

Old Testament Core Seminar

15

KINGS

Introduction

Welcome back again. Today we will return to the story of God's plan of redemption. We will return to the study of Redemptive-History. How did we define "Redemptive-History" at the beginning of the course? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] Redemptive-History is the account of what God is doing, in space and time, to restore fallen humanity to fellowship with Himself. It is the study of God's works in history that were designed to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ to come into the world, and the consideration of what Christ did and will do to complete the salvation of God's people. Or, if that's too confusing, in simplest terms it is the story in the Bible about what God is doing to save sinners. This story is an ongoing and developing drama through the pages of the Bible. God doesn't tell us everything about His plan of redemption all at once, in some technical philosophical language. Rather, He reveals Himself and His plan for the ages in a story, a true story.

Well, for the last month we've been studying the poetry and the wisdom literature of His ancient special people, Israel. In doing so we took a bit of a break from the developing story line of the Old Testament. Today, we will resume that story right where we left off. What will happen to Israel after their great King David dies and his son, Solomon, is charged with shepherding God's people? And how will the following generations of kings fair as covenant representatives for the people? And, most importantly, what does all this history tell us about the King of all kings, the Lord Jesus Christ? These are the questions on our plate today. And as we study today, listen especially for application for *leaders*, and the crucial role that the word of God plays in either their effectiveness or failure.

[PRAY]

Context

First and second Kings were originally written as one book, and so we will treat them as one book. We don't know exactly who the author was, but we do know that he (or they) drew upon many different historical documents to compile what we know today as First and Second Kings.¹ This compilation most likely took place during the time of the exile, when the people were taken captive to Babylon, displaced from the Land of Promise. Certainly one of the reasons the book was written was to show how the people's exile was a result of their own sins and the sins of the kings, and not because Yahweh wouldn't or couldn't keep His promises. Yet, at the same time it also has the agenda of encouraging the people of God that their history is not done, and Yahweh may yet take them back to the land.

The events of the books take place over a long period of time, about 400 years. As far as the books of the Bible go, only 1st and 2nd Chronicles cover a longer period of history. The events recorded in Kings begin with the crowning of King Solomon, in about 970 BC, and the last events recorded occurred a little over half way through the exile in about 560 BC. A

¹ Cf. I Kings 11:41 and 14:19 for just two of the many examples of how we know this.

timeline of major events of the Old Testament is provided for you in the supplemental handout. You'll see there that in this time the kingdom is divided, then the northern kingdom is scattered among the nations, and then the southern kingdom is exiled.

The redemptive-historical context is important to grasp as one studies Kings. Hopefully you remember from 2 Samuel 7 that Yahweh made a covenant with David, and promised him that he would always have a descendent on the throne, ruling over the people of God, forever. These subsequent kings were charged with (as we might expect) being obedient to Yahweh, which involved heeding the word of Yahweh and upholding the covenant obligations of Israel. If they didn't they would be chastened and disciplined. Nonetheless, Yahweh had promised never to remove His mercy from them, and that David would indeed have an everlasting line ruling over God's people. So as we read about kings who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and kings who did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, tension will mount as we wait to see how the LORD will deal with His rebellious people. In all, the nation unravels and slides further and further into sin, until by the end of the book the people are kicked out of the land and the king in the line of David has no power, and is, in fact, in jail in a far and distant land. So the book ends on a real cliffhanger. What's going to happen to the promises God made to Abraham? Has He thrown Israel off entirely? And what of the promises made to David? Where is the Davidic king, and the permanent, eternal royal line? God's plan of redemption looks to be in complete shambles by the end of the book: 11 of the 12 tribes of Israel scattered and lost among the nations, and the remaining tribe captive far away from the land, with a king in chains.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Theme

The two books of the Kings cover a lot of ground, but we try to summarize them like this:

The King, the covenant representative, sometimes obeys the word of Yahweh and the people are blessed, but sometimes rebels against the word of Yahweh and brings calamity upon the people. Finally, Yahweh's patience runs out and His people suffer the covenant consequences for their sins. Yet, through it all, Yahweh is still faithful to the promises He made to David.

As we mentioned when we were studying 1st and 2nd Samuel, the focus of the Old Testament is now turned to the king in the line of David. It's not that the people and their behavior are not important, but that the king now serves as a covenant representative before Yahweh, on behalf of the people. What that means is that Yahweh will deal with the nation according to the faithfulness, or unfaithfulness, of the king. He, in particular, has a great obligation to be faithful to the terms of the covenant. He stands before Yahweh as a representative of everyone else. And rightly so. He is their leader and as he does the people quickly follow suit. The prophets that we will encounter will primarily speak to the king. The prophets are like covenant watchdogs, guardians of the covenant calling the people to faithfulness. Well, their number one task, therefore, will be to call the *king* to covenant faithfulness. Ultimately the kings are not faithful, except for a few bright spots here and there, and so Yahweh's patience and faithfulness to His covenant-promises are stressed as He suffers long with such covenant betrayal. Finally, the end will come, again, because the consequences for unfaithfulness were written into the covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 28).

[This outline does not need to be gone over. The class only needs to be told that it is printed in their handouts so that they could have a little guide for their own study.]

Outline w/ Pivotal Texts

- I. I Kings 1-11 – The Height of the Kingdom
 - II. I Kings 12-II Kings 17 – The Division of the Kingdom
 - III. II Kings 18-25 – The Fall of the Kingdom
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Theme texts

1 Kings 2:1-4

Now we want to turn to some specific texts and see where these themes come from. Let's start in **1 Kings, chapter 2**. The great King David is here on his death bed, and he speaks these last words to his son and successor, Solomon. [READ VERSES 1 THROUGH 4] In these words we see David's awareness of two things. (1) God has made a mighty promise to him that his line will never fail. And (2), notice there in verse 3, David's descendants, beginning with Solomon, are charged to walk in God's ways and keep His decrees and commands, His laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses if they are to experience God's blessing. That's just another way of saying, "keep the covenant." So from here forth, the focus will be on the kings and how well they are doing that. Very few *worldly* successes of the kings are reported in these books. What the author is interested in is whether or not they are keeping the "Law of Moses," which is just another way of speaking of the covenant that Moses mediated to the people in the book of Exodus.

1 Kings 8:56-61

As we read on, we see that in Solomon's day Israel is in a golden age, quite literally. Chapters 6 and 7 contain the description of the building projects that Solomon undertook, and everything is covered in gold! In fact, Israel at this time is at its highest and most **climactic** point in all of redemptive-history so far. I know I've said that before in Joshua and 2 Samuel, and that was true, then. By the time Solomon takes the throne, Israel is at even greater heights, and redemptive-history is at its *utmost pinnacle* yet. It won't peak like this again until Jesus is born.

To see what I mean, turn to **chapter 8**. Do you remember the discussion we had about the tabernacle, back when we looked at the second half of Exodus? What did we say that the tabernacle represented? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] It represented God's presence with, and blessing upon, His people. Well, a tabernacle is for traveling, and wondering. A temple is permanent. And here in 1 Kings 8, the temple in Jerusalem is finally built and this is what happened when it was completed. Look at **verse 10**. [READ VERSES 10 AND 11] Do you remember, the same thing happened when the tabernacle was completed in Exodus 40? Well now, the dwelling place of God on earth is in a fixed location, making the temple greater than the tabernacle.²

² This "dwelling place on earth" is only symbolic (a shadow/a type). See 1 Kings 8:27.

Furthermore, listen to Solomon's benediction that he gave to the people of Israel on the day that the temple was dedicated. It is shot through with just about every redemptive-historical theme that we've considered so far. See how many redemptive-historical themes you can hear that Solomon says are now fulfilled with the building of the temple. Let's start reading in **verse 55**. [READ THROUGH VERSE 61] Did you hear all the references to God's plan of redemption? What were they? [TAKE A FEW ANSWERS] Just about every sentence or phrase is some kind of reference to something Yahweh has either done or promised in the past. The themes of rest, Israel being "His people," and promises are mentioned. That phrase "not one word had failed" is taken right out of the book of Joshua. Moses is mentioned. God is said to be "with us," which is exactly what was promised to their "fathers," to "never leave nor forsake them." The law is emphasized. And all of this is to the end that "all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh is God and there is no other." Where have we heard that before? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] Yeah, that was God's driving motive behind the whole exodus event. And there is one other major redemptive-historical fulfillment that is only implicit here. At the moment that Solomon is saying these things, Israel had its biggest borders that it has ever had. Look at **chapter 4, verses 20 and 21**. [READ] So the theology of the land – exiled from Eden, the Promise Land as a shadow of the New Creation to come – is here at its zenith as well. So the entirety of redemptive-history is here pumping on all cylinders. If we didn't already know what comes after this, we might be tempted to think, that with these words of Solomon, God's plan of redemption is complete! Victory is His, and there is no need for anything else. The victory of God has arrived in its entirety!

1 Kings 11:1-14

Well sadly, despite all this great success and triumph, there is still one major problem. There remains one thing that should *not* be in this kingdom. One thing that result in its fall: *sin*. Sin still lurks. And what follows not is a very disappointing decline. As I said a moment ago the books of the Kings will end with God's promises and God's plan of redemption hanging from a very lanky thread. To see how this kingdom fell from these towering heights that we just read about, to such a woeful chasm, turn to **chapter 11**. This chapter tells the sad story about how Solomon didn't heed the advice in his very own Song, which we looked at last week. Instead, as we read in verse 3, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. And these wives led Solomon's heart astray. Look at **verse 4**. [READ] David wasn't perfect, as we read. But one thing he never did was serve other gods; his heart was always fully devoted to Yahweh his God. So what we're going to see from this point forward is that every king's heart will be compared to David's heart. And here we see that his first son to succeed him failed the test. Look at **verse 6**. [READ]

Yahweh then dealt with Solomon just as He had promised David that He would if any of his sons behaved thus, and so violated the covenant. Look at **verse 11**. [READ] So the kingdom is torn from the hand of David's son! Yet, even in God's anger, He remembers His plan and His promises. Look at **verse 13**. [READ] Did you hear that? "For the sake of David Yahweh's servant" the kingdom is not totally lost. Though He deals with Solomon's covenant breaking sin in an awful way, He will not deal with the sons of David in such away to violate His own promises to David. Even in wrath, Yahweh is gracious.

Now, from this point on in the history of God's people we have some **new vocabulary**. The Southern Kingdom, over which David's sons will still rule, is called "Judah" (and

sometimes “Jerusalem”). It’s called Judah because that is the name of the one tribe that David’s sons are given kingship over. And the Northern Kingdom, which will be ruled by non-Davidic kings, is called “Israel” (and sometimes “Ephraim” or “Samaria”). Sorry if that sounds complicated, but you need to understand the new connotations that the names “Judah” and “Israel” take on from this point forward. “Judah” no longer refers to one of 12 tribes of Israel, but the only tribe over which David’s line will rule. And “Israel” doesn’t mean all the people of God, but only the Northern half of this torn kingdom.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

The following pages of the King are full of scandal, conspiracies, rebellion, and of course sin and idolatry. In Judah, David’s line will remain unbroken, though a number of attempts will be made to overthrow it. Or, to put it in redemptive-historical terms, the seed of the serpent will be relentless at trying to destroy the seed of the woman – which is now carried forward in the line of David. Israel, on the other hand, never really gets its act together, and goes through 10 dynasties in about 200 years. That is great instability. Of course the truth here is that Judah would have experienced the same instability and turn over were it not for Yahweh’s sovereign oversight in preserving the Davidic line.

1 Kings 14:14-16

Let’s look at a few of the texts that describe the downfall of both of these kingdoms. We’ll start with the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The very first king of Israel, Jeroboam, immediately leads the people of Israel into idolatry. And he seals the nations doom. Look at **chapter 14, verses 14 through 16**. [READ] These words are death to the Northern Kingdom. Notice that this prophet says, in verse 15, that they will be removed from the land. Further, in verse 15, the prophet says that Yahweh will “scatter” them among the nations. He’s saying that Israel will no longer be distinct. They will be assimilated into the pagan nations who do not know Yahweh. And to make it clear, he says in verse 16 that Yahweh will “give Israel up.” These are surely the saddest words so far in all of redemptive-history. The northern tribes are lost.

The fulfillment of this doesn’t come right away. It’s still about 200 years off. Nonetheless, Yahweh does not forget the sins of Jeroboam. In fact, his wickedness was so great that all the subsequent kings of Israel will be compared to Jeroboam to evaluate just how wicked they are too.

When a new king comes to power in these books, their reign will first be summarized like this: look at **15:11**, [READ] or like this: look at **verse 26**. [READ] They will be described as either doing what is right, or what is evil, in the eyes of Yahweh. Some of *Judah’s* kings were good, and some were evil. *All* of Israel’s kings are described as evil. They didn’t have a single good king. They all followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam. And did you hear that in verse 26? The king, in his sin, caused the people to sin too. That refrain is repeated over and over.³

It’s in this context that we should talk about two prominent **prophets** in the Kings, Elijah and Elisha. You can read about them in 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 13. That’s a lot of chapters. They are prominent figures in the books. Why are they so important? They aren’t kings. Well,

³ 1 Kings 15:26, 34; 16:2, 19, 26; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kings 17:21; 21:16; 23:15.

no they aren't kings, but they do play an important role *to* the kings. The prophets are there to speak the word of Yahweh to the kings and to the people. They are there to remind the kings that the kings are *not* autonomous sovereigns. They cannot do whatever they want, and govern their kingdoms however they so fancy. Rather, they are men with only a derivative power. They are men also under authority: the authority of the word of God, the authority of the covenant. And it's the prophets' job to remind them of that. I mentioned before that the prophets are like covenant watchdogs, guardians of the covenant calling the kings and the people to faithfulness. So in that role, they represent the call to be faithful to God's word.

Perhaps their commission is best understood in light of **Deuteronomy 17:18-20**. What's going on in Deuteronomy 17 is that Moses is describing how future kings should behave. He says this: "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel."

"The king's first task, in other words, is not to appoint Joint Chiefs of Staff or install a new Secretary of State. His first task is to copy over huge chunks of Scripture by hand. He is not simply to download it from a CD to his hard drive without it passing through his brain; he is to copy it out by hand so clearly that his hand-written copy becomes the copy that he reads daily for the rest of his life. The purpose of this exercise is that he may 'revere' the Lord his God and 'follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.' Thus regard for the Lord leads him to read and reread Scripture; Scripture teaches him to revere the Lord and trains his mind to follow all of the Lord's words."⁴

The prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha, were to remind the kings of this. The prophets were there to remind the kings that they are not the final authority. Yahweh is, and His revealed word must be the guiding light. It's the disobedience of this very command, to read and re-read the law as so fear Yahweh, that is behind the decline.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

2 Kings 17

The prophets' secondary task was then to proclaim the punishment that the kings and the people would have to endure if they didn't repent. That's the other side of the covenant. Deuteronomy 28 lays out all the blessings for faithfulness *and* the curses for unfaithfulness. The prophets were aware of these and always reminding the kings and people. Sadly though, the kings wouldn't listen, and led the people into further and further decay. Finally Yahweh's patience with them ran out and the threats of Deuteronomy 28 became a reality. Turn to **2 Kings 17, verses 6-8**, [READ] **verse 15**, [READ] and **verses 18-23**. [READ] Did you hear that? Two hundred years later and the focus is still on Jeroboam because the nation never turned from the wickedness he began. Every king followed suit, and the people in turn followed their kings. So they were displaced. Verse 6 names the places they went. And Yahweh makes no promises here that they will ever return. Look at **verse 24**. [READ] Their land is settled by the pagan nations.

⁴ *Love in Hard Places* by D. A. Carson, page 24.

It's like a reversal of what we read in Joshua. Yahweh takes covenant faithfulness *very* seriously.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

1 Kings 15:1-5

The story of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, is only a bit different. The reason this one is different is because Yahweh's promises to David are still outstanding. He had made no such promises to any of the northern kings. It was the Davidic kings only who had a special relationship with Yahweh. And it was the Davidic kings *only* who Yahweh had a special interest in because of His promises, and because it was through that line that His Son Jesus would be born.

So let's consider how Judah fared a little differently. Turn back to **1 Kings 15**. What we are going to read there is the summary of the reign of Abijam, the second king of Judah after Solomon. And as we read, listen to how Yahweh deals differently here than He did with Jeroboam, and why. [READ VERSES 1 THROUGH 5] Notice two things there. (1) He was compared to David. All the kings of Judah will be compared to David. He is the benchmark. And notice (2) that even though Abijam did evil in the eyes of Yahweh he was not cast off and his son was established after him (verse 4). Why is that? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] The reason given is "for David's sake," because Yahweh had made a promise to David, and it will be fulfilled.

Well, even though the line of David is preserved, that doesn't necessarily mean that Judah's kings were all good kings. In fact we just saw that Abijam wasn't. Some of the kings were good and did what was right, but about half of them were bad, and did what was evil.

2 Kings 18:3-5

Well, the day of reckoning arrived when Assyria came to attack Jerusalem. Remember Assyria? They were the nation we just saw conquer the north. Once they were done with Israel, they set their sights on Judah. The difference though is that in Judah Assyria encountered something they didn't in Israel: a godly king. Look at **2 Kings 18:3-5**. [READ]

2 Kings 19:16-19

And when the Assyrians tried to lay siege to Jerusalem, Hezekiah, the godly king, knew exactly what to do. He would pray to Yahweh, and base his prayer on a petition for Yahweh to *glorify* Himself in saving His people. Look at **19:16-19**. [READ] Where have we heard that before? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] Sounds like this king at least had been reading the books of Moses as he ought to have, and understood why Yahweh saves His people: for His own glory. And do you think such a prayer was effectual? It sure was. Yahweh spared Judah.

2 Kings 21:10-18

Yet, history marches on and after Hezekiah died, his son, Manasseh, took the throne. The summary of his reign is the worst yet. Look at **21:11-16**. [READ] Just as Jeroboam had sealed

the fate of Israel, so Manasseh's sins were so bad that they brought this irrevocable prophecy. Judah will soon be taken captive just as Israel was.

2 Kings 23:25-27

I say it's an irrevocable prophecy because of what we read in **23:25-26**. [READ] It's over for Judah.

2 Kings 25:7

In the following chapters there are three waves of attack by the Babylonians. With each attack they take a few more captives away, until they finally *level* Jerusalem, and that great temple in the third attack. By the end of the book, the people of Judah are in Babylon, far away from the land of God's presence and blessing, and the temple is razed to the ground. It's a long way from First Kings 8.

But what about the king in the line of David? Has Yahweh reneged on His promises? Or was Yahweh too weak to stop so great a force as the terrible Babylonian army? Well, we know this all happened because of the sins of the kings. But it sure looks doubtful that anything can be salvaged from this situation. One king (Jehoiachin) was taken captive to Babylon (24:15), and his uncle was set up in Jerusalem by the Babylonians. However, this king, Zedekiah, rebelled against the Babylonians, and look at what happened: look at **25:7**. [READ] This is terrible! It's terrible for two reasons. First, there is the simple horror of it: the last thing he saw before they rendered him blind was the death of his sons. But what's worse, is that the last thing he saw was the line of David being extinguished! If he's the king, and his sons are dead, who will reign in the line of David after him? Have Yahweh's promises fallen to the ground? In this way, the book of the Kings ends in a real cliffhanger. What does all this mean for the promises to David? What does it mean to the promises to Abraham? What does it mean for the seed of the woman? Has the seed of the serpent finally finished his job, and killed off the seed of the woman? What does it mean for God's plan of redemption?

2 Kings 25:27-30

But wait! There is just a little ray of hope left. There is still one descendant of David's still alive, the king captured right before Zedekiah took the throne: Jehoiachin. He's in exile in Babylon, so that's not good. But look at **chapter 25, verses 27-30**. [READ] It's not much, but it's a ray of hope! And the last sentence of the book affirms that one descendant of David is still alive! The book ends on one cliffhanger indeed!

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Solomon's kingdom was magnificent indeed. But surely it wasn't the full realization of the kingdom of God. And with every king's sin, and with every king's death, and with the down fall of Judah we are reminded over and over that something greater must still be ahead. If the greatest manifestation of the kingdom of God can fall, then it must not have been the greatest. Something more must be in store. That something more of course is Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Potentate of potentates. And so the kingdom of Israel was a shadow, a type, pointing us forward to the realization and the full embodiment of the kingdom of

Heaven – a phrase that Jesus used often. This is all meant to prefigure, and contrast with, Jesus Christ. He is the King that never fails. He is the King who perfectly represents His people before God. He is the King whose kingdom never falls, and forever saves all who repent of their *own* covenant unfaithfulness and look to him at their Covenant Head.

Conclusion

But we can't get too far ahead of ourselves. For now, the kingdom has fallen from great heights. In fact, this fall and exile is just like the first fall and exile we read about. When was that? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] It's just like the fall and exile from Eden. Again, God's people are kicked out of God's presence because of their sins. And again, it will be up to God in His sovereign grace, to rescue them and bring them back to the place where they can have fellowship with Him again. That's where we are going next. The people of God need a second Exodus. Stay tuned.

Application

What can we learn by way of application from all of this? [LEAD A BRIEF DISCUSSION]

Much can be drawn out here. But at the least something should be said about the sobering responsibilities of leadership. Whether it's leadership in the home, in the church, at work, or over a little league baseball team, as the leader's ethical life goes, so he will lead his followers. Our sins are never private. Rather, they always have ramifications upon others. And if God has made you a leader in anyway, then understand that your ethical behavior *will* rub off on others. Even if your sin is private and no one sees it, be advised and be warned that these things have a way of creeping out and infecting others. Walk uprightly before the LORD, fear Him, and meditate upon His statutes day and night. Write them upon the tablet of your heart.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

[PRAY]