

1 Kings-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are really just one story. And these four books are really just the latter part of the larger story told in what the Hebrew Bible refers to as the "Former Prophets," a section made up of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—the historical narratives which begin with Israel entering the promised land and conclude with their exile out of the land, into Babylon. We must carry that wider context in mind whenever we study any of these six books. 1 Kings begins in David's last days. Solomon has been appointed as the next king, but his older brother Adonijah—*like Absalom before him, from the 2 Samuel 15-18 part of this story*—has prideful, selfish ambitions for the throne. How difficult it is to see some honor go to another when it could have come to us, but sometimes that is exactly God's will. Think of Jonathan submitting to the will of God that David inherit the throne. Think of John the baptist saying of Jesus' popularity, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* This humility is what Paul calls "the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2). And note that though Adonijah could have been executed for this rebellion, he is spared because he *"took hold of the horns of the altar"* (v.50). The altar is the place of sacrifice, reconciliation, and deliverance. It's a picture of the sinner taking hold of Christ and finding deliverance from death through Christ's sacrifice.

Chapter 2

Romans 2.4 asks: *"Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* But sometimes when God delays just judgment, the sinner does not interpret this as divine kindness and forbearance and patience, meant to lead him or her to repentance. Rather, the sinner sees the suspension of judgment as passivity or apathy on God's part. Or perhaps even evidence of the nonexistence of God. So they persist in their sin, confident that they're getting away with it. But no, not one ounce of God's just judgment will ever be set aside. It will all be paid in full, either on the head of Christ (at the cross, in the place of sinners who repent) or on the heads of the hardened and unrepentant sinners themselves. See Ecclesiastes 8.12,13. The murders committed by Joab had brought blood-guilt upon the house of David (vs.5,6; 31-33). He now gets what he has long deserved (Genesis 9.6). Also, note that Adonijah's request is not just for the hand of some random girl. Abishag was a royal concubine of David's (see 1.1-4). In requesting her, Adonijah is deliberately making a bid for kingly power. We've seen that move before: in 2 Samuel 3.6-8 and 16.21-22.

Chapter 3

Four times in the Bible the Lord speaks to Solomon: here in chapter 3; 6.11-13; 9.1-9; and 11.11-13. In a dream, God simply invited Solomon to make any request he wanted: *"Ask what I shall give you"* (v.5). Decisively and unselfishly Solomon asks for *"an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"* (v.9). The Lord is very pleased to grant Solomon the wisdom for which he has asked, in addition to all the things for which he did not ask: *"both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days"* (v.13). In addition, if Solomon continued to walk in God's ways, he would also enjoy long life (v.14). Back in 2.6, David had already praised Solomon for his wisdom, but Solomon—humbly aware of how great this task would be (vs.7,8)—knows that he must exercise a wisdom well beyond the norm. Note that *"your servant"* and *"your people"* are both spoken three times each in vs.7-9. Solomon is very

conscious of his great need. Are we? Prayer is not merely for us to hand God a list of things that would increase our comforts and conveniences. It is a means of seeking God's power and blessing for what he's called us to do and be.

Chapter 4

Referring to himself in Matthew 12.42, the Lord Jesus once said:

"behold, something greater than Solomon is here." Consider Jesus' introduction in Matthew 1.1 as *"the son of David."* Consider the Biblical ways Jesus is celebrated as "Great David's Greater Son" in the wonderful hymn "Hail to the Lord's Anointed." Consider Psalm 72, the Psalm that is *"of Solomon"* (see the title), and how every line of it is ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Now... with this line of thinking firmly in mind, read 1 Kings 4's account of the glory and power and reach of Solomon's kingdom... keeping in mind that it's a picture of the kingdom of the Greater Solomon to come. Solomon was granted wisdom from God, but Jesus **is** wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1.30). The boundaries of Solomon's kingdom were impressive, but Jesus' kingdom has no boundaries (Psalm 2.8; Revelation 7.9). Solomon had a mighty army, but Jesus' mighty scepter signifies his rule even over his enemies, authority in all of heaven and earth (Psalm 110.2; Matthew 28.18). Solomon's subjects *"ate and drank and were happy"*(v.20), but not as freely and peacefully as Jesus' subjects (John 10.10; Philippians 4.7). Learn from the picture. Live in the substance, the reality.

Chapter 5

When a church builds sanctuaries or other buildings, it asks for sacrifice from its members. And this is nothing new, as we see here in chapter 5. We first hear of *"Hiram king of Tyre"* (v.1) in 2 Samuel 5.11, when he supplied David with timber, carpenters, and stonemasons to build David's house in Jerusalem. That same Hiram, when he hears of Solomon's coronation, sends ambassadors to celebrate and to signal his desire for continued diplomatic relations. Wise Solomon uses the opportunity to negotiate another contract to secure Hiram's help with *another* building project—the temple in Jerusalem (vs.3-6). The building of the temple will be the heart of the Bible's account of Solomon's reign (chapters 6-9), at the end of which there will be another passage showing Solomon's dealings with Hiram king of Tyre (9.10-14). A couple of things to note about today's reading... First, let's appreciate that many Gentiles were involved in building the Lord's temple (vs.6 & 18), as people from all nations are building his living temple—the church of the Lord Jesus—today. Second, we see in vs.13-18 that the people of God had to sacrifice greatly to get the temple built. And it took seven years to do so (see 6.38).

Chapter 6

Note the symmetrical structure of today's chapter. It begins and ends with notes of the chronology of this event (vs.1, 37-38), which reflect one another. Coming "in" (from both sides) toward the heart of the chapter, we next find two sections describing the actual building and the decorating of the temple (vs.2-10, 14-36), which also reflect one another. In ancient literature this kind of "mirroring" structure is meant to highlight the heart of the passage—in this case, God's words to Solomon in vs.11-13. The first part of the chronological note in v.1, dating the beginning of the work of the temple from the Exodus, suggests to the reader that this event is every bit as significant as that one. In the Exodus, the nation of Israel was "born." In the building of the temple, God's promise from way back in Deuteronomy 12.5 has finally found fulfillment. It has taken many generations, but our God is both patient and faithful with the unfolding of his good promises and holy purposes. But what is at the symmetrical heart of the passage, vs.11-13? God's promise that he will dwell among his people and never forsake

them... "if"—see v.12. The temple is not a magic box guarantee, and God is not a tamed pet. See also 2.4.

Chapter 7

In Haggai 1.2-5 the Lord God rebukes his people for leaving *his house*—by which he means this temple that Solomon built, by then destroyed by the Babylonians—in ruins, while they finish *their own comfortable houses* first. Their priorities were disordered. In striking contrast to that, we see Solomon finishing the temple before finishing his own house. What do we "seek first" (Matthew 6.33): our interests, or the kingdom of God? When we love the Lord first and most, all of our other affections and priorities are properly ordered and properly strengthened. There is so much we learn about our faith by studying the temple. The altar (v.48) is the place of blood sacrifice, and one must pass through it before approaching the presence of God. What a picture of the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. And one could go on, with every single part of the temple and its furnishings pointing the reader to the One who was to come, the One who would identify himself as "*greater than the temple*" (Matthew 12.6). The temple is *literally* FILLED with pictures of the Lord Jesus, who—like God in the temple—came to dwell in the midst of his people (John 1.14). The temple was glorious, but Jesus is far more glorious (2 Corinthians 4.6).

Chapter 8

Remember the symmetrical structure we noted in chapter 6, where there are mirroring reflections of subject matter that correspond to one another as you come "in" to the heart of the passage? We see the same thing here! In vs.1&2, the great assembly is gathered; in vs.65&66, the great assembly is concluded and sent home with glad and joyful hearts. Coming "in," from both sides: in vs.3-13 God comes to dwell in the temple with sacrifices so great "*that they could not be counted or numbered*"; in vs.62-64 many more sacrifices are offered, to honor the Lord. Next: in vs.14-21 Solomon addresses the great assembly; in vs.54-62 he does so again. Do you remember the purpose of this "mirroring" structure? It's to highlight that which is at the literary heart of the passage. In this chapter that would be Solomon's prayer, in vs.22-53. There is so much going on in this amazing prayer; it would take more than a whole sermon to adequately appreciate. Pray through it yourself and see! It contains praise, worship, confession, intercessions, and supplications. It repeatedly appeals to God's Word and God's promises. It reveals an obvious sense of utter dependence upon the Lord. Seek to pray *all* the prayers of the Bible.

Chapter 9

In vs.3-9 God speaks to Solomon a second time, renewing the covenant promise he made to David—restating both the *covenant blessings* and the *covenant curses*. Solomon, as king of Israel, represents the whole nation in this covenant with God. If he is faithful, everyone experiences the *blessings* of vs.4 & 5. If he is unfaithful, everyone experiences the *curses* of vs.6-9. It's much like the "representative" nature of the covenant God made with all of humanity through Adam. When Adam proved to be unfaithful, we received the curses. That is the origin of every sad reality you've ever known in your whole life: pain, futility, sickness, loneliness, estrangement, self-destructive sins, grief, death, etc. But, hallelujah, it's also much like the "representative" nature of the covenant God made with all believers through Christ. Jesus is our perfect King, holy and righteous and good and wise and just. See Jeremiah 23.5&6. No, really. See Jeremiah 23.5&6 right now... that's talking about your Jesus. Because Jesus of Nazareth lived a perfect life of obedience before God, you—if you are a sincere believer—are established before God the Father forever. The Lord Jesus Christ alone has secured God's presence and kingdom for you.

Chapter 10

Imagine Dave Adams, Rupert & Anna Louise Thornton, Mike Ladner, Bill Brinkman, and Kristi Thurman meeting up in heaven for whatever the glorified saints enjoy instead of coffee, while still patiently waiting for the resurrection of their bodies. They each recall something of the glories of Christ that they heard while members of DPC, back on earth. Dave, Rupert, and Anna Louise—ever the encouragers—use several superlatives to describe the fame of Christ they heard back then (v.1). Mike and Bill graciously concur, but—ever given to truthful evaluation and careful analysis of the situation—also make the point that the half of Christ's glory was not adequately declared to them while back at DPC (v.7). In fact, if we're going to reason through the matters honestly, they say, we must agree that the very best and brightest expressions of Christ's glories back at DPC were only very pale and weak resemblances of the actual realities of eternal glory. Dave and the Thorntons cannot disagree. And then Kristi—who was perhaps, among them, the most aware of her mortality before meeting her Maker—looked around and summarized the scene beautifully for all: Jesus has now given them all that they ever desired; whatever they ever asked for has now been granted them by the bounty of the king (v.13). Their glorified countenances are like the one once worn by the Queen of Sheba, when she looked around at all the wisdom and prosperity and abundance and wealth and glory of King Solomon.... and *"there was no more breath in her"* (v.5). Reader, the whole point of the glorious reign of King Solomon is to point you to the more glorious kingdom of the one *"greater than Solomon"* (Matthew 12.42).

Chapter 11

There is much to reflect on in this chapter, and all of it is sad. There's been a subdued critique of Solomon's reign running as an unobtrusive, background thread in this story ever since 3.1, but seen most recently in the latter part of yesterday's chapter. (To understand the strand of criticism, study the rules for the king found in Deuteronomy 17.14-17; see also Deuteronomy 7.3-4, which is summarized in v.2 of our present chapter.) But here the inconspicuous thread finally becomes the front-and-center focus. Solomon's heart has now turned away from the Lord. The very king who built the temple also ended up building high places for the worship of other gods (vs.4,5). A little tolerated sin always leads to more sin. And when has our sin ever loved us? Never. Not even once. May we repent earnestly and daily. True repentance is the only way to keep sin from growing and growing and taking us further and further away from the Lord. Apostasy always begins with one sin, of which we are unwilling to repent. Did Solomon repent before he died? I believe so; I regard the whole book of Ecclesiastes as his late-in-life repentance—which makes that book a very valuable source of help in our own fight against temptation and sin.

Chapter 12

Sin distorts and decays and destroys all that it touches. Back in 5.4 Solomon rejoiced that he had *"neither adversary nor misfortune."* But when he strayed from the Lord, disaster found him; that same word

"adversary" was used twice in chapter 11 (vs.14&23) to describe the misfortunes of Solomon's later reign. The storm clouds were gathering, the kingdom was fraying at the edges. Solomon—the very king who built the temple—would also be the last king to rule over all twelve of the tribes of Israel. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, faces an important question soon after he becomes king. In the midst of a difficult decision, will he listen to the servant-hearted wisdom of the *"old men"* (v.6), who had served Solomon? Or will he listen to the self-exalting foolishness of the *"young men"* (v.8), his peers? There's much we can learn from that. Meanwhile... Jeroboam. Back in 11.38 God gave Jeroboam the simple condition for an established kingdom: obedience. But rather than listening to the Lord, Jeroboam listened to

things *"that he had devised from his own heart"* (12.33). Out of fear (vs.26,27), he tries to secure his kingdom around the idolatry of false worship. Not going to work.

Chapter 13

Three truths meet us today: **#1**: The commendable obedience of the unnamed prophet, in vs.1-10. He is given a hazardous mission, but he obeys God courageously and without hesitation. He fearlessly delivers a strong message to a hostile king (v.4), and then he further obeys God in refusing Jeroboam's offer of hospitality. What an example to us! **#2**: But that very same unnamed prophet then provides us with a stark warning against disobedience (vs.11-32). When an older prophet contradicts God's clear and unmistakable Word, the younger prophet is led astray. He disregards the Word of the Lord. We must remember that people simply lie sometimes (v.18). See the command of God in 1 John 4.1. The Lord of truth does not contradict himself. And he has not made his Word difficult for us to understand. **#3**: Did you catch the striking prophecy in v.2? This would not be fulfilled until over three centuries had passed by. But it was fulfilled. To the letter. See 2 Kings 23.14-17. God knows the end from the beginning (see Isaiah 46.9-10). His Word is truth, and it shall always stand. Refusing to turn from evil ways (v.33) leads to destruction (v.34).

Chapter 14

Consider Jeroboam's shameful legacy. He did evil above all who were before him, he sunk himself into works of idolatry, he provoked God to anger, casting God behind his back (v.9). He's the one who *"made Israel to sin"* (v.16); contemplate Jesus' dreadful judgment on the sin of leading others into sin, in Mark 9.42. When his son falls ill, Jeroboam gets his wife to disguise herself and seek the word of the prophet Ahijah, who prophesied Jeroboam's kingship back in 11.29-39. The disguise was pointless, first of all because Ahijah was blind (v.4) and secondly because God was pleased to reveal the whole situation to Ahijah (v.5). Ahijah proclaimed God's answer before the wife of Jeroboam ever even asked her question (v.6). There are four judgments: **1st**, all of Jeroboam's other sons will die dreadful, disgraceful deaths. The dynasty promised in 11.38 had a condition attached. **2nd**, the sick son is pleasing to the Lord, so he will be spared such judgment. God will mercifully receive him into heaven, very soon (Psalm 116.15). **3rd**, the kingship will pass to others. **4th**, eventual exile for idolatrous Israel. *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6.23).

Chapter 15

In yesterday's reflection we focused on what was happening in the Northern kingdom of Israel, under the corrupting reign of Jeroboam. But the chapter we read yesterday told us that Judah (the Southern kingdom) was in terrible spiritual shape as well (see 15.22-24). We read yesterday that the king of Egypt invaded Jerusalem (see 15.25,26); by the way, that king of Egypt had a relief scene carved on the wall of the temple of Amun at Thebes, Egypt, celebrating this victory in Palestine. So, Judah has been in very sad shape as well. Even the gold shields of Solomon's day were lost, and they could only afford to replace them with bronze shields (see 15.26-28). The first eight verses of today's chapter tell us of the next king of Judah, Ahijah; it's not a good report (v.3), and he only reigns for 3 years (v.2). In fact, we're even told that this dynasty in Judah only survived because of the covenant God made with David (vs.4,5), not because of the conduct of king or people. But then... there's Asa, Solomon's grandson. Study vs.11-15 and be encouraged! May we do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord (v.11). May our hearts be wholly true (v.14).

Chapter 16

And you think today's political headlines are crazy! We'll pick up with vs.8-10: Elah has been king of Israel for two years. One day he's drinking himself drunk in the palace, with his buddy and steward Arza, when Zimri—another of Elah's servants, the commander of half his chariots—walks in and strikes King Elah down, killing him. King Zimri then wipes out all the males in the family of Elah, son of Baasha. (A common practice in the ancient world: when you become king, you kill all potential rivals in the former royal family.) As it happens the army of Israel is busy fighting against the Philistines when they get the news. The army decides it would rather have Omri (their commander) as king. Ironically, they then withdraw from attacking the Philistines to go attack their own capital! Newly crowned King Zimri commits suicide, after a reign of only seven days. After a brief challenge from another rival, Omri is crowned king. Now here's what King Omri teaches us: we know from Assyrian inscriptions and the Moabite Stone / Mesha Stele (look it up!) that he was an amazingly successful politician. He vanquished the Moabites, he created important trade treaties with the Phoenicians, he forged powerful alliances, he founded a dynasty of kings, he constructed a brand new capital city, he oversaw a booming economy, and more. But what has eternal significance? What does God want us to know? See vs.25 & 26.

Chapter 17

People who don't know the Bible sometimes have the impression that miracles are being reported all the time, all over the place. They think miracles in the Bible are as common as Wednesdays. That's not the case at all. Bible miracles only happen at crucial moments in redemptive history, to demonstrate the complete uniqueness of God's power, over against rival gods. The miracles associated with Moses proclaim God's victory over the gods of Egypt. The miracles associated with Jesus proclaim God's victory over sin and death. And here, in 1 Kings, the miracles associated with Elijah proclaim God's victory over the false god Baal. King Ahab is on the throne of Israel from 16.29 - 22.40. That's a lot of space to devote to one king's reign in 1 Kings! But it's King Ahab's reign that provides the backdrop for all the Elijah stories, and more. King Ahab tries to change the official religion of Israel from the worship of the true God, Yahweh, the Lord... to the worship of the false god, Baal. See 16.30-33. Don't miss that he actually built a temple to Baal in the new capital city of Israel. Later we read of a systematic attempt to kill and destroy all the prophets of the Lord. And here come the miracles... every one of which defies the supposed power of Baal, point by point. For example, Baal's celebrated power to give rain.

Chapter 18

Colossians 2.15 tells us that Christ's sacrifice on the cross decisively disarmed all the fallen powers of this world. Christ by his sacrifice so triumphed over those that would challenge his sovereignty that he has *"put them to open shame,"* Colossians says. In today's passage Elijah provides us with a wonderful picture of that kind of decisive defeat through sacrifice. At the conclusion of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal, the people could boldly proclaim, *"Yahweh, he is God"* (v.39). See 1 Kings 8.60; Deuteronomy 4.35, Isaiah 43.10-13 & 45.21-22. May we proclaim Christ's victory as boldly today! After the confrontation, Elijah prays for rain. The Apostle James uses this part of the story to encourage us in a life of prayer: *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit"* (James 5.17-18). Note: Elijah prayed humbly (with his body as well, v.42) and persistently (vs.43-44, see Luke 18.1-8). He also prayed God's very Word, trusting it wholly (see v.1).

Chapter 19

In yesterday's reflection we quoted the Apostle James' teaching on Elijah, which, in part, read thus: *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours"* (James 5.17). Now, at first that might seem to be an untrue statement. How many of us have the boldness of Elijah, as witnessed in his mighty confrontations with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal? How many of us can perform as many miracles as Elijah? I can barely do half that many! (Insert smiley face.) We might, at first, see hardly any similarities between our nature and Elijah's. But—as we saw yesterday—James' most immediate point was that we might learn faithful practices of prayer from Elijah. And in today's reading we discover that maybe we aren't so different from Elijah after all. Here we read of Elijah's low point: fear and terror, fleeing for his life, irrational thoughts, physical exhaustion, spiritual depression, and utter despair. We see him in his frailty, fragility, and fallibility. And notice how gentle God is with his weak servant. First he has Elijah take a nap. Then he gives him something to eat. Then another nap and more to eat. Then came his Word and Presence.

Chapter 20

Yesterday we saw a moment of spiritual sanity in Elisha's response to his call to be a prophet. He immediately *"left the oxen"* (unlike the man who refused the invitation to the kingdom in Jesus' parable *because of his oxen*, in Luke 14.19), *"and ran after Elijah"* (see 1 Kings 19.20). It reminds us of how the fishermen-disciples *"immediately they left their nets and followed"* Jesus (Mark 1.18). This is what it looks like to follow the Christ who said, *"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14.33). That was yesterday's chapter... but today we find a picture of spiritual insanity. In 1 Kings 20 God is giving King Ahab a free, clear, and wide-open opportunity to live as someone who is spiritually aware. God sent prophets with gracious promises of unlooked-for victories so that Ahab would know that the Lord Yahweh is the true God (vs.13,28). Ahab then saw and experienced the undeserved truth of God's Word. Did he repent and turn to the Lord in faith? No. And when rebuked for his response, he sulked (v.43).

Chapter 21

Remember how yesterday's chapter ended? *"And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen"* (20.43). The king sulked, full of resentment and anger. Today we read of that same king (Ahab) being *"vexed and sullen"* (21.4) again, this time because a faithful Israelite would not separate himself from the inheritance of his fathers (v.3, see Leviticus 25.25-28 and Numbers 27.1-11; 36.7). Are we not embarrassed for King Ahab when we read these words? He's acting like a selfish, petty, petulant child who pouts when he doesn't get his way. He can't be grateful for the many, many good things he has; he refuses contentment until he also has the good thing that someone else has. How often are we like this? Are we not embarrassed for our sinful hearts when we read this story? The Tenth Commandment is *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet.... anything that is your neighbor's"* (Exodus 20.17). But Ahab's breaking of the tenth then leads to the breaking of the sixth and ninth as well. And never forget that every sin breaks the first (see Exodus 20.3).

Chapter 22

A life-changing truth can be found in this last chapter of 1 Kings. God declared through his prophet that King Ahab would die in this battle (vs.17-28). Ahab tried to cheat that death by donning a disguise (v.30)... note that he's hiding himself from God, whose eyes *"are like a flame of fire"* (Revelation 1.14). Look at v.34: *"But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate."* The Bible says this happened *"at random."* But the larger point being made is that nothing is truly random in God's world. It was the unseen hand of God that guided that arrow of his judgment (apparently aimed at nothing in particular) very precisely, so that it landed in the little chink of space in between the

scale armor and the breastplate. The Heidelberg Catechism defines God's providence (the life-changing truth mentioned earlier) this way: *"Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand."* How does this change our life? *"We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved."*

-Reflecting on 1 Kings-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 1 Kings. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 1 Kings before we move forward?

"Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord God." Ezekiel 12.28