord is the one who provides food and agricultural bounty for his people. There is also the irony of Elijah providing food in the territory of Baal for a widow woman while Israel is crippled by famine and drought as they give their devotion to Baal. Note these examples where we see a supernatural provision of food in connection with the ministries of Elijah and Elisha:

- Ravens miraculously bring Elijah food (1 Kings 17:6)
- The unending supply of flour and oil for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:14)
- The angel's provision of sustenance during Elijah's long journey to Horeb (1 Kings 19:5-7).
- Elisha the multiplication of oil for the widow (2 Kings 4:1-7)
- The purification of poisoned stew (2 Kings 4:38-41)
- The miraculous feeding of a hundred men with a small amount of barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- the Lord's dramatic relief of the famine in Samaria (2 Kings 7).

## The Contest Between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)

We have the Super Bowl of prophetic conflicts here in 1 Kings 18 as Elijah takes on the prophets of Baal. In 18:1-20, the Lord promises to send much-needed rain to Israel, but the Lord's blessing will require the people's return to him and renewal of their covenantal commitment. What is the ultimate purpose of this contest:

- To Reveal the True God: The central purpose was to definitively demonstrate to the people of Israel, who were wavering in their allegiance, that Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, was the only true and living God, and that Baal was a powerless idol.
- To Expose the Futility of Idolatry: By showcasing Baal's inability to answer the fervent prayers of his prophets, Elijah aimed to expose the emptiness and deception inherent in idolatry.
- To Call for National Repentance: Elijah's ultimate goal was to turn the hearts of the Israelites back to the Lord, to break the cycle of apostasy and restore true worship in the land. Note the people's unwillingness to answer Elijah in 18:21 when he calls for

their decision contrasted to their confession, “*The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God*” in 18:39.

The contest is stilted a bit in favor of the prophets of Baal.

- One prophet of the Lord (Elijah) vs. 450 false prophets of Baal (who also have royal support)
- Mt. Carmel: Elijah is giving up home field advantage, as Carmel is located on the border of Israel and Phoenicia.
- Elijah defers to the second half by letting the prophets of Baal have the first opportunity to prove that their god has supreme power
- The contest centers around Baal’s supposed special capacity as the storm god and rider of the clouds to send “fire/lightning” from heaven
- Elijah gives prophets of Baal ample time to prove that their god is capable of answering their prayers.

Elijah’s supreme confidence in the Lord.

- Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal with his suggestions that Baal might be sleeping or on a journey (which seems to be a specific allusion to the Canaanite belief in Baal’s yearly descent into the underworld).
- Note the contrasting actions of the prophets of Baal: frantic invocation, physical agitation, self-mutilation (cf. Hos 7:14)—but utter silence from their god.
- Elijah pours water on his altar—to prove the Lord’s ability to send fire and also his confidence by “wasting” water, that God would send rain.

The Lord’s decisive answer to Elijah’s prayer and defeat of Baal and his prophets leads the people to confess their allegiance to the Lord and leads to the execution of the prophets of Baal. Elijah was using “excess force” here because execution was the prescribed punishment for false prophets who led the people away from the Lord (Deut. 13:1-5). Idolatry was a capital crime because it represented treason against Israel’s divine king (cf. Exod. 32:25-29; 2 Kgs 10:18-28).

The story concludes with the Lord sending the needed rain for Israel—but the rain only comes after Israel has confessed the Lord as their God (see 18:42-48)

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. What would have been Ahab's motivation in taking the daughter of a pagan king as his wife? What are similar types of compromises that believers are tempted to make today?
2. What does Ahab's life teach us about the difference between God's measure of success and the world's?
3. How do Obadiah and Elijah provide examples for how believers today are to engage with an ungodly culture? Can you think of contemporary examples of each type of response—what have you learned from observing them?
4. What was appealing about the worship of Baal for the people of ancient Israel and why was devotion to this god often more appealing than following the Lord?
5. How would you define an "idol?" Instead of gods like Baal, what are the popular gods and idols in our culture that people give their ultimate loyalty and allegiances to in the place of the one true God? How and why do these gods ultimately disappoint those who follow them?
6. How do we grow into the kind of faith and courage that Elijah reflects in his encounters with Ahab and the prophets of Baal?

# 9 Defeat and Discouragement After a Great Victory

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Read: 1 Kings 19

It might seem counterintuitive, but **discouragement and defeat often follow our greatest spiritual triumphs**. Trials and temptations can arise even after moments of great spiritual strength. We will explore this paradox through the story of Elijah's flight to Mount Horeb in response to Jezebel's threat to take his life in 1 Kings 19, a chapter that unfolds immediately after his triumphant victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

## Jezebel's Murderous Intentions and Elijah's Response (1 Kings 19:1-5)

The dramatic victory on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) saw Elijah call down fire from heaven, exposing the false prophets of Baal and leading to their execution. One would expect Elijah to be riding high on this spiritual momentum, yet what follows is a stark contrast.

Jezebel, the queen, and a staunch supporter of Baal worship, sends a message to Elijah, threatening his life. Her response is swift and deadly serious.

- Jezebel's Threat (19:1-2): "*So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.*" This is a direct, unequivocal death threat.
- Elijah's Response (19:3): "*Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.*" Elijah, who just confronted 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah with unwavering courage, flees in terror.
- Elijah's Despair (19:4): "*But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'*" This is a cry of profound despair.

Other servants of God who asked to die: Elijah is not alone in this desperate plea. Throughout scripture, we find other faithful servants of God who, in moments of intense trial or discouragement, expressed a similar desire for death:

- Moses (Numbers 11:13-15)
- Jonah (Jonah 4:1-5)
- Job (Job 3)
- Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14)

The reasons for Elijah's fearful and despairing response?

1 Kings 18:4; 8:35-36 seem to provide some helpful insights.

- 1 Kings 18:4 refers to Jezebel's previous persecution of the Lord's prophets, hiding them in caves and killing others. This shows her ruthlessness and a history of successful persecution. That opposition to the Lord's servants continues.
- 1 Kings 8:35-36, part of Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, speaks of God's forgiveness and restoration when His people turn from their sin. This context highlights the potential for God to intervene and bring about national repentance.

At Carmel, the people had turned from their wavering between Baal and the Lord by confessing, "*The Lord, he is God; the Lord he is God*" (1 Kgs 18:39). It seemed as if national repentance had occurred, but instead Elijah experiences more of the same royal opposition to his message and call to follow the Lord. The personal threat of death reflection that deep-seated spiritual opposition that remained. There was disappointment that his great victory had not, in fact, changed the heart of the nation's leadership, and that the fight was far from over.

- Elijah: He's only human. This story reminds us that even the most devoted and faithful figures in scripture were still human, subject to fear, discouragement, and despair. Faith is not a guarantee against emotional struggle but rather enables us to persevere and endure through such struggles. If God can use the irony of Elijah's request to die? If Elijah really wanted to die, then Jezebel would have been happy to assist! The request to die highlights the depth of his despair—after experiencing a miraculous demonstration of God's life-giving power, now wants to end his own life. Furthermore, Elijah is one of only two people in the Bible (the other being Enoch) who are taken to heaven without experiencing death, making his request even more ironic in retrospect.

## Elijah's Flight to Horeb (Sinai) and His Encounter with God on the Mountain

Elijah's flight is not merely a physical journey; it's a spiritual one. He flees to Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, the very mountain where God had revealed himself to Moses and given the Law.

The angels provide a meal as God ministers to Elijah's physical needs.

This provision of food reflects God's compassion and understanding of human weakness. Before spiritual renewal can take place, basic physical needs must be met. God cares for our whole person, not just our spiritual well-being.

The encounter with God on Horeb (another name for Sinai)

Elijah's indictment of Israel (19:9-10). When God asks Elijah, "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" Elijah responds with a lament, expressing his deep concern and disappointment: "*I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.*" This is not just a pity party from Elijah, as the prophet is articulating the depth of Israel's spiritual decline and his own perceived isolation in defending God's covenant.

Elijah as a new Moses (note the promise in Deuteronomy 18:15-18). The events in 1 Kings 18-19 clearly demonstrate Elijah as a Moses-like figure. Deuteronomy 18:15-18 speaks of a prophet like Moses whom God would raise up from among the Israelites.

Mt. Carmel is like the story of Sinai in Exodus 20-24:

A time of establishing or renewing the covenant between God and Israel. Mt. Carmel is like the story of Sinai in Exodus 20-24: a time of establishing or renewing the **covenant** between God and Israel. Both events are dramatic displays of God's power, intended to draw His people back to Him and remind them of their obligations under the covenant.

Mt. Carmel is like the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32

There has been idolatry and unfaithfulness to the Lord. Idolaters are also executed in both stories (Exod. 32:25-29; 1 Kgs 18:40).

Elijah goes up on Sinai to plead with God to judge Israel (1 Kings 19), while Moses had gone up on Sinai (Exodus 33-34) to plead with God to spare/restore Israel.

While Moses intercedes for Israel's restoration, Elijah, in his despair and zeal, calls for judgment.

The Lord “passes by” both men on the mountain to reveal himself (Exod. 33:2, 22; 34:6-7; 1 Kgs 19:11-13). Both of God’s servants receive a personal revelation of the Lord himself.

The revelation to Elijah is different from that given to Moses: not in the wind, earthquake, and fire but now in the “*still small voice*.” The contrast is profound. In Exodus, God reveals himself to Moses in powerful, overwhelming natural phenomena, demonstrating his power and majesty. In 1 Kings 19, after the dramatic events of Mount Carmel, God speaks to Elijah not in the spectacle of wind, earthquake, or fire, but in a “*still small voice*” (or a “*whisper*” or “*gentle whisper*” in some translations).

For Elijah, God’s presence provides:

- **Intimacy and Personal Guidance:** It suggests that God's guidance and presence are not always found in the extraordinary, but often in the ordinary and in a personal, quiet communion.
- **Comfort and Assurance:** For a discouraged and fearful Elijah, a “*still small voice*” might have been more comforting and reassuring than another overwhelming display of power. It signifies God's gentle care and presence even in despair.

### The Re-commissioning of Elijah to His Prophetic Calling (1 Kings 19:15–21)

Following his encounter with God, Elijah is not left in his despair. God re-commissions him, demonstrating that there is still work to be done and that Elijah's ministry is not over. The Lord essentially agrees with Elijah’s assessment of Israel and announces the rise of three specific individuals to help carry out the judgment on his disobedient and rebellious people. As part of his commissioning, there are three specific things that Elijah is supposed to do:

- to anoint Hazael as the future **king** of the Syrians
- to anoint Jehu as the future king of **Israel**
- to anoint **Elisha** as his prophetic successor

These three figures will continue to carry forth the work of Elijah by judging Israel for its continued unfaithfulness to the Lord, by purging the house of Ahab from Israel as the source of the idolatry, and by continuing a prophetic presence to a sinful people. God has a larger plan that extends beyond his individual ministry.

In the same way that we have a Moses and a Joshua, we also have an Elijah and an Elisha to carry on the work of bringing the people back to God. This highlights the continuity of God's redemptive plan and the succession of leadership in His service.

### The Expectation of an Ultimate Prophet Like Moses

The Old Testament looks forward to a greater fulfillment of the "*prophet like Moses*." (See Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and then Acts 3:22-23). **Deuteronomy 34:10-12** states that "*there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face*." This verse emphasizes Moses' unique relationship with God, but it also leaves an anticipation for a future prophet who would similarly mediate God's will to His people.

**Acts 3:22-23** refers to Peter quoting Moses' prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:15: "*The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people*." The ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a new "*prophet like Moses*" would be found in **Jesus Christ**. Jesus is the ultimate prophet, priest, and king and the mediator of a new covenant. He is the one to whom all the prophets pointed, and through whom God's ultimate plan of salvation is accomplished.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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1. Why do we often see spiritual victories and triumphs in our lives followed by defeat and discouragement? How does success and effectiveness make us susceptible to failure?
2. What are the causes of spiritual burnout in our lives and what are some of the evidence that we might be suffering from burnout? What do we learn from Elijah about how to work through burnout and discouragement so that we can get back on track in living for and serving the Lord?
3. What are some of the primary causes of spiritual discouragement in our lives and how does discouragement shrink our faith and courage?
4. What are the kinds of fears that most often keep you from serving God and how do you work through them and overcome them?
5. What do we learn about the character of God and how he treats his fearful and discouraged children from the responses that God has to Elijah when he runs away in response to Jezebel's threats?

6. Why does the writer of Kings emphasize viewing Elijah as a second Moses? What does this tell us about his ministry and his calling as a prophet?
7. How does seeing Jesus as the promised prophet like Moses shape our understanding of who Jesus is and his role in carrying out God's plan of redemption?

# 10

## Mercy and Final Judgment for a Wicked King

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Read: 1 Kings 20–22

1 Kings 16:31-33 gives Ahab the dishonorable distinction of being Israel's worst king who did more to provoke the Lord to anger than any king who came before him, and 1 Kings 21:25 provides this damning assessment: "*There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.*" Given such a record of egregious evil, why should we ever expect God to show mercy to Ahab for all the evil he did as the ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel?

And yet, the final chapters devoted to Ahab in 1 Kings 20-22 tell a story of God's surprising mercy in extending grace and victory even to a king who did not deserve it. We also witness God's unwavering commitment to justice, ultimately bringing judgment upon Ahab for his persistent disobedience, injustice, and embrace of false prophecy. This portion of 1 Kings reminds us that while God is merciful, He is also just, and His word will ultimately prevail.

### 1 Kings 20: God's grace to Ahab in Israel's defeat of the Arameans (and Ahab's continued failure to follow the Lord)

What comes to mind when you think of the term "holy war?" The term "holy war" typically conjures images of battles fought under divine command, where God is actively involved in securing victory for His people, often with specific instructions for the treatment of enemies. It implies a divine mandate and purpose for the conflict. We have an account of holy war in 1 Kings 20 as God commands Ahab to wage war on the Arameans and their king Ben-Hadad who has threatened Israel. The Arameans are often the primary enemy of Israel in Kings (though they are often allies as well).

#### Ben-Hadad's threats (20:3, 10)

Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, makes exorbitant demands on Ahab, first demanding Ahab's silver, gold, wives, and children, and then later threatening to completely plunder Samaria. These threats are aimed at humiliating and subjugating Israel.

God's gracious promise to Ahab (20:13) "*so that Ahab would know that he was the Lord.*"

Despite Ahab's wickedness, God intervenes and promises him victory over the Arameans. The prophet comes to Ahab with a clear message: "*Thus says the Lord, 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, that you may know that I am the Lord.'*" This is a remarkable act of undeserved grace. God's motivation is not Ahab's righteousness, but his own glory by assuring that even this wicked king would acknowledge His power and sovereignty.

Ahab's failure that leads to prophetic denunciation (20:32–34).

After two miraculous victories given by God, Ahab captures Ben-Hadad. Instead of executing him as was the common practice in "*holy war*" contexts or as God's judgment might imply, Ahab makes a covenant with Ben-Hadad, releasing him in exchange for some cities. It looks like Ahab is being merciful to his enemy, a trait that we think is a good one and similar to the way that God has treated him.

Why does it lead to the condemnation from the Lord's prophet in 20:35–43?

This act of "*mercy*" is condemned by a prophet because it directly contravenes God's implicit will for this holy war. God had given Israel victory so that Ahab would know that He was the Lord. By sparing Ben-Hadad, Ahab essentially disregarded God's purpose for the war and forged an alliance with an enemy whom God intended to judge. This was not true mercy, but a self-serving political decision that prioritized his own interests over God's command and glory. We might see parallels here to the story of Saul in 1 Samuel 15 when he shows "*mercy*" and spares Agag, the king of the Amalekites, when the Lord has commanded him to kill the king and his people.

**Result: God shows mercy, but Ahab continues to show his unfaithful character and refusal to act in ways that are pleasing to God.**

We learn that God is incredibly merciful, willing to extend grace even to the unfaithful and wicked. He gives Ahab opportunities to know and acknowledge him, but we also learn that his mercy is not a license for disobedience.

1 Kings 21: Naboth's Vineyard and the Injustice Perpetrated by Ahab and Jezebel

The purpose of the historical books in the Old Testament is to demonstrate how God sent Israel into exile because they were completely unfaithful to their covenant with the Lord and had repeatedly broken his commandments. We are also given prime examples of the breaking of the Ten Commandments:

- The Golden Calf (Exodus 32): a prime example of idolatry
- The rape and murder of the Levites' concubine (Judges 19): a prime example of murder
- Achan taking plunder and stealing from the Lord (Joshua 6-7): a prime example of theft
- King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12): a prime example of adultery
- King Ahab taking Naboth's vineyard: a prime example of bearing false witness and covetousness and note how murder goes along with this royal sin.

King Ahab's coveting of Naboth's vineyard.

King Ahab's **desire** of Naboth's vineyard. Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard because it is conveniently located near his palace in Jezreel and would make a good vegetable garden.

Naboth's refusal to sell the vineyard and the theology of land in ancient Israel (see Lev 25:23-24).

Naboth refuses to sell the vineyard because it is his ancestral inheritance, and according to Israelite law, land was not to be sold permanently but was to remain within families. This reflects a deeper theological understanding. The land belongs to **God** to distribute as he desires; it does not belong to the **king** to use as he wants. This principle underscores God's ultimate ownership of the land and the temporary stewardship granted to His people.

Jezebel's plan and the ethical implications of following the pagan gods of the Canaanites vs. following the God of Israel:

Jezebel, in her ruthless determination to please Ahab, devises a wicked plan. She arranges for false witnesses to accuse Naboth of blasphemy and treason, leading to his stoning and subsequent death. This allows Ahab to seize the vineyard.

This episode starkly contrasts two ethical frameworks:

- Pagan gods of the Canaanites: Often associated with power, self-interest, and a willingness to commit injustice and violence to achieve desired ends. Jezebel's actions are a direct manifestation of this pagan worldview, where might makes right and human life is disposable for personal gain. There is no concept of justice that protects the vulnerable.

- The God of Israel: Demands justice, righteousness, and respect for the rights of all, especially the vulnerable (e.g., the poor, the sojourner, the orphan, the widow). The Mosaic Law, with its protections for land inheritance and due process, reflects God's character. Jezebel's actions are a complete affront to the character and laws of YHWH.

Result: The Lord's response: severe judgment:

Ahab's family will be completely wiped out, and the punishment will fit the crime because it will happen at the very place where Naboth was killed.

But, God also shows a measure of grace and mercy even in response to Ahab's less than ideal repentance. Upon hearing the judgment, Ahab *"tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about humbly."* In response to this, God says to Elijah, *"Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house."*

God has a track record of showing mercy even to the "worst of the worst" (see God's mercy to Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:10-20; see God's mercy to Nineveh in Jonah 3-4). This passage powerfully illustrates God's unwavering commitment to justice and his willingness to extend mercy even to those who seem least deserving,

### 1 Kings 22: God's Execution of Final Justice on Ahab and His Death in Battle.

Despite the temporary reprieve due to his repentance, Ahab's ultimate end is revealed in chapter 22, showcasing God's final execution of justice.

- Another incidence of conflict between Israel and the Arameans (Syria). Three years after the events of Naboth's vineyard, there is renewed tension between Israel and Aram over the city of Ramoth-gilead. Ahab recruits King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join forces with him. Jehoshaphat walked in the ways of the Lord (1 Kgs 22:43) but also had the troubling tendency to form compromising alliances with the wicked kings of Israel, as seen here with Ahab.
- Consultation of the prophets: this is an important text for thinking through the problem of true prophecy vs. false prophecy. How are Ahab's court prophets different from the prophets that Elijah encounters on Mount Carmel? On Mount Carmel, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and Asherah, who were clearly false prophets serving pagan deities. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab consults his own prophets, who claim to speak in the name of the Lord (YHWH). This presents a more subtle and dangerous form of false prophecy: prophets who appear to be aligned with the Lord but who proclaim a false message.

- The message of the court prophets who support Ahab and how it is communicated. Ahab gathers about 400 prophets. They all unanimously declare, "*Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.*" They communicate their message with confidence and even dramatic sign acts and gestures (e.g., Zedekiah making horns of iron to symbolize the goring the Arameans). Their prophecy is entirely positive and aligns with Ahab's desire to go to war.
- The message of the faithful prophet Micaiah and how it is communicated. Jehoshaphat asks if there is a faithful prophet of the Lord. Ahab reluctantly calls for Micaiah, whom he hates because Micaiah never prophesies good concerning him.
- First there is sarcasm: "*Go into battle and you will be successful.*" Initially, Micaiah mockingly parrots the other prophets' message, exposing their flattery and deceit.
- And then the relaying of a terrifying vision: the vision of the heavenly (divine) council and their decision concerning Ahab's fate. When pressed by Ahab, Micaiah delivers the true and terrifying prophecy. He describes a vision of the Lord seated on His throne with the heavenly host standing around Him. God asks, "*Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?*" A spirit volunteers to be a "*lying spirit*" in the mouths of all of Ahab's prophets. This reveals that the unanimous "good" prophecies Ahab is hearing are a divinely sanctioned deception to lead him to his doom.
- The role of the prophets (see Jeremiah 23:16-20): true prophets relay the true message concerning the decrees of God and his heavenly council. False prophets proclaim messages of their creation and imagination. Jeremiah 23:16-20 warns against listening to false prophets who speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. It emphasizes that true prophets stand in God's council and declare His word, often messages of judgment or difficult truths, while false prophets offer comforting but deceptive messages. The idea here is that true prophets have access to the heavenly cabinet meetings where God is making his decisions and declaring his decrees.
- The role of the members of the council (see Job 1; Isaiah 6:8, etc.). The heavenly realm involves more than just angelic messengers. These council members are the powerful "*sons of God*" who serve as God's executive cabinet members. The concept of a "*heavenly council*" or "*divine council*" is present in other biblical texts (e.g., Job 1:6-12, Isaiah 6:1-8). It portrays God as a sovereign ruler who consults with various heavenly beings (often referred to as "sons of God," angels, or spirits) in carrying out His decrees. This reflects how God allows his created beings to participate in his rule over the cosmos and the ways in which he uses various agents including heavenly beings) to accomplish his purposes.

## The problem of divine deception?

The resolution is the recognition that God may punish an unbelieving response to his word with deception that produces belief in falsehood. Or God may punish unbelief with resistance to the truth and inability to believe.

Other examples of this principle at work in the Bible:

- Exodus 7-12: the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in response to Pharaoh's refusal to obey God's command to release the Israelites.
- Romans 1:24-28: God giving humanity over to their sinful desires and depraved minds because they have suppressed the truth.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12: God sending a "*strong delusion*" to those who refuse to believe the truth so that they may believe what is false and be condemned.

The ensuing battle and the result of Ahab's attempt to evade the warning of Micaiah. Despite Micaiah's clear warning, Ahab tries to outsmart God's decree. He disguises himself in battle, while Jehoshaphat wears his royal robes. However, a seemingly random arrow, "*shot at random*," strikes Ahab between the joints of his armor, mortally wounding him.

Result: The message of the true prophet of the Lord is fulfilled. Elijah had stood alone against the 400 prophets of Baal at Carmel. Micaiah had stood alone against the court prophets of Ahab and was vindicated as the true prophet.

The word of the Lord rather than the military strategies, plans, and strength of the king determines the future and fate of his people. Ahab's elaborate plan to deceive the enemy and evade prophecy ultimately fails. It underscores the sovereignty of God's word. No human scheme can thwart His purposes.

The defeat in battle for the king and Israel is one of the covenant curses laid out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The covenant curses warned of defeat in battle, pestilence, and other calamities for disobedience to God's commands. Ahab's death in battle is a direct fulfillment of these curses and God's righteous judgment on a king who consistently led Israel astray.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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7. What do we learn about God's nature and his character qualities and his dealings with Ahab in 1 Kings 20-22? Are there things about God that you find surprising in these chapters?

8. What did Ahab's mercy toward the king of the Arameans reflect about his relationship with God and why did what appear to be an act of mercy anger God in the way that it did?
9. What beliefs about ownership of the land were to guide the people of Israel in the way that they used the land and treated others? How was the Canaanite theology that drove the actions of Jezebel and Ahab different from the theological beliefs that were to direct Israel as the people of God?
10. What are some specific ways that your theological beliefs about God influence the way that you view and treat other people?
11. How do you assess Ahab's repentance when Elijah confronts him after stealing Naboth's vineyard? Was it real and sincere and what do you make of God recognizing and honoring this repentance to some extent? What should we learn from this about the character of God?
12. What are the key differences between true prophecy and false prophecy that are highlighted in 1 Kings 22? How and why are the messages of true prophets like Micaiah different from the messages of false prophets like the ones who served King Ahab?
13. How do we explain God "deceiving" Ahab and does the story in 1 Kings 22 create problems for our view of God's truthfulness and integrity?