



Key Passage: 1 Kings 12:7; 2 Kings 17:20

Key Thought: God rejects those who reject Him (allowing punishment and chastising), but that is never the final word.¹

The gospel in 1 Kings:

1st and 2nd Kings are not easy books to read. A story of constant struggle between faithfulness and faithlessness seems to yield to the latter, as God's people incur God's righteous anger. The people's faithlessness will lead to two captivities. How could the story be any worse?

Yet even in such a horrible storyline, God's grace awaits. This is the gospel. Notice how the story begins and ends.

The story begins in hope. King David wanted to build a Temple—but God had decided that honor would fall upon the next King, a son of David. A son whose birth comes in

¹ Note, key passages, key thoughts, and hook questions come from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*. These notes are compiled from 4 principal sources. In addition to Michael Williams book, notes are also derived from Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

the wake of great sinfulness, but whose birth signals great joy and hope for the people of God. Solomon builds the Temple of God and offers a dedication that God would bless all those who worship there, including the foreigner (signaling the hope to Abraham that all nations would be blessed). [See 1 Kings 8:41-43]. This is a beautiful beginning to the story, just as the garden was; just as redemption from Egypt was. Just as Joshua's conquering of the Promised land was. But you know how these stories go.

Solomon enjoys a long and glorious reign (1 Kings 1-11). He offers a peace to Israel that they had never known.

God appears to Solomon and says he will continue to bless his people if they walk faithfully with integrity and in keeping with his commandments. But if he or his descendants turn away, then God will have no choice but to cut them off and to even reject this Temple (1 Kings 9:1-9). And that is exactly what happens.

Solomon was not without his problems. You probably know them. The book of Ecclesiastes recounts many of them. In fact, if you consult Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God gives three restrictions for any King of Israel, and Solomon breaks all three. He was not to multiply for himself weapons, women, or wealth. But Solomon seems to collect all three.²

And his troubles carried over into subsequent generations, as our sins often do. After his death, and through the failed actions of his son upon the throne, the united nation ruled by Saul, David, and Solomon for 100 years divides into two parts: Israel and Judah. The "divided monarchy" lasts about 350 years (931-587 BC). This is covered from 1 Kings 12 through 2 Kings 25 (and again in 2 Chron 10-36).

The Northern kingdom of Israel followed Jeroboam I—who favored the foolish council of the young over the wise counsel of the aged (1 Kings 12), and who set up golden calves to provide an alternative form of worship for people under his rule. A bit later, Ahab becomes King (1 Kings 16), who listens to the bad advice of Jezebel, and leads the people to worship Baal. More kings rise and fall. The story is similar with Judah. For every one good king, there seem to be two bad ones. One step forward; two steps back. When a good king arises (such as Jehoshaphat in Judah), he follows the ways of the Lord, but fails to remove the high places where people offered sacrifices to Baal (1 Kings 22). And both Israel and Judah fall into disrepute from serving the living God. The last verse of the book of 1 Kings says of Ahaziah, King of Israel, "He served and worshiped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done" (1 Kings 22:52).

² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, p.92.

And yet, we see God at work in the book.

- 1) God sends prophets to warn and to offer God's hand of help for the hurting and justice for the oppressed. Elijah (who arises from the northern kingdom of Israel in the 9th century) figures prominently in the second half of the book. He seeks to return Israel to the worship of God alone, offering a mountaintop battle between God and Baal, and warnings issued to Ahab and Jezebel. His name means "Yahweh is my God."
- 2) There are hints and traces that set us up for the New Testament. Consider the call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21 and compare with Luke 9:57-62.
- 3) A remnant of Judah remains faithful to the covenant, as God reminds even Elijah. It might be easy to focus on their hard work and commitment. I certainly believe the remnant shows this. But it was God who remained loyal to the remnant. God who sent prophets to warn and guide. God who rescued and redeemed providing hope for the remnant.

The gospel in 2 Kings:

2 Kings opens with God taking up judgment. Then, in chapter 2, Elijah is taken up into heaven, leaving Elisha to serve as God's representative. The seesaw effect we saw in northern Israel is true with Judah also. Good king Hezekiah is replaced by the bad king Manasseh. "His long, half-century reign became a time of unprecedented apostasy, religious decay, corruption, and a return even to ancient Canaanite practices long abominated and forbidden in Israel, such as child sacrifice. His reign was violent, oppressive, and pagan...and as far as can be seen, no voice of prophecy penetrated the darkness."³ His grandson, Josiah, is an excellent King who finds the book of the law and restores the covenant. But the prophet Jeremiah sees that the reforms are mostly external and warns of a fate that will eventually befall. No matter how hard God tries to send prophets to plead with his people, they refuse to listen.

God's people go into Assyrian exile (2 Kings 17:7-23)

God's people go into Babylonian exile (2 Kings 24)

But...look at how the story ends. Jehoiachin is released from prison and given a seat of honor even in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30). This means "the exile is not the last word

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, p. 29.

from God. Judgment must be experienced, but God in his grace and mercy has not given up on his people.”⁴

Elisha already received his calling in 1 Kings 19, but he makes a more prominent appearance in 2nd Kings. His name means “God saves.” He also arises from the Northern kingdom of Israel in the 9th century. He is Elijah’s assistant but takes over (much like Joshua and Moses), leading a group of prophets for nearly 50 years. His miracles are precursors to the New Testament: he heals the sick, feeds the hungry, raises the dead, and delivers cities from attack. Notice how Elisha follows Elijah, and Jesus follows John the Baptist, with many similarities.

Some beautiful stories:

The widow’s oil, promised son, and resurrection (2 Kings 4:1-37)

Naaman healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5)

Josiah and the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22) & renewal of covenant (2 Kings 23)

Hook Questions:⁵

1. What is your “rule of life”? What spiritual disciplines can help you know the life God wants for you in relationship with him?
2. What are you more likely to do: what you know is right or what you want to do at the time? Have you considered the long-term consequences of your choices?
3. What are you doing to guard against turning away from God? Are you trying to stay faithful on your own, or are you drawing on the strength of God and his people?

⁴ Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, p. 51.

⁵ Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, p.52.