

SESSION #19

1 KINGS

As you might imagine this book has to do with kings. So do the books of Samuel which is why, in some Bibles, 1 & 2 Samuel are titled as the first two books of kings. In most of our Bibles 1 Kings deals with the monarchy period after David.

And this book of 1 Kings is notable because this is the book of the disruption, when things start to break apart as far as the nation is concerned.

So the theme of this book is “Discontinuance through Disobedience”. A kingdom divided against itself now, cannot any longer stand as a united nation. And that’s exactly what happens.

1 Kings 11:11 gives us the story: *“So the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees which I have commanded you, I will certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son, yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him but will give him one tribe, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.’”*

So the kingdom will be divided because of Solomon’s sin and disobedience against God. Which takes us, of course, to King Solomon.

And again the book is divided directly into two parts similar to 2 Samuel. First of all, the Golden Age of King Solomon, a 40 year reign, like his father David. During this 40 years of the Golden Age of Israel he builds a magnificent house for God, the temple in Jerusalem. That’s the focal point in those first 11 chapters.

But again as you hit the middle of this book we get a turning point. And the kingdom is divided. And then the last chapters, 12 to 22, tell us about the divided kingdom with a special focus on the ministry of the prophet Elijah, whom we’ll note in just a moment.

So in chapters 1 through 11 the kingdom is in tranquility. It's a Golden Age. God rules His people through Solomon with peace and wisdom and prosperity during his 40 year reign.

In chapter 12, the kingdom is split and divided, and only Judah and Benjamin remain as the southern kingdom. The rest, the other 10 tribes, break away in rebellion. And that results in turmoil for both kingdoms.

Now in the last half of the book, it isn't so much a king who is in focus, it's a prophet, God's prophet Elijah through whom God speaks. God is no longer able to rule through the kings on a consistent basis. But He can now speak through the prophets and Elijah is the first of those in this book.

So on the map you can see this division. Ten tribes break away as the northern tribes now taking the name Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin, a very small tribe, is seen to the south in red. The northern kingdom has its capital at Samaria. (The initial capital was at Shechem but the majority of the kings of Israel ruled from Samaria so I'm showing Samaria on the map here.) The southern kingdom retains its capital at Jerusalem. And this continues for hundreds of years following this period.

Let's go back to Solomon for just a moment because, of course, he is so famous for his gift of wisdom. This was not spiritual wisdom. He was the wisest man who ever lived, but not in terms of spiritual wisdom; he wasn't very wise in his spiritual walk with God. But he was enormously wise in administrative, intellectual and practical ways.

2 Kings 4:25 describes his reign during that Golden Age of Israel this way: *"Throughout the lifetime of Solomon, all of Judah and Israel lived in peace and safety. And from Dan to Beersheba, each family had its own home and garden."*

This is a small picture of a greater reality: the reign of Jesus Christ, yet in the future, when He will come as the King over all the earth, a time which will be marked by peace and rest, wisdom and knowledge, wealth and glory, fame and honour, and joy and safety. Very much like King Solomon's reign, but without the tragic disobedience, of course, that marred his later years.

Solomon's downfall arises out of a direct disobedience to the command of Moses in Deuteronomy 17. Moses said, *"When you get kings in the future, those kings are not to multiply these three things: don't multiply horses (military power), don't multiply wives and don't multiply personal wealth."* What did Solomon do? He was famous – perhaps we should say, infamous – for multiplying all three! One thousand wives and concubines. 12,000 horses stabled all over the land. And terrific personal wealth, unbelievable wealth. And all of that increase in those three areas where God had said, *"don't increase in those three areas if you're the king"*. Solomon disobeyed and these multiplied aspects all turned his heart away from God.

As a result, God gave – as He said – the ten tribes of the north to a subordinate of Solomon, a man named Jeroboam. So politically they break away and set up a political kingdom and a political capital at Samaria.

But they also break away religiously and set up two religious centres, one at the far north of the country at Dan, and they put a golden calf at Dan for the people to worship. And then they put another down at Bethel, at the border near Judah, so that no matter where you lived in the land of Israel you could get to one of those religious shrines reasonably easily. They instituted a new order of priests. And everything starts to move away very rapidly from the truth of worshipping God.

So during the next 80 years described in this book in chapters 12 through 22, we see in the southern kingdom sort of a 50% batting average, as they would say in American baseball: two kings were good and two kings were bad.

In Israel they had 8 kings during this period and all of the 8 were absolutely wicked. Israel's kings didn't do very well at all. That breakaway was not just a political disruption; it was indeed a religious disruption.

In the midst of all of that turmoil, an enormous personality arises on the stage of the Middle East. The first of the great prophets and surely one of the most charismatic, striking characters in all the Bible, Elijah. In physical appearance he was absolutely astonishing. In moral courage he was even more astonishing. In his faith, in his zeal, in his miracles nobody could touch that great prophet, Elijah.

God raised him up at a particular time because this was a dark and difficult time when God needed a strong voice, a strong character. The northern kingdom of Israel at that time was ruled by a man named King Ahab. There was no one like Ahab, the Bible says, *“who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord”*. He was really a bad guy. And in his time, at the darkest hour, God raises up a really good guy who can be God’s man to match the hour.

There are some great lessons from the life of Elijah. We don’t have time to explore them in any detail. However, you might remember Elijah at the Brook Cherith – a wonderful illustration of what it means to be obedient to God when things don’t go the way you expected. Take a look at that story if that rings any bells with you.

Or chapter 19, if you’re suffering stress especially to the point of burnout, because Elijah did. He was God’s man but still he suffered burnout. And the reasons for the burnout and God’s cure for burnout are given in the story of Elijah, chapter 19. From Elijah’s experience, we also see that victory always makes us vulnerable. His burnout came after his greatest triumph when he was on a literal mountaintop and a spiritual mountaintop and God answered his prayer by instantaneous fire from heaven. A tremendous experience in that contest against the prophets of Baal!

And after that terrific victory Elijah, the great man of God, goes into a valley of despair and despondency as a result. Burnout. If you’re interested in that subject take a look at chapter 19 especially.

In our next session, 2 Kings will tell the sad story of the kingdoms taken captive.
