



Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time B August 26, 2018

The Old Testament: Part Eight 1 and 2 Kings

The Story of 1Kings

David's reign comes to an end, and he is succeeded by his son Solomon, whose reign is described in great detail. After Solomon's rule, the kingdom is divided in two: 1) Israel in the north, with its own centers of worship to rival Jerusalem, and 2) Judah in the south. Twenty kings, all judged unfaithful, rule the northern kingdom over a period of approximately 200 years until the north collapses in 722-721B.C. and its population is led into exile. In the south, David's descendants (numbering 20 in all, one of whom is a usurper) rule for a period of about 360 years until the time of the Babylonian exile in 586B.C. Several of the southern kings attempt reform but, ultimately, their efforts prove too little, too late.

The chapters of the first book of Kings can be divided in the following way:

- **Chapters 1-11:** Reign of Solomon, a united kingdom
- **Chapters 12-22:** Israel and Judah, a divided kingdom

Chapter 3: Solomon asks for wisdom

After offering sacrifice in the sanctuary, Solomon has a dream in which God reveals himself, telling him: "Ask something of me and I will give it to you" (v.5). Solomon asks for an understanding heart so that he can distinguish right from wrong and govern God's people with wisdom (v.9). God is so pleased with Solomon's request that he grants Solomon not only wisdom but also great riches and glory. In God's words to Solomon, we note in verse 14 a conditional clause: "If you follow me by keeping my commandments, I will give you long life."

Verses 16-28—Solomon displays his wisdom. This well-known story is told to illustrate Solomon's wisdom. He knows that the true mother of the child would sacrifice anything to protect her child.

Chapters 4-8: The Temple

David wants to build God a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant but God says no because it is his Son who will build the Temple. Chapters 5:15-7:52 give a detailed account of the building of the Temple. Chapter 8 describes the Dedication Ceremony. In his commentary on 1 and 2Kings, Richard Nelson states: "When it comes to a big public liturgy, little has changed in three thousand years! A showy procession and impressive religious actions frame a lot of talking: a poem (vv 12-13), comments on the significance of the occasion (vv 15-21)...and a forecast of hopes and expectations (vv 56-61)" (p.49).

Chapter 10: Queen of Sheba visits Solomon

Chapter 10 is further evidence that God has fully kept the promise he made to Solomon in 3:12-13: "I will give you a wise and understanding mind ...riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you all your days." The visit of the Queen of Sheba is an opportunity for Solomon to showcase his wisdom and wealth. He is portrayed as a person of international diplomacy. He has peace and wealth at home and harmonious relationship with other countries. When the Queen of Sheba comes, she is overwhelmed with what she sees and experiences. Solomon's wealth and wisdom go way beyond the reports she has heard.

Chapter 11: The sins of Solomon

"Solomon loved many foreign women...from nations with which the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry, 'because,' he said, 'they will turn your hearts to their gods.'" (vv 1-2)

As we finish reading Chapter 10, we might say "all is rosy in the garden." Solomon is blessed with wisdom and wealth, and he enjoys peace at home and abroad. But the seeds of destruction are sown early on in Solomon's reign. In 3:1-3, Solomon marries Pharaoh's daughter and he worships at "high places."

Solomon's other wives turn his heart from following God's ways (v.3). His marriages to foreign women are contracted for political ends, and shrines are built for his wives and traders. Such contracts, however, have jeopardized the purity of Israel's religion which strictly

forbids such marriages and tolerance of pagan worship (Dt 17:14-17). Because of Solomon's failure to follow God's ways, he receives a third and final visit from the Lord who tells him: *"Since this is what you want, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I enjoined on you, I will deprive you of the kingdom and give it to your servant. I will not do this during your lifetime; however, for the sake of your father David, it is your son whom I will deprive. Nor will I take away the whole kingdom; I will leave your son one tribe for the sake of my servant David and of Jerusalem, which I have chosen"* (11:11-13).

For the sake of political stability, economic prosperity, unrestrained lust, and military strength, Solomon triggers an earthquake that will shake the kingdom of Israel to its foundations. Because of God's love for David, the consequences of Solomon's sin will not occur during his lifetime, but during the lifetime of his son.

We now turn to one of the darkest periods in Israel's history: the division of the nation into two kingdoms.

Chapter 12: Revolt of the northern tribes

"Your father put on us a heavy yoke. If you lighten the harsh service and the heavy yoke your father imposed on us, we will serve you" (v.4).

After Solomon dies, all Israel assemble at Shechem to make his son, Rehoboam, king. The above quoted verse shows us how harsh Solomon had become toward his people, ending his reign as a tyrant. When the people plead with Rehoboam to lighten their burden, he asks for three days to reflect on their request. He listens to the old men and young men but follows instead the foolish advice of his peers. Rehoboam's action leads to the division of the kingdom—described in economic (vv 1-25) and religious (vv 26-39) terms. Henceforth, the term 'Israel' is normally used to refer to the northern kingdom, but is sometimes used to speak of the whole nation—e.g., the phrase "God of Israel" (1Kgs 17:1) is intended to mean the whole nation. The southern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, is called Judah.

Chapters 17-19, 21: The prophet Elijah

The figure of Elijah dominates 1Kings 17-19, 21, and 2Kings 1-2. Elijah is regarded as one of Israel's greatest prophets. In chapter 17, Elijah performs two miracles to show that the God of Israel, not Baal, is the one who gives life. Prophets are raised up by God to call the people to covenant fidelity with their God. They warn

of judgment and punishment for infidelity but also give hope of restoration if the people turn from their evil ways.

Chapter 18: God and Baal battle on Mount Carmel

This event is one of the most humorous stories in the Bible. Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a contest to see whose god is more powerful. Elijah presents the challenge: *"The god who answers with fire is God."* All the people answer: *"Agreed!"* (1Kgs 18:24).

From morning till night, the prophets of Baal call out to him to light the fire: *"Answer us, Baal!"* (v.26). When there is no response, Elijah suggests that they shout more loudly, in case their god might be praying or resting. They then whip themselves into a frenzy, but nothing works. *"There was not a sound; no one answered, and no one was listening"* (v.29). Point: there is no answer because there is no Baal.

Then Elijah builds his altar, placing twelve stones on it to remind the people that Israel consists of twelve tribes and not just ten. He has his opponents drench the altar with water three times. Then he calls out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel to bring down fire on the altar. Thereupon, God responds with a fire so powerful that it consumes everything on the altar. Impressed, the people fall on their knees exclaiming: *"The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"* The prophets of Baal are put to death, signifying that evil has been removed from the land of Israel.

Chapter 19: A depressed prophet wants to leave his ministry

This is a very beautiful story. In verses 4-5, Elijah says: *"This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat.*

After the wicked Jezebel hears of Elijah's great victory over the prophets of Baal, she becomes very angry and seeks to kill Elijah. Afraid for his life, Elijah flees to the desert. He becomes so discouraged that he wants to die. But then an angel of the Lord comes to comfort him and give him new strength to continue his prophetic ministry.

SECOND BOOK OF KINGS

In its introduction to 2 Kings, the *Application Study Bible* reads:

Second Kings continues the history of Israel, halfway between the death of David and the death of the nation. Israel had been divided (1Kings 12), and the two kingdoms had begun to slide into idolatry and corruption toward collapse and captivity. Second Kings relates the sordid stories of the 12 kings of the northern kingdom (called Israel) and the 16 kings of the southern kingdom (called Judah). For 130 years Israel endured the succession of evil rulers until they were conquered by Shalmaneser of Assyria and led into captivity in 722B.C. (17:6). Of all the kings in both the north and south, only two—Hezekiah and Josiah—were called good. Because of their obedience to God and the spiritual revivals during their reigns, Judah stood for an additional 136 years until falling to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586B.C. (p.564)

In **Chapter 2**, Elisha succeeds Elijah as Israel’s prophet. In the next several chapters of Second Kings, we read about the wonders and miracles that God works through Elisha. Two of his most dramatic miracles are told in chapter 4.

- *From death to life* (vv 8-37). A well-to-do woman from Shunem realizes that Elisha is a man of God and offers him hospitality. She is rewarded with a son. When the son dies, the mother is understandably very upset and lets Elisha know of her anger (v.28). She demands that Elisha come to see her dead son. Anticipating the power of Jesus over death, Elisha raises the dead boy to life.
- *From hunger to plenty* (vv 42-44). This story clearly reminds us of Jesus’ miracles of the loaves and fishes.
- Elisha orders that twenty barley loaves, normally used as a *first fruits* offering, be served on this occasion to feed a hundred starving men. Not only do the few loaves suffice to feed the hungry men, but there are leftovers (v.43). In all these stories, the “man of God” is a Jesus figure who goes about doing good.

The second half of the Second Book of Kings is mainly focused on the failures of the kings in both kingdoms to get rid of pagan shrines and practices. Some things to note.

The admirable woman of Shunem - 4:8-37. In his *Commentary on 1-2 Kings*, Denis Nelson helps us to see the woman of Shunem as one of the most admirable women in the Bible. He writes:

She is a woman of substance (v.8) capable of building and furnishing a substantial guest lodge. She knows how to take advantage of circumstances (v.10). She is an independent woman unwilling to take favors, relying on

kinfolk rather than powerful strangers (v.13), not subject to unrealistic hopes (v.16). She knows how to behave properly (vv 15, 27, 37) and speak properly (v. 16) towards prophets. She knows the value of silence at the right moment (vv 23, 26), but can make a convincing and impassioned appeal when the time is ripe (v.28). She is engagingly maternal (v.20), but in a crisis acts decisively. Revealing by her actions in verse 21 that her plan is already formed, she hastens straight to Elisha, refusing to talk to subordinates, refusing to be turned aside from what she has planned for the prophet, and in the end is proved right by circumstances. She is one of the Old Testament’s most attractive characters. (p.172)

Chapter 17: The northern kingdom disappears

The northern kingdom of Israel (which consists of ten of the twelve tribes) falls to the Assyrians, and those who were not killed or deported intermarry with the pagan people that Assyria resettled in Israel. The resulting syncretism of religions gives rise to beliefs and practices quite different from Israel’s heritage. Unlike the exiled remnant of Judah in Babylon, who will eventually be allowed to return to the Promised Land, the exiled Israelites in effect “disappear.” They are either absorbed into the foreign peoples among whom they are sent, or assimilated with the foreigners now living among them in Israel. They are called “Samaritans.” These northern ten tribes have no corporate experience of return and are referred to as the “Ten Lost Tribes.”

Chapter 22: Josiah, best king ever

Speaking of Josiah, 2Kings 23:25 states: *“Before him there had been no king who turned to the Lord as he did, with his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole strength, in accord with the entire Law of Moses; nor could any after him compare with him.”*

Josiah purges the nation of all symbols of pagan worship and reestablishes the celebration of the Passover. Unfortunately, his religious reform dies with him. All of his successors will do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

Chapters 24-25: Judah is exiled from the land

“He deported all Jerusalem: all the officers and men of the army, ten thousand in number, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None were left among the people of the land except the poor.” (24:14)

Introducing his commentary on these final two chapters of 2 Kings, Richard Nelson writes:

These last chapters of Kings chronicle the violent dismantling of the nation of Judah. The institutions launched so gloriously by Solomon at the beginning of the book have gradually decayed, chapter by chapter. Now the pace of dissolution snowballs. Judah collapses under the punitive brutality of two Babylonian invasions.

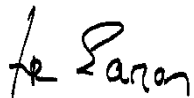
Kings pulls no punches in describing this final catastrophe. By the time the reader reaches the last sentence of this section (25:26), the absolute worst has happened. The kings after David's line are in prison (24:12; 25:7). The skilled and useful classes of Judah's society have been exiled (24:14-16, 25:11) or killed (25:18-21), leaving only the peasantry (25:12). The city and temple have been burned, the wall demolished (25:9-10), the last remnants of Solomonic greatness broken up, melted down, and taken away (24:13, 25:13-17). (p.261)

25:8-17 describes the sad story of the destruction of Jerusalem and of Solomon's temple and palace. "He burned the house of the Lord, the palace of the king, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every large building was destroyed by fire" (v.9).

For more on 1 & 2Kings, see my Commentaries on these two books—Level 3, Articles 29-32.

Next week, we will cover Introduction to the Prophets.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Le Paron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.