

1 KINGS: How to Lose a Kingdom

by Ray C. Stedman

First Kings is the gripping story of how to lose a kingdom.

As we read these Old Testament books, the key to making them live and be vital in our lives is to see that they are visual aids by which God is showing us what is going on in our own lives. We can see ourselves in every one of these Old Testament stories and when we do, the words take on eyes and look at us. We discover that the words are aimed exactly and directly at us.

The view that the Bible gives of man is that every one of us is intended to be a king over a kingdom. The whole purpose of the Lord Jesus coming into our lives, which is the theme of the book of Romans, is that we might learn how to reign over the kingdom of our lives in God-given authority and victory. It is this that makes human life full and complete and fascinating when we learn to walk in God's power.

One of the overworked phrases constantly bandied about in Christian circles is "the victorious Christian life." Unfortunately that has been abused, distorted, twisted, and perverted so many times that it has lost much of its meaning for us. But if you take it in the freshness of its original intention, that is exactly what God has in mind for you – to learn how to walk in victory as a king over the kingdom of your life and thus find its intended fulfillment. That is exactly what these books of the Old Testament illustrate for us, especially the books dealing with the monarchy in Israel.

God called aside the nation Israel; he marked it out as his own people. He made, in a sense, a stage of the little land of Israel. He bid the whole world

to look upon that nation. What went on in that land is a portrayal of what is going on throughout the whole course of human history, and individually going on in each of our lives. If we see these books like this, they take on a tremendously intense meaning and purpose in our lives.

The book of First Kings holds the secret of success in reigning over the kingdom of your life. It is the secret of learning to be submissive to the authority and dominion of God in your own life. In other words, man can never exercise dominion over his life unless he first subjects himself to the dominion of God. If you yield to God's dominion, you are given reign over the areas in your own life. On the other hand, if you refuse the dominion of God in your own life, you cannot under any circumstances or by any means fulfill your desire to be in authority over your life. It is impossible! This is what these books teach us. That is why all through this book you will find that the spotlight is on the throne. It is the king that is the important one – for as the king goes, so goes the nation. In your life your will is king. What your will allows to enter in to control your life, determines how the kingdom of your life goes.

King Solomon, the successor to David, is upon the throne. David is still king when the book opens, but immediately he is confronted by the rebellion of another one of his sons, Adonijah. Adonijah attempts to gain control of the throne even before his father David dies. David, learning of this, acts to put Solomon on the throne. Solomon is anointed king while his father still lives and

in effect assumes the throne while David is still alive. This indicates **the first mark** of what a real reigning authority in our lives should be: Authority must come by the gift and hand of God. We cannot reign except as we are established by God. When we give ourselves to the authority of God, it becomes his responsibility to bring every circumstance, and every enemy, and every rebellion that would otherwise threaten our reign, under control. This is what he did in the case of Adonijah.

As we read on in the second and third chapters you see Solomon coming to the throne. He rules in power and might and glory. Solomon's reign marks the greatest extension of the kingdom of Israel and was particularly characterized by a display of outward majesty and power. But in Chapter 3, you also have the seeds of defeat. These are very, very important to notice. In Verses 1 and 2 we read:

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been build for the name of the Lord. {1 Ki 3:1-2 RSV}

Then the all-important third verse:

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father; only, he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places. {1 Ki 3:3 RSV}

Now here is a man who loves God. He loves him with all his heart. Solomon begins his reign with a wonderful expression of yieldedness and a desire for God's rule and authority in his life. He follows in the footsteps of his father, David. Nevertheless, he does two little things – which seem to be very small, trivial matters – that ultimately overthrow his kingdom:

1. He makes an alliance with the daughter of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, (which always pictures the world) and brings her into the central life of the nation of Israel; here an alliance is made with the world.

2. Then he also worships at the high places.

In the pagan religions of that day all the worship and rites were conducted up on the mountain tops. The pagan tribes had erected altars, many of which were the center of very idolatrous and licentious worship. Frequently, the altar was the place where the fertility of sex gods was worshipped in a sexual display. But the altars were also taken over by the people of Israel and used for the sacrifices to Jehovah. The ark of God was now in the city of Jerusalem in the tabernacle, where David placed it. But Solomon did not present his offerings at the altar in the tabernacle; instead he was offering in these high places. He was offering sacrifices to God, but on pagan altars. Outwardly there was much that was beautiful and admirable in this young man's rule, and, in general, his heart was set in the right direction. Nevertheless, there was an area that was not fully committed to God. There was a weakness in his fellowship. There was a lack of understanding that the secret of God's love lay in that inner yieldedness to his will, represented by a worship before the ark of the covenant. In many, many a life, there is often much outward yieldedness and commitment to the will of God, but in the private inner life there is a lack of warmth and a hunger after God.

It was here that the strength of David so vividly lay. Even though David fell into the black sins of murder and adultery, nevertheless, in the inner sanctum of his heart there was a deep and abiding commitment to the will of God and a hungering after the person of God. You see it breaking through in all the psalms of David. But this is lacking in Solomon, and this is the first indication that something is wrong in his life.

This story takes us into a description of the beauty and the display of the greatness of Solomon's kingdom.

The second mark of a God-given power and reign is given to us in Chapter 3 in the account of Solomon's dream, in which God appeared and told him to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon, in a marvelous passage, asks not for riches or for honor, but for wisdom:

“Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?” {1 Ki 3:9 RSV}

In beginning his reign like this, Solomon indicated that he had grasped to a great extent what was a primary need in exercising authority within the kingdom that God had given him – wisdom.

When you come to the New Testament, you find that this is true. In the book of Hebrews the writer takes to task the people that he is writing to because he says, “When you ought to be teachers, when you have been Christians long enough that by now you ought to be able to teach others, you have need of somebody to take you back to kindergarten and instruct you all over again in the ABC’s of the Christian life,” (cf, Heb 5:12). He says the sign of those who are mature in Christ, and have learned to really walk in Him, is that they are able to discern between good and evil.

That is the problem today, isn’t it? Good looks bad, and bad looks good. Anybody can tell good from evil when good looks good and evil looks evil. The great problem is to identify evil when it comes smiling at you, dripping with solicitude, and seems to offer you everything you have been looking for. Christian maturity comes when we learn to exercise the spirit of wisdom to distinguish between good and evil. That which seems to minister to the spirit may actually be a clever trap of Satan to plant a seed of distrust in the heart and will eventually produce terrible fruit a few years later in life.

This wisdom is what Solomon asked for. God granted him his request. But there was one slight weakness in his request. He asked for wisdom that he might govern the people. We can only wish, as we read, that this fine young man had asked for wisdom to govern his own life first. That is where he began to fail. It is evident from this that God knows exactly what is in a person. He granted Solomon this wisdom but he also gave with it the circumstances that put wisdom to the test.

God does this with all of us. God knows exactly what is in us. He gives us essentially what is our basic, urgent, clamant cry to him. If we want something from God badly enough, he will give it to us. But he also puts us in circumstances that will bring out what is in us.

Along with the wisdom, he gave to Solomon riches and honor. It was the riches and honor that overthrew Solomon. As Solomon gloried and exulted in the magnificence of his kingdom, pride began to enter his heart. His downfall came as a result of this.

The first mark of rulership then, in order to establish your rule in the kingdom of your own life, is dependence upon God. The second is wisdom – insight and understanding of yourself – if you are to walk in the Spirit.

We have this demonstrated to us in Solomon’s wise judgment between the two mothers who brought a baby to him. They had both had a baby, but one baby had died. Both women claimed the living baby. Solomon was asked to decide whose baby it was. In a display of his wisdom to analyze other people’s problems he said, “Bring a sword.” Then laying the baby down before these two women, he said, “Now divide the baby in half. Give one half to one woman and the other half to the other.” The real mother immediately said, “Oh, no; don’t do that! Let the other woman have the baby.” But the other woman said, “No, that is fine. That is perfectly fair. Divide the child and we will each take half.” Solomon knew at once who the real mother was. Thus his wisdom was demonstrated.

Chapter 4, Verse 29, begins a commentary on how much wisdom Solomon was given:

God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand of the seashore, so though Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east [including all the so-called wisdom of the orient – the Chinese and Indian] and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Herman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol [these were the newspaper commentators of that day!]; and his fame was in all the nations round about. He also uttered three thousand proverbs [we have them recorded in the book of Proverbs]; and his songs were a thousand and five [of those we have only one: “The Song of Solomon” or “The Song of Songs”]. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles,

and of fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. {1 Ki 4:29-34 RSV}

What a picture this is of what Paul says in First Corinthians, “we have the mind of Christ” {1 Cor 2:16b RSV}, and “the spiritual man judges all things” {1 Cor 2:15a RSV}. He does not need anyone to teach him, since he already discerns all things. He is able to analyze and understand all things.

In Chapter 4 you have **the third mark** of what it means to reign – orderliness. A kingdom is orderly. God is not the author of confusion for he does things decently and in order. Also in Chapter 4, Verse 20, is **the fourth mark** of authority:

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. {1 Ki 4:20 RSV}

That is total control over all that God intended him to have.

Have you learned to reign like that in your life? This is what God wants you to have.

In Chapters 5 through 8 we find the account of **the glorious temple** that Solomon built. How marvelous was this beautiful building. The interior was even more glorious than the outside. The inside was entirely covered with gold. To have entered that sanctuary must have been a most amazing experience. Everything one touched was covered with gold. But the central glory of it was the Shekinah glory of God which came down and dwelt in the holy place when Solomon dedicated the temple. In a marvelous prayer, Solomon gives thanks to the grace of God and recognizes again the one great principle by which a kingdom must be maintained – the king’s obedience to the throne of God.

Then we have the story, wonderful in its detail, of the visits of the Queen of Sheba and the King of Tyre to Solomon, and the recognition by the nations of the glory of Solomon’s kingdom.

Then suddenly, at the beginning of Chapter 11, the whole story takes a quick turn in the other direction. We read of **the results of the seeds of evil** that were sown earlier in Solomon’s life:

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women: the daughter of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, {1 Ki 11:1 RSV}

These are pagan tribes.

... from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods;” Solomon clung to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and [in the greatest understatement in the Bible] his wives turned away his heart. {1 Ki 11:3 RSV}

This is the same man who in the book of Proverbs wrote, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing,” (Prov 18:22a RSV). This is the greatest example I know of, of a good thing carried to an extreme. One thousand wives! Somebody has said that he was amply punished by having one thousand mothers-in-law! But this also marks the weakness and the failure of Solomon as his heart was turned away from God.

Now notice where it first began: This man enjoyed all the magnificence of his rule, with the greatest glory of the kingdom committed to him. The outward magnificence here was evidence of God’s blessing upon his life. But his downfall began when his heart became captured by something that God had prohibited. This is exactly in line with the warning that Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Watch out where your heart goes, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” {Matt 6:21, Luke 12:34 RSV}. The first step in moral decline always begins with your emotions.

What do you allow your emotions to center upon? What captures the central place of emotion in your life? That is where the decline begins.

Then we read it is followed by idolatry:

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth [the sex goddess] the goddess of the Sidonians, and

after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab,” {1 Ki 11:5-7a RSV}

Chemosh was the hideous image in which a fire was built and at the height of the religious festival children were thrown into the fire. It was Solomon who built this place where the rites centered on the worship of this grinning god.

... and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites [another fertility god], on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away ... {1 Ki 11:7b-9a RSV}

Three times in rapid succession in the rest of this chapter “the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon.” First Hadad, the Edomite the man of the flesh. Then in Verse 23:

God also raised up an adversary to him, Rezon, the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. {1 Ki 11:23 RSV}

Then in Verse 26:

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, [who later split the kingdom]. {1 Ki 11:26 RSV}

So these adversaries came in to overthrow Solomon and to accomplish his defeat. The chapter closes with Solomon “sleeping with his fathers” and being buried in the city of David – a sudden collapse to the glory and majesty of his kingdom.

I heard recently of a man who had exercised great pulpit power and a tremendous ministry in many ways for God and whose whole ministry suddenly collapsed. He was brought before his session on moral charges. It was discovered that there had been an unjudged affection in his heart that had been going on behind the scenes, year after year. Despite the outward display of power and authority that he exercised in his ministry, there was eating

away at his heart and emotions that seed which was to utterly overthrow his kingdom. This story is repeated again and again in lives everywhere.

Chapter 12 begins the second movement in this book – **the degradation and breakup of the kingdom**. Jeroboam split the kingdom, taking the ten tribes of Israel in the north to begin the Northern Kingdom. He reintroduced in Israel the awful worship of golden calves. Long before, while Moses was up on the mountain communing with God, the people came to Aaron and said, “We want to have a God that we can worship like the nations.” Do you remember what Aaron told Moses after he got down off the mountain? He said, “I told them to bring all their gold all their earrings and all their jewelry and I took all this gold and threw it into the fire. Lo and behold, a calf came walking out. We fell down and worshipped it, calling it Jehovah,” {cf, Exod 32:23-24}. It was not that they intended to be idolatrous. They simply wanted some visible evidence on which to center their worship. Now we come to the sin of Jeroboam. He is forever afterwards known in Israel as “Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin.” Here it is not one calf, but two calves. It is the same sin multiplied, doubled in its intensity and power that is introduced into the life of the nation by Jeroboam.

Chapter 14 presents to us the story of the invasion and defeat of Israel by Egypt, the very Egypt out of which God had led this people. Egypt is again a picture of the world and its ways – its wickedness its folly, its futility, and its foolishness. We read in Chapter 14, Verses 25 and 26:

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord ... {1 Ki 14:25-26a RSV}

He assaulted the place of worship first of all.

... and the treasures of the king’s house; he took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. {1 Ki 14: 26b RSV}

Do you get the picture? Solomon who knew God and sought to walk with him did not fully judge the emotions and attachments of his heart. He was finally undermined and went back into the ways of the world with all its foolish manifestation,

and so lost that inner glory and sense of worship where God was exalted in the inner temple of his own life.

After this the account tells of the various kings that come to the throne of Israel. Nadab is followed by Baasha and Zimri. Finally comes Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel.

The final part of the book, beginning in Chapter 17, introduces **the prophetic ministry** beginning with Elijah. There are other prophets who came before Elijah but they did not do miracles. Elijah begins the ministry of miracles in the Bible. The prophets who ministered to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, did no miracles because there God's testimony was still the central life of the nation. But in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, God's presence was rejected and in his place the golden calves were worshipped. The ministry of miracles here is a testimony to the people that God is still in their midst. God sought to shake them up to be aware of the fact that they have drifted away from him. Elijah's ministry is a tremendous revelation of God's dealings with the wayward human heart. First of all, in his ministry, he shut the heavens so that it did not rain upon the land for three years. Then he called down fire from heaven upon the sheriffs and others who were sent to arrest him and bring him before the king. As these miracles caught the attention of the people, there came a degree of repentance. They understood that God was using a harsh hand, as God sometimes has to do with us, in chastisement and judgment to wake us up and make us aware of how we are drifting away from central worship of him in the innermost part of our being.

When this happened there came at last the judgment of Baal, when the two philosophies in Israel came to a headlong clash up on Mt. Carmel. God vindicated his honor by sending fire from heaven to destroy all of Elijah's offering, including all the water that was poured upon the offering and the stone altar, and God reigned in mighty power. When that judgment was exercised, the heavens were opened again and rain poured down upon the land.

That is all a picture of us, of what happens in our lives when we resist the right of God to rule in our hearts. God brings us under chastening, and, at last, our stubbornness is broken. The willful rebellion is ended and we are humbled at last before

God. Then the rain of grace begins again and pours down upon our hearts to bring fruit and blessing once more.

Following this is the unusual account of Elijah's fear of Jezebel. I am always amused by this. Here is this fearless prophet, this rugged man of God who has faced four hundred priests alone on top of the mountain, now running in terror from one angry woman. He cries as he hides under the juniper bush, "Lord, I have had enough. It was bad enough facing four hundred priests of Baal but when this one woman gets after me, that is too much." She was threatening his life. This is amusing because he says, "Lord, I have had enough – take my life," but of course he doesn't really mean that. All he would have to do is walk out and find Jezebel and she would accommodate him in his wish. Instead he hides under the juniper bush. God deals with him in wondrous grace:

- The first thing that he does is to put him to bed and give him a good night's rest.
- Then God gives him a good square meal.
- Finally God teaches him the greatest secret that Elijah ever learned – that God does not always move through earthquake, fire, and thunder – but many times through the still, small voice of a changed conscience.

The book closes with **the story of King Ahab**, and his failure, his folly, and his self-centered desire for the vineyard of Naboth, bringing down the judgment of God. In Chapter 22 we learn how God works through what seem to be accidental circumstances. The two kings of Israel and Judah go out to battle. Ahab, king of Israel, in his Satanic cleverness tries to put the king of Judah out in the forefront of battle. Ahab dresses the king of Judah in his own armor in order that he might be mistaken for the king of Israel and shot at. But as King Ahab is complimenting himself on how he has tricked the king of Judah into being exposed to danger, we read that an arrow shot into the air (just by chance) by a warrior on the opposite side, finds its way to him and pierces through a crack in the armor into his heart. God's judgment is accomplished! God is the God of circumstances. God is the God of accidents. God is behind all the move-

ments of our lives. This is the revelation of this account.

As I close this book of First Kings, the verse that comes most prominently to my mind and thrusts itself upon my heart, is this:

**Keep your heart with all vigilance;
for from it flow the springs of life.**
(Prov 4:23 RSV)

Outward circumstances will never dethrone you from reigning in your life. Nothing you run up against in terms of outward pressures and outward circumstances will ever succeed in dethroning you. Your dethronement, your moving back into the slavery and bondage of the flesh and the devil, will come only as you permit some rival worship to enter into your heart and dethrone God. When your

emotions become attached to some place that is a rival to the worship of God, then the kingdom's days are numbered.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may learn the great lesson of this book for our own hearts – “that out of the heart flow the springs of life.” As we watch that central place of desire, we learn to know what we want most of all in life. Lord, whom have we in heaven besides thee and who on earth do we desire more than thee? We pray that we may answer this question in the loneliness of our hearts before thee. In Christ's name, Amen.

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