

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 3a 1 Kings: Division Through Disobedience (Part 1)

Presented by the



LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE
CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

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David is old and bedridden, and his son Adoni [sic Adonijah] proclaims himself king with the help of David's commander Joab and the priest Abiathar. Hearing this news, David instructs the prophet Nathan to anoint David's son, Solomon, as king. The people rally behind Solomon in a grand procession to the royal throne. Before dying, David charges Solomon to remain faithful to God and his laws. Solomon solidifies his claim to the throne by killing Joab, Adoni [sic Adonijah], and the remaining dissenters from David's reign. He also makes an alliance with Egypt by marrying the pharaoh's daughter. Because Solomon carefully obeys God's law, God appears to him in a dream and offers to grant the new king one wish. Solomon asked for wisdom to govern with justice and to know the difference between right and wrong. God is so impressed with Solomon's humble request that he promises Solomon the additional gifts of wealth and a long life. As a result, Solomon lives in great opulence and his empire stretches from Egypt to the Euphrates River. He earns international fame for his wise sayings and his scientific knowledge.

With these vast resources, Solomon builds an elaborate temple to God as well as a palace for himself in Jerusalem. Construction begins exactly 480 years after Israel's exodus from Egypt. Solomon conscripts thousands of laborers for the work and imports materials from neighboring countries even. The temple is lined with gold and features large hand-sculpted angels and pillars. Solomon places the Ark of the Covenant inside and all Israel gathers for the dedication. After sacrificing herds of animals to the altar, Solomon prays for God's blessings on this temple. God appears to Solomon and promises to dwell in the temple as long as Solomon and the Israelites are obedient to his laws. If they are not, God will remove his presence from the temple and destroy the temple and enslave the children of God.

Solomon's success continues until he marries foreign women. They influence him to worship and erect altars and even temples to foreign deities. God is infuriated and tells Solomon that he will now have to dismember the kingdom. God will tear away all of the tribes from Solomon's kingdom, except for one. That one is Judah. God not only allows the tribe of Judah to remain, one of Solomon's officials also does, Jeroboam, with a cloak that's torn into 12 pieces, which represents the 12 tribes of Israel. The prophet hands Jeroboam 10 of the 12 pieces and explains that God has chosen him to rule these selected tribes as Israel's new king.

Solomon dies and his son Rehoboam assumes the throne led by Jeroboam. The people gathered before the young king to request that Rehoboam would treat them more kindly than Solomon did during his reign. Rehoboam, though, is headstrong and refuses, choosing to listen to the young friends as counselors rather than the old wise men who had counseled Solomon, the most wise man, on his kingdom affairs. In fact, he threatens to punish the Israelites and make the yoke of tax that his father bestowed on them to be so great that his father seemed minuscule in comparison. The Israelites unite and rebel again as a result of this, cursing the tribe of Judah and eluding Rehoboam's attempts to forcefully subdue them. They head north where they crowned Jeroboam king of Israel in the city of Shechem.

Israel is now split into two kingdoms, just as God predicted. And the kingdom of Israel we call the north, and the kingdom of Judah is in the south. To distinguish the new separate kingdom of Israel from the old kingdom in Jerusalem, Jeroboam erects altars and shrines to golden calves throughout the whole northern land. The Israelites worship these idols and the Levite priests formerly devoted to God serve them as well. One day, Jeroboam's son is ill and his wife approaches a prophet to seek guidance. The prophet warns that Jeroboam's household will be destroyed and that Israel will eventually lose control of the Promised Land because of Jeroboam's abhorrent practices. One generation later, Jeroboam's entire family is slaughtered when another Israelite takes the throne from him by force. Meanwhile, King Rehoboam also erects altars and shrines to idols in Judah, even authorizing male and female prostitution in these shrines. The two kingdoms, both northern and southern, continue to fight each other.

After Rehoboam and Jeroboam die, we see the story recounted of how succeeding kings take over one after another. They're summarized in this book. The kings' reigns are more evil than good, but we see the complete story. Almost all of Israel's northern kings commit great evil, expanding on the practices of their fathers' sinful paths. Some of the southern kingdoms in Jerusalem, they try to revive an obedience to God, but none of them ban the worship of foreign gods in Judah. With the help of his wife Jezebel, Ahab, northern kingdom's most wicked king, spreads cult worship of the god Baal throughout the northern lands.

In response, a prophet named Elijah emerges and informs Ahab that God will curse the land with a great drought. Elijah leads a secluded life on the outskirts of civilization. Ravens even bring Elijah food at one point, and he performs miracles among the local people. After three years of drought, Queen Jezebel begins a campaign to murder all of God's prophets. In challenge to that, Elijah calls the prophets of Baal to a contest to see whose god can miraculously set an unlit animal sacrifice on fire. Despite animated prayer and self-mutilation, the big priests of Baal are unable to get their god to send fire down from heaven. Elijah then soaks his altars with water so much so that he digs a trench around the altars. The water soaks the altars, soaks the rocks, and even fills up the trench. And then we see Elijah pray, not that he would be spared, not that he would be seen as great, but that once again these quieted children of God would acknowledge and recognize that Jehovah God, Yahweh, is the only God.

And if you think about it, this is one of those times in history I would have loved to get in a time machine to see what God does, because God sends down fire that not only burns the soaking wet sacrifice. It burns up the rocks. And if that isn't miraculous enough, it licks up or soaks up or burns up the water in the trench around. Wow. Can you imagine being there? The Israelites seeing that and understanding without doubt that God is God, they worship him and eradicate many of the prophets of Baal.

Elijah flees knowing that Jezebel was going to come after him as a result of this. He goes to the desert. And as happens too often, after some of our greatest mountaintop experiences come some of the deepest, darkest valleys. And Elijah complains to God, we see soon after, that despite his earnest service to the Lord, the Israelites continue to be disobedient. God promises to show himself to Elijah, and Elijah is shown by God through wind, through earthquakes, and through fire that those weren't where he inhabited himself, but we're told, instead, God comes in a whisper, a still small voice. And Elijah once again recognizes that God is God and he will reign and do things according to his timeline and his plan. Elijah returns to civilization where he appoints a new man Elisha to be his apprentice and to eventually succeed him as a prophet.

One day, Ahab and Jezebel steal a man's vineyard, slandering the man's name in public until the citizens stoned the man. Elijah finds Ahab in the vineyard and declares that because of his murderous deeds, Ahab and Jezebel will die and dogs will lick up their blood. Soon after, King Ahab makes a rare pact with the king of Judah. The two lead their united forces against the Arameans who are occupying Israel's borders. Ahab is killed and bleeds to death in his chariot. When the chariot is cleaned after battles, the dogs gather to lick up his blood. Wow, what a story. And we're not even finished.

You can see why this book is so intriguing and so rich with history and practical lessons for us. Like the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book. In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of 2 Kings continue the narrative in the books of Samuel. The Septuagint then separates them into two parts. And we derive even the English title Kings from Jerome's Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible. Now, no one knows for sure who the author of 1 and 2 Kings are, though some commentators have suggested Ezra, Ezekiel, and even Jeremiah as possible authors. Because the entire work encompasses a time of more than 400 years, several source materials were used to compile these records.

The Book of 1 Kings was likely written somewhere between 560 and 540 B.C., so a smaller window than some of the other books of the Old Testament. Certain clues such as literary styles, themes that are woven throughout the book, and even the nature of the material used point really to a single compiler or author rather than multiple compilers or authors. The person who assembled the manuscript had to do it while God's people were in exile in Babylon. You'll see that later on if you study 2 Kings. But he didn't complete the work until the Babylonians released King Jehoiakim after 37 years in prison in 560 B.C. Most likely, he completed it within another 20 years or so of that.

This book again is a sequel to 1 and 2 Samuel and begins by tracing Solomon's rise to kingship right after the death of his father David. And we see that it starts as a united kingdom, almost a happy story. David had finally brought Israel to a place of military promise, military power. Their borders are secure. Their people are happy. And one thing that God said to David, if you look back to 1 and 2 Samuel, is that because he was a man of war, he would not be allowed to build the temple of God.

But David began the storing up and gathering of resources and supplies that would be needed, knowing that his son Solomon would have the opportunity to build the temple of God.

As the united kingdom is staged together under Solomon's reign, we see that it doesn't take long. The disobedience comes in and two kingdoms known as Judah and Israel emerge. 1 Kings opens describing the final days of King David right around 971 B.C., and then the conspiracies surrounding his succession. When David dies, which is in 1 Kings 2:10, Solomon ascends to the throne and establishes himself as a strong and wise leader. We told you the story a few moments ago. In the early years of Solomon's reign, Israel experienced its glory days. In fact, one part of Scripture says silver was as common as pebbles. The military economic influence of the power of Israel was unprecedented, and there were little problems from their enemies, and their economy flourished where people traveled for thousands of miles, which was very difficult during those times, to do trade and even just to come and see Solomon's kingdom with all its glory.

Shortly after Solomon's death, though, in 931 B.C., as we see in 1 Kings 11:43, the kingdom was then divided into the northern Israel and the southern Judah kingdoms. 1 Kings follows the history of these divided kingdoms, which goes through right about the year 853 B.C. The kings who reigned under God's authority, who remain faithful to the law, experienced God's blessings. But those kings who deviated from the laws, they experienced his curses. As you study the Old Testament, that's the theme that you find over and over again. And again, it's a lesson that applies to today: obey God. It doesn't necessarily bring material blessings in our day and age, but having God's blessings in our life, knowing that as we put our head down on our pillow each night and we've lived in obedience to God brings great peace and allows us to experience the joy that God intended. God has to punish sin because of the just God that he is, and he will do that if we deviate from his plan that's laid out very clearly in his word.

We see that 1 Kings reveals Solomon's relationship with Yahweh, emphasizing Solomon's divinely given wisdom and wealth. Solomon's reputation reached far beyond Israel's borders, as I just mentioned, to all the way what we would consider modern day Yemen, the Queen of Sheba's likely home, as listed in 1 Kings 10:1-13. Solomon's numerous marriages and extensive harem are the stuff of legends, but they also led to his wandering faith in his later years. Solomon did, however, complete and build the temple that his father David had started to accumulate the resources for. And God came down and had a permanent dwelling place after traveling all those years. And being in the tabernacle, he was finally with his people in a permanent way. 1 Kings, we also know, introduces the prophet Elijah who pronounced God's judgment on the evil northern king Ahab. In addition to performing many other miracles, Elijah won a dramatic confrontation with those false prophets. It's probably one of his most well-known stories in the Book of 1 Kings. And that was on Mount Carmel in 1Ki 18:1-46.

There are some key verses that I think bring out really the flavor of what 1 Kings is all about. I'm going to share a few of them with you. In 1 Kings 1:30, we see him saying this: "I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son will be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." 1 Kings 9:3, "The Lord said to him: 'I have heard the prayer and plea that you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.'" 1Ki 12:16 tells us, "When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: 'What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!'" Harsh words given as Rehoboam had put that huge tax burden and began the splitting of the two kingdoms.

1Ki 12:28 says this: "After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'" Isn't it always interesting how justification takes place? And then he said, "It's too far to go to Jerusalem. Let's make it convenient," which would entail being disobedient to God, and he builds these calves that they begin to worship instead of Yahweh. And then 1 Kings 17:1 is our last one. "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, says to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except by my word.'"

Now, let's give a breakdown of the basic big two sections that we see listed here in the Book of 1 Kings. The first one is chapters 1 through 11, at least approximately. We see in there that Solomon becomes king in a violent method after his father David dies. David instructs Solomon to walk in his ways, that's God's ways, in 1Ki 2:3, and Solomon asks God for wisdom. And God is pleased at his request and he approves it, and as we heard earlier, gives so much more. Solomon begins the building production, which includes the temple that his father David desired and prepared for him to do. He began building the temple about 480 years, as we mentioned earlier, after the exodus from Egypt. Can you imagine? That seems just like a number to us, but 500 years it took for this to be able to take place almost. Seven years later, the ark was brought to the temple and the glory of the Lord descended upon it. Solomon prays a powerful prayer. I encourage you to read it. And then sacrifices were offered. Solomon, although the wisest king ever, doesn't do such wise things as he chooses to worship foreign gods as a result of bringing the wives into his nation who did not please God. He allows his lust for women and desire to please them to be his downfall, which happens shortly after he begins this disobedient descent.

Then we see chapters 12 to 23. First half, Solomon, as he takes over from David, and then Rehoboam comes on the scene, and things quickly disintegrate. We see the beginning of the united kingdom, but the nation with tough decisions to make chooses a very wrong one. And in 931 B.C., that kingdom splits north and south. Rehoboam inherits the kingdom and is persistent about enforcing his high taxes. The northern tribes, as we said, revolt. Jeroboam is crowned king of Israel. Ten tribes of the northern Israel, and two tribes of Judah and Benjamin become the southern, which again is Judah.

And God raises the prophet Elijah to warn evil king Ahab to turn from idol worship and to worship Yahweh, which again is a common thing. Prophets come, say “Go back to God,” and then the king has to make a decision about his response to Yahweh. God frequently and often gives us reminders before his judgment comes. “Please be obedient to me” seems to be the ongoing message.

1 Kings was predominantly written to record history, but it was also written to be able to teach us lessons that we can learn from history. As with many of the other historical books of the Old Testament, the history recorded here was meant to preserve not just the important events but the spiritual truths that are learned through these events. In the books of 1 and 2 Kings, each king is evaluated by one thing: how he would react to his covenantal responsibility to the law of the Lord. That was the acid test of whether he did evil in the sight of the Lord or if he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Readers will notice very easily the scathing rebuke of some kings, reports that are typically written by purely historical writers. In addition to the kings, the prophets figure heavily in this book. They're God's spokesmen proclaiming his word to a mostly hardhearted people and the rulers that led them. It is through the prophet's eyes always connecting the nation's fortunes with its king's faithfulness, or lack thereof, that we learn the history of Israel and of Judah.

The Book of 1 Kings, as we said, starts with Solomon and ends with Elijah. The difference between the two gives you an idea of what lies between the two of them and that great chasm not just of time periods but also of lifestyles. Solomon was born after a palace scandal between David and Bathsheba. Like his father, he had a weakness for women, and that would be the very thing that brought him down. Solomon did well at first, praying for wisdom and building a temple to God that took seven years to construct, but then he spends 13 years building a palace for himself. His accumulation of many wives led him to worship their idols and lead him away from God. After Solomon's death, Israel was ruled by a series of kings, most of whom were evil and idolatrous. The nation falls further and further away from God. And even the preaching of Elijah could not bring them fully back to him.

One of the vilest kings was Ahab, and his evil cohort was Queen Jezebel who brought the worship of Baal to new heights in Israel. Elijah tried to turn the Israelites back to worship Yahweh and had success in small ways or for small periods of time. He challenged the idolatrous priests on Mount Carmel, as we heard, but in many other ways. Of course, we know that God won, but this made Queen Jezebel angry, to say the least, and she ordered Elijah's death. As he ran away and hid, we see also the advent, probably in a more vivid way, of an individual who may have struggled with depression or anxiety as we see Elijah, who at this time should have been on the greatest of all highs, struggles and is exhausted and he says, “Just let me die, God.” But God sent him food and encouragement, and he whispered to him in that quiet, gentle sound. In the process, he saved his life and also his potential to do further work for God.

The temple in Jerusalem where God's spirit would dwell is in the Holy of Holies. And really it foreshadows for believers in Christ the Holy Spirit who resides in our lives after the moment of salvation. Just as the Israelites were to forsake idolatry, so we're to put away anything that separates us from God. We are his people, the very temple of the living God. 2 Corinthians 6:16 says this: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'"

Elijah the prophet was the forerunner of Christ and the apostles of the New Testament. God enabled Elijah to do miraculous things to prove that he was truly a man of God. He raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath, causing her to exclaim, "Now I know that you're a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." [1Ki 17:24] In the same way, men of God who spoke his words through his power are evident in the New Testament. Not only did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, but he also raised the son of the widow of Nain in Luke 7:14-15 and Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:52-56. In fact, the apostle Peter even raises Dorcas in Acts 9:40 and Paul raises Eutychus in Acts 20:9-12.

Elijah's experience of the wilderness also teaches us another valuable lesson. After his incredible victory over those 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, his joy turns to sorrow and he's pursued by Jezebel and he flees for his life. Such mountaintop experiences are often followed by a letdown, and the depression and discouragement can sometimes follow those. We must be on guard for this type of experience in our own Christian lives. But our God is faithful and will never leave or forsake us. The quiet, gentle sound that encouraged Elijah will encourage us. I love the verse "Be still, and know that I am God." [Psa 46:10a]

Solomon was known as the wisest man of his day. He was arguably the wealthiest man of his time. He enjoyed God's favor in many ways, yet his legacy is tarnished by his faithlessness that he displayed in his later years. In direct contradiction to God's command for a king to not have multiple wives in Deuteronomy 17:17, Solomon married many. 1 Kings laments, "When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away to other gods." (1Ki 11:4) Solomon began to rely on his fortune, in his military might, and his political alliances instead of the God who gave all of those blessings to him. He focused on the gifts, forgetting the giver. How often do we do the same? Are there any direct commands from God that we might be ignoring even today? Let's take time to recall the blessings of God in your life, and then thank the Lord for them. Rely on him. Not your possessions or your position; as your source of strength and significance. I love Psalm 20:7 as we wrap up 1 Kings. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."