

1 Kings 1–4

We now begin the study of the life and reign of Solomon, David's son and successor to the throne of Israel. In David we have a type of Christ in His humiliation, exile, and rejection; but in Solomon we see the "Prince of Peace" (the name Solomon means "peaceable") reigning in glory and splendor over His people. David made the conquests that enabled Solomon to live and reign in peace and magnificent prosperity.

I. Solomon Fulfills God's Word (1)

David was now unable to carry on his royal duties, so his son Adonijah took advantage of the situation and proclaimed himself king of Israel. "I will be king!" he announced, all the while realizing that God had appointed Solomon to succeed David (1:17; and see 2:13–15). Adonijah was deliberately rebelling against the will of God. Sad to say, some of David's confidential advisors fell in with the wicked plot, including Joab (whom David once tried to replace; see 2 Sam. 19:11–15 and 20:4–13) and Abiathar the priest. The treacherous prince followed the example of Absalom by preparing chariots and seeking to impress the people (see 2 Sam. 15:1ff).

However, three loyal servants took matters into their own hands and informed Bathsheba. She, in turn, took the message to King David, knowing that he would not break his oath that Solomon, her son, be crowned the next king. The entire plan worked smoothly, and David made it very clear that he wanted Solomon to take the throne immediately. Zadok, Nathan, and Bathsheba lost no time in putting Solomon on the royal mule and proclaiming him the new king of Israel. Verse 40 suggests that the news was received with great joy by the people of the land. However, when Adonijah and his unsuspecting crowd of admirers heard the news, it threw them into panic, for now their treachery was known. The rebellious prince ran to God's altar for protection and Solomon promised not to kill him. Too often wicked people flee to God for help without really repenting in their hearts.

II. Solomon Executes God's Wrath (2)

A. *David's last counsels (vv. 1–11).*

See also 1 Chron. 22–29. David emphasized the spiritual before the political, for he wanted his son to walk in the ways of the Lord. He admonished him to study and obey the Law (see Deut. 17:14–20 and Josh. 1:8). God had made wonderful promises concerning Solomon (2 Sam. 7:8–17), but He could not fulfill them apart from Solomon's faith and obedience. David also reminded Solomon of the enemies that would oppose him and the friends that would assist him.

B. *Judgment on Adonijah (vv. 12–25).*

Had Adonijah remained in his proper place, he would have lived, but he stubbornly refused to yield. In asking for the hand of Abishag, the last of David's wives (1:1–4),

Adonijah was making a rash claim; for everything of David's had been turned over to Solomon. Bathsheba seems to have been an innocent go-between in this entire episode. Solomon realized the treacherous implications of his brother's request and made it clear that he knew also the treachery of Abiathar and Joab (v. 22). Adonijah had gone too far; now he had to die.

C. Judgment on Abiathar and Joab (vv. 26–35).

Solomon honored the priest's office by not slaying him, but he banished him from service. This fulfilled 1 Sam. 2:30–36. When Joab heard of his friend's exile, he knew that judgment would soon come to him; so he, like Adonijah, fled to the altar for protection. Joab was guilty of murdering several men and he had to pay for his sins. Benaiah became the new general of the army, and Zadok was made the high priest. It's interesting to note that Benaiah was a priest (1 Chron. 27:5) who turned general.

D. Judgment on Shimei (vv. 36–46).

This was the man who so cruelly cursed David when he was fleeing from Absalom (2 Sam. 16:5ff). Solomon ordered him to remain in Jerusalem where he could be watched, a sentence far more merciful than he deserved. However, Shimei tried to "call his bluff" by disobeying the king's order, and it cost him his life. If these many judgments of Solomon seem cruel, keep in mind that these were enemies of the king and therefore enemies of the Lord.

III. Solomon Receives God's Wisdom (3)

Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess was purely a political move; later he was to wed other heathen women (11:1ff) and be turned away from the true worship of Jehovah. But at the beginning of his career, he had a sincere love for the Lord and wanted to put Him first in his life. When God gave Solomon the privilege of asking for anything he wanted, he asked for wisdom and an understanding heart; and God answered his prayer. Furthermore, God gave him all the other blessings too (Matt. 6:33). Of course, if Solomon wanted to enjoy these blessings, he would have to walk in obedience to the Word (vv. 13–14).

The account of the two mothers is but one of many illustrations of the wisdom of Solomon. The fact that these two women had access to the king's throne shows how much young Solomon loved his people and wanted to serve them. How wonderful it is that every Christian has access to the throne of one who is "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42), and who promises to give wisdom and to meet every need. Certainly all of us need to depend on the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:18–31; James 3:13–18).

It is a precious truth to the Christian that God equips us for our calling. God made Solomon king, and God supplied all that he needed to serve acceptably. "Ask and it shall be given you."

IV. Solomon Enjoys God's Wealth (4)

In vv. 1–6 we have the names of the men in Solomon's "cabinet," and in vv. 7–19 the names of those who were overseers of the divisions of Israel. Samuel's warning about the king certainly came true: read 1 Sam. 8:10–18 as well as Deut. 17:14–20. It appears that the material prosperity of the nation was not matched by a spiritual prosperity, for in a few years the kingdom would be divided and Solomon's splendor would fade away. The people were "eating, drinking, and making merry" (4:20), but we do not read of their interest in the Law of the Lord. It is possible for a person to enjoy material prosperity and still be spiritual, as in the case of Abraham, but most people cannot handle much wealth.

Solomon's kingdom was the largest in Israel's history (v. 21, and see Gen. 15:18). Those were days of peace and prosperity (v. 25). However, the seeds of sin and apostasy were being sown. Solomon brought horses from Egypt (10:26–29) in direct disobedience to the Law (Deut. 17:16). He also multiplied wives (11:1 with Deut. 17:17). These sins eventually brought ruin to the kingdom. Solomon was a great student of nature, as you cannot help but notice when you read the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. We do not have all of his 3,000 proverbs, and the only "songs" we have are in the Song of Solomon. Certainly we may learn much of the ways of God watching nature; Jesus pointed to the lilies, seeds, sparrows, and other forms in nature to teach us about God.

Yet Jesus Christ is "greater than Solomon." Certainly He is greater in His person, being the very Son of God; and He is greater in His wisdom (Col. 2:3) and in His wealth (see Col. 1:19 and 2:9). Solomon took foreign wives, yet Jesus Christ will one day be married to His bride, the church, made up of blood-bought sinners from every tribe and nation. Christ is greater in His power and glory, and one day He shall reign over a greater kingdom forever and forever.

1 Kings 5–8

These chapters record the fulfillment of God's promise that Solomon would build a temple to the glory of God (2 Sam. 7:12–16; and see 1 Kings 8:15–21). That this was a gigantic undertaking for so young a king, it is not difficult to imagine; but the Lord had given him assurance, and Solomon trusted the Lord (see 6:11–14). The parallel passages are found in 1 Chron. 22–2 Chron. 7.

I. Preparation (5)

David was the man who started the entire project. God approved the project but made it clear that Solomon would do the actual work. David had ready the plans (1 Chron. 28:11–21) and the costly materials (1 Chron. 22:5, 14–16). He encouraged his son in the work and assured him that God would faithfully assist him (1 Chron. 28:1–21).

Hiram, the Gentile king of Tyre, agreed to supply the wood and the skillful men to do the work. Solomon in turn paid him 130,000 bushels of wheat and 120 gallons of pure olive oil each year. See also 1 Kings 9:10–14.

Israel provided the manpower through a part-time enlistment or “draft.” The heavy “slave work” was done by the Canaanites, 150,000 of them (5:15; 9:20–22), while 30,000 Jews did the other work “in courses.” There would be 10,000 a month on the job, and then they would return home for two months. This levy represented about 1/40th of the available men in the land, so it was not oppressive, and the service was temporary.

The building of the temple represented the cooperative efforts of many people, both Jews and Gentiles. The materials secured were the very finest: great and costly stones that would endure, and precious metals that would give glory to the house. It reminds us of Paul's admonition concerning the local church that we build with “gold, silver, precious stones” and not “wood, hay, stubble” (1 Cor. 3:9–23). While God does not dwell in material temples today (Acts 17:24), this is no reason why the work we do for Him should be cheap or shoddy.

II. Construction (6–7)

Please check your Bible dictionary for the floor plan of the temple. You will note that the “temple area” included buildings in addition to the temple proper (7:1–12). Solomon built the temple first; this required seven years (6:38). Then he built the king's house and the other structures and courts that made up the temple area (9:10). The entire project took twenty years.

It is not necessary to go into all the details of the construction of the temple. You will note that the dimensions of the temple proper were double that of the tabernacle, so the temple itself was not a huge structure. The temple was made of cut stone, overlaid with wood, overlaid with gold, and embellished with precious stones. In 6:7 we note that the building stones were precut at the quarry and silently fitted into place. The stone cutters were following God's plans, so everything fit together. This is a good example for Christian workers to follow today as we assist in the building of His temple, the church (Eph. 2:19–22, and see 1 Peter 2:5–8).

The temple was larger and more elaborate than the tabernacle. It was not a temporary tent with skins for a covering; rather, it was a magnificent stone building that could not be moved. There were windows and a floor in the temple (6:4 and 6:15), both of which were lacking in the tabernacle. Solomon added two cherubim to the holy of holies (6:23–30) and placed the ark under them. Instead of a dusty outer court, the temple had a beautiful porch (7:1–12) with two pillars (13–22) called “Jachin” (“He will establish”) and “Boaz” (“in Him is strength”). Strength and stability belonged to the Lord and now would belong to His people as they settled in their land. Instead of the small laver, they made a large “molten sea” (7:23–26) which stood upon twelve oxen. They also made ten portable brass lavers (7:27–39) to use throughout the temple area. We are told in 2 Chron. 4:1 that the altar of brass was equal in size to the holy of holies. There were ten candlesticks instead of one (2 Chron. 4:7–8), as well as ten tables for the bread.

The NT does not give us as much instruction as to the meaning of the temple as it gives concerning the tabernacle. Some see the tabernacle as a picture of Christ in His

humility on the earth, and the temple as a type of His present ministry in glory, building that "holy temple" of living stones. Or, the tabernacle typifies our pilgrim life today, while the temple (a permanent building) typifies our glorious reign with Christ when He returns. How tragic that the Jews trusted the presence of their temple instead of the promises of the Lord; for in less than 500 years, this temple was destroyed as the Jews went into captivity for their sins. In 6:11–13, God reminded Solomon that the important thing was obeying His Word, not building a great temple.

III. Dedication (8)

God filled the temple with His glory when the ark was brought in (vv. 1–11). In later years, Ezekiel would see that glory depart (Ezek. 8–11). Solomon addressed the people (vv. 12–21) and reminded them of God's faithfulness to keep His promises. Then he prayed to the Lord on behalf of his family (vv. 22–30), citizens who sinned (vv. 31–40), Gentile strangers (vv. 41–43), and the nation in future exile (vv. 44–53). The key thought of his prayer is that God would hear their cries and be merciful to them in spite of their sins. Solomon makes it clear in his prayer that the condition of Israel's heart was more important than the presence of the temple. He knew that sin would bring chastening, but that repentance would bring forgiveness and blessing. It was more important to dedicate the people than the building.

Verses 44–53 certainly did come true, for Israel was taken captive because of their sins, and God brought them back to their land to rebuild their temple and serve Him again. This prayer and promise will also be fulfilled in these latter days when Israel goes back to her land in unbelief.

After the prayer, Solomon blessed the people (vv. 54–61) and exhorted them to have their hearts right with God. Note that the king is concerned that other nations know the truth of the Lord (v. 60, and see vv. 41–43). It is too bad that Israel did not fulfill her mission to take the truth to the Gentiles. The celebration lasted fourteen days (v. 65), with the first week taken up with sacrifices, feasts, and the official dedication ceremonies. In the second week, the people went back to their tents to rejoice in the Lord. In 9:1–9, God appeared to Solomon to remind him that with his privileges came great responsibilities; that He would establish his throne forever if the people followed the Lord in obedience; but that He would cut off the nation if they sinned. Unfortunately, the nation lapsed into sin and unbelief, and the prophecy of 9:6–9 came true. The beautiful and costly temple was plundered and destroyed in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians took the people captive.

God originally dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), then in Solomon's temple. The glory of God then came to earth in the Person of Christ (John 1:12–14). Today, every true Christian is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19–20), as is the church collectively (Eph. 2:21) and locally (1 Cor. 3:16). There will be a future Jewish temple during the tribulation period (2 Thes. 2:1–12) in which the Antichrist will be worshiped by an unbelieving world. There will also be a glorious temple during the 1,000 year reign of Christ (Ezek. 40–48).

1 Kings 9–11

See 2 Chron. 7–9 for the parallel passages. These chapters cover Solomon's life after the great building programs had been completed. They show how this wise and godly king gradually declined spiritually and brought about the division of the kingdom.

I. Divine Admonition (9:1–9)

God had appeared to Solomon just shortly after he ascended the throne (3:5–15), at which time the young king had asked for divine wisdom to carry on his duties. God had also sent a message of encouragement to the king during the difficult years of building the temple (6:11–13). Now that his great projects were completed, Solomon received another message from the Lord, this time to admonish him to obey God's Word. We often face our greatest temptations after a period of successful ministry. God reaffirmed his covenant with David and reminded Solomon of his responsibility to "keep his heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23) and walk in obedience to the Word. If Solomon obeyed God's Word, his throne would be established and God would be able to bless Israel. But if Solomon disobeyed, and his children after him disobeyed, God would have to withdraw His blessings and take the people off their good land. Then the great houses he had built would be ruined and left behind as monuments of Israel's unbelief. No matter where you turn in the Bible, the same principle holds true: obedience leads to blessing, disobedience leads to chastening. Alas, we shall see in this study that King Solomon did not heed the warning, but instead gradually drifted away from the Lord until (near the end of his life) he tried to kill an innocent man (11:40).

II. Dangerous Alliances (9:10–10:13)

A. *With Hiram (9:10–14).*

We have already seen that Solomon depended on Hiram for the wood and skilled workmen for building the temple (5:1–12). Apparently in later years, Solomon needed more money, so he "borrowed it" from Hiram, giving the twenty cities of Galilee as security. This is the "Galilee of the Gentiles" of Matt. 4:15. When Hiram saw the cities, he considered them "worthless" (which is what "Cabul" means). Second Chronicles 8:1–2 informs us that Hiram had also given some cities to Solomon as part of the transaction. In any event, such alliances with the heathen nations were prohibited by the Law, and they only led Solomon deeper into trouble. See 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1.

B. *With Egypt (9:15–24).*

Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess was strictly a political move, for he was importing horses and other luxuries from Egypt (10:28–29). To "go back to Egypt" was contrary to God's will for the Jews. "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help!" cried Isaiah (31:1). By marrying a heathen woman, Solomon was setting a bad example for his nation and unnecessarily involving the people in the affairs of the heathen.

C. With other nations (9:25–10:13).

Solomon's navy must have sailed as far away as India to secure the luxuries his kingdom demanded. The visit of the Queen of Sheba too was more than a personal visit; it involved setting up trade agreements and other alliances with her country. Solomon and the Queen exchanged expensive gifts, and she went home completely overwhelmed with his wisdom and wealth. Jesus mentions her in Matt. 12:42, using her visit to warn the Jews of His day. If the Queen of Sheba expended all that effort to go hear the wisdom of Solomon, how much greater judgment will fall on the Jews who had a "greater than Solomon" in their very midst, yet rejected Him!

These accounts show the peril of fame and fortune. Note that in 10:7 we have "wisdom and prosperity," but in 10:23 it is "riches and wisdom"—riches come first. No doubt Solomon gradually declined in spiritual things as the material became more important.

III. Destructive Ambitions (10:12–29)

"Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare," warns 1 Tim. 6:9 (nkjv); and this came true in Solomon's life. He was not content with the abundance of blessings God had given him; he had to send away for even greater luxuries to satisfy his heart. No doubt the latter years of Solomon's life are revealed in Ecclesiastes, a book that reveals the emptiness of living for material pleasures. Perhaps it is not without significance that Solomon received 666 talents of gold a year (see Rev. 13:18). He would use only vessels of gold (v. 21), unlike our Lord who will use *any* vessel that is sanctified (2 Tim. 2:20–21). Yes, Solomon lived in glory and luxury, but Jesus said that even Solomon in all his glory was not as beautiful as one of God's simple lilies (Matt. 6:28–29).

Read Deut. 17:16–20 for God's instructions to the king, and note how Solomon disobeyed these instructions. He multiplied horses and chariots, he multiplied money, and he multiplied wives. Perhaps Solomon thought that his building of the temple was sufficient for his spiritual life; now he could afford to "coast" on past blessings. Read Ecc. 2 to see Solomon's interest in material gain.

IV. Deliberate Apostasy (11)

It is unbelievable that the man who wrote Prov. 5:20–23 and 6:20–24 would multiply wives and concubines from heathen nations. Polygamy itself was bad enough (it had caused his father David no end of trouble), but to take wives from heathen lands was deliberate apostasy. See Deut. 7:1–14. What was the cause of this repeated sin? Solomon's heart was not right with God (11:4). God wanted "integrity of heart" (9:4), which means a united heart single to the glory of God. But Solomon had a divided heart—he loved the world as he tried to serve God. What a tragedy that the man who built the temple to the one true God should begin to worship at heathen altars. God was angry at this, so He sent several disciplines to bring the erring king back to the faith.

A. A warning message (vv. 1–13).

God threatened to take the kingdom away from Solomon and give it to another. You would think that this warning would shock Solomon back to his senses, but apparently it did not. If a person will not listen to the Word, then the Lord has to take even more drastic measures.

B. An invasion by Edom (vv. 14–22).

Solomon's "kingdom of rest" is now upset by war. Read James 4 for the spiritual explanation of this. Apparently Solomon's alliances with Pharaoh were not accomplishing much, because Egypt turned out to be an ally with the Edomites.

C. Trouble from Rezon (vv. 23–25).

This band of warriors harassed Solomon's borders for many years. The apostate king was losing ground rapidly.

D. Competition from Jeroboam (vv. 26–43).

Solomon himself had promoted Jeroboam into a good position because of his bravery and industry. But God chose this obscure young man to be the king over ten tribes. The one tribe remaining would be Judah, but this southern kingdom would include "little Benjamin" (12:21). When Solomon heard that he had a rival, he tried to kill him. The king must have known that the people were groaning under the heavy taxes and forced labor programs (see 12:6–11). In fact, Adoram, who was in charge of the "public works" was stoned by the people (12:18).

Solomon's death left his son Rehoboam to reign in his place. Had Solomon remained true to the Lord, his later years would have been filled with blessing and victory instead of chastening and defeat. He left to his son the problem of winning back the love of the people and lifting the heavy tax burdens that helped to make Solomon so wealthy. Yes, Israel seemed to be basking in great glory and splendor, but all was not well. It was a hollow glory that could not last. The description in Rev. 3:17–18 fits the situation well.

1 Kings 12–16

These chapters record "the beginning of the end." With the death of Solomon, the nation's glory begins to fade. First Kings covers about 125 years of history, 40 years of Solomon's reign, and about 85 years for the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah. Only five kings reigned in Judah during that period, while eight kings reigned in Israel, and all of them were wicked. Second Kings then takes up the account of the Assyrian captivity of Israel (the northern tribes) and the Babylonian captivity of Judah (the southern tribes).

I. The Division of the Kingdom (12:1–14:20)

A. Rehoboam's folly (12:1–15).

Solomon's vast program of building and expansion had brought fame and glory to the nation, but the taxes were heavy upon the people and they were hoping for some relief from the burden. In his later years, Solomon's values had changed and he was more interested in material wealth than spiritual blessing (see Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26). Had his son Rehoboam listened to the wisdom of the older leaders, he would have won the hearts of the people; but he was unwilling to be a servant to the people. He listened to the younger men, who lacked experience and, as a consequence, made a foolish decision. The way to be a ruler is to be a servant (Mark 10:42–45).

B. Jeroboam's rebellion (12:16–13:34).

God had already chosen Jeroboam to be the king of the ten tribes (11:26–40) because of Solomon's sins (11:9–13). Sin is a great divider and destroyer. Only Judah and Benjamin were left to Rehoboam, and God did this for David's sake. Alas, Jeroboam failed to live up to his opportunities, for he led the ten tribes into idolatry. He was afraid that the people of his kingdom would go up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts, and there revolt against him, so he made it "convenient" for them to worship in their own territory. He repeated Aaron's sin (Ex. 32:1–6) and made calves of gold, putting one in Dan and the other in Bethel. He also consecrated places of worship and organized his own priesthood. It was a man-made religion, designed for the convenience of the people; therefore, it had nothing of the power of God or the blessing of God. Of course, God could not permit such apostasy to continue, so He sent a message of warning and judgment to the king (chap. 13). Note that the king was burning incense at the altar, acting like a priest. The mysterious man of God announced the birth of the future king Josiah (13:2, see 2 Kings 23:15–18), and also warned that the king's man-made religion would be judged and destroyed. When Jeroboam tried to arrest the prophet, the king's extended hand was dried up and the altar broke open, just as the prophet had predicted. The king begged to be healed, and the man prayed for him. The king then tried to trap the prophet by inviting him to the palace, but the man of God refused to fall for the trick. It is unfortunate that the man of God listened to the lies of a fellow prophet and lost his life. If there is one lesson to be learned from 13:11–34, it is this: don't let other people determine the will of God for your life. Obey what God's Word says to you, regardless of the cost.

C. God's judgment (14:1–20).

Abijah was a young man when he became fatally ill (his father reigned for twenty-two years), and, of course, the king was concerned lest there be no son to succeed him on the throne. Jeroboam could not turn to his false gods for help; he had to turn to the prophet Ahijah for guidance. This was the prophet who first told Jeroboam that he would be the new king. The king dared not go himself; he sent his wife in a disguise. But the blind prophet could see more with his spiritual eyes than Jeroboam could see with his

physical eyes. Ahijah exposed the disguise and sent the wicked king a message of judgment. The message came true: the queen returned home, and, when she entered the house, her son died. It is tragic that Jeroboam turned away from the Lord, for he could have led the ten tribes into wonderful blessing and victory. Instead, he set a terrible example for other kings to follow.

II. The Decline of Judah (14:21–15:24)

A. Rehoboam (14:21–31).

For seventeen years, this evil son of Solomon led the people into terrible sins. Instead of walking in the laws of the Lord, he patterned himself after the wicked nations Israel had defeated. God punished him by bringing Egypt up to defeat the nation. The people had lost their spiritual values: the expensive gold shields were now replaced with cheaper bronze shields. Things “looked the same,” but God knew they were not the same.

B. Abijam (15:1–8).

“Like father, like son.” God allowed him to reign only three short years. Note that his mother was related to Absalom (“Abishalom” in v. 2). He declared war on Jeroboam (read 2 Chron. 13), and God gave him victory *for David's sake*. The victory was purely military; there was no spiritual revival in the nation.

C. Asa (15:9–24).

Read 2 Chron. 14–16. Asa was a *good* king, a welcome change after years of evil rulers. He tried to take away the sins established by Rehoboam (14:24). There was a brief period of rest and revival under his leadership. He even deposed his own mother because she was an idol worshiper (2 Chron. 15:16). Sad to say, his reign did not end as well as it began, for he trusted in men for protection and failed to trust in the Lord. He used the temple wealth to hire Syria to fight for him; and this ungodly alliance cost him much personally.

D. Jehoshaphat (15:24).

See also 22:41–50 and 2 Chron. 17:1–21:3. The writer here does not give the history of this good king who purged out the idolatry and who sought to teach the people the Word of God. God gave him many victories, because he “sought the Lord with all his heart” (2 Chron. 22:9).

III. The Decay of Israel (15:25–16:34)

Six kings are listed here, starting with Nadab and ending with Ahab, and all of them were evil. Nadab maintained his father's wicked idolatry; he was slain by Baasha during one of the battles with the Philistines. Baasha reigned for twenty-four years and fulfilled

the prophecy of 14:14–15 that all of Jeroboam's seed would be destroyed. Jehu the prophet then came with a message for Baasha, however, predicting the destruction of Baasha's household. His son, Elah, reigned for less than two years and was killed by Zimri, one of his captains, while the king was drunk. Zimri led the nation for only one week (16:15), but during that time he wiped out the family of Baasha and fulfilled the prophecy of Jehu (16:1–4). The army revolted and appointed Omri the new king. He in turn marched against Zimri, who set fire to the palace and committed suicide by perishing in the blaze. Omri ruled for twelve years (after putting down a brief revolt of the people) and led the people into further sin. His son Ahab was married to Jezebel, and this brought Baal worship officially into the kingdom. His only claim to fame was the establishing of Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom. Upon his death, his son Ahab came to the throne, and under his leadership the tribes declined further into idolatry and sin.

You will note that it was when the nation was moving into idolatry that God called His prophets forth to preach to the people. We have met an anonymous prophet in chapter 13, and we will yet meet Elijah and Elisha. Of course, Jehu and Ahijah should also be mentioned. When God's people sin, it is only the Word of God proclaimed by the servants of God that can call them back and save them.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34, nkjv). When godly kings were ruling, God blessed His people; when ungodly men reigned, God sent judgment and defeat. How tragic it is to see this great nation, called by the Lord, now declining in spiritual things and turning away from the truth. Yes, they often had material prosperity, but this was no sign that God was pleased with their deeds. In fact, the lust for material things often led the people farther from God. The best way to build a godly nation is to have godly citizens in godly churches (1 Tim. 2:1–6).

1 Kings 17–18

Whenever the nation fell into sin and idolatry, God sent prophets to call it back to the true faith. The prophet was not simply a “foreteller”; he was also a “forth-teller” who announced God's judgment and exposed the sins of the people. Such a prophet was Elijah the Tishbite (native of the town Tishbeh), a “man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17), yet a man with great courage and faith. In these two chapters we see Elijah obeying two commandments from the Lord: “Go hide yourself,” and “Go show yourself.”

I. His Private Ministry: “Go Hide Yourself” (17)

Luke 4:25 tells us that the drought lasted for three years, but in 1 Kings 18:1 we find the contest on Mt. Carmel taking place “in the third year.” Apparently the drought had begun six months before Elijah suddenly appeared in Ahab's court to proclaim that the drought would last another three years. Lack of rain was often a punishment for the sins of the people (Deut. 11:13–17; see 2 Chron. 7:12–15). Ahab and his wicked heathen wife

Jezebel had led the people into Baal worship, a religion so vile we dare not describe it. The extra three years of drought was an answer to Elijah's prayer (James 5:17). Having delivered his message, the prophet retired from public ministry for three years, and during this time, the Lord graciously cared for him. The obedient servant can always depend on his master's faithful care. Note the three disciplines Elijah experienced:

A. The dry brook (vv. 2–7).

God told Elijah exactly where to go and what to do. See Prov. 3:5–6 and Ps. 37:3–6. God withdrew Elijah's ministry from Israel as another punishment for their sins (Ps. 74:7–9). The Lord permitted Elijah to drink of the brook, and He provided bread and meat daily, delivered to the prophet by ravens. The raven is the first bird named in the Bible (Gen. 8:7); it was an unclean bird, yet God used it to help His servant. Note that while Elijah was enjoying bread, water, and meat in the place of God's appointment, the 100 prophets hiding in the cave (18:4) had to settle for only bread and water. But there came a day when the brook dried up. Did this mean Elijah had sinned, or that he was out of God's will? No! It simply meant that God had another place for him, and it was a reminder for Elijah to trust the Lord and not the brook.

B. The depleted barrel (vv. 8–16).

God's Word always leads God's servant in the time of testing. But what strange commandments: "Go to Gentile territory where a widow will feed you." See Luke 4:22–26. "Zarephath" means "refining"; and God was certainly putting his servant through the furnace. Imagine Elijah's feelings when he discovered how poor the widow was, and that she was about to prepare her last meal. But God's commands are never wrong; for when the widow put God first (by obeying Elijah's commands), God provided for her, her son, and her guest. Note in v. 14 that Elijah honored the Lord God of Israel before this Gentile woman. All God asks is that we give Him what we have, and He will take care of the rest. He can feed thousands with only a few loaves and fishes.

C. The dead boy (vv. 17–24).

The dry brook was Elijah's test; the dead boy was the widow's test. Great blessings are usually followed by great testings. It is unfortunate that the widow's faith should fail as indicated in v. 18; see Ps. 119:75 and 1 Sam. 3:18 for the right way to react to disappointments and trials. "Give me the boy" is Elijah's answer, for he knew God could raise the dead boy to life again. This is the first recorded instance of resurrection in the Bible. The prophet took the corpse up to his private guestroom (an upper chamber on the roof) and there prayed to God for the boy's life. Notice that he agonized for the boy and even stretched his own body upon the dead body of the lad. What an example for us today who would seek to "raise the dead" spiritually. The miracle brought forth a testimony of faith from the woman.

II. His Public Ministry: "Go Show Yourself" (18)

Having been trained and tested in private, the prophet is now ready for his public ministry, so God commands him to face wicked King Ahab (see 16:33). We must admire Elijah's patience as he waited three years to preach one sermon.

A. *Elijah and Obadiah (vv. 1–16).*

Obadiah is a picture of the compromising believer, and his life is in direct contrast to that of Elijah. Elijah was serving the Lord publicly and without fear; Obadiah was serving Ahab (vv. 7–8) and trying to serve Jehovah secretly (vv. 3–4). Elijah was "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13); Obadiah was inside the court. Elijah knew the will of God; Obadiah did not know what was going on. While Elijah was laboring to save the nation, Obadiah was out looking for grass to save the horses and mules. When Elijah confronted Obadiah, the frightened servant did not trust the prophet. And note that Obadiah had to "brag" about his secret service to impress Elijah with his devotion (v. 13). Alas, we have too many Obadiahs these days and not enough Elijahs!

B. *Elijah and Baal (vv. 17–29).*

The prophet was not afraid to meet King Ahab; nor was he afraid to tell the king the truth. The wicked always blame the believers for the trouble in the world; they never think to blame their own sins. The contest was not between Elijah and Ahab. It was between God and Baal. The nation was "limping and tottering between two ways," and it was time to make a decision (see Ex. 32:26; Josh. 24:15; Matt. 12:30). Confronted with their sins, the people answered nothing (v. 21). Elijah asked for an impossible situation: the true God would answer with fire. Of course, he knew that God had often "answered with fire" in years past (Lev. 9:24; 1 Chron. 21:26). When the servant of God obeys and trusts the Word of God, he need not fear failure. Of course, Baal could not answer because Baal does not exist. Satan could have sent fire to deceive the people (Job 1:16; Rev. 13:13), but God would not permit this. Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal; "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. 2:4, nkjv). It is amazing to what wicked extremes the heathen will go trying to get their false gods to answer prayer. Look at Ps. 115. By the time of the evening sacrifice (three o'clock in the afternoon), it was obvious to all that Baal was a false god and could not answer.

C. *Elijah and Israel (vv. 30–46).*

Exposing the folly and sin of Baal worship was but half of Elijah's task for the day. More important was bringing the nation back to the true worship of Jehovah. Elijah was not out only to reform the people; he wanted to revive them too. First, he repaired the altar which the people had permitted to fall down. This is the first step toward blessing—repairing the personal altar of devotion, the family altar, the altar of sacrifice, and communion with God. By using twelve stones, Elijah reminded the people of their unity, because for many years the nation had been divided. To make it impossible for anyone to ignite the fire, Elijah had four barrels of water emptied on the wood and sacrifice three

times, which would mean twelve barrels of water. The prophet prayed a simple prayer of faith, and the fire of God consumed the wood, the sacrifice, the water, and the altar.

But Elijah still had work to do. To begin with, the false prophets (850 of them, v. 19) had to be slain; see Deut. 13:1–5. It is not enough for us to acknowledge that “the Lord, He is God” (v. 39); we must also hate that which is evil and remove it from our lives. Judgment always prepares the way for blessing.

Then the prophet told the king to get back home, for rain was on the way. Baal was the “rain god,” but he could neither send fire nor bring rain! As the king started on his way, Elijah began to pray for rain, just as three and a half years before he had prayed for drought (James 5:17). He knew how to watch and pray (Col. 4:2), and he knew how to persist in prayer until God sent the answer. God does not send the showers of blessing until sin has been judged. Before long, the sky was black with clouds, the wind began to blow, and the rains came. God gave Elijah superhuman strength to run ahead of the king as his chariot raced toward Jezreel.

What we do with God in private is far more important than what we do for God in public. Our hidden life prepares us for our public life. Unless we are willing to go through such disciplines as the dry brook, the depleted barrel, and the dead boy, we will never have the victories of Mt. Carmel. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31).

1 Kings 19

What a contrast we have here to the scene of victory in chapter 18! How often our greatest trials follow our greatest blessings. Here the man of faith gets his eyes off the Lord and becomes a man of fear; yet, in spite of Elijah's failures, God tenderly deals with His servant.

I. God Refreshes Elijah (19:1–8)

James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was “a man of like passions,” a man of clay subject to the same trials and failures as any believer. How strange that Elijah should face 850 angry prophets and not be afraid, and then run away from the threats of one woman! Certainly there was a physical cause to his failure: the great contest on Mt. Carmel had undoubtedly wearied Elijah and drained him emotionally. Christians would do well to take better care of their bodies, especially after times of intense ministry and sacrifice (cf. Mark 6:31). But the main cause for Elijah's failure was spiritual: he saw Jezebel and failed to see the Lord; he listened to Jezebel's threats and forgot to wait for God's promises. In every step he had taken, Elijah had waited for God's command (17:2, 8; 18:1, 36), but now his fear led to impatience, and impatience led to disobedience (Isa. 28:16). He was no longer risking his life for God's glory; rather, he was trying to save his life for his own sake.

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Ps. 37:23), but the steps of an unbelieving and disobedient prophet only led him into worse trouble. Elijah fled to

Judah, forgetting that Ahab's daughter was reigning there with Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16–18). He traveled more than eighty miles into greater danger. Wanting to be alone with his dejection, Elijah left his servant there and traveled into the wastelands. It is better for a man to walk with another, for "it is not good for a man to be alone." Loneliness and despondency usually go together. Physically and emotionally exhausted, Elijah lay down to sleep, and his "bedtime prayer" was, "Take away my life!" Moses had prayed this prayer at a time of great discouragement (Num. 11:15), and so had Jonah (Jonah 4:3). Elijah had his eyes on himself and what he had done (and not done), instead of looking to the Lord.

How graciously God refreshed His servant. The Lord knew that Elijah needed food and rest, as well as spiritual quickening. Elijah ate the meal and then went back to sleep. We see no evidence of repentance or confession of sin; it seems as though he had given up. So, God fed him the second time, and this time Elijah got up and started his journey again. The hand of the Lord guided him to Mt. Horeb, where Moses had received his call from God (Ex. 3) and where the Law had been given. It is encouraging to know that even when the child of God is backslidden and discouraged, God cares for him in grace.

II. God Rebukes Elijah (19:9–18)

The word of God came to him in the cave (v. 9). "What are you doing here?" is a good question to ask ourselves at any time. Elijah's answer again revealed the discouragement of his heart; he felt as though he were the only one in Israel still faithful to the Lord. Instead of confessing his pride and desire for self-vindication, Elijah continued to argue his case with the Lord, so the Lord had to use other means to teach him and to bring him to the place of surrender.

Why did the Lord bring the wind, earthquake, and fire? For one thing, He was teaching his distraught prophet that He has many tools available to do His bidding. God does not lack for obedient servants in all nature (Ps. 148:1–10); yet men, made in the image of God, will not obey Him. What a rebuke this must have been to the backslidden prophet. Furthermore, when the "still small voice" came after the storm, God was showing Elijah that His work is not always done in a big, noisy way. The miracles on Mt. Carmel were wonderful, but the lasting spiritual work in the nation must be accomplished by the Word of God quietly working in the hearts of the people. Elijah wanted something accomplished that was loud and big, but sometimes God prefers that which is still and small. It is not for us to dictate to God what methods He should use. It is our duty only to trust and obey.

"Go, return!" was God's word to the prophet after he tried to defend himself the second time (vv. 14–15). God would give him another chance to serve by anointing Hazael as the new king of Syria, Jehu as the new king of Israel, and Elisha as the new prophet. God was saying to Elijah: "Stop complaining and grieving over your seeming failures. Get back to work." This is certainly good counsel.

III. God Replaces Elijah (19:19–21)

It is wonderful the way God encouraged Elijah by assuring him that there were 7,000 faithful believers yet in the land. We wonder where these believers were when Elijah stood alone on Mt. Carmel. We never know how much good our work has done, but God knows, and that is all that matters. Elijah's ministry was drawing to a close; he was to select his successor and prepare him for the continued work of proclaiming the Word of God. This too was an encouragement to Elijah, for now he knew that his work would continue even after his departure. There is a practical lesson for us here: if we will but wait for the Lord's message from His Word, and will not run away, He will give us the encouragement we need.

Elijah's first step was to appoint Elisha as his successor. This he did by casting his mantle (or cloak) about Elisha as Elisha was plowing in the fields. This act symbolized the fact that Elisha would now be a prophet with the same power and authority of Elijah. Elisha desired to bid farewell to his loved ones, and this was permitted, although in most homes such farewells would have taken several days to complete. See Luke 9:61–62. When God has called us, it is important that we follow immediately and not put others ahead of him.

The fact that Elisha slew the oxen and used the tools for his firewood indicates how definitely he was breaking with the past. He was "burning his bridges behind him" so to speak. The feast involved the friends of the neighborhood as well as Elisha's family; they all came to wish him well in his new calling. But once the feast was over, Elisha arose and followed his master and ministered to him. Elijah did not anoint Hazael; Elisha did this later on (2 Kings 8:8–15). It was also Elisha who anointed Jehu (2 Kings 9:1–10). However, inasmuch as Elijah anointed Elisha, he indirectly anointed the others.

The fact that Elisha was assisted in the plowing by eleven other men (probably his father's servants, v. 19) suggests that Elisha came from a wealthy family. Have you noticed in the Bible that God usually calls people who are busy? Moses was caring for the sheep; Gideon was threshing wheat; Peter, James, and John were busy in their fishing business; Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king. God has no place for lazy people. For Elisha to give up his family and home, and the wealth he would have inherited, was certainly an act of faith and surrender. Elisha stayed in the background until Elijah's ascension (2 Kings 2), at which time he took up the ministry. Elijah's ministry had been that of "the earthquake, the fire, and the wind"; but Elisha would minister as "the still small voice." Of course, there would be judgments in his ministry as well, since sin must always be judged.

This experience in the life of Elijah is a good warning against despondency and discouragement. Just about the time we feel we have accomplished nothing, God reveals that He has used us more than we realized. It is a dangerous thing to think we are the only ones holding to the truth. Of course, it would have been better had the 7,000 "hidden ones" taken their stand with the prophet. It is likely that Elijah's bitter attitude shortened his ministry. The best solution for discouragement is Isa. 40:31—waiting upon the Lord.

1 Kings 20–22

Ahab has gone down in history as the wickedest king Israel ever had (see 1 Kings 16:29–33 and 21:25–26). His heathen wife, Jezebel, ruled him from behind the scenes and saw to it that Baal worship was made the official religion of the land. Ahab had “sold himself to work evil” (21:20, 25). In these chapters we see his sins and his final judgment from God.

I. Ahab's Defense (20)

A. *The challenge (vv. 1–12).*

The king of Syria brought his vast army, assisted by thirty-two other kings, and threatened Samaria. His messengers asked for the king's wealth and family, and Ahab agreed to obey. But when they asked for the privilege of looting his palace, Ahab refused. Ahab tried to put up a brave front, but he knew the end was near. Had he been walking with the Lord, he could have turned his problem over to Him, but Baal was unable to deliver the king.

B. *The conquest (vv. 13–30).*

The Lord stepped in to save the king and his people, not because Ahab deserved it (for he surely did not), but because God had a cause against Syria and the time of her judgment had arrived. The anonymous prophet gave the frightened king the message (v. 13), and Ahab's immediate answer in v. 14 indicates that he believed the message. Ahab was not a man of faith but was clutching to the last hope offered him. He immediately obeyed the Word of the Lord and sent his small army out to face the vast armies of the Syrians. God gave the Israelites a great victory; then the king himself went out to take charge of the battle and finish it in great glory. The Syrians concluded that Israel's God could win victories in the hills but not in the plains and valleys, so they planned another invasion for the following year. Once again, God in His mercy sent a message of hope to the evil king, and the Lord gave Israel another tremendous victory.

C. *The compromise (vv. 31–43).*

What Satan could not accomplish with force, he accomplished with guile; for he led Ahab into a wicked compromise with the enemy. The enemy king and his servants pretended to repent and to humble themselves before proud Ahab, and the vain king fell for the trick. “He is my brother!” he said of Ben-hadad, his enemy. The two kings made a covenant of peace, and Ahab sent Ben-hadad away alive, in direct disobedience to the Word of God. The anonymous prophet, his face bruised by his friend, waited to see the king and to announce God's verdict of judgment. By telling the story of the escaped prisoner, the prophet was able to get King Ahab to confess his own guilt and pass his own sentence. (Nathan used this same approach with David, 2 Sam. 12). Ahab himself would die along with many of his people because he refused to follow God's directions.

Please keep in mind that God delivered Israel from her enemies wholly because of His grace; the king did not deserve it, neither did the people. God had already decreed that Ahab would be slain, not by Ben-hadad, but by Hazeel (19:15–17), so the time was not right. God will perform His Word, and He is not in a great hurry to accomplish His will, for in mercy He gives men time to repent.

II. Ahab's Deception (21)

A. The sin (vv. 1–16).

The heart of the wicked is constantly lusting after things, and even the king is not satisfied in his empty idolatry. Now he covets his neighbor's vineyard and "pouts" because his neighbor will not disobey the Word of God and give it to him (see Lev. 25:23 and Num. 36:7). Queen Jezebel solves the problem by bringing false witness against Naboth, forging letters in her husband's name, and hiding the entire undertaking under the disguise of a religious fast. Naboth, an innocent man, was stoned to death just to satisfy the lust of King Ahab and his Baal-worshiping wife. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

B. The judgment (vv. 17–29).

God knew all that had happened, and He sent Elijah to settle matters with the wicked king. "Have you found me?" asked Ahab, reminding us of Num. 32:23—"Be sure your sins will find you out." Elijah announced doom to the household of Ahab, and in a short time his prophecies came true (2 Kings 9–10). Ahab had "sold himself to do wickedness" and therefore he had to accept the wages he had earned. The king humbled himself before the Lord (whether sincerely or hypocritically, we do not know), so the Lord postponed the punishment.

III. Ahab's Defeat and Death (22)

Ahab did not defeat Syria when he had the opportunity, so the enemy came back to attack him and finally kill him. Similarly, King Saul had failed to destroy the Amalekites, and one of their young men killed him. Since Ahab's daughter was married to King Jehoshaphat's son

(2 Chron. 21:1–7), his alliance with Ahab for this battle was not surprising. Note that King Jehoshaphat wanted to know God's will about the battle, so they inquired of the prophets that ministered to Ahab. Of course, the heathen prophets in their blindness catered to the desires of the two kings and promised victory. But their promises sounded hollow; Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of the Lord. Micaiah was the only one available (and he was a prisoner), so they sent for him and asked for his message. In holy sarcasm, Micaiah echoed the promises of the heathen prophets, but the king knew he was pretending. Is it not strange the way the lost want to hear from the Lord, but yet they do not want to hear the truth and obey it? Micaiah told the truth: the heathen prophets were being used to tell lies, for King Ahab would die in the battle and

Israel would be scattered. What did the faithful prophet receive for his ministry? Bread and water in the prison. But he had been faithful to the Lord, and that is all that counted.

Ahab thought to avoid death by disguising himself, for the soldiers would seek to kill the king first. (Paul follows this idea in Eph. 6 when he cautions us not to fight against flesh and blood, but to battle against Satan through prayer and the Word. Once you have defeated the king, the rest is easy.) Jehoshaphat went into battle in his royal robes, and the Lord protected him, but Ahab in his disguise was slain. Verse 34 indicates that the soldier shot the arrow without even aiming, yet the Lord directed it to its proper target. When the judgment of the Lord comes, no devices or disguises will protect the sinner. Israel lost the battle and also lost her king.

The king was buried at Samaria; the bloody chariot was washed at the pool; and the dogs licked the blood, as God had promised (20:42 and 21:19). Ahab's wicked son Ahaziah reigned in his place, and the nation continued in its sinful course.

King Ahab was a great soldier who could have led Israel to victory and peace had he followed the Lord in truth, but his alliance with Baal worship, and the evil influence of his godless wife, brought him defeat. Ahab experienced the goodness of God in the military victories, yet refused to submit himself to the Law. He humbled himself outwardly when judgment was announced, and even then received a "stay of execution," but his shallow repentance did not last. The three and a half years of drought and the great demonstration of God's glory on Mt. Carmel did not soften his hard heart. He had "sold himself to do evil," and he would not repent. He heard one of the greatest prophets of OT history, Elijah, and yet did not repent. His twenty-two years of reign only led the nation farther away from God.