



1 KINGS

1&2 KINGS

Introduction to the Book of Kings

Author

The author is unknown. But many people believe it could have been written by Jeremiah.

Date and Place:

Kings was likely written between 560 and 540 BC.

See the "When and where was it written?" section for more information.

Original Audience

The original audience was Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

Purpose

Kings was written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed.

Anchor Verse

"If you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

—1 Kings 3:14

Where are we?

After Joshua conquered the land of Canaan, Israel quickly fractured. The tribes of Israel were mostly disconnected from one another and were vulnerable to attack from the nations bordering Israel. There was no central or unified government until King David. He united the fractured tribes of Israel and made preparations for a permanent temple to be built in Jerusalem, centralizing the worship of God and His Word.

The book of Kings tells us the story of what happened to God's people after David's death. It's a sad story where God's people (as before) begin to trust the power of governments, political allies, and idols to protect and provided for them more than God.

Who wrote the Book of Kings?

The author is unknown. But many people believe it could have been written by Jeremiah. Whoever wrote the book was very intelligent, carefully structuring the book and selecting facts from Israel's history. The author had significant access to books of kingly records and was very familiar with the first five books of the Bible.

When and where was it written?

Kings was likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries. Jeremiah, who may have written Kings, lived just north of Jerusalem. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Israel's last kings, most notably King Josiah. He would have had a front row seat to the successes and failures of Judah's final years.

To whom was it written?

The original audience was Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

Why was it written?

God made a covenant with Israel. God promised to always protect and provide for His people, provided that they would follow and obey him. To help them, God gave Israel political leaders (like David), institutions (like the temple), laws (the Torah), and prophets (like Elisha and Elijah) so that they could better and more faithfully obey God. However, Israel abandoned all of these things in favor of trusting political alliances with and the gods of other nations. As a result God, removed His protection and provision, and Israel died in exile. ~~God was no longer bound to the covenant He made.~~ But the book of Kings was written to convince Israel that God would bring them back to life, even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had all died or been destroyed. God would be still be faithful despite their broken covenant. We will see a lot of different kings throughout the book and non of them will be the kind of King that Israel ultimately needs. Each time we see another flawed leader we are aware that we need God to provide a different kind of king – we need King Jesus.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings interpreted Hebrew history in light of Old Testament covenant theology, finding the “failure” was due not to God but to God’s people who did not uphold their part in the covenant. God is faithful to us in His covenant with us, even when we are not.

Why does this matter for our students?

1) Resurrection Is the Hope of the Old Testament.

Too often it’s easy to see the Old and New Testaments as totally different phases of God’s relationship with humanity. The false story goes something like: “In the Old Testament, God was harsh and judgmental, eventually sending His people into exile for their failures. But in the New Testament, Jesus shows us God’s love and something new: life from the dead.” But in the book of Kings we see God’s love and life from the dead are just as present in the Old Testament. For all of your students who are confused or feel jolted by the differences between the Old and New Testaments, the book of Kings is for them.

2) A Possible Antidote to Deconstruction.

Many of our friends are “deconstructing.” Generally that’s because a spiritual institution or leader failed them greatly. This type of failure is all over the book of Kings. Even supposedly good kings like David, or things like the temple failed to live up to its ideal. And in once sense, Scripture “deconstructs” these failed institutions; Israel does go into exile, for example. But Scripture also holds out hope for the rebuilding and reformation of God’s people. What this teaches our teenagers is that Scripture is very aware of the flaws of leaders and institutions and has, for centuries, offered correction and critique. Churches and leaders are held responsible for their failures, if not in this life, then by God. We shouldn’t abandon what God has been working to correct, but join Him in His project of mercy and reformation.

3) God Is Astoundingly Merciful.

We all, and perhaps especially our students, need to be reminded of God’s mercy. While we all make mistakes and sin frequently, some of the most egregious, regrettable, and just plain dumb choices are made as teenagers. In fact, many of Israel’s kings are teenagers (or younger!) when they take the throne. But even if it’s not true that most mistakes are made in our teens, teens often *feel* that their mistakes will negatively and irreparably impact the rest of their lives. But the book of Kings shows us that God is merciful to even the most hard-hearted and sinful people and He always gives second chances.

What are the main themes?

- **Theme 1: God expects His people to be faithful.** It's hard to miss from the earliest pages of Kings that God expects His people to obey His laws and to faithfully worship Him alone. They are the dying words David gives to his son Solomon and, by extension, every king after him (1 Kings 2:2). Almost without fail, once a king abandons faithfulness to God, the country takes a nosedive. God expects His people to be faithful, and when they fail to be faithful, their nation collapses.
- **Theme 2: God's Astounding Mercy.** While God expects faithfulness from His people God is also extremely, almost offensively, merciful to the faithless. To wicked kings who sacrifice their own children, the fuse on God's anger is incredibly long. Frequently God offers second and third chances to people we would deem beyond redemption. In fact, He gives His people dozens of chances over hundreds of years of failure and apostasy to return to Him. And even when they don't, God is still merciful. The last story in the book of Kings tells us that Jehoiachin, the man responsible for Israel's fall into exile, is elevated and seated at a king's table. This is obviously good news, no matter how bad a person is, no matter how sordid a history becomes, God never abandons His people to His anger and justice.
- **Theme 3: Death Comes Before Life.** Perhaps the most counterintuitive theme in Kings is that death must come before new life. Kings is written to a people in exile—they're essentially "dead" already. They need the hope that some sort of resurrection is possible, and perhaps, even necessary. The books of 1 and 2 Kings are the first and only Old Testament books to include resurrections from the dead. And over and over again we see the "deaths" of institutions (like the monarchy and the temple), of leaders, and even of God's law. Nothing in all Israel could save them from dying, but that's precisely the point. Israel has died so that they would know that God is the God who can bring life from the dead.

Outline:

Lesson 1: Who Gets the Throne? (1 Kings 1)

- The book of Kings teaches us that even in the midst of death and danger, God will remain true to His promises and provide His people with a king.

Lesson 2: Solomon Takes the Throne (1 Kings 2)

- As King David dies, he hopes Solomon will be the King who will recreate the world, defeat Israel's enemies, and establish God's final kingdom.

Lesson 3: Solomon Asks for Wisdom (1 Kings 3)

- When a wise king sits on the throne, his nation experiences justice and prosperity. Ultimately, the only king who does this perfectly is Jesus.

Lesson 4: Solomon Builds a Kingdom (1 Kings 4-5)

- Solomon is the high point of Israel's history. If anyone could bring God's people back to the Garden of Eden, it seems that it would be him.

Lesson 5: Solomon Builds the Temple (1 Kings 6-7)

- The temple is a miniature model of the Garden of Eden and a picture of how God and humanity are meant to live together.

Lesson 6: Solomon's Temple Is Dedicated (1 Kings 8)

- Sacrifices are not the point of the temple. The temple was a physical symbol of God's presence with His people.

Lesson 7: The Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 9-10)

- God still uses Solomon and Israel to bless the world, despite their growing failures; this should remind us that God is more powerful than our failures.

Lesson 8: Solomon's 700 Wives (1 Kings 11)

- Judgment for the sins of Israel's kings is not God's last word to Israel; His promise to David is. Soon there will be a son of David on the throne to lead His people into life once again.

Lesson 9: Israel's Civil War (1 Kings 12-14)

- Idolatry leads to suffering, death, and slavery because it prevents us from fellowship with the God, for whom we were made to love, serve, and worship.

Lesson 10: Idols Are Just Boring (1 Kings 15-16)

- Idolatry happens when we look to something other than God to give us what only He can. Not only is it boring and repetitive, it leads to spiritual death and separation from God.

Lesson 11: The Power of God's Word (1 Kings 17-18)

- God will always find a way to prove to people who don't believe in him that He is worth worshiping.

Lesson 12: The Insanity of Saying "No" To Mercy (1 Kings 19-20)

- God is so committed to his people that he will extend second, third, and even 20th chances if it means that one of his people might return to him.

Lesson 13: Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21-22)

- Obedience and humility to God's Word brings us closer God.

Lesson 14: Elisha Succeeds Elijah (2 Kings 1-2)

- Elisha succeeds Elijah and is given a double dose of God's Spirit, and we are successors of Jesus filled with his Spirit.

Lesson 15: God, Our Provider (2 Kings 3)

- God can be trusted to provide for His people. Jesus' work on the cross shows us that God is the most trustworthy being there is.

Lesson 16: Elisha Brings Life to Dire Situations (2 Kings 4)

- God's presence reverses death and gives life.

Lesson 17: Naaman's Leprosy (2 Kings 5)

- Acknowledging God as the creator and sustainer of life brings us to a place of humility.

Lesson 18: God's Protection (2 Kings 6:1-23)

- God's miracles in the world are good news to the humble but warnings to the proud. Elisha sees God's invisible, spiritual protection.

Lesson 19: Ahab's Dynasty Gets More Mercy (2 Kings 6:24-8:6)

- Relief and justice are found in God's words in the mouth of God's prophet.

Lesson 20: Jehu: Right Actions, Wrong Heart (2 Kings 8:7-10:35)

- God is finally fulfilling a prophecy he made to Elijah. Jehu is the first and only northern king to do "right" in God's eyes. However, it is possible to act "rightly" without ever having a relationship with God.

Lesson 21: Two Kings Named Joash (2 Kings 11-13)

- God is determined to give life to dying Israel, even when God's people don't deserve it. This is who God has always been. Which means, even if we are sinful and proud, God is willing to save us.

Lesson 22: The Problem of Mercy (2 Kings 14:1-15:7)

- The good news of the gospel is that God is merciful to people who do not deserve it. God saves abusers, murderers, and racists, which means there is hope for sinners like us, too.

Lesson 23: Israel's Idolatry, God's Redemption (2 Kings 15:8-17:41)

- Israel's idolatry and their refusal to listen to God's prophets have caused their exile. When we don't obey God's laws in the Bible, it will always cause us isolation, separation, and pain.

Lesson 24: King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20)

- God saves humble kings and destroys proud generals. Similarly, God judges us according to our pride. But we can show our humility by bowing to God's Son and the true King of the world, Jesus.

Lesson 25: Josiah: The Last Good King (2 Kings 21:1-23:30)

- Josiah's obedience can only delay Judah's destruction, but if Judah does die there is hope God can raise them from the dead. Ultimately, we are not saved by our good works, but by God's grace and power to raise his people up.

Lesson 26: Judah in Exile (2 Kings 23:31-25:30)

- There is no obedience, institution, or leader that will save us. God's mercy and grace to raise us from the dead is our only hope.

1 KINGS 1

Who Gets the Throne?

Memory Verse

"I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place."

1 Kings 1:30

Real-life Problems

The Affairs of Kings—Most of us will never lead a country. Our fate will be wrapped up in the decisions of people far more powerful than we are. Sometimes our nation's leaders are bad, and sometimes they're passive, or oblivious to the needs of the people. When our country is in chaos, it can be hard to know if God cares about the affairs of our leaders, whether He will hold them accountable, and how we can live in a world so outside of our control.

The Good News

The book of 1 Kings teaches us that both in life and even after death, God will remain true to His promises and provide His people with a king—King Jesus.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: One of the most important themes in 1 Kings is that death comes before life. Name some things that must first die, in order to live again.

Idea #2: Can you name a time when your older brother or sister took something that was yours? In that moment, how did that feel? How did you react?

Idea #3: Why do you think the leader of a country is important? Why is it a big deal when that leader dies or is replaced by someone else?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. [God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.](#)

What's going on?

REMIND

1 Kings was written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. With every flawed king that we see in this book, we'll be reminded that we should be looking for the ultimate king to come: King Jesus.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) That death must come before new life.
- 2) We see this as David approaches his own death as a passive man and a shell of his former self.
- 3) But as David dies, a new, active, and merciful king takes David's place—his son, Solomon.

Read

Read **1 Kings 1** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What is King David's physical state at the beginning of the book (1 Kings 1:1-4)?

David is old and weakening. He's under the continual care of a beautiful young woman named Abishag.

2) Who is Adonijah and what does he attempt to do (vv. 5-9)?

Adonijah is David's son (2 Sam 3:1-4). Under normal circumstances he would be heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. But David has promised that the throne belongs to his younger son, Solomon (1 Kings 1:17). Adonijah attempts a coup, getting David's general, Joab, and priest, Abiathar, to join him. Secretly and outside the city, he offers sacrifices and tries to crown himself king.

3) Who tries to stop Adonijah's rebellion (vv. 11-14)?

The prophet Nathan tells David's wife Bathsheba about Adonijah's rebellion. Together they come up with a plan to stop Adonijah.

4) How do Bathsheba and Nathan convince David to act (vv. 15-27)?

Bathsheba and Nathan enter his chambers one at a time to create a sense of urgency. Bathsheba reminds David of his promise to place Solomon on the throne. She tells David that Adonijah has become king against his wishes and plans to kill them soon. Nathan then informs David of Adonijah's coronation ceremony and asks David to act decisively.

5) What does David do in response (vv. 28-40)?

David swears to place Solomon on the throne. He calls those still loyal to him to hold a public ceremony. He tells them to parade Solomon through Jerusalem on King David's mule, to blow trumpets and to proclaim him as king. Then they are to place Solomon on the throne.

6) What happens to Adonijah's rebellion? Specifically, where does Adonijah end up (vv. 41-50)?

Everyone abandons Adonijah, who goes into the temple and "clings to the horns of the altar." According to the book of Numbers, the altar was a place where people guilty of manslaughter could be granted protection and asylum (Num 35:25). Adonijah hopes Solomon will mercifully apply that law to his situation.

7) What is Solomon's first act as king (1 Kings 1:51-53)?

Solomon grants mercy to his rebellious brother and does not punish him for his rebellion.

B. SO WHAT?

1) What kind of king is David portrayed as in the opening chapter of 1 Kings?

David is in decline. He has held onto power, but does not use it. He refuses to ever discipline his sons. He has not made clear succession plans. He is unaware of a rebellion forming. He's close to death and unable to take care of himself. And it's only after Bathsheba and Nathan force his hand that David finally takes action.

2) Why are David's indifference and his approaching death so problematic?

Politically, it places Israel in a dangerous position. There is infighting among the most powerful men in the land, and factions are forming. Jesus would later say that a "kingdom divided against itself can't stand," and this rebellion is a bad omen for Israel as a nation. But God promised that David's dynasty would last forever, and that one of his sons would bring peace to all people and rule the world forever (2 Sam 7:1-17). If David dies without appointing a successor, it's unclear how God's promises will come to pass.

3) Why is it significant that Solomon's first act as king is to show his rebellious brother mercy?

This shows us that Solomon is a king like his father, at least his father in his earlier years. There is a consistency in character between these generations, and that bodes well for Israel. It also prepares us to understand Solomon as a wise king. Wisdom, in part, means being able to know and apply old laws to new situations. Solomon does this for Adonijah. But the mercy of Solomon also gives us a glimpse at the heart of God. God is a King like Solomon, willing to pardon those guilty of the worst crimes against the kingdom.

A Change in the Monarchy

After nearly 70 years in power, Queen Elizabeth died at the age of 96. She was a symbol of unity, stability, and constancy in an era of massive technological, political, and social change. Her son, King Charles III, has succeeded her. Almost immediately people feared that the Queen's death might bring about significant changes to aspects of British culture. The death of a leader almost always throws into question previous realities, but even when kings, kingdoms, and rulers change, God is always in control, and no leader rises or falls outside of His plans. We can always trust God to direct the paths of nations for His people's good and His glory.

C. NOW WHAT?**1) In what ways should we be unlike King David?**

The portrait of David in 1 Kings is a continuation of his story from 2 Samuel. After sleeping with Bathsheba and having her husband, Uriah, sent to his death, David loses his moral courage and seems unable to actively lead his kingdom. The story of David is a cautionary tale about the lingering power of sin and pride. It shows us the danger of becoming complacent about following God, and it encourages us to actively pursue obedience to Scripture, to surround ourselves with wise counselors, and to remind ourselves daily of what God has promised.

2) If the message of the book of 1 Kings is in part to teach us that death comes before life, how can we embrace "death" so that we can receive life?

Jesus told us that we must die to ourselves and pick up our crosses if we want to live. Many times we focus our attention on avoiding pain, suffering, and discomfort. But God has organized both the world (think of seeds falling to the ground and coming to life in the spring) and eternal life to come only through death. We should start ([John 12:24-25](#)) cultivating a willingness to follow God, particularly when it's difficult. There might be something in your life God is calling you to put to death: maybe an addiction, too much time on social media, a gossiping habit, or pridefulness. Remember that God always brings life out of death, so while it will be hard to put behind us things we might enjoy or rely on, doing so means that an abundant life is right around the corner.

[Letting go of your old life in order to experience new life in Christ by following Him. **Matthew 16:24.**](#)

3) In what ways is the kingship of Jesus like the kingship of Solomon?

Jesus is a descendant of David and is the fulfillment of God's promise to make David's dynasty last forever (Mt 1:1). Solomon is anointed with oil, while Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus also rides into Jerusalem on a donkey in the context of political drama and betrayal (Mk 11:7). Solomon's father, David, and Jesus' Father, God, both foil the plots of sinful men to establish their sons on thrones (Acts 2:24). Like Solomon, Jesus is merciful, asking God to forgive His executioners (Lk 23:34). And both Solomon and Jesus are anything but passive; they are ready and willing to do justice on behalf of their people.

Main takeaway

The book of 1 Kings teaches us that even in the midst of death and danger, God will remain true to His promises and provide His people with a true King: King Jesus.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

The book of 1 Kings teaches us that both in life and even after death, God remains true to His promises and provides His people with a King.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who keeps His promises despite the plans of rebels and the weakness of kings. Help us to see Jesus as the one who forgives rebels of their treason and stands in heaven, willing and ready to judge with fairness and equity. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thank you, Jesus, for not only forgiving the rebels of their treason, but also for forgiving me of my sin and giving me new life. Each morning, your mercies are new.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Where do you need God to provide for you today? How can you remember his promises?
- 2) David's passivity was, in part, born out of his past sin. Perhaps he felt disqualified to judge others, since he had messed up so badly. Do you feel disqualified, unworthy, or broken by your past sins? What would Jesus say to you?
- 3) Can you name three areas of your life where you have been passive—accepting whatever happens without responding or resisting—like David in his old age? What would it look like to be more proactive?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) In a sentence, what's the book of 1 Kings about?
- 2) A lot of tension in the book of 1 Kings comes from parents and children being at odds with one another. What are some ways your family might be able to break that pattern?

1 KINGS 2

Solomon Takes the Throne

Memory Verse

“Observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to Him, and keep His decrees and commands, His laws and regulations, as written in the law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go.”

1 Kings 2:3

Real-life Problems

Instability—While none of us will ever be given a kingdom, we are all part of nations where power is transferred from one party or person to another. This can cause instability, fear, chaos, and even death.

The Good News

Jesus is a more merciful King than Solomon. He does not demand that we be punished for our own treasons and sins. Instead, He dies in our place. Jesus sheds His blood for the treachery and slander we’ve committed against His throne, and gives us life in His kingdom instead. When our world feels unstable, we can trust Jesus is sitting on the throne and He is the one holding all things together.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Do you prefer to be in control or do you prefer someone else being in control? Tell us why.

Idea #2: David is about to die and speaks to his son for the last time in today’s passage. Why do you think someone’s last words have so much power?

Idea #3: If you could have the skills and attitude of any biblical character, who would it be and why?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Why did He die for your sins?

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What's going on?

REMINDE

The book of 1 Kings teaches us that even amidst death and despair, God will remain true to His promises and provide His people with a true King—King Jesus.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) David has high hopes for his son and successor, Solomon.
- 2) For a time, Solomon obeys God and His commands.
- 3) Jesus is a more merciful king than Solomon. He does not demand that we be punished for our own treasons and sins. Instead, He dies in our place.

Read

Read **1 Kings 2** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) Just like God created the world in seven days, David tells Solomon to begin his kingdom with seven pieces of advice. What are they (1 Kings 2:1-4)?

David tells Solomon to 1) be strong, 2) act like a man, 3) observe what God requires, 4) walk in obedience to Him, 5) keep His decrees and commands, 6) watch how his descendants live, and 7) walk faithfully before God.

2) Before David dies he tells Solomon to kill two people and honor one person. Who are they (vv. 5-12)?

David wants Solomon to kill Joab and Shimei, and honor Barzillai. Joab was David's general, who committed murder but was never convicted for it (v. 5). Shimei, a loyalist to Saul, slandered David but was never brought to justice (v. 8). And Barzillai was loyal to David during his son's rebellion (v. 7).

3) Solomon's older brother, Adonijah, tries one more time to seize power for himself. How does he do it (vv. 13-21)?

Adonijah tries to trick Solomon's mother into giving him Abishag as a wife. This is a cunning political move. If Adonijah can marry the woman David shared a bed with, it could be interpreted as a symbol of his power over David's dynasty. Without realizing this, Solomon's mother asks her son to grant this request.

4) What does Solomon do in response to Adonijah's plot (vv. 22-27)?

Realizing Adonijah's treachery, Solomon orders his general to kill Adonijah. He also removes the priest, Abiathar, from his position in the temple for helping Adonijah.

5) Does Solomon carry out his father's last wishes (vv. 28-46)?

Yes. Solomon kills Joab and honors Barzillai. Shimei is placed under house arrest and warned that, if he ever leaves, his death will be his own fault. Eventually, Shimei leaves his home and Solomon executes him, just as he promised.

B. SO WHAT? The number seven in the Bible represents completion. If creation was complete in seven days, what do you think is the significance of David giving Solomon seven commands?

1) What's the significance of David giving Solomon seven commands? Think back to Genesis 1-3.

The number seven should make us think of the seven days of creation from Genesis 1-3.

2) Why do you think that David makes reference to the stories of Joshua and Moses, and the promises God made to him?

Moses was the leader of the Hebrew people when they became a nation for the first time. When Moses died, Joshua became the leader as they reclaimed their ancestral lands. God promised David that his son would reign on a throne forever. David has *extremely* high hopes for his son, and all these references make it clear that he expects Solomon to live up to them.

3) Why does David tell Solomon to kill two people and honor another?

1 Kings 2:12 and 2:46 mention the kingdom being “established” in Solomon’s hands after these events. Apparently, David saw these actions as necessary to secure the kingdom for his son. Joab’s murders, Shimei’s slander, and David’s debt to Barzillai all needed to be repaid.

4) Do you think it was right for David to order the deaths of Joab and Shimei? Was it right for Solomon to kill Adonijah for his second attempt at rebellion? Why or why not?

Allow time for discussion. These questions are not easily answered, even among scholars. Some see these as brutal political revenge. Others see this as Solomon acting wisely and doing justice. Soon Solomon will be called the wisest king in the world, but we’ll also be told that Solomon used that wisdom to amass over 700 wives. Solomon is a complicated character; let him be so to your students.

Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great was one of the most influential figures in history. He exported Greek ideas and culture throughout the ancient world; he founded more than 20 cities; and he was virtually unbeatable in battle. He’s even mentioned in the book of Daniel (Dan 8:5-8, 21-22)! But he died at age 32 without clearly naming his successor. His kingdom was divided among his four generals, who almost immediately went to war with each other. Greece never regained its prominence after that. Without a clear and gifted successor, kingdoms often fall.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) We will see that Solomon never met the expectations of his father. He was not a new Adam, Joshua, or Moses. He did not receive what God promised David. How do these biblical characters help us fill out who Jesus should be to us?

Jesus is the son (direct descendant) of David, the eternal King that Solomon never was. He is a new, obedient Adam who is making us and this world into His new creation. He is a new Joshua conquering our enemies. And Jesus is a new Moses who makes us into a new people of God.

2) Solomon was a good king. What does Solomon’s rule tell us about what Jesus’ rule as King might be like?

Like Solomon, Jesus’ rule will be one characterized by justice and mercy. Those in power, such as Joab, will not get away with murder. Those who plot to take power from God’s king, like Adonijah, will be judged. And people who slander and belittle God and His people, like Shimei, even though they don’t deserve it, will be given mercy.

3) Solomon wasn’t a perfect king. How is Jesus’ rule different than Solomon’s rule?

Jesus’ rule is different because even though we might be traitors like Adonijah, murderers like Joab, or slanderers like Shimei, we aren’t punished for our treasons. Instead Jesus dies in our place. His blood is shed for the treachery and slander we’ve committed against His throne. And since our sin has been wiped away, we are free to live in God’s kingdom forever without fear of being banished.

Main takeaway

As King David dies, he expresses hope Solomon will be the king who will recreate the world, defeat Israel's enemies, and establish God's final kingdom. We know that Solomon does not fulfill this role. Jesus is the eternal, merciful King that Solomon never was.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus is a more merciful king than Solomon. He does not demand that we be punished for our own treasons and sins. Instead, He dies in our place. Jesus sheds His blood for the treachery and slander we've committed against His throne, and He gives us life in His kingdom instead.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see that God has established an eternal kingdom of justice and mercy. And may we see Jesus as the true Son of David who has been chosen by His Father to reign and make a new people, bring about a new creation, and defeat the enemies of God's people. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Write five reasons Solomon's actions can be considered wise.
- 2) Write five reasons Solomon's actions can be considered unwise or wrong.
- 3) How can 1 Kings 2 speak to people who are experiencing political instability? Where do you tend to turn when life feels chaotic or out of control?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What kinds of expectations did David have for Solomon?
- 2) Why didn't Solomon live up to his father's expectations?
- 3) How is Jesus everything David hoped Solomon would be?

1 KINGS 3

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Memory Verse

"When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice."

1 Kings 3:28

Real-life Problems

Choosing Wisely—We're often presented with choices where it's not clear what the right thing to do is. In those instances we often default to what seems right in the moment, and we have to deal with the fallout. Maybe our choice didn't account for all the factors, or our friend's feelings, or our parent's expectations, or what a future employer might think. Our lives are full of almost impossible-to-predict outcomes based on small choices we make. Sometimes, those choices haunt us for the rest of our lives.

The Good News

Jesus is a wise King. He perfectly enacts justice on behalf of the innocent. And He is able to see every outcome, He knows every factor, and He desires that our lives turn out for our ultimate good and His glory.

He desires for us, as His children, to obey Him and bring Him glory.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: If you could ask God for any one thing, what would it be?

Idea #2: Have you ever been (or are you currently) in a situation where you needed to choose between two very different options? What were they? How did you decide what to do?

Idea #3: From everything you know about Solomon, was he a good king or a bad king? Why?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. **God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.**

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we read that King David died. Shortly before his death, he passed on the kingdom to his son, Solomon, and he expressed hopes that Solomon would be the king who will recreate the world, defeat Israel's enemies, and establish God's final kingdom.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) God gave Solomon greater wisdom than any of his peers.
- 2) Solomon used that wisdom to enact justice in his kingdom.
- 3) Solomon still makes questionable decisions despite the wisdom God gives him.

Read

Read **1 Kings 3** aloud in your group.

Jeff Goldblum, The Butterfly Effect, and the Wisdom OS

In chaos theory, the "butterfly effect" describes how hundreds (perhaps thousands) of tiny variations can cause dramatic changes. In the original "Jurassic Park" movie, Jeff Goldblum's character, Dr. Malcolm, explains it this way while flirting with Dr. Ellie Sattler: "A butterfly can flap its wings in Peking, and in Central Park, you get rain instead of sunshine."

With this amount of chaos it's impossible to know the fallout of our actions and choices. We will make millions of choices in our lifetime and we need an operating system to help us make them all without being frozen by the possibilities. The Bible calls that operating system "wisdom." God made the world with it, and it through it we can be confident in the decisions we make.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) When Solomon becomes king, what is the first thing he does? What are the first things we're told about his kingdom (1 Kings 3:1-3)?

The first thing he does is make a political alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon's kingdom is also still under construction. There is no royal palace, no temple, and no city walls. The people of Israel are also syncretistic, meaning that they make sacrifices to both other gods *and* the God of Israel. Solomon is also syncretistic. He follows God's instructions but he also makes sacrifices to other gods.

2) Eventually, Solomon makes an extravagant sacrifice to God. What happens then (vv. 4-5)?

God comes to Solomon in a dream and tells him He will give him whatever he asks for.

3) What does Solomon say to God, and what does he ask for (vv. 6-9)?

Solomon praises God for His faithfulness to his father David. He then admits his own immaturity and asks God to help him know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong.

4) How does God respond (vv. 10-15)?

God is pleased with Solomon's answer. It's an answer that will benefit his kingdom, not just himself. God grants Solomon's request and gives him everything he didn't ask for (money and prestige). God then warns Solomon to follow His laws, as his father did. Solomon wakes up, realizing it was a dream.

5) Immediately, Solomon's wisdom is tested. What happens (vv. 16-27)?

Two prostitutes are having a custody battle over a child. It's just one woman's word against the other's. Solomon can't definitively prove who is telling the truth, so he threatens to cut the baby in two and give half to each woman, knowing that the real mother would never let this happen. And she doesn't. The real mother offers to give up her baby instead of allowing it to be killed. Solomon then gives the baby to the true mother. Even though we see Solomon put his wisdom into action, the fact that there are prostitutes in Israel shows us that all is not as it should be. Solomon is acting justly in the midst of a deeply sinful society.

6) How do the people in Solomon's kingdom respond (v. 28)?

The entire kingdom is dumbfounded by their new king's wisdom. It's clear to them that God has given Solomon wisdom to administer justice in Israel.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Solomon ask for “an understanding mind” to govern God’s people. He wants to be able to “discern between good and evil (v.9). God responds saying he will give him “a wise and discerning mind” unlike anyone before him. What is the definition of wisdom? How should we understand wisdom based on what God says in verse 14?

Merriam-Webster defines wisdom as the “ability to discern inner qualities and relationships”. Wisdom is more than knowledge and Solomon wanted more than just knowledge. He wanted understanding. God says to Solomon “If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days”. We can understand wisdom to be living in light of what God has said.

2) Proverbs 9:10 says “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”. Solomon was one of the wisest men in the world. Why do you think the author of 1 Kings tells us that Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter and offered sacrifices to other gods? What does this tell us about Solomon?

There are two ways to see this. It could be that Solomon is acting foolishly. God saved Israel from Egypt. Submitting to an alliance with their former slave-masters is short-sighted. Not to mention a violation of God’s law in Deuteronomy 7:3, which says Israel’s kings are never to become son-in-laws to Pharaoh. The fact that this marriage occurred *before* Solomon received wisdom from God indicates that it was a strategic decision made according to his own wisdom and shows that Solomon doesn’t trust God to act on Israel’s behalf. And it would later come to haunt him and diminish his reign. Solomon did love the Lord, yet he also married and loved foreign wives (against God’s commandments) who eventually played a role in turning his heart away from the Lord.

3) In Solomon’s request for wisdom, he makes references to both the Garden of Eden and the promise God made to Abraham. Can you find them? Why do you think Solomon does that?

When Solomon says God’s people are “too numerous to count or number,” he references the promise God made to Abraham (Gen 22:17). When Solomon asks for a heart to know the difference between good and evil, it’s a phrase similar to how the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was described in Genesis 2:3. Solomon understands that he could be an instrument for God’s promises to be fulfilled. So Solomon wants to be a “better Adam” over the people God promised would descend from Abraham.

4) Solomon seems to be a great king, but he is not a perfect king. In what ways is Solomon’s kingship like Jesus’?

Solomon is a wise king who rules his kingdom with justice. He knows who is telling the truth, and who is lying. Solomon also includes the entire world in his kingdom. Even Egypt, a nation that formerly enslaved the Israelites, is given mercy and invited into the wealth and prestige of Israel. Solomon is also humble like Jesus. Solomon admits when he needs God’s wisdom, and even though Jesus was God’s wisdom in the flesh, He still became a child and “grew” in wisdom (Lk 2:52). Eventually, in humility, Jesus the King would die so that foreigners, traitors, and even His executioners might enter His kingdom. Solomon ruled with justice. And Jesus knows perfectly who is guilty and who is innocent. Jesus will make sure justice is done perfectly.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) In what ways should we want to be like Solomon? In what ways should we learn from Solomon's mistakes?

Answer may vary.

2) How do people become more wise? Where does wisdom come from?

Even after being given wisdom, Solomon was told he needed to follow God's commands. The book of Proverbs, written at least in part by Solomon, says, "The fear [or respect] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10). We gain wisdom the more we admire, love, respect, and "fear" God. This is a lifelong pursuit. We can't just flip a switch and become more loyal or loving. These things need to be cultivated through frequent and extended time among God's people and God's Word. When we put our trust in Jesus, we have His Spirit living in us. We can call upon Him for help in time of need. *Encourage your students to be practical here as well.*

3) What prevents us from making wise decisions and trusting God? What hope do we have?

Answer may vary. Like Solomon, we can also have a divided heart. We struggle to trust God to provide for us and so we make decisions out of fear, greed, our own strength or lack of understanding. Even when we fail like Solomon, we can trust that God will show up in the midst of our divided heart. That when our hearts are "prone to wander", God will keep chasing us down.

Main takeaway

The choices we make matter. Our hearts will run after the things we choose and so it is important to choose things that help us remain faithful to God. We gain wisdom the more we admire, love, respect, spend time with and "fear" God. We can trust that Jesus is a King worth following.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus is a wiser King than Solomon. He perfectly enacts justice on behalf of the innocent. He is able to see every outcome, He knows every factor, and He desires that our lives turn out for our ultimate good and His glory. One way to fear God is to trust that Jesus is a King worth following and to spend your life in His service.

He desires for us, as His children, to obey Him and bring Him glory.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who gives wisdom to His people. And may we see Jesus as a wiser King than Solomon—one who rules justly on our behalf. And God, give us wisdom like Solomon, to live rightly in our world and with each other. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Who is someone you consider to be wise? Why?
- 2) Becoming wise is a lifelong process. What are two habits or rhythms that can cultivate wisdom?
- 3) Jesus is a better king than Solomon, and His laws are wiser than Solomon's. Is there a law, rule, or command that Jesus gives that you disagree with or find difficult to accept? What is it? What wisdom do you think Jesus has that you don't?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Do you think Solomon was a good king or a bad king?
- 2) Tell your children a story about when you learned you were not very wise. What has becoming more wise looked like in your life?
- 3) In what ways is Jesus a King like Solomon?

1 KINGS 4-5

Solomon Builds a Kingdom

Memory Verse

"The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy."

1 Kings 4:20

Real-life Problems

Godly Leadership—We need good leaders. Without them people often don't know a clear path forward. But for all the good that leaders can bring, they can also bring disaster on the people they lead. A leader's character can shape the course of a family, business, or nation. And it's often the case that even the best leaders are slowly corrupted. God's people are always in need of good leaders, but too often the only leaders available are deeply flawed.

The Good News

God is a better leader and King than any we've seen on earth. Jesus refused the temptations of wealth, power, and prestige. And rather than amass power and wealth for Himself, He died to freely give His inheritance and power to His "citizens" and "subjects." He doesn't demand our allegiance under threat of sword but invites us to join a kingdom that has not yet been seen in this world.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: If you ruled a country, and money or skill wasn't a problem, what's the first thing you would do? Why?

Idea #2: If you could instantly learn everything there is to know about one subject, what would it be and why?

Idea #3: Have you ever been the leader of an organization or group? What challenges do leaders face?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

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What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we saw that the choices we make matter. Our hearts will run after the things we choose and so it is important to choose things that help us remain faithful to God. We gain wisdom the more we admire, love, respect, spend time with and "fear" God. We can trust that Jesus is a King worth following.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) The extent of Solomon's wisdom.
[Solomon's wisdom exceeded that of any other ruler.](#)
- 2) Solomon's reign seems like the highest point in Israel's history.
[Solomon's reign leads Israel to its highest point in history.](#)
- 3) For all his greatness and wisdom, Solomon's leadership is flawed.
[In spite of his divided heart, God uses Solomon to accomplish His purpose for Israel.](#)

Read

Read **1 Kings 4-5** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) Solomon's palace was extravagant. What did it take to keep Solomon's court running (1 Kings 4:20-27)?

Each day, the palace residents and guests consumed 5.5 tons of flour, 10 tons of meal, 10 farmed cows, 10 free range cows, and many wild game animals. Solomon also had a standing army that included 40,000 horses. It was the responsibility of each of Solomon's 12 governors to provide both Solomon's food and enough food for his horses.

2) Solomon's wisdom and knowledge was vast. What did he know? What effect did it have on his kingdom (vv. 29-34)?

There doesn't seem to be anything Solomon didn't have expertise in. He knew about plants, animals, fish, poetry, music, and writing. He was so well-known for his wisdom, people from around the world came to hear what he had to say, presumably with gifts in hand. Israel was now well-known for its wisdom and wealth. No wars are mentioned.

3) Solomon sends word to the King of Tyre. What does he say to him (1 Kings 5:1-6)?

Solomon is at peace with all the nations that surround him, and he is ready to build a temple for God. Solomon wants to broker a trade agreement with Hiram, King of Tyre, requesting timber.

4) How does the King of Tyre respond (vv. 7-12)?

God's wisdom is evident to Hiram, and he agrees to send Solomon cedar and juniper logs in exchange for 3,600 tons of wheat and almost a half-million liters of olive oil. God's wisdom is in the deal, and Solomon and Hiram enjoy several years of peace while the temple is being built.

5) How does Solomon find the workers to build his temple (vv. 13-18)?

Solomon conscripts at least 188,000 craftsmen and laborers from throughout Israel to work the wood and stone necessary for the temple. The vast majority were non-Israelites who worked as slaves. The Israelites employed in the projects worked one month in Lebanon and spent two months at home.

6) How does Solomon find the workers to build his temple? (1 Kings 5:13-18) (Repeated question)

Solomon conscripts at least 188,000 slaves from among his own people to work the wood and stone necessary for the temple.

B. SO WHAT?

Genesis 22:17-18 - the angel of the Lord said to Abraham, "I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore. All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed my command." Many generations later, Solomon is living proof of the promise God made to Abraham.

1) In 1 Kings 4:20 and 4:29 the phrase "numerous as the sand on the seashore" is repeated. Why do you think this phrase important? Look in Genesis 22:17 for help.

This is the exact phrase God used when He promised to make Abraham into a nation in Genesis 22:17. God has fulfilled His promise, and Solomon is ruling over them. Solomon isn't just ruling over a people as numerous as the sand, his breadth of mind and wisdom is also compared to sand on a seashore. He has the wisdom needed to rule the people God promised Abraham.

2) Describe the abundance of God's favor over Solomon in 1 Kings 4:20-23.

3) 2) What does God forbid in Deuteronomy 17:16-17? What does this tell us about Solomon's leadership?

God forbids Israel's Kings from amassing three things: 1) wealth 2) women and 3) horses. Solomon accumulates all three. This suggests Solomon doesn't trust God to act on Israel's behalf. Just because Solomon is king, this doesn't mean he gets a pass on obeying God's law. If anything he should be setting the example because he is the leader. Unfortunately, like his father, David, women are his weak spot. We again see Solomon's divided heart. Solomon does act wisely in the way he delegates and surrounds himself with other officials (1 Kings 4:1-6). However, for all of Solomon's greatness, his leadership is still flawed.

4) 3) In relation to the promise God made to Abraham, why do you think the author tells us Solomon's wisdom was greater than any other nation, and nations from all over the world came to listen to Solomon?

God also promised Abraham that through his family line all nations of the world would be blessed. The nations coming to hear Solomon's wisdom is one way that God's promise to Abraham is coming true yet again.

~~4) With God's promise to Abraham coming true, and a son of David ruling on the throne, Israel seems to be at the highest point of its history since the perfection of the garden of Eden. Why does Solomon start making plans to build the temple next?~~

~~The temple was supposed to be a permanent place where God's presence could live with His people. In Eden God walked with Adam and Eve and was present with them always. With a temple, God's presence would never leave Israel, and Eden (at least in part) could finally return! Solomon seems to be the one to restore humanity to God and God to humanity.~~

5) Why are we told, more than once, that Solomon uses forced labor in the construction of the temple?

God's promises are coming true, but the man in charge seems to be making serious errors in judgment. He is conscripting workers, including some Israelites, to build the temple and other buildings. It is tempting to view Solomon's wealth and wisdom as evidence that God is blessing Israel and its king, but on further consideration, not all is right in Israel. There are other hints at this as well, including Solomon's extravagance subsidized by the 12 tribes of Israel, and his massive horse army, something forbidden by God's law (Deut 17:16).

Power Exposes Who We Really Are

A lot of people have heard the phrase "power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely." But this might not be all true; often power simply exposes who we already are. Some psychologists call power an "amplifier" turning up what's really inside of us. [This article from the Washington Post explores this dynamic.](#) Think about King Solomon and Jesus in this light. What did Solomon's wisdom and throne do in him? What did Jesus do with His wisdom and throne?

C. NOW WHAT?

1) In Solomon all God's promises ~~seem to be coming true~~, but to a man with serious flaws. Why is this good news for us? are being fulfilled

God's blessing and goodness are not dependent on our moral behavior but on His promises. Solomon isn't experiencing wealth and national success because he's awesome, but because God promised Abraham that He would make his lineage into a great nation. Solomon is experiencing the benefit of something he didn't earn.

2) How is Solomon's experience of blessing, wealth, and wisdom similar to what we experience in the gospel?

Jesus has provided for us the blessing of God, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the inheritance of heaven. But ~~none of this is given to us because we deserve it. We're not blessed because we are sinless, or because we do good works. Rather, God is faithful to the promises He made to His Son, Jesus. And when we join ourselves to Him, we are given everything He is promised, despite what we've done.~~ Solomon experienced incredible blessings that were a gift from God. He did nothing to earn or deserve them. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, His gift of eternal life is something we cannot earn.

3) Solomon's story is also a warning. Success, wealth, and happiness don't mean God has given you a pass on all your behaviors. Perhaps you are experiencing a time of prosperity like Solomon's, even though you haven't always acted in line with God's commands. What public or private part of yourself might God be inviting you to change?

Answers will vary. Encourage honesty and openness.

Main takeaway

Jesus is a better leader and King than any we've seen on earth. He has provided for us the blessing of God, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the inheritance of heaven. But none of this is given to us because we deserve it. ~~We're not blessed because we are sinless, or because we do good works.~~ Rather, God is faithful to the promises He made to His Son, Jesus. And when we join ourselves to Him, we are given everything He is promised, despite what we've done.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

God is a better leader and King than any we've seen on earth. Jesus refused the temptations of wealth, power, and prestige. And rather than amass power and wealth for Himself, He died to freely distribute His inheritance and power among His citizens and subjects. He doesn't demand our allegiance under threat of sword but invites us to join a kingdom that has not yet been seen in the world.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who ensures that all the promises He makes come true. And may we see Jesus as a better leader than any we have currently experienced, who instead of forcing us to serve Him, makes us fellow sons and daughters of God. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) From the passage today, what are 10 benefits a wise and godly king brings to his people?
- 2) Why do you think the Bible is full of flawed leaders?
- 3) In what ways is Jesus a better king than Solomon was?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) In what way is Solomon the high point of Israel's story so far?
- 2) What were some concerning things about Solomon's early years as king?
- 3) How important do you think the character and wisdom of a leader is?

1 KINGS 6-7

Solomon Builds the Temple

Memory Verse

"As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel."

1 Kings 6:12-13

Real-life Problems

Misplaced Worship—We all want to experience something transcendent and beautiful. We spend much of our lives looking for new experiences, new tastes, new countries, better music, and better relationships. Humans want to experience something higher, bigger, and better than themselves. In chasing after our hearts' desires we are really looking for God, even if we don't call it that. And we're often willing to spend all our time, money, and attention to get it. Sadly and often, we never feel what we hoped we would feel, and if we do, it doesn't last as long we thought.

The Good News

Our deepest desire comes to us in Jesus, but we don't need to look for Him in a foreign country, nor do we need to visit a beautiful building to experience His grandeur. The good news is that God is not located or contained in a place or a building but comes to be with us where we are.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: What's the most impressive building you've ever seen? Why does it stick out in your mind?

Idea #2: If you could build your dream home, what would it be like? Describe it.

Idea #3: We're about to read some long passages of Scripture documenting very specific measurements and materials. Often we skip over these sections. Why do you think the Bible's authors thought it would be interesting to their readers?

Because God has been so specific in laying out His instructions for building the temple, what do you think that tells us about His character and how He lays out instructions for His children?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Good news

What's the good news?

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Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

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1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

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What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we learned that for all of Solomon's greatness, his leadership was still flawed. Jesus is a better leader and King than any we've seen on earth. He has provided for us the blessing of God, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the inheritance of heaven. But none of this is given to us because we deserve it. We're not blessed ~~because we are sinless, or because we do good works.~~ Rather, God is faithful to the promises He made to His Son, Jesus. ~~And when we join ourselves to Him, we are given everything He is promised, despite what we've done.~~ [When we repent, turn from our sin, and follow Jesus, we have new life in Christ.](#)

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) The highest point of Solomon's reign was building the temple.
- 2) The temple is a minimodel of Eden.
- 3) The temple ~~represents God and humanity living together in harmony.~~
[represented the Israelites' access to God in His holy place.](#)

Read

Read **1 Kings 6-7** aloud in your group.

A Picture of Solomon's Temple

Helping your students work through each section of the temple is hard without a visual aid. Use this one as you work your way through chapters 6 and 7. Emphasize that more important than what the temple *looked* like (the blueprints mentioned here are incomplete), is what the temple and its contents *symbolized*. It's less important to know precisely what the temple might have looked like than it is to grasp what is communicated through the images inside the temple.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) When, with what, and how is the temple built (1 Kings 6:1-10)?

The temple is built 480 years after the exodus, it's made of stone and cedar, and it's made in relative silence. There's no banging of hammers on nails, and even the stone is chiseled away from the work site. This doesn't just communicate a reverence for what's happening, it also means an incredible amount of professional, mathematical, and artistic skill was needed to build the temple.

2) What does God say to Solomon as he's building the temple (vv. 11-13)?

Here, God tells Solomon that His presence in the temple and in Israel is dependent on Solomon's obedience to His laws. God is not tied to the temple. Rather, it's the obedience of the king that will determine God's closeness with His people. This is the third time something similar has been said to Solomon (1 Kings 2:2-4, 3:14).

3) There are a lot of similarities between the temple and the Garden of Eden. After reading Genesis 1:1-11, 2:4-9, and 3:21-24, read 1 Kings 6:14-38. What do you notice there?

Just as the Garden of Eden was guarded by two cherubim, two giant, golden angels guard the inner sanctuary. Everything is made of different types of wood, a reminder that there were many types of trees in the garden. There are flowers everywhere. Just as God rested from his work on the Garden of Eden on the seventh day, Solomon's temple is finished in its seventh year.

4) What did Hiram build for Solomon (1 Kings 7:13-50)?

Hiram built two giant bronze pillars decorated with pomegranates and flowers. He made a giant basin of water called "The Sea," which could hold 12,000 gallons and which sat on top of 12 bronze oxen. He also made 10 large, highly decorated pillar-chariots. On top of each were large basins. The 10 basins flanked the entrance to the temple.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Every detail in the temple is filled with symbolic imagery meant to communicate some truth to the people of Israel. Why do you think the temple is filled with so many references to Eden?

The Garden of Eden is where God and his people lived in perfect harmony. Adam and Eve, the original king and queen, ruled with God over the entire world. The temple looks like the Garden of Eden because that's where God's presence most freely interacted with humans. The temple looks like the Garden of Eden because it will host God's presence once again!

2) After building the temple, Solomon begins work on his palace, Israel's supreme court building and other government structures. Why do you think the author records these details?

The government buildings of Israel are built with the same materials and in the same complex as the temple. In the Garden of Eden ^{Adam and Eve were} humanity was meant to rule with God over the earth. The proximity and similarity between the temple and Solomon's palaces are meant to remind us of this fact.

3) What would the "Sea" held up by 12 giant oxen have symbolized to the people of Israel as they walked through the temple?

The Sea is full of meaning to ancient Israel. When God created the world, the "waters" above were separated from the "waters" beneath. The Garden of Eden was also called a "well-watered place," so having a lot of water in the temple is natural. When God made his covenant with Abraham, He promised that every nation on earth would be blessed through him, and his descendants would outnumber the "sand on the seashore." The 12 oxen, three facing each point of the compass, was symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. God's chosen 12 tribes hold up the promises of Abraham and even the creation itself. Through Israel, God will bless the world.

4) Think back to what you know about the exodus story... What would the 10 chariot-pillars with 10 bowls of water on top have symbolized to the people of Israel?

These are symbols from Israel's exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. As people approach God's presence, they are flanked on either side by pillars of water—reminders of how God split open the Red Sea. The fact that they also have wheels could help the people remember the chariots of Egypt God destroyed in the waters as well. As Israel entered into God's presence they would have been reminded of how they got there... by God saving them!

5) Why do you think God warns Solomon that he must be obedient if God's presence is to remain in Israel?

Before this moment, Israel's symbol for God's presence was contained in a "tabernacle." It was a special tent that could be moved as God's people moved. Once God's people had settled in their own land and built a permanent structure, it would be easy to forget that God and His presence is not bound to a physical place. More than God wants a permanent building, He has always wanted a relationship with His people.

C. NOW WHAT?**1) The physical space of the temple communicated theological truths to the people of God. How does that change the way you think about your homes, your churches, and other buildings you enter? What truths might the building around us communicate?**

Encourage your students to think creatively here. What's the first thing they see when they walk into their homes? What's the central focus of their living rooms? Why do old churches have tiny doors that open up to reveal high ceilings? Why do malls do the same thing?

2) God warns Solomon that, more than a temple, obedience is what will secure His continued presence. Why is this important for us to keep in mind?

God's ultimate plan was never to confine Himself to a building. Rather He wanted to approach His people wherever they are. That's why the first "tabernacle" was a tent that could move, and it's why the apostle John tells us that God

"tabernacled" among us in Jesus. More important than a place was a heart devoted to following God and what He desires.

3) God tells Solomon that the king must obey in order for God's presence to remain in the temple. How is the message of Jesus similar to what God tells Solomon?

The message of Jesus is similar because the obedience of the king is still necessary for God's presence to live with His people. But where Solomon eventually failed to obey God's laws, Jesus our King obeys them all perfectly. Through our better King, Jesus, God's presence is available to all people at all times. Because of Jesus, God's presence with us is not dependent on our behavior.

4) Look at the picture of Solomon's temple again and imagine you are walking through it. As you pass everything, what would you think about God based on what you are seeing?

In a lot of ways this is just helping your students put into their own words what truths each element is meant to evoke. Help them by highlighting the tactile or physical elements of the temple. (What do you think it would feel like to walk past a GIANT altar with blood dripping down it? What would you think about God and His plans if you are surrounded by golden fruits?)

Main takeaway

The temple is a minimodel of the Garden of Eden and a picture of how God and humanity are meant to live together. Where Solomon eventually failed to obey God's laws, Jesus our King obeys them all perfectly. Through our better King, Jesus, God's presence is available to all people at all times. Because of Jesus, God's presence with us is not dependent on our behavior.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

The transcendent and beautiful comes to us in Jesus. We don't need to look for Him in a foreign country, nor do we need to visit a beautiful building to experience His grandeur. The good news is that God is not located or contained in a place or a building but comes to be with us wherever we are.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see the God who wants to be at home with His people. And may we see Jesus as the King who is obedient enough to secure that presence forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) God's initial plan to communicate His presence was a portable tent. After Jesus came as "God with us," God's "temple" is in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you think Solomon was right to want to build God a permanent and stationary temple?
- 2) What's something you could change in the way your house or room looks today that could communicate a truth about God and the way the world is supposed to be?
- 3) What's something you really want to see, hear, do, or visit? In what ways might that desire be a yearning for Eden?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What's something you could change in the way your house or room looks today that could communicate a truth about God and the way the world is supposed to be?
- 2) Share a story of when you have "felt" God's presence? What was that like?
- 3) Share a story with your children of a time when God's presence was especially powerful to you.

1 KINGS 8

Solomon's Temple Is Dedicated

Memory Verse

"Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!"

1 Kings 8:27

Real-life Problems

Trusting An Invisible God—We often read stories like the one we'll read today about God showing up in a cloud and knocking people over. And we think, "If only God would do that for me, then I would know He is real." But most of us never get anything like that. And unlike the Jews, who had a temple, we have no visible symbol that God lives or works in our lives. We seem to follow an invisible god who never reveals Himself.

The Good News

While we may not have any new visible symbols of God's presence, followers of God have been given Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was and is God's temple—the place where God dwelt—in the flesh. Jesus is the living embodiment of God's presence. That means we have historic and living proof that God is real. It also means we don't have to go to a temple to receive forgiveness of sins or healing, as Israel did. God has come to us through Jesus, and Jesus now lives in us through His Holy Spirit.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: When you hear the word "dedicate" what do you think of? Can you think of an example of "dedication?"

Idea #2: What do you think it means to "feel" or "experience" God's presence? How do you know if you have?

Idea #3: Have any of you ever visited a temple or shrine of another faith? What was it like for you? Why do you think temples are so common among the world's religions?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. [God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.](#)

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we learned that the temple is a minimodel of the Garden of Eden and a picture of how God and humanity are meant to live together. Where Solomon eventually failed to obey God's laws, Jesus our King obeys them all perfectly. Through our better King, Jesus, God's presence is available to all people at all times. Because of Jesus, God's presence with us is not dependent on our behavior.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) What it means to "dedicate" something.
- 2) What God's presence falling in the temple means.
- 3) What God's temple looks like now.

Read

Read **1 Kings 8** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) The temple was the place where God's presence ^{dwelled} is supposed to live, and the temple is almost complete. What are the final things that happen before God arrives (1 Kings 8:1-9)?

All the elders of Israel are invited into Jerusalem. The priests carry all the final furnishings and furniture into the temple. Solomon offers an enormous number of sacrifices. The priests then bring the "ark of the covenant" and place it between two giant angelic cherubim. Inside the ark are the tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.

2) How does God arrive? Does this remind you of any other stories in the Bible (vv. 10-13)?

God arrives in a cloud that fills the temple and prevents people from working. It's similar to how God is described when He rescued Israel out of Egypt in pillars of smoke and when He descended on Mount Sinai in a cloud to give the Ten Commandments.

3) A dedication is usually a formal event in which a person or place is marked for a specific purpose. What does Solomon say at the beginning of his temple dedication (vv. 14-21)?

Solomon reminds Israel of all the promises God has kept up to this point in their history. God chose them as His people, special nation, chose David to be their ruler, and chose Solomon to build the temple. Everything God has promised is coming true, being fulfilled.

4) Solomon gives seven examples of what he expects God to do for His people now that the temple is built. What are they (vv. 30-51)?

Solomon expects God to 1) judge rightly between innocent and guilty people (vv. 31-32); 2) forgive and return Israel to their land if they are defeated by an enemy army (vv. 33-34); 3) forgive and restore rain when Israel turns back to following God's ways (vv. 35-36); 4) forgive and act on behalf of God's people who are afflicted by natural disasters (vv. 37-40); 5) answer the prayers of foreigners (vv. 41-43); 6) give Israel victory in battle (vv. 44-46); and 7) forgive and return Israel in the event they are exiled from their land (vv. 46-51).

5) How does the dedication ceremony officially end (vv. 62-66)?

Solomon makes another round of costly fellowship offerings and burnt offerings. Burnt offerings were completely burned up, but fellowship offerings, once offered, were given back to the people so they could feast and throw a party. The ceremony ends after two sets of seven days, when Solomon sends the people who had gathered from all over the world back home.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why do God's people even need a temple? What is their temple for?

A temple was a visible symbol of God's presence living with His people. In a very real sense, it's a way to make an infinite and invisible God understandable and visible. The temple is also a picture of the Garden of Eden and of the world as it's meant to be. The hope of Eden was to live with God, but because humans have sinned, our access to God is cut off. But at the temple a sacrifice could be made that restores God's relationship with His people and

brings back a small taste of the Garden of Eden. God's people need a temple to remind them that God wants to dwell with His people, and that the way to do so is through offering the sacrifices He's prescribed.

2) Why does it matter that the same cloud that covered God's people on Mt. Sinai shows up again in Jerusalem?

It's proof that God is doing something climactic. The nation-making, sea-splitting God they know from the past has returned!

3) Solomon expects God to do seven things from His temple, and the dedication of the temple lasts two sets of seven days. Think back to Genesis. Why are these details recorded?

Seven is the number of creation. Whenever we see it in Scripture, it often means that something new is starting or a new era is dawning. Solomon understands that with the temple built and God's presence living in it, God's relationship to Israel is entering a new national phase.

4) Even though thousands of sacrifices are offered, prayer is the emphasis of this chapter. Why do you think that is?

Sacrifices happen at a temple, but they are not the point of a temple. A temple is a symbol of God's presence, which makes it a place to encounter God and to receive forgiveness and provision. More than ritual sacrifices, God wants His people to be *with* Him. This emphasis might point toward the future we live in, where ritual sacrifices are done away with and replaced by lives of trust and heartfelt obedience to God.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Read John 2:19-21. With all the importance accorded to Israel's temple, why does Jesus say that it must be destroyed?

After this temple was built, Israel's relationship with the temple was poisoned. Future kings sold off its gold to buy treaties with other nations. Future priests were often corrupt. And the people of Israel began to treat it like a "magic" building. They believed that if the temple stood, God must be on their side, regardless of how they lived or to what degree they trusted God. Jesus said the temple must be destroyed because it had been corrupted, and a new temple needed to take its place. (The Book of Hebrews also tells us that Solomon's temple was only intended to be a shadow of the one Jesus would build with His body.)

2) Once, when critiquing the corrupted temple, Jesus identifies Himself and His body as a new temple that must be destroyed (Jn 2:19-22). In what sense is Jesus a new temple? Why must He be destroyed?

The first temple was a visible symbol of God's presence living with His people and a picture of the world as it's meant to be. In the body of Jesus, the infinite God is made understandable and visible. However, true access to God was still blocked by human sin and a corrupt temple. Both the sin of God's people and their corrupt temple needed a sacrifice to cover their sin and restore them to a relationship with God. So Jesus dies both as a sacrifice for His people's sin and as a "temple" in order to restore true access to God in a temple that can never die again.

Invisible Love, Hearts, and Rings

Like God, love is invisible. So we make up lots of ways to make that love visible, like heart emojis and wedding rings. But heart emojis and wedding rings don't mean anything by themselves. The people that send and wear them must also embody those invisible attributes. It's not enough to simply have a symbol—we also need flesh-and-blood proof that the invisible thing is real. This is why Jesus is such great news. The symbol of an old era is proved true by His flesh-and-blood body. God doesn't just give us a temple, He gives us Himself.

3) The apostle Peter says that we are now living temples of God (1 Pet 2:4-5). We're not dedicated by offering sacrifices, but by offering our own bodies in baptism. How does understanding Solomon's temple better change the way you think about yourself as a Christian?

Answers will vary, but this question is meant to mirror question 1 from the "So What" section. Encourage your students to think deeply about what it means to be a symbol of the world set right, and the embodiment of God's presence.

Main takeaway

Sacrifices are not the point of the temple. The temple was a physical symbol of God's presence with His people. Jesus was and is God's temple in the flesh; Jesus is the living embodiment of God's presence. Jesus now lives in us through His Holy Spirit.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

While we may not have any new visible symbols of God's presence, followers of God have been given Jesus. Jesus was and is God's temple in the flesh; Jesus is the living embodiment of God's presence. That means we have historic and living proof that God is real. It also means we don't have to go to a temple to receive forgiveness of sins or healing, as Israel did. God has come to us through Jesus, and Jesus now lives in us through His Holy Spirit.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see the God who makes Himself known and understood through things like buildings and bodies. And I pray that we would see both Jesus and ourselves as living temples embodying God's presence and the hope of Eden to the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Your presence in a room should say something about the presence of God in that room. Name three "rooms" you've been invited into where people listen to you and trust you. How can your presence in those rooms change to better reflect the presence of God?
- 2) How does it feel to know that God longs to dwell with His people? What can make it hard to believe that truth?
- 3) You are a "living" temple meant to embody the presence of Jesus (see 1 Cor 6:19). But Jesus was a living temple who knew He needed to die. In what way is that an encouragement? In what way is that a challenge?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Why did God's people need a temple? What was their temple for?
- 2) In what ways do you think your family uniquely expresses something of the presence of God?

1 KINGS 9-10

The Queen of Sheba

Memory Verse

"Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, He has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness."

1 Kings 10:9

Real-life Problems

Misused Gifts—It's entirely possible to be one of the most promising and gifted people alive and use those gifts for corrupt ends. It's also possible for God Himself to give you gifts and talents that you end up using to harm others. It's a strange but common part of being human that the gifts or abilities God gives us can be the things that lead to our greatest temptation and our most likely downfall.

The Good News

There are no perfect characters in the Bible, apart from Jesus. And while all human leaders have been corrupted by their own gifts and talents in some way, Jesus never has. Instead of using His wisdom to take advantage of His "citizens," Jesus gave up His power and wealth for His followers' sake. And even though this might seem foolish to the world, it's actually the purest form of wisdom.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Can you name a time (family vacation, day at school, or holiday dinner) when everything seemed to go wrong, but now when you look back on it, you wouldn't change anything, even the bad parts?

Idea #2: God appears and speaks to Solomon twice. Each time he warns Solomon with roughly the same message. If God showed up to warn you twice about something, what do you think He would warn you about?

Idea #3: Is it possible to have too much money and power? If not, why not? If so, how much is too much?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Good news

What's the good news?

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Why did He die for your sins?

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REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

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The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

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What's going on?

REMIND

Sacrifices are not the point of the temple. The temple was a physical symbol of God's presence with His people. Jesus was and is God's temple in the flesh; Jesus is the living embodiment of God's presence. Jesus now lives in us through His Holy Spirit.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Cracks are starting to form in Solomon's kingdom.
- 2) Solomon is beginning to look more like Pharaoh.
- 3) Despite Solomon's increasing failures, God still uses him to bless the world.

Read

Read **1 Kings 9-10** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) God warns Solomon a second time with the same message. What does He tell him (1 Kings 9:1-9)?

God tells Solomon that if he continues to obey His commands, then Solomon's dynasty will last forever. However, if Solomon or his descendants fail to obey, then God will exile Israel from its own land and turn to rubble the temple Solomon has just built. The whole world will know that Israel was too fickle to continue to serve the God that brought them out of Egypt.

2) Cracks are starting to form in Solomon's kingdom. What is the first (vv. 10-14)?

Hiram, the King of Tyre, had given Solomon 4 tons of gold and all the juniper and cedar wood needed to build the temple. In return Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities. But Hiram calls them "kabul" or "worthless." Solomon doesn't seem to be treating his allies fairly. This interaction also foreshadows future conflicts between Tyre and Israel.

3) What's are some other cracks in Solomon's reign (vv. 15-24)?

Solomon is slowly turning into Pharaoh. Even though God had saved Israel from slavery in Egypt, Solomon makes free use of slaves to build his kingdom. Solomon even has his slaves build "store cities," which is exactly what Israel was forced to build for Pharaoh (Ex 1:11).

Solomon's slave population is also made up of idolatrous people God had previously told Israel to clear from their land. Solomon even rebuilds one of their capitals, Gezer. Solomon is undoing what God has said to do. Ironically, the Egyptian Pharaoh is painted as more obedient to God because we're told he previously destroyed the city.

4) After we're shown these cracks, what happens next (vv. 25-28)?

Solomon continues to sacrifice to God, runs his temple well, and continues to have a good relationship with the King of Tyre. Through one of their joint efforts Solomon imports over 16 tons of gold into Israel.

5) When the Queen of Sheba (Ethiopia) meets Solomon, what is her reaction (1 Kings 10:1-10)?

The Queen of Sheba worships God as a result of the wealth, wisdom, and power of Solomon. Solomon is fulfilling the hope that God has always had for His people, that through them, the whole world would be blessed. Despite Solomon's increasingly apparent foolishness, this queen is converted by seeing God's wisdom played out in Solomon's kingdom.

6) The end of chapter 10 details Solomon's massive wealth and wisdom. What do you notice?

Under Solomon, Israel is extremely wealthy, which allows Solomon to be very extravagant. Solomon also retains his wisdom despite how it might be misused from time to time. Dignitaries from around the world ask for his advice and counsel.

But, the final crack in Solomon's kingdom is saved for the end. In direct contradiction to God's commands (Deut 17:16), Solomon begins to build a massive herd of Egyptian horses. It's one final hint that Solomon's transformation into Pharaoh is almost complete.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why is it significant that Solomon's kingdom is beginning to crack?

As we've said many times during this study, Solomon seems to represent the best hope the people of Israel have to return to the garden of Eden. If *his* kingship and wisdom fail Israel, then there is no king or wisdom on earth that will be able to save God's people.

2) Why is Solomon subtly being compared to Egypt's Pharaoh?

Egypt's Pharaoh was representative of slavery, cruelty, oppression and idolatry. God saved Israel from him and all that he ruled inflicted. And when God decided to make Israel into a people and a nation, He intended for them to be an anti-Egypt—a different kind of kingdom that lived and ruled by God's ethics and laws. Solomon is compared to Pharaoh because it demonstrates that God's people are beginning to entirely reject the purpose for which God saved them in the first place.

3) Knowing all these worrisome facts, why do you think it is in this passage we're told about the Queen of Sheba converting and worshiping the God of Israel?

A good answer is that it highlights God's grace to other nations. Israel was meant to be a blessing to the whole world, and despite Israel's growing failures, God is using an imperfect king and kingdom to bring some of God's blessing to more and more parts of the world. Another answer is that it highlights God's grace toward Israel. The original audience of Kings would have already experienced the exile described in 1 Kings 9:6-9. They need to know that their disobedience does not mean the end of God's ability to use them to bless the world.

4) Knowing the failures of Solomon and the failures of Israel, why is it significant that Jesus was an Israelite from the line of David and Solomon (Mt 1:1-7)?

It's significant because it continues to prove that God is still gracious and keeps his promises. God is not done with the people of Israel or with the line of David. And God will still use them to accomplish His purpose to bless the world. Ultimately, Jesus blesses the world because He is a better King and ruler than Solomon ever was.

Gold and Shadow

God has given us all gifts, talents and abilities. Let's call them "gold." Our intelligence, decisiveness, emotional awareness, physical strength, social skills, our ability to read a room, or be wise are all good and great things. However, all gold casts a shadow. Every strength has a liability. People who are really aware of other people's emotions often get lost in them and don't want to upset them. Decisive people make great leaders, but they also tend to make others feel bullied with their opinions, without their knowing it. And the magnitude of our strengths also corresponds to the intensity of our shadow. A minor strength has a less pronounced shadow. (Hold a clear plastic cup in such a way as to make a shadow in front of your students.) A greater strength has a greater shadow. (Hold a book up in the same way.) The book's shadow is darker because it is denser. The same is true with our gold this side of eternity. It might be good to keep in mind that many times our shadow isn't even sin (although it can be)—it's just the flip side of our God-given gifts.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Name your two greatest talents, abilities, or qualities. What do you hope to accomplish with them? How can God use them for your good and His glory?

If your students have a hard time with this, use it as an opportunity to name what strengths you see in them. If your students know each other well enough, consider asking the group to name what they appreciate most about each other.

2) Knowing your greatest talents and knowing yourself, what do you think will be your greatest “shadow” as you get older? Based on today’s story, how do you think God will treat you despite your failures?

Answers will obviously vary, but help your students understand that all strengths this side of heaven come with liabilities and “shadows.” Using your own knowledge of them, as well as your own life experiences, help them name at least one way their greatest strengths will be a source of temptation. It will be important to help your students remember the main point of this lesson... God uses us despite our shadows and sins.

3) In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus mentions the Queen of Sheba (Lk 11:29-32). He says we will all meet her when God comes for the last time. Apparently, she will judge those who do not listen to the wisdom of King Jesus, the way she listened to the wisdom of King Solomon. Name two ways the Queen of Sheba can be an example to you in how you interact with God, the Bible, and the story of Jesus.

Answers will vary, but the Queen of Sheba prepared questions and asked them of Solomon. She also listened well and perceptively worshiped God after experiencing all Solomon had to offer. She brought costly gifts to Solomon. Your students might mention things like asking good and deep questions of spiritual leaders, listening well to God’s leaders, offering their worship, themselves, or their money to God in response to His wisdom.

Main takeaway

God still uses Solomon and Israel to bless the world, despite their growing failures; this should remind us that God is more powerful than our failures.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Apart from Jesus, there are no perfect characters in the Bible, and no other humans have lived perfectly. And while all human leaders have been corrupted by their own gifts and talents in some way, Jesus never was. Instead of using His wisdom to take advantage of His “citizens,” Jesus gave up His power and wealth for His followers’ sake. And even though this might seem foolish, it’s actually the most important kind of wisdom.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who is gracious to unwise and foolish people. And may we see Jesus as worthy of our devotion, worship and sacrifice. In His name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Why do you think it's important that the Bible portrays complex and broken characters like Solomon?
- 2) What do you think counts as your "gold"?
- 3) What steps can you take to be aware of and address your "shadow."

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) For someone who ended up failing so dramatically, why does the Bible spend so much time talking about Solomon?
- 2) What were some of the "cracks" that begin to form in Solomon's kingdom?
- 3) Who was the Queen of Sheba, and what did she do?

1 KINGS 11

Solomon's 700 Wives

Memory Verse

"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

1 Kings 11:4

Real-life Problems

A Lifetime of Failures—The older we get, the more decisions we will have made. And the older we get the more mistakes we will have made. There might even be a time we look back on our lives and realize we are far, far removed from where we started and where we should be. On days like that we will be tempted to wonder if our lifetime of failures and mistakes means we are beyond receiving God's mercy and love. We will wonder if all we should expect is judgment.

The Good News

Judgment for the sins of Israel's kings is not God's last word to Israel; His promise to David is. Which means your sin is not God's final word for you; the work of Jesus, the Son of David, on your behalf is! And He is already seated on His throne and leading His people into life once again.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Have you ever broken a promise you've made to a friend or an adult? What happened? Tell us the story.

Idea #2: What are the circumstances, if any, where it's okay to break a promise or a deal you've made with someone else? Is it ever okay?

Idea #3: In your own words what is "idolatry"? What do you think idolatry looks like today?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Why did He die for your sins?

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What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we saw that God still uses Solomon and Israel to bless the world, despite their growing failures; this reminds us that God is more powerful than our failures.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Solomon dies and leaves behind a divided kingdom.
- 2) Just as God promised, Solomon's disobedience will bring death to Israel.
- 3) The book of 1 Kings was written to remind people like us that even when the people we most trust die, God can still bring us life.

Read

Read **1 Kings 11** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) At the end of Solomon's life, what is he known for (1 Kings 11:1-5)?

Solomon ends up marrying some 700 women—in addition to claiming 300 concubines. Each marriage likely represents a political alliance and Solomon's shrewd consolidation of Mesopotamian power. But these women also lead Solomon to ignore God's commands and to follow other gods and goddesses.

2) What is God's verdict on this behavior (vv. 6-13)?

God calls Solomon's actions and his reign evil. Since Solomon has disobeyed God's commands and misused the wisdom God gave him, He will rip the kingdom from Solomon's hand and give it to one of his subordinates. Because of David's obedience, God gives Solomon a degree of mercy and says this will only happen after his death.

3) Up to this point Israel has been at peace. For the first time since Solomon came to power, we're introduced to two foreign enemies. Who are they (vv. 14-25)?

Hadad of Edom and Rezon of Damascus. Both are survivors of David's military campaigns and spend their adult lives looking for ways to cripple and harm Solomon and Israel.

4) We're then introduced to a threat to Solomon's power from inside Israel. Who is he? What will He do (vv. 26-33)?

Jeroboam son of Nebat was in charge of a significant chunk of Israel's slave labor and would end up leading a civil war. One day, a prophet meets him on the road from Jerusalem and predicts that Israel will be divided between Solomon's son and him. Ten of Israel's tribes will follow him, while the other two will remain loyal to David's dynasty.

5) What does God tell Jeroboam through the prophet (vv. 34-39)?

God tells Jeroboam the same thing He told Solomon! If he obeys God, God will bless him with an eternal dynasty to rival and humble David's.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Solomon tries to assassinate Jeroboam but fails. Why do you think this detail is added in verse 40?

Toward the end of his life, Solomon not only fails to obey God, but he also tries to rebel against God. It was God's plan to punish Solomon's dynasty with a civil war. By trying to kill Jeroboam, Solomon is seeking to avoid his punishment from God. It's a sign of just how far Solomon has fallen, and it foreshadows much of the rest of the books of 1 and 2 Kings.

2) Why are we told that God punishes Solomon?

Solomon disobeys God's commands but more specifically, he's idolatrous. He's married idolatrous women. He's also built altars to false gods in Israel and actively worships in their temples.

3) Do you notice any parallels between the rise of Rezon and Haddad and other stories in Israel's history? Why would these parallels be significant?

Haddad's story is a lot like the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. He finds shelter in Egypt, is promoted to a position of prominence, marries Egyptian royalty before wanting to be sent back to his homeland to conquer it. Rezon's story is like the story of David under King Saul's leadership. Constantly on the run, Rezon forms a small guerrilla team and bides his time until he gets a chance to rise to power. This is significant because it paints Solomon as the villain in stories where Israel used to be the hero. Solomon is the paranoid King Saul to Rezon's David. And if Haddad represents Israel in its exodus from Egypt, that makes Solomon the Canaanite king occupying the land the Israelites desire.

4) Why do you think God raises these rival leaders?

They are God's punishment and a curse of Solomon. They also foreshadow the end of 1 Kings. Jeroboam's rebellion will divide Israel for the rest of its history. Rezon and Haddad are just the first wave of enemies that will eventually destroy Israel.

5) We're told the reason God shows Solomon some degree of mercy is because of God's promise to provide David an everlasting kingdom and eternal protection from all of Israel's enemies. Why might this offer a glimmer of hope for the original audience?

For all the harm Israel's kings can do, ultimately Israel's fate will be determined by God's faithfulness to a promise He made to David. Evil kings must be punished, but there is always grace for those who return to the ways of David and the commands of God.

Undeserved Mercy

After apartheid ended in South Africa, Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the new government took a unique approach to addressing the country's past injustices. Instead of prosecuting those who committed crimes during apartheid, they established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This commission allowed perpetrators of apartheid-era crimes to confess and ask for forgiveness, in exchange for amnesty from prosecution. Mandela and others recognized that a cycle of revenge and violence would not heal the country and move it forward. Instead of acting purely to exact justice, they adhered to higher ideals. His decision to prioritize reconciliation over retribution was a demonstration of mercy toward those who did not deserve it, and it helped lay the foundation for a more peaceful and just South Africa. Similarly, God does not simply execute justice on Solomon, but in accordance with His own promises, offers him mercy.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Eventually, Solomon's actions lead to the destruction of Israel. How does God remain true to His promise that a son of David would rule forever?

Jesus is the Son of David that Israel has been waiting for. Unlike Solomon, He is like His forefather David. He is not only a "man after God's heart" He is God's heart in the flesh. Jesus doesn't use His wisdom to consolidate power but to give His power away (1 Cor 1:23-24). And instead of using His dying breath to assassinate those who threaten His rule, Jesus forgives them. God is faithful to His promise to David by sending us Jesus.

2) When we disobey God, there are consequences. For Solomon that meant the emergence of a rival leader who would threaten his power and eventually destroy Israel. Do you think God still acts that way? Why or why not?

There's a fine line here that might be helpful to walk, especially with your older students. God does judge humans for their sins, and sin often has natural negative consequences. But God does not have a special relationship (covenant) with nations like He did with Israel anymore. It would be unwise to attribute something like a natural disaster or current war to God's judgment of a nation. Scripture tells us all Christians' sins have already been judged on the cross through Jesus or will be judged in hell. It would be unjust for God to punish a person (or a nation) for a sin already atoned for. This is a deep question; allow time for debate.

3) The most important aspect of this story is God's faithfulness to His promise to David despite the sin of David's son. Why is this good news?

God is always willing to pardon our sins when we admit we are wrong and when we trust Jesus, the Son of David! The consequences of our sins might never be national collapse. But we will all have to answer for the ways we have not obeyed God's word. Solomon died for his sins, and so will Israel, eventually. Our sin deserves the punishment of death as well (Rom 6:23). But God promised that because He is faithful to David, His people would not ultimately be lost to death. God sent a Son of David to be obedient where Solomon could not, and He provided an escape from death. And when we trust Him, our sins are paid for, and eternal life is assured for us.

Main takeaway

Judgment for the sins of Israel's kings is not God's last word to Israel; His promise to David is. One day there will be a Son of David on the throne to lead His people into life once again.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Judgment for the sins of Israel's kings is not God's last word to Israel; His promise to David is. Which means your sin is not God's final word for you; the work of Jesus, the Son of David, on your behalf is! And He is already seated on His throne and leading His people into life once again.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see that God is faithful to His promises. And we thank You, Lord, for Jesus—the perfect Son of David—who saves us from the consequences of our sins when we trust in Him. In His name we pray, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) If God's past promises are more important than someone's behavior, why does it matter how we live? Isn't Solomon justified in his bad behavior if God was always going to forgive him?
- 2) Read John 9 and pay careful attention to the first verses. Why isn't it appropriate to believe that a time of suffering always means God is punishing you for your sins?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Why did Solomon and the kingdom of Israel fall?
- 2) What was more important to God than the behavior of King Solomon?
- 3) Solomon's promise to King David was that God's promise to David would continue, despite his disobedience. What was God's promise to David, and how did He keep it?

1 KINGS 12-14

Israel's Civil War

Memory Verse

"When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David."

1 Kings 12:20

Real-life Problems

Idolatry—Many of us are trapped in loops, endlessly repeating the failures and mistakes of our past. And it seems the more we try to escape our past, the more we seem trapped by it. Normally, this is because we're trying to muscle through a problem only God can solve. We look to partners, friends, or powerful people to get us out of the situation we feel stuck in. But the Bible calls this idolatry and teaches us it inevitably leads to a life enslaved to patterns we seem doomed to repeat.

The Good News

To a people endlessly and repetitively committed to trying to find our own way out of our circumstances and problems, God offers us an image of Himself. Jesus is the "image" of God. Instead of seeking relief from things of this world—a form of idolatry—we must turn to Jesus, the true representation of all the goodness and power of God in the flesh. We are freed from our slavery when we trust Him above all else.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Who knows or remembers what happened in the exodus story? Retell it in your own words.

Idea #2: Can you tell us about a moment when you realized you were making the same mistake over and over again but didn't know how to stop?

Idea #3: How would you define idolatry?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. [God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.](#)

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we saw that judgment is not God's last word to Israel; His promise to David is. Soon there will be a Son of David on the throne to lead His people into life once again.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Solomon's son, Rehoboam, is far worse than his father and under his leadership, Israel is split in two.
- 2) God's people experience a reversal of the exodus story.
- 3) Idolatry leads to suffering, death, and slavery because it prevents us from fellowship with God, who made us to love, serve, and worship Him.

Read

Read **1 Kings 12-14** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) Solomon's son Rehoboam is crowned king, and immediately there's a problem. What is it (1 Kings 12:1-4)?

Jeroboam returns to Israel from Egypt. He used to be in charge of Solomon's forced-labor programs until God promised him that he would successfully lead a civil war against Solomon's regime and inherit 10 of Israel's tribes (vv. 11:31-34). When he returns, he gathers the slaves he used to lead and publicly demands that Rehoboam decrease the workload Solomon placed on the workers.

2) How does Rehoboam respond (vv. 5-15)?

Rehoboam asks for three days to consult his advisers. His older advisers tell him to avoid a rebellion by giving in to the workers' demands. His younger advisers tell him to show no weakness and to threaten greater punishment and greater workloads in the future. Unfortunately, he follows the foolish counsel of the younger advisers.

3) How do Jeroboam and the rest of Israel respond to Rehoboam's threats (vv. 16-24)?

Israel divides in two. Ten tribes are sympathetic to Jeroboam and revoke Rehoboam as their king. In an attempt to stop the uprising, Rehoboam sends out the current slave-master of Israel. He's immediately stoned. Rehoboam narrowly escapes back to his capital, Jerusalem, where he gathers a force of almost 200,000 men to fight Jeroboam. But a prophet arrives and tells Rehoboam that God has determined this civil war would come to pass and they should not fight it. Thankfully, Rehoboam listens. From now on God's people are divided between Israel in the North and Judah in the South.

4) Jeroboam, the new King of Israel, establishes his capital in Shechem. What does he do next (vv. 25-33)?

Afraid that his people will want to offer sacrifices back at Jerusalem's temple and eventually defect back to Judah, Jeroboam builds his own temple. He builds two golden calves, appoints priests to organize the worship of these deities, and invents his own religious feast. Strangely, he repeats the words Aaron used when he built a golden calf: "Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

5) A prophet confronts Jeroboam's false worship. What happens (1 Kings 13:1-9)?

The prophet prophesies that a new king, Josiah, will end Jeroboam's idolatrous cult. As signs to prove his message is from God, Jeroboam's hand withers, and his false altar splits in two. But Jeroboam is stubborn and hard-hearted. He tries to bribe the prophet over a meal, but God warned the prophet of this, and he abruptly leaves.

6) As the prophet returns home, he is greeted by another prophet. What happens (vv. 16-34)?

The second prophet invites the first prophet for a meal. He refuses once again. But the second prophet lies and says that an angel appeared to him and told him to invite the first prophet to a meal. The first prophet decides to eat with the second. But during the meal the second prophet begins to speak on God's behalf and rebukes the first prophet for disobeying God's word. The prophet leaves on his donkey but is mauled by a lion. Strangely the lion doesn't eat the donkey. The donkey and the lion then stand over the body of the disobedient prophet. The second prophet realizes this is a picture of what will happen to Israel because Jeroboam has filled Israel with idols. Jeroboam hears about all this but does nothing to change his ways.

7) Eventually, Jeroboam's son falls ill, and Jeroboam sends his wife to the same prophet who prophesied he would be king. Jeroboam hopes the prophet will give him good news about his son's recovery. What does the prophet say (vv. 7-20)?

In God's eyes Jeroboam's idolatry is more evil than any who have lived before him. So God has determined to bring disaster to Jeroboam's dynasty just like He promised. None of Jeroboam's family will enjoy a proper burial. They will be burned, eaten by dogs, and picked apart by birds. Everyone that is, except their sick son. He will be spared such a horrible fate because he is the only good thing in Jeroboam's household. Nevertheless, soon God will remove his family from power.

8) The chapter ends with a summary of Rehoboam's life. What is God's verdict on Solomon's son (vv. 21-31)?

Rehoboam is an evil king. Not only is he cruel, like Jeroboam, but he also introduces a lot of idolatry into Judah. And before he dies, Egypt is successful in raiding Jerusalem and plundering the temple of its gold.

B. SO WHAT?

1) What is idolatry and why do you think God takes it so seriously?

Idolatry isn't just bowing or making offerings to other gods. Idolatry is misplaced trust. God's people should trust God to provide for them and preserve their kingdom. Any trust given to a leader, an advisor, or even a prophet in opposition to what God has said is a failure to trust the God who has created and saved us. Idolatry is also an abandonment of who we were created to be. We are called God's "images." The whole world is a temple, and we are meant to be representatives of God in that world. When we worship and trust other "gods," whether they be other people or things like money, power, or fame, we are abandoning who we were meant to be. And as Israel shows us, when we abandon who we were created to be, it leads to slavery.

History Repeats Itself

Option 1: History repeats itself, and it isn't just Israel that experiences this; we've experienced history repeating itself recently! This story might sound familiar: A new disease begins spreading globally, millions are dying, and new variants keep emerging, each more serious than the last. Mask mandates, quarantine orders, and social distancing suggestions are issued by governments in an effort to stop the spread. Officials demand churches stop meeting indoors, and many religious groups protest these orders. These details don't just describe the events of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, but they also describe the Spanish Flu outbreak of a century earlier. Not only did a global pandemic repeat, but our human responses also were almost identical, down to the social tension between maskers and anti-maskers. History always repeats itself.

Option 2: Throughout history, fashion trends have repeated themselves, with styles from previous decades becoming popular again and again after a short period of time. For example, bellbottom pants, crop tops, and platform shoes were popular in the 1970s, and these have since become popular again in the 2010s. For the last several years fashion trends from the '80s have also become more popular—especially since streaming platforms like Netflix produce TV shows set in that time period (like "Stranger Things"). This repetition of fashion trends highlights the repetitive nature of fashion as well as history.

2) 1 Kings 12 is told in a way to remind us of the exodus story in which God's people were freed from slavery in Egypt. What similarities can you see?

Jeroboam tells Rehoboam to reduce the slaves' workload, but like Pharaoh, Solomon's son responds to this threat by increasing demands on the workers (Ex 5:9). Like Moses, Jeroboam leads 10 of Israel's tribes out of slavery and

into the wilderness. But as soon as they're free, Jeroboam builds new golden calves and tells Israel, "Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." And, just as the Israelites plundered the Egyptians of their treasures when leaving Egypt, now Egypt plunders Israel of its treasures. Israel's history has repeated itself except Israel is now the oppressive Egypt in need of a liberator.

3) Why do you think this reversal of the exodus is significant?

It's significant because it represents Israel's total abandonment of God. They are supposed to be the people who have been saved from slavery in Egypt, but Israel would rather be like Egypt than listen to God.

4) Both sides of Israel's civil war learn the same lesson. What is it?

Both sides learn that idolatry leads to destruction and death. Idolatry also leads back to slavery. Ironically, Jeroboam was the master of Israel's slaves under Solomon. Israel trusted a slave master to liberate them, but they end up enslaved to new masters and new idols, and to death.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) We are not immune to forgetting who God created us to be. And we are not immune to trusting other things to give us what only God can. What are some "idols" you trust to make you more free? In what ways have you forgotten who God has made you to be in this world?

Allow space for honesty and openness.

2) In one sense, it's natural to worship images and idols. We want to trust things, especially things we can see and touch and control, to make us feel and be free. What significance do you think there is to Jesus also being called the "image" and "exact representation" of God (Heb 1:3)?

We don't need an idol, we need God to liberate us. And God has shown himself, not as an image carved from wood or molded from gold, but born in the flesh. And those who worship Jesus, those whom He sets free, are free forever (Jn 8:36).

Instead of making sacrifices to false gods, hopes, and idols, trust that Jesus is both your God and your sacrifice. By His blood He liberates you from slavery to sin. And by His resurrection, Jesus inverts the grave and plunders death of its power (1 Cor 15:55).

3) The warning of 1 Kings 12-14 is to avoid the pull of idolatry. What are some things you can do to protect your heart from being drawn to worship and trust other things?

Help your students think through both individual and group strategies to deal with idolatry. Individually, your students should know their own hearts, their own temptations, and their own triggers well enough to protect themselves in advance. One way to do this is to frequently ask yourself, "If I were the devil, how would I tempt myself?" This question helps us be aware of the things we are most prone to be tempted by—be that money, academic achievement, or attention from the opposite sex. Self-awareness should also be paired with a commitment to spend personal time in Scripture and prayer. Corporately fighting idolatry involves going to church, being accountable to another believer, and committing to a small group of believers who know us and can pray for us.

Main takeaway

Idolatry leads to suffering, death, and slavery because it prevents us from fellowship with God, who made us to love, serve, and worship Him.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

To a people endlessly and repetitively committed to the idolatry of trying to find our own way out of our circumstances and problems, God offers us an image of Himself. Jesus is the “image” of God. He is all the goodness and power of God in the flesh. And we are freed from our slavery when we trust Him to the exclusion of other things.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see the God who has given us His image in Jesus so that we can be freed from all the idols that enslave us. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are some “idols” to which you are consistently drawn? What do you look for to “save” you from your circumstances and feelings?
- 2) Idolatry often catches us by surprise, but it doesn’t need to. Ask yourself this question, “If I were the devil, how would I tempt myself?”
- 3) Do you notice any ways that you are just like your parents? Do you see history repeating itself in your own life?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Share a story with your students about how you failed to learn from your past. How has history repeated itself in your life? In what ways are you just like your father or mother? How have you dealt with that?
- 2) What are some things that you feel you (and your family) can’t live without? Do you consider those things “idols”?

1 KINGS 15-16

Idols Are Just Boring

Memory Verse

"So he died, because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and following the ways of Jeroboam and committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit."

1 Kings 16:18-19

Real-life Problems

Idolatry Leads to Death—In one way or another, most of us struggle to worship things other than God. Our willingness to grab things God has promised—like security, intimacy, and satisfaction—in ways that God has not prescribed is called idolatry. We are all idolaters, and as the kings of Israel will show us, idolatry always leads to death. In the case of these kings, it was a physical death, but our idolatry results in spiritual death and separation from God.

The Good News

But Jesus is the exact image of God, and when we bow to Him, all of God's promises are given to us freely, and death is followed by resurrection.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: What's the most bored you've felt in in the last two weeks? Why do you think you felt that way?

Idea #2: Finish these sentences with the first thing that pops into your head. "I couldn't be happy without _____," and "I'm terrified of not having _____ in my life."

Idea #3: What's one thing you get in trouble for, or one flaw your friends keep pointing out to you, that you've tried to stop but can't, no matter how much you try?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. *God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.*

What's going on?

REMIND

Last time we saw that idolatry leads to suffering, death, and slavery because it prevents us from fellowship with God, who made us to love, serve, and worship Him.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) What idolatry is.
- 2) That idolatry is boring and repetitive.
- 3) And that Jesus is the only "image" of God that we need to trust.

Read

Read **1 Kings 15-16** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) The first 60 years of Israel's nationhood took 14 chapters to explore; the next 60 take only two. Who is the first King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah after Israel's civil war? What does he do (1 Kings 15:1-8)?

The first King of Judah is Abijah, and the only details we're told is that he was at war with Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and that he did evil in God's eyes.

2) Three years later, Abijah dies and is replaced by Asa. He's a good king and a relatively bright spot during Israel's decaying years. What does he do (vv. 9-15)?

Asa does right in God's eyes. He expels male shrine prostitutes from Israel's temple, deposes his own idolatrous grandmother, and burns down shrines as he encounters them.

NOTE: You may have to use discernment about how to talk about this topic with younger students. We suggest not getting too focused in on a discussion about prostitution and instead focusing on the fact that Asa does right by in God's eyes.

3) At one point Asa goes to war with Baasha, the new King of Israel. What happens during that war (vv. 16-23)?

Baasha tries to rebuild a city called Ramah to prevent Israel from traveling to or trading with surrounding nations. Asa sends silver and gold to the King of Syria (or Aram) and asks him to break his treaty with Baasha, which he does. Baasha is forced to retreat from Ramah and Asa removes every stone and timber from Ramah that Baasha built up.

4) We're then given two short biographies of the first kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Nadab and Baasha. What do we learn (vv. 25-6:7)?

Both kings are evil. But Nadab and his family are assassinated by Baasha, who then takes the throne. Apparently, this was done at God's command in response to Nadab's evil. But Baasha is no better than Nadab and a prophet tells him that his family's bodies will be eaten by dogs and birds.

5) The next kings of Israel are Baasha's son Elah and Baasha's general Zimri. How do their stories end (vv. 8-20)?

While drunk at a party, Elah's general, Zimri, attacks him and kills all his male relatives, fulfilling the prophecy against Baasha. Zimri then takes the throne. But only seven days later there's a coup. Zimri's army rebels, and Omri is appointed the new captain of the king's armies. Zimri then burns himself alive in his own palace.

6) Chapter 16 ends with the rise of the "Omride Dynasty." This family will be in charge for most of the rest of the book of 1 Kings. How do they come to power (vv. 21-34)?

Israel is split on who should take charge after Zimri. But Omri's forces are able to violently overthrow any opposition and secure the throne, not only for himself but also for his son, Ahab. King Ahab introduces Baal worship to Israel, and we're told that his sins make the sins of Jeroboam (the man who made two golden calves and caused Israel's civil war) look trivial. He even sacrifices his own sons to his new gods as he rebuilds the city of Jericho, the first city Joshua destroyed when Israel reclaimed its ancestral homelands.

7) What are some repeated phrases the author uses at the beginning and end of each story about every king of Israel and Judah?

Apart from Asa, we're told that kings either "aroused God's anger" or "followed in the sins of Jeroboam" or "did evil in the sight of the Lord."

What is An Idol? What is Idolatry?

Best-selling author and theologian Tim Keller defines idol a couple different ways. He says, "An idol is usually a good thing that we make ultimate. We say, 'Unless I have that, I am nothing.' Or, 'An idol is something that we look to for things that only God can give.'"

God was the only one who could take a tiny nation like Israel and rescue it from the clutches of a superpower like Egypt. But throughout Israel's history, Israel looked for that protection and safety in other nations and their gods. They assumed adding the idols of Baal or Assyria would provide a layer of protection they weren't getting from God. In some ways Israel made their nation the ultimate thing, believing if they lost their borders they would have nothing. And so they began looking for ways to secure protection that only God could ever give. Idolatry isn't about bowing down to something, it's about wanting something so badly you'd be willing to try anything to get it, even disobey the commands of the God who rescued you.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Chapters 15 and 16 repeatedly compare Israel's evil kings to Jeroboam. Why is this significant?

Jeroboam was the man who caused Israel's civil war. And after leaving Jerusalem, he built two golden calves to consolidate his power in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (just like Israel did after leaving Egypt). Comparing a king to Jeroboam is a way of saying "history is repeating itself." It's also a way of saying that Israel is still committing the same sins all over again. They are stuck in a cycle and cannot escape their idolatrous past.

2) Chapters 15 and 16 also make a couple of passing references to the story of Joshua. We're told that Baasha leaves "none that breathed" after his battle, and that Ahab rebuilds Jericho. Joshua 10:40 describes Joshua's victories against idolatry as leaving "none that breathed." And Jericho was the first city Joshua destroyed when Israel reclaimed their ancestral homelands. Why do you think these parallels matter?

Joshua was responsible for creating the nation Israel now lives in. But now the type of victory that once created Israel is destroying it. And the old cities that represented idolatrous empires are being rebuilt inside Israel. Israel is going backward.

3) Consistently, God is angry at Israel for the same underlying reason. What is it? Why do you think this causes God so much frustration? It's also one of His ten commandments - "You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:3

Idolatry is the cause of God's anger. And perhaps one reason God is so angered by it is that idolatry has plagued Israel since its people were first rescued from Egypt. It has never not been a problem. Israel built a golden calf immediately after being rescued from Egypt, and they are doing the same thing again. The times of Joshua presumably taught them nothing about God's stance toward idols. Besides the centuries-long struggle with idolatry, no idol has ever saved Israel the way God has. To bow to other gods is to reject and push aside God's love for His people in exchange for something inferior.

God's anger is also a byproduct of His love for His people. God deeply desires the best for His people, and He knows that every other god will fail and hurt them. God is jealous for their affection because He knows that no one apart

from Him will satisfy them. God also yearns to be in relationship with Israel; to see them worship other gods breaks His heart.

4) What is God's response to idolatrous Israel in these chapters?

Idolatry is always punished, normally by another leader rising up and assassinating the person on the throne. Idolatry leads to judgment, most often at the hands of another wicked leader, who is also eventually killed. It might be worth mentioning that this is foreshadowing Israel's eventual exile, when the idolatrous Assyria and Babylon will eventually judge Israel and Judah for their evil.

5) Think back to the last 14 chapters and Israel under the reign of King Solomon... what's different about this period in Israel's history?

The political intrigue of Solomon's days, and the exciting battles of David's reign are gone. They've been replaced with short, detail-thin summaries of kings, and a reminder to look up more information in the history books. The effect is numbing. Even the kings' names all sound alike (Rehoboam and Jeroboam, Omri and Zimri, Asa and Baasha). Encourage your students not to feel guilty about their boredom—they're supposed to feel that way. Israel's idolatry and disobedience are increasingly repetitive, and the author has written these passages to make you feel it. (Fun but sad fact: Aaron, the man who built Israel's first golden calf, had two sons named Nadab and Abi-hu. And Jeroboam, the man who built Israel's golden calves the second time, has two sons named Nadab, and Abi-jah. This once again highlights the repetitive nature of Israel's idolatry.)

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Israel's idolatry is monotonous, repetitive, and (honestly) boring to read. That's because idolatry and disobedience are boring. Disobedience and rebellion against God has looked the same for thousands of years. What do you think counts as "idolatry" today? Do you think it's any different?

Idolatry isn't any different today than it was thousands of years ago. The desires of humans are the same. Humans still want to protect their nation, to be beautiful and alluring, to be secure, to have intimate relationships, to be successful and powerful. None of which are necessarily wrong, but all can become "ultimate" things very easily. We may not bow down to statues anymore, but our hearts are exactly the same.

2) The one bright spot in these chapters is Asa. His heart was "fully committed to the Lord" in a context where idolatry was the norm. We don't have the authority to tear down idolatrous buildings or shrines, but we can follow Asa's lead without doing those things—if we're committed to the Lord. What could "committing to the Lord" look like for you?

The simple answer is "obey." It's to follow God's laws. On a deeper level, committing to God is to trust God. It's to take God at His word when He says that He will protect and provide for you, that you can be satisfied without sex until marriage, and that you don't need to get even because He will make things right. *(As time allows, help your students identify where they just simply don't believe God will come through on one of His promises, or instances in which they don't believe the Bible's vision for their lives can possibly be good.)*

3) Jesus was once tempted to idolatry. Satan offered Jesus a kingdom, wealth, and power if He would just kneel (Mt 4:8-9). But He didn't. Jesus did what every king of Israel should have done. And in response, God gave Him an eternal kingdom. What does the story of Jesus' temptation teach us about what it means to "commit" to God?

Jesus' path to kingship proves that idolatry doesn't work, and that trusting God does. In particular, it means that we must trust God through death. Jesus did not get His kingdom until after He died. Which means that following God will cause suffering and alienation in our own lives. Saying no to idols will be hard; it's something that Israel's kings were unable to do. But if we trust God, we will be given God's kingdom. *(Encourage your students also that we have something that the kings of Israel didn't have: We know what God looks like! He doesn't look like a golden calf, but rather, He is a man who was willing to suffering like us so that we can be given all that God has promised.)*

Main takeaway

Idolatry happens when we look to something other than God to give us what only He can. Not only is it boring and repetitive, it leads to spiritual death and separation from God. God is faithfully committed to showing us the emptiness of our idols and turning our hearts back to him time and time again.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus is the exact "image" of God, and when we bow to Him, all of God's promises are given to us freely, and death is followed by resurrection.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see the God who is angered by idolatry. And may we see Jesus as the true image of God who can save us from death and give us all that God has promised. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) In his book, "Counterfeit Gods," Tim Keller writes, "When people say, 'I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself,' they mean that they have failed an idol, whose approval is more important than God's." When do you feel most unforgivable and unloveable? What idol do you think is lurking there?
- 2) Jesus' ministry was spent loving and forgiving even the worst of people. What stories from Jesus' life speak to the idols you've just identified? What would it look like for you to accept God's love and approval?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What does it mean that idolatry is always repetitive and boring?
- 2) Share a story with your child in which one of your "idols" was exposed, explaining how you began to trust God to give you what you thought only your idol could?

1 KINGS 17-18

The Power of God's Word

Memory Verse

"I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals."

1 Kings 18:18

Real-life Problems

Idolatry— A constant temptation, even for believers, is to worship false gods in a sense. We look to things that aren't God for our fulfillment, and they always disappoint us. It's not always Baal that we're worshiping, it might be money, power, fame, or any number of other things. Regardless of what we're worshiping, though, if it's not the God of the Bible, it will leave us empty.

The Good News

God proves to people who don't believe in him that his is worth worshipping. All other gods will fail to deliver on their promises to us, and all other gods - like money, power, or fame - are cruel masters

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Imagine you knew a severe drought was coming. No rain would fall for three years. How would you prepare?

Idea #2: What "gives you life"? Everyone, name three things that make you feel happier and more revived when things are going poorly?

Idea #3: Have you ever blamed God for something bad in your life? What was it?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever [For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.](#)

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. *God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.*

What's going on?

REMIND

Last time we learned that Israel is trapped in a cycle of boring and repetitive idolatry. Idolatry happens when we look to something other than God to give us what only He can. Not only is it boring and repetitive, it leads to spiritual death and separation from God. God is faithfully committed to showing us the emptiness of our idols and turning our hearts back to him time and time again.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) The consequences of abandoning God's Word are severe.
- 2) Elijah is a living and breathing representative of God.
- 3) God proves to people who don't believe in Him that He is worth worshiping.

Read

Read **1 Kings 17-18** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) In response to Israel's (and in particular King Ahab's) idolatry, God sends Elijah to tell Ahab that a drought will plague Israel for the next several years. What are some ways that God provides for Elijah during the drought (1 Kings 17:1-11)?

At first, God provides a place for Elijah to live near a source of fresh water and feeds him food with the help of some ravens. Once the stream dries up, He sends him to the town of Zarephath, where God says a widow will provide for him. (Also notice how God tells Elijah what He will do before He does it.)

2) When Elijah arrives, the widow is starving just as he is; in fact, she is preparing a final meal before she and her son starve to death. What does Elijah do (vv. 12-16)?

Elijah tells her not to be afraid and to prepare some bread for him anyway. He also tells her that God has said that her jug of oil and her jar of flour will not run out—and they don't. Elijah then stays with this family for a long while.

3) The widow's son eventually becomes so sick he stops breathing. What does she do, and how does Elijah respond (vv. 13-24)?

At first the widow blames Elijah for the boy's death. But Elijah takes the boy, prays over him three times, and God raises the boy back to life. This is the first story of resurrection in the entire Bible. Elijah presents the boy to the widow, and she says that Elijah is truly a man of God who speaks God's words.

4) Three years later God tells Elijah to visit Ahab and tell him that He is about to send rain. What has been happening while Elijah was in hiding (1 Kings 18:1-15)?

Ahab and his wife have been hunting down and killing God's prophets. They have been especially searching for Elijah, perhaps looking for a way to end the famine that began at Elijah's words. Meanwhile Obadiah, one of Ahab's administrators, has been acting like a prophetic double agent, hiding and feeding 100 prophets in some nearby caves. Elijah meets Obadiah and tells him to set up a meeting with Ahab.

5) It's tense when Ahab and Elijah finally meet again. Elijah immediately confronts Ahab's Baal worship and sets up a contest to prove which god is the true God. What is the contest (vv. 16-24)?

Two altars will be built with a bull placed on top of each. Then the 450 prophets of Baal will compete with Elijah to see which god will answer his people's prayers by setting the altar on fire. Whichever god responds is the true God of Israel.

6) Who wins the contest and how (vv. 25-39)?

Elijah wins the contest. The prophets of Baal wail and whip themselves for hours in an attempt to get Baal to respond, but with no effect. Elijah makes fun of their god, saying he must be too busy sleeping. Then Elijah builds his altar and douses it with water three times. After Elijah prays a simple prayer, God rains fire from heaven. And the people watching proclaim that God is the Lord.

7) Elijah then kills the false prophets of Baal and tells Ahab that God is about to send rain. Elijah then waits for the rain to start. What does he do (vv. 40-46)?

Elijah goes back to the top of Mt. Carmel, where he had just won the contest, and he tells his servant to look for clouds seven times. Once a small cloud finally rises from the sea, he tells his servant to inform Ahab that rain is coming, and soon a storm comes, ending a long three years of drought and famine.

Too Proud for Chemo

In trying to kill Elijah, King Ahab tries to kill the one thing bringing life to Israel. He's like a man dying of cancer who is too proud to start chemo because he will lose his hair. The solution is right in front of Ahab, like the solution is right in front of the cancer patient. But both would rather hold onto symbols of their dying life (hair and idols) than admit they are sick or that God is the true God of Israel.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Look over Chapter 17 again, how many times does God speak to Elijah or does Elijah say something on God's behalf?

At least seven times. In verse 1 God says there will be no rain in Israel. In verses 2 and 3, God tells Elijah to go to the wilderness and that He will feed them there. In verse 9, God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath. In verse 14, Elijah tells the woman that God has said the flour and oil won't run out. In verse 16 we're told the previous "word of the Lord" came to pass. In verse 22 the Lord hears Elijah's cry and resurrects the dead boy. In verse 24 the widow says that Elijah is a man of God, and the "word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

2) These two chapters are all about God speaking through or in response to Elijah. What happened when God spoke?

God's word caused the famine in Israel. God's word provided food and water, oil and flour. God answered Elijah's prayers by bringing a boy back from the dead. And God answered Elijah's prayer to burn the sacrifice. God's word ended the famine in Israel.

3) In both chapters Elijah prays three times, once for the boy to be raised, and then again for the fire to fall. What happens in both stories?

God answers Elijah's prayers both times. And in response, both the widow and the people watching at Carmel recognize that Elijah is God's prophet and that God is the true God of Israel.

4) We're never told how Ahab responds to Elijah's actions. But based on everything we've read, what should Ahab's response be?

Ahab should admit that God is speaking through Elijah and that God is the true God of Israel. Like the widow he should recognize that God can bring Israel back from the brink of death and famine. And like the people he should abandon Baal and worship God alone or else suffer the consequences. Sadly, in the next chapter we learn that Ahab tries to kill Elijah instead, sealing his fate as God's enemy.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) God's word is powerful. It causes famines and raises the dead. How should stories like the ones we read today change our attitude toward the Bible?

Normally when we think about "God's Word," we think of it as a book of rules to follow or a collection of expectations to meet. Help reorient your students. Help them understand that God's Word isn't only a book but a living God speaking into the world, and a voice that burns like fire. Help them see how that should radically change their approach to reading the actual text of Scripture.

2) How people responded to Elijah was really how people responded to God. In a small and limited way, he was God's "word" walking and talking around Israel! We know God's Word in the flesh as Jesus. Can you think of any parallels between Jesus and these stories about Elijah?

Like Elijah, Jesus was fed in a wilderness, multiplied food to the starving, changed weather with a word, and is the only other man in Scripture to raise a widow's son from the dead (Lk 7:11-17). Like Elijah, Jesus was also rejected by Israel and its leaders. And just as Elijah prayed three times before God responded with miraculous power, leading people to believe in Him, Jesus spends three days in the earth before rising from the dead.

3) In today's story Israel was dying, a widow was starving, and a boy was deathly ill. But in each case God's word in Elijah's mouth rescued them. What one area of your life would you like a miracle like you read about today? Where do you feel dead, starved, or sick? As students share, pray for them, particularly with Scripture.

To the extent that your students are willing, give them the opportunity to be honest about their problems, issues and concerns. Spend time praying for each of them as they communicate their needs. Encourage your other students to pray as well, using as much Scripture and/or stories from the life of Jesus as possible.

Main takeaway

God proves to people who don't believe in Him that He is worth worshipping.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

God provides life where there is death by sending us His Word in the flesh to resurrect us.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see that God's words provide life where there is death. And may we see Jesus as God's Word, His powerful, life-giving Word in the flesh. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Identify three places in your own life in which you feel you're starving and/or dying spiritually, emotionally, or otherwise.
- 2) In those three places, are you tempted to be like Ahab, dismissing God's words when you encounter them?
- 3) What would it look like for you to respond like the widow or the people of Israel after the fire fell from heaven? What would trusting God's words look like for you?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Share with your children a time when a story from Jesus' life or a particular Bible verse was particularly powerful and/or changed the course of your life.
- 2) What was the point of all of Elijah's miracles?

1 KINGS 19-20

The Insanity of Saying "No" to Mercy

Memory Verse

"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."

1 Kings 19:11-12

Real-life Problems

Feeling Defeated—Our lives will not always pan out the way we want. Our plans will not all succeed. Evil people will remain in power when they shouldn't, and good people will be marginalized and persecuted for standing up for what is right. We might even be tempted to give up under the harsh reality of life in this world. In moments like this, we need God to speak to us, and the good news is that He has—in His Word!

The Good News

In His death Jesus demonstrates what will happen to all evil, and in His resurrection He demonstrates what will happen to all those who believe that He is God and trust in Him.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Name one or two people from history that you believe don't deserve any mercy or sympathy.

Idea #2: How would feel if you found out a terrible person from history (like Hitler) was in heaven? Would that change your opinion about God? Why?

Idea #3: If you could see one miracle from the Bible for yourself, which would it be?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

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Why did He die for your sins?

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They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. [God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.](#)

What's going on?

REMIND

Last time we learned that God's words in the mouth of His prophet bring life to dead Israel. We saw that God proves to people who don't believe in Him that He is worth worshiping.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) God wants to restart and reform Israel, just as He wants to reform you and me.
- 2) God will show mercy to wicked kings, as well as to sinful people like us.
- 3) Miracles are not enough to convince us that God is real.

Read

Read **1 Kings 19-20** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) Elijah has just killed the false prophets, and Ahab and Jezebel seek to kill him for it. What does Elijah do? What happens to him there (1 Kings 19:1-9)?

He makes a run for it, back into the wilderness. Collapsing under a tree, he asks God to kill him. But an angel appears and gives him food and water instead. Elijah then wanders for 40 days and into the wilderness to a mountain called Horeb. (*Point out to your students that this is a different name for Mt. Sinai, where God spoke to Israel and made them a nation.*)

2) While on the mountain, Elijah has a conversation with God. What do they say to each other (vv. 10-14)?

God asks Elijah why he's on Mt. Horeb, and Elijah responds that he is the only one left in Israel that follows Him. God tells Elijah to leave his cave and go stand on the mountain top and wait for God to pass by. At first a powerful wind sweeps by, but God is not in the wind. Then an earthquake shakes the mountain, followed by a fire, but God is in neither of these. Instead, God arrives in a whisper, and they repeat the conversation they had when Elijah first arrived.

3) Then God tells Elijah to anoint three people. Who are they and what will they do (vv. 15-21)?

Elijah needs to anoint Jehu as the future King of Israel, Hazael as the future King of Syria (or Aram), and Elisha as Elijah's successor. Together they will replace Ahab's idolatrous Israel with 7,000 faithful men and women to restore Israel to the nation it was always meant to be, a place where God alone is worshiped.

4) In chapter 20 the King of Syria demands Israel and Ahab's surrender. When Ahab refuses, Ben-Hadad rides out to war. It seems as if God's plan to rid Israel of evil and restore His people is underway! But an unnamed prophet appears to Ahab. What does the prophet offer? How does Ahab respond (1 Kings 20:1-21)?

The prophet tells Ahab that he will win this battle so that he would finally know that God is the true Lord of Israel. Ahab seems to be getting mercy from God! Ahab gathers 7,000 soldiers and ambushes the overconfident Syrian forces, who are getting drunk before the battle. It's a total victory for Ahab.

5) The prophet tells Ahab that Syria will attack again next spring. What is the Syrians' tactic (vv. 22-26)?

The Syrians think the only reason they lost was because Israel's God was a "god of the plains." They think if they battle in the hill country the next year, they will win.

6) Before the battle begins the prophet comes to Ahab again and tells him that he will be victorious, so that he would know that God is Lord both of the plains and the hills. How does Ahab win? And what other Bible story does this sound like (vv. 27-34)?

Ahab wins by waiting for seven days in his encampment. On the seventh day, Ahab attacks, and after killing many, the walls of the city collapse on 27,000 men. This should remind your students of Joshua and Jericho. It was the first battle in Israel's campaign to reclaim their ancestral homeland.

7) The King of Syria escapes the battle, and Ahab spares his life in exchange for trading routes in Syria. God is displeased by this act of disobedience, so a prophet reenacts Ahab's disobedience in a strange way. What does he do (vv. 35-43)?

The prophet asks his friend to wound him, but when he refuses the prophet says that he will die because he has disobeyed God, and he does. The prophet finds another man, who actually wounds him. The prophet then disguises himself as a soldier who has failed to carry out his orders. When Ahab walks by, he says his sentence should be death. The prophet then reveals himself. Ahab will receive the same sentence he just gave his soldier. He will die for failing to kill Ben-Hadad as God instructed him.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why do you think Elijah asked God to kill him?

Elijah isn't just a preacher. He's trying to bring Israel back to faithfulness to God and prevent it from falling apart, and nothing he has done up to this point has worked. He's feeling discouraged because not one of his miracles has convinced Ahab to stop his idolatry. He's now being hunted. As far as he knows, he's the only one loyal to God left alive. It seems as if Israel is doomed.

2) The last time God spoke from Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai) was when Israel first became a nation (Ex 19-20). How does this detail shape our understanding of what's happening in 1 Kings 19?

Elijah thinks Israel is doomed. But God is speaking from the place where Israel first became a nation. God is reestablishing His people and remaking His nation, just as He did before. Elijah doesn't need to be discouraged because God has not abandoned His people.

3) God tells Elijah that there are 7,000 faithful people left in Israel. Ahab then gathers 7,000 men to fight Syria. And then, after waiting seven days, this army defeats Syria when the walls of their city come crashing down. Why would all this seem particularly significant if you were Elijah or another Israelite at that time?

It seems that God is remaking His nation just like He did with Joshua. Ahab, despite his evil, is acting like a new Joshua in restoring Israel to faithfulness. Elijah's ministry seems to be a success after all. (Note: As detailed in Deuteronomy 5-6, right after God makes Israel into a nation, he tells them that part of Israel's mission as a nation is to remove idolatry from the land. These victories under King Ahab restore Israel to its original mission.)

4) Over and over we're told that Ahab's victories over Syria are meant to prove to him that God is the Lord, but in the end, Ahab doesn't get the message. Why do you think God pronounced a death sentence on Ahab for failing to kill Ben-Hadad?

Whenever Joshua conquered idolatrous kings, he was supposed to end their influence in Israel by killing them. God has just mercifully given Ahab a Joshua-like victory, and that comes with Joshua-like expectations. Failing to kill Ben-Hadad was a form of idolatry. Ahab chose the money he could make with new trade routes over obedience to God.

5) What's strange about this story is that Ahab is described as one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history. We expect someone as evil as Ahab to meet God's fiery punishment, like the kind we saw on Mt. Carmel. Why do you think God gave Ahab victory in battle and a chance to return to Him once again?

I think there are two ways to answer this question. First, this is exactly the kind of God that God is. He is so committed to His people He will extend second, third, and even 20th chances if it means that one of His people might return to Him. Second, perhaps the reason Ahab is described as being so evil is precisely because he was shown so much mercy. God gave him every reason to believe in Him, but Ahab nevertheless chose to reject Him.

The Insanity of Rejecting Mercy

When King Ahab rejects God's mercy it's almost baffling. How on earth could someone who had been shown that much mercy and miracles still refuse to admit that God is Lord? Jesus tells a similar story in Matthew 18:21-35 about an unmerciful servant. In Jesus' story a servant owes a massive debt that would be impossible to pay off in his lifetime. Mercifully, his master forgives the debt and sets him free. But the servant sees someone who owes him money and starts choking him, demanding his money back. When he refuses, the servant throws the man in jail. When the master hears about this, he's irate and sends his servant to prison and to be tortured until he can pay everything back. Part of the point of this parable is to recognize how insane it is to do what this man has done. Someone who has been shown great mercy should naturally respond in kind. Whenever he doesn't, it's proof that this person is guilty and evil beyond redemption.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) In 1 Kings 19-20 God wants to remake His people and reform His kingdom. He wants new leaders to know that He is God and to remove idolatry from His people. How does God battle our enemies and heal our idolatry in Jesus?

Instead of prophets like Elijah or undeserved victories against Syrians, we have Jesus, the truer and better prophet, to show us who the Lord is. In a demonstration of grace, Jesus goes to battle against "enemies" He is under no obligation to fight—our Ahab-like pride and our inevitable deaths. He even dies in battle against them as their substitute. More unexpected than walls falling down, Jesus dies for His enemies so that His enemies would know that He is the Lord and can be united to Him. And more merciful than giving a wicked king a second chance, Jesus fills us with His Spirit and removes the power other gods have over us.

2) In 1 Kings 20 a prophet reenacts what Ahab's disobedience deserves. How does Jesus, like this prophet, reenact what our sin deserves?

Jesus' death and resurrection are prophetic dramas. Jesus' death is a picture of the inevitable condemnation and death those who reject God will experience. But Jesus' resurrection is a picture that reveals there is eternal life for anyone who recognizes God's true power and repents of their pride.

3) Why do you think Ahab's miraculous victories were not enough to convince him that God was the true God? Why is it often the case that Jesus' victory over death is not enough to convince us (or others) that He is God and is worth obeying?

People often say that if they saw a miracle they would believe God and follow Him. But stories like Ahab's prove that even if we see miracles up close and personal (with a prophet telling us what we should understand from them) we still would not believe God. Discuss these ideas with your students.

Main takeaway

God is so committed to His people that He will extend second, third, and even 20th chances if it means that one of His people might return to Him.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

In His death Jesus demonstrates what will happen to all evil, and in His resurrection He demonstrates what will happen to all those who believe that He is God and trust in Him.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who is recreating His kingdom on earth. And may we see Jesus as the one who dies so that even evil people might receive mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Read Exodus 19 and 33. What's similar and what's different about how God shows up to Elijah in 1 Kings 19?
- 2) Ahab was at war with God, refusing to believe that the miraculous things done for him required his allegiance or obedience. Are you like Ahab in some ways? How so?
- 3) Think about Jesus as a prophet. His death is a prophecy of inevitable condemnation for those who reject God. But Jesus' resurrection is a prophecy of eternal life for anyone who recognizes God's power and repents of their pride. Does this comfort you? Scare you? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Why do you think God gave the evil King Ahab a second chance?
- 2) Why do you think miracles aren't enough to convince people that God is real?

1 KINGS 21-22

Naboth's Vineyard

Memory Verse

"There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols...."

1 Kings 21:25-26

Real-life Problems

Struggling to listen to God's Voice

—We are surrounded by voices telling us what to do, what to buy, how to behave, and where to find happiness. It can feel impossible to know who is telling the truth, and which option, if any, is from God. In a world of endless voices, it's almost impossible to feel confident in the way forward, ~~and often it feels like God is lying to us.~~ So we do what seems most intuitive: We follow our gut, our instincts, and cross our fingers that our decisions will lead us to the life we want.

The Good News

In a world of competing voices, God has spoken to us through His Word and in Jesus, the very Word of God, who died for our sins and guides us even today.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Did you ever steal anything from a store when you were younger? What did your parents do when they found out? Tell us the story.

Idea #2: Do you think everyone deserves to be told the truth all the time? Is it ever permissible to lie? Is it possible to be so evil that you don't deserve to be told the truth? Why or why not?

Idea #3: Do you think it's possible to be so evil that you don't deserve a second chance? Why or why not?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever **For God so loved the world . . . John 3:16.**

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings?

The author is unknown, but many people believe they might have been written by the prophet Jeremiah.

2) Who was the original audience of these books?

The books were likely written between 560 and 540 BC. The original audience was the people of Israel and Judah after Assyria and Babylon destroyed their countries.

3) Why were the books of 1 and 2 Kings written?

They were written to convince Israel that God could bring them back to life even after their nation, kings, prophets, and temple had been destroyed. *God is faithful in His covenant with us, even when we are not.*

What's going on?

REMIND

Last time we saw that God showed mercy to Ahab, so that he would know that He is the Lord.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Ahab rejects God's mercy yet again, just like when we reject God's Word and turn against Him.
- 2) God proportionately punishes Ahab for his evil, demonstrating His justice against sin and evil.
- 3) Jesus ^{tells} the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard ~~is a picture of how all of us react to Jesus and His message.~~ *to show the Pharisees His authority and reveal*

Read

Read **1 Kings 21-22** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) Ahab tries to buy a vineyard, but the owner refuses to sell it. How does Ahab respond? What does his response tell you about his character (1 Kings 21:1-4)?

Ahab sulks and refuses to eat. Ahab seems childish. You could also point out the lesson from last week. After God performed miracles and defeated Syria on Ahab's behalf, Ahab still chooses to disobey. Ahab has been acting childishly and foolishly against God for a long time now.

2) Ahab's wife, Jezebel, comes up with a plan to get the vineyard for her husband. What does she do? What happens to Naboth, owner of the vineyards (vv. 5-16)?

Jezebel sends two lying witnesses to publicly accuse Naboth during a religious festival. They incite a mob, claiming Naboth has "cursed both God and the king." They convince the crowd to stone Naboth. Ahab then seizes the vineyard for himself (v. 16).

3) When Elijah hears what happened, he gives Jezebel and Ahab three dire prophecies about their future. What are they? How does Ahab respond (vv. 17-29)?

1) Ahab will die in the same vineyard he stole, and the dogs he let lick up Naboth's blood will later drink his blood. 2) All of Ahab's male descendants will be removed from power and killed. 3) Jezebel will be killed, and dogs will lick up her blood in a city called Jezreel. In response, Ahab has a brief moment of humility, and God delays part of his sentence. He will not live to see his family destroyed.

4) Three years later, Ahab asks the King of Judah to go back to war with Syria and take the strategic city of Ramoth Gilead. The King of Judah agrees, but wants to ask God what to do first. So Ahab gathers 400 of his prophets. What do they say? What's strange about their prophecy (1 Kings 22:1-6)?

All 400 prophets say the same thing: "The Lord will give it into the king's hand." This is a strange prophecy because it's very ambiguous. It's not clear what God is giving and to which king.

5) The King of Judah is not satisfied with Ahab's prophets and asks if a prophet of "the Lord" can be consulted instead. Why is Ahab reluctant to invite a prophet of the Lord (vv. 7-8)?

Ahab knows that every time a prophet of God shows up he prophesies Ahab's coming death, and he doesn't want to hear that anymore. He just wants prophets who agree with his ambitions.

6) Eventually Ahab invites Micaiah to hear what the Lord has to say. What does Micaiah say? How does Ahab respond to Micaiah's prophecy (vv. 9-28)?

At first Micaiah tells Ahab to "Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king". He is essentially mocking Ahab and telling him what he wants to hear like all the other prophets have. He then tells him that their battle with Syria will end in disaster and that Israel will be scattered like sheep without a shepherd. He then explains why all of Ahab's prophets gave the same vague prophecy. God ^{allowed} ~~recruited~~ a lying spirit to deceive Ahab's prophets and lure him into a battle he's sure to lose. Importantly, this is a very severe type of justice. Just as Jezebel ^{allowed} ~~recruited~~ liars to kill Naboth, God has ^{allowed} ~~recruited~~ liars to destroy Ahab. For his honesty, Ahab throws Micaiah in prison.

7) Ahab disregards Micaiah's warning and rides out to war. But to hedge his bets, he goes into battle in disguise. How does Ahab die?

Ahab's disguise does him no good. A stray arrow pierces his armor. Fatally wounded, Ahab is forced to watch his army lose while he slowly bleeds to death. Just as God predicted, dogs lick his blood. He's then buried back home near his stolen vineyard.

B. SO WHAT?

1) The book of 1 Kings ends with the introduction of Ahab's successor and a short biography of the King of Judah. Why do you think these are placed at the end of 1 Kings (vv. 41-53)?

They are meant to highlight the two very different paths Judah and Israel are taking. Ahab's Israel has chosen to disobey God, embrace idolatry, and murder God's prophets. As a result, God's anger has been roused, and Ahab's family and Israel itself are on the verge of dying. Judah, however, is experiencing comparative peace and security because its people are doing "right in the eyes of the Lord." These two short introductions teach us yet again that idolatry and, in particular, refusing to listen to God's prophets, leads to inevitable death, but obeying God leads to life and peace.

2) Ahab and Jezebel killed countless prophets during their reign. And they hunted Elijah until he wanted to die. Interestingly, Naboth's name is a play on the word "prophet." Yet again Ahab and Jezebel are seen as people who will kill God's prophets to get what they want. What is a prophet? And what do these stories teach us our response to God's words should be?

A prophet is a messenger for God. They speak God's words and inform others of what God expects and has decided. In Ahab's story, choosing idolatry also meant rejecting the words of God and murdering or imprisoning the messengers of the Lord. God's people are not supposed to be like Ahab! We're supposed to listen to the voice of God or else be swept up in God's justice against our idolatry and rebellion.

3) Read Matthew 21:33-46, where Jesus retells the story of Ahab and Naboth in a different context. Who is Ahab in Jesus' version of the story? Who is the prophet they are rejecting?

Israel's religious leadership is Ahab. Like Ahab, they are taking care of a vineyard that was never theirs but belonged to God. In mercy God sends prophet after prophet, but Israel's leadership has mistreated or killed them all. Ahab's dealings with Naboth foreshadow what the religious establishment will do to God's ultimate prophet, Jesus.

4) From what you know of Jesus' story, can you think of any parallels between Naboth's death and Jesus'?

Like Naboth, false witnesses accuse Jesus of cursing both God and king. A mob seals both their fates. And as Ahab murdered Naboth but let the bloodthirsty King of Syria go, Israel's leaders murder Jesus and let an insurrectionist go free.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) The ending chapters of 1 Kings want us to respond rightly to God's Word in the mouth of God's prophets. What should our response be toward God's ultimate prophet, Jesus?

We should not be like Ahab through most of his story. But Ahab did have one moment of humility. After hearing about his coming death from Elijah, he tore his clothes and (momentarily) repented. We should be like Ahab in his humility, however. We should accept Jesus as not merely a messenger of God, but God's Word in the flesh. Unlike other prophets, Jesus doesn't just explain what God expects of us, He also demonstrates it perfectly.

2) Somewhat strangely to our ears, God ^{allows} sends a lying spirit to lure Ahab into his death. But in 1 Corinthians 2:8, the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus' death was a kind of deception too. Jesus trapped the powers of this world and defeated them by His own death. Why is a god who "lures" and "traps" the powers of evil good news?

Our enemies might be smart, but our God is smarter. Our enemies might lure us, tempt us, and trick us to buy their products and buy into their lifestyles, but God tempts the tempters to their own destruction. When we see injustice, bullying, or evil in our world, we can take heart that God cares deeply about it. The cross and the resurrection remind us that one day, God will right every wrong and execute justice on our enemies.

Jill Pole's Four Signs

In C.S. Lewis' book, "The Silver Chair," a girl by the name of Jill Pole ultimately destroys the forces of darkness. But her job isn't to kill the evil Lady of the Green Kirtle or to fight a war, but rather to remember four signs given to her by King Aslan. Each is odd and vague—more like a riddle, really. But the signs will guide Jill in her quest and ultimately defeat the forces of evil. Throughout Jill's story, other voices tempt her away from these signs, confuse them, or reinterpret them. And as a result, Jill fails to heed the first three signs, and her quest gets darker and harder. But, when it matters most, Jill remembers to follow the fourth sign, even though it might cost her her life. I think it's clear that C.S. Lewis intended Aslan's signs to be analogous to Scripture. And when we follow it, despite the cost, it leads to victory.

3) There are many voices competing for our attention and telling us what to do and what is right. How do we know what God is saying to us in any given moment?

(Note: Perhaps modify this question for your older students this way: The commands contained in the Bible are thousands of years old, and our world is different in significant ways from the days of Elijah, Ahab, and even Jesus. How do we know what God is saying to us today?)

Ultimately, the answer to "knowing God's voice" is in being familiar with God's Word, the Word made flesh in Jesus, and listening to God's Holy Spirit abiding within us. There really are no shortcuts to memorization, Bible reading, and prayer. To avoid being like Ahab, we must 1) rejoice that God's Word *lives* inside those who trust in Jesus, and 2) make every effort to allow God's Word in us to be demonstrated in our lives and actions.

Main takeaway

Humility and obedience to God's Word bring us closer to God.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

In a world of competing voices, God has spoken to us through His Word and through Jesus, who died for our sins and guides us even today.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

I pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the God who traps evil kings but also gives us His words to live by. And thank You that Jesus is God's prophet and His Word in the flesh. Thank You that Jesus shows us what God's Word requires and plants God's Word in the hearts of all those who trust in Him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are some of the "voices" competing for your attention right now? Which are the loudest? Which do you listen to most?
- 2) This story should alert us to the fact that often, the voices we surround ourselves with pave the way to our own destruction. What does this say about God? How does this change the way you think about the voices in your life?
- 3) What is a concrete plan you can take to make God's Word a more prominent voice in your life?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Following God's Word can be difficult, especially when the stakes are high. How can your family prepare itself to follow God's Word, even when it might not seem like it benefits you?
- 2) What are some things you can do as a family to remind yourselves of God's Word more frequently?