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**Core Seminar**

**Old Testament**

**Class 15: 1st & 2nd Kings**

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**Introduction:**

Welcome back again! Last week we finished our study of the wisdom literature of God’s people… which detoured us from the developing story line of the Old Testament. But today we’ll return to that history, the story of what God is doing to save sinners.

Today, we’re looking at 1 and 2 Kings. So what do we know about 1 and 2 Kings?

Four quick things to note:

1. Originally, they were one book and so this morning we’ll look at them as one book.

1. We don’t know exactly who the author was. We do know that he (or they) drew upon many different historical documents to compile what we know today as First and Second Kings.
2. The compilation most likely took place during the time of the exile, when the people were taken from the Promised Land to Babylon.
3. The events recorded in Kings stretch from the crowning of King Solomon, in about 970 BC, all the way to the exile, 400 years later. During this time the kingdom is divided. The northern kingdom is scattered among the nations, and the southern kingdom is exiled.

Kings is a study in how God’s promises of mercy will interact with his promises of judgment. So I think a good place to start is with our own lives. ***What are some of the promises of judgment that apply to us? Or mercy? [Wait for some answers.] For Christians, how are they resolved in the Cross?***

**God’s people with no king (Moses and the Judges)**

Now, to understand exactly what promises are at stake in Kings, we need to go all the way back to Deuteronomy chapter 28.

**1**“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. **2**And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. **3**Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. **4**Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.

And the blessings continue. Then skip down to verse 58.

**58**“If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, **59**then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. **60**And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you.

And the curses continue. Skip down to verse 64.

**64**“And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

These are God’s blessings on his people if they keep this covenant, and curses if they do not.

At this stage, God is speaking directly to his people. Without a king everyone pretty much represents themselves before God. (DRAW ON WHITE BOARD)

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**The people**

These promises and conditions in Deuteronomy are the undercurrent of everything that happens in Kings.

**God’s people with their first faithful king (King David)**

Ok. Let’s move forward, past the judges, past King Saul, and finally to Israel’s first faithful king, David. Now the focus of the Old Testament turns to the kings in the line of David. It’s not that the people and their behavior are unimportant but the king now serves as a covenant representative before Yahweh, on behalf of the people.

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**The people**

With these kings, God’s relationship with his people changes. We read in 2 Samuel 7 that David’s house and David’s kingdom “will endure forever.” God says that he will punish David’s descendents when they do wrong, but this promise of a forever kingdom is without conditions. God’s just going to do it. Doesn’t depend on his people at all.

So the book of Kings starts on a real cliffhanger. The blessings and curses of Deuteronomy are in full effect. But so is this new promise of a kingdom that will last forever. What’s going to happen? Will the people have a king who obeys the law, so that they might have blessing, or rebel and cause the people suffering? And if they rebel and are cursed according to God’s promise in Deuteronomy, what happens to his promise in 2 Samuel?

Well before we embark on answering those central questions for the book… do you have any questions of your own?

**(TAKE QUESTIONS)**

**God’s people with their fulfillment king? (King Solomon – 1 Kings 1-11)**

Well, that brings us to the book of Kings and to the next King after David, David’s son Solomon.

Who is Solomon? Well, open your Bibles to 1 Kings, and let’s begin simply by reading

2:1-4, where we find out exactly who he is. King David is here is on his deathbed, and he speaks these last words to his son and successor, Solomon.

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lacka man on the throne of Israel.’

In these words we see two key promises God made to David:

1. That his line will never fail (v.4).
2. That David’s descendants, (v.3), beginning with Solomon, are charged to walk in God’s ways and keep His decrees and commands, if they are to experience God’s blessing. Again, there’s the idea of the king as the people’s representative before God. It’s interesting that very few worldly successes of the kings are reported in these books. What really interests the author is whether or not they are obeying God.

So what happens next? Will Solomon be this fulfillment king? Let’s see what happens.

Turn to chapter 3, where we discover in verse 12 that God grants to Solomon to be the wisest person who ever lived.

And the results of this wise ruler, in chapters 4-10 are clear. Look at 4:20-21 there is “population growth, eating, drinking, happiness”; in v24-25 there is “peace and prosperity” in the land; in verse 34 there is world-renowned fame for God’s people and their king.

But most wonderfully, the Lord even blesses with his own special presence with the Temple in chapters 5-8. In chapter 8, verse 10 God enters the temple, just like he did the tabernacle in Exodus 40. And unlike the movable tabernacle, the temple is here to stay.

Furthermore, listen to Solomon’s benediction that he gave to the people of Israel on that day. It’s 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 and God’s presence with them. Let’s start reading in verse 56.

**56**“Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. **57**The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, **58**that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. **59**Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires, **60**that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other.

Notice that phrase in verse 56 “not one word had failed”.

So here we see that the covenant mediator, the king, is bringing God’s blessings to his people through his obedience. In many ways, Solomon is the peak of covenant. God’s people need a king, not only to receive God’s blessings, but also to help them display God’s glory to a watching world.

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The people**: Blessed, Glorifying God**

So 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!

But what’s shocking is that when Solomon prays in this time of seeming perfection, he also asks for God’s mercy if the people sin, in fact, for *when* they sin.

Look at verses 46-50:

**46**“If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, **47**yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’ **48**if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name,**49**then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause **50**and forgive your people who have sinned against you

There are two problems here if you think about it:

Firstly, the problem is that “no-one does not sin” (v.46)

…and secondly (perhaps counterintuitively) that God will keep his promises.

Remember back to Deuteronomy 28. God will judge Israel when they disobey—even sending them out of the land. (v.46)

As a result, God’s people need a king to ask for mercy when they fail.

(POINT OUT THE DIAGRAM AGAIN adding but needing mercy)

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The people: Blessed, Glorifying God**…. but needing mercy**

Sadly, what follows is the fulfillment of that prayer. The so-called fulfillment king will fall, and take all his people down with him. To see how this kingdom fell from the towering heights that we just read about, 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.

Well David wasn’t perfect, but one thing he never did was serve other gods; his heart was always fully devoted to Yahweh. 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 the first to succeed him failed the test. That’s 11:6.

So, verse 11, the kingdom is torn from the hand of David’s son. And yet even in anger, God remembers mercy. Look at verse 13.

“However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”

So Solomon blesses the people for a time and asks God for mercy, but he is not the fulfillment King. He doesn’t live perfectly, and he doesn’t live forever.

Pausing here, I think it’s worth making a few points of application. First, I think this narrative section helps us to reflect on the danger of how being a few degrees off God’s law can sends us in the wrong direction totally. Solomon was wise, but in acting very unwisely in one particular area, he sinned greatly, and this brought down the entire nation. We should especially think about this if we’re in Christian leadership.

Ultimately though I think this passage helps to see God as so trustworthy. Did you notice that God never breaks his promise with his people or David? In fact he always keeps his Word. This should encourage us immensely when we struggle to see how God’s promises will work out in the midst of our failure.

**(TAKE QUESTIONS)**

Well back to the story as we move forward in Kings, we see that part of God’s judgment is that the nation will be spilt. At this point we need some new vocabulary.

1. The Southern Kingdom, over which David’s sons will still rule, is called “Judah” (and sometimes “Jerusalem”).
2. The Northern Kingdom, which will be ruled by non-Davidic kings, is called “Israel” (and sometimes “Ephraim” or “Samaria”).

And now our narrative moves along two tracks: the history of the Northern Kingdom Israel, and the history of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Let’s start with the flawed northern kings of Israel.

**God’s people with their flawed Northern kings (Kings of Israel – 1 Kings 12- 2 Kings 21)**

The very first king of Israel, Jeroboam, immediately leads the people of Israel into idolatry. Notice in verse 28 of chapter 11, Jeroboam leads the people to make golden calves. Golden calves! Had he ever read the book of Exodus? In fact, Jeroboam’s wickedness was so great that all the subsequent kings of Israel will be compared to him to evaluate just how wicked they are. In the same way that David’s faithfulness will be the benchmark for Judah’s godliness.

And this bad start seals the nation’s doom. Chapter 14, verses 15-16: “the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger. And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin.”

These are surely some of the saddest words so far in all of the Bible. The northern tribes are lost. But the fulfillment of this doesn’t come right away. It’s still about 200 years off. But in those 200 years, not a single king of Israel will *not* be counted as evil.

It’s in this context that we should talk more about prophets and about two prominent prophets in Kings, Elijah and Elisha. You can read about them in 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 13.

Why are they important? They aren’t kings. But they speak the word of Yahweh to the kings and to the people.

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The people: Blessed, Glorifying God…. but needing mercy

So they have two jobs:

1. First, they remind the kings that they cannot do whatever they want. They are men under authority: the authority of the word of God and the authority of the covenant. The prophets are like covenant watchdogs, guardians of the covenant calling kings and people to faithfulness.
2. The prophets’ secondary task was to proclaim the punishment that the kings and the people would endure if they didn’t repent.

Sadly the kings don’t listen, and they lead the people into further and further decay. And so 2 Kings 17 recounts the destruction of Israel by Assyria. The king of Assyria brings pagan nations to settle in the land of Israel. A complete reversal of what we read in Joshua. Yahweh takes covenant faithfulness very seriously.

As we seek to apply this part of God’s salvation history, this section with the Northern Kingdom provides us with a stark reminder that sin will eventually catch up with us. We can run from sin for years, but we cannot ultimately run from God’s judgment. It will often cause failure in this life, as it did for Solomon. Or if not then in the next.

**God’s people with their flawed Southern kings (Kings of Israel – 1 Kings 12- 2 Kings 21)**

Well, then, let’s turn to the Southern Kingdom. Now, the story of Judah is similar to that of her Northern sister. But there’s one key difference: Yahweh’s promises to David.

Let’s look at this difference. Turn back to 1 Kings 15 for one of many examples: a summary of the reign of Abijam. As we read, listen to how Yahweh deals differently here than He did with Jeroboam, and why.

“He walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem.”

Notice two things there:

1. First, the reason God showed mercy to Abijam, allowing his son to succeed him, was

“for David’s sake.” Because Yahweh had made a promise to David, and it *will* be fulfilled. You see in the North there are 10 changes in ruling family, but in the South there were none. The line of David continued.

1. The second thing to note is that Abijam was compared to David, as were all the kings of Judah—just as Jeroboam was the benchmark of wickedness in Israel.

As we walk through 1 Kings and into 2 Kings we see that some Judean kings were good, like Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18-20 and they did what was right. Though even these good kings fall short of the mark set by David. But about half of them were bad. In fact when we get to Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son, his reign is the worst yet. Look at 21:11-12:

“Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

Just as Jeroboam sealed Israel’s fate, Manasseh’s sins sealed Judah’s. Judah will soon be taken captive just as Israel was.

But just when it looks likes it’s over that every king is flawed compared to David and all hope is lost, Kings finally reaches a climax with a king who, amazingly, exceeds even David in godliness and goodness.

Really? A King better than David? Yes. Josiah.

**God’s people with their finest king (King Josiah – 2 Kings 22-23)**

Don’t believe me? Well turn back with me to 1 Kings 13:2 and to a prophecy almost 300 years before the evil king Manasseh.

“O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’”

So there will be a future king Josiah who will restore true worship in Israel. Eventually, he arrives here in the closing chapters of 2 Kings. Now there’s not time to see all the amazing things he does but if you scan through chapters 22 and 23 you can see the types of things accomplished… he finds the book of the law, he renews the covenant, he purges the land of idolatry… In fact look at 23v25.

“Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.”

Never before? Goodness! Here is one greater even than David! But, tragically, Josiah meets a tragic end. Judah will not escape final judgment. God’s promised anger, because of Manasseh, will stand. This godly king, this finest king, will not live forever. He dies in battle. And again God’s promises, and God’s plan of redemption through David’s line are left hanging from a thread. It has seemed all through this book like the solution was a godly king. But here he is, and we’re still left waiting. If even Josiah isn’t God’s forever king, who’s it going to be?

Well, Josiah points to something our forever king will need to do. He will need to defeat even death.

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The people: Blessed, Glorifying God…. but needing mercy

**(TAKE QUESTIONS)**

**God’s people with their final king (Jehoiachin – 2 Kings 24-25)**

Well as we turn to the final few chapters of Kings let’s get to one last king. Soon after Josiah there are three waves of attack by the Babylonians, and with each attack they take a few more captives away. Until, as promised, they finally level Jerusalem and the temple. Josiah’s great grandson, King Jehoiachin, is taken captive to Babylon (24v.15). In his place, his uncle is set up in Jerusalem by the Babylonians as a puppet king. However, this king, Zedekiah, rebels against the Babylonians. His punishment? Just before his eyes are put out, his sons—the line of David—are all killed in front of him.

So as Kings concludes, is the promise over for God’s people? Is God just going to start over again in the New Testament? His plan of redemption certainly looks in complete shambles by the end of the book. 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel are scattered and lost among the nations, and the remaining tribes captive far away from the land. And what about the King in the line of David… has Yahweh reneged on those promises? Was Yahweh too weak to stop so great a force as the terrible Babylonian army? 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. Has the seed of the serpent finally finished his job, and killed off the seed of the woman?

Well, wait! There is just a little ray of hope left. There is still one final descendant of David’s still alive, the king captured right before Zedekiah took the throne: Jehoiachin, Josiah’s great grandson. He’s in exile in Babylon, which is not good. But just as the book ends, Jehoiachin is released to dine for the rest of his days at the king’s table.

Well it’s not much, but it’s a ray of hope! After all this, one descendant of David is still alive!

**God’s people with their forever king (Jesus)**

Well as we conclude it’s clear we’re left with almost as great a cliffhanger as what we started with. Who knows what God’s people in Babylon thought… but for us who have the privilege of living *after* Christ, we can see that the true pinnacle of the story isn’t Solomon, or Josiah, or Jehoiachin… but Jesus, the forever king. You see, as we know, the ultimate fulfillment King is Jesus who completes our diagram. He is the one in David’s line who never breaks any of God’s law; he displays God’s glory perfectly and allows us to display God’s glory now; he brings God’s full judgment of our sin through his death; he brings every blessing to us; he now intercedes for us, pleading that God might show his certain mercy if we turn and trust in Him; it is he who will take us to heaven - the promised land forever. So reading Kings should leave us with the great excitement of knowing that God keeps his promises. And he’s shown his trustworthiness through his provision of King Jesus.

Why don’t we end by thanking God for that… (**PRAY)**