

Grace Presbyterian Church Bible Studies

I Kings

Welcome to our on-line Bible study for 2014

David, Jesus' Ancestor

"I am the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star." – Revelation 22:16

I Kings chapters 1-2 – Solomon Becomes King

David is old and frail. He wants a woman to keep him company and so, not surprisingly, he asks for a beautiful young virgin named Abishag the Shuymannite. She serves him without being intimate with him (probably only because of his age). She will however play a role in the intrigue to come. The question of David's successor is a major one in this section. In a series of bloody clashes, David names Solomon as the next king. This is critical to the line that will include Jesus (Matthew 1:6b-7).

I. "Long Live King Solomon" – chapter 1

The story of David's successor is filled with intrigue and indeed bloodshed. We need to remember that the Bible has no illusions regarding human nature. We read over too quickly Paul's statement in Romans 8:3 that God sent his own Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is full of scandal, including adultery, seduction and bloodshed. David is the closest to a type of Christ in the Old Testament, but as we have seen he has more than his share of flaws.

David clearly enjoys women. In his advanced age, he needs someone to be with him to keep him warm. That could theoretically be anyone. However, David clearly prefers a beautiful young woman, even though he is past the age of sexual activity (no jokes about Viagra). They find the very beautiful Abishag the Shunammite and she agrees to lie in his bosom (I Kings:1,2).

We now turn to court intrigue. David's son, Adonijah is the son of Haggith. We know little of Haggith, except that she was presumably one of David's many wives (II Samuel 3:4). Adonijah is next in line in terms of age to Absalom. He is, therefore, the oldest living son of David and by rights he claims to be the heir to the throne. The narrator adds that he was very handsome, so that apparently added to his appeal (I Kings 1:6). He is supported in his claim by Joab, David's chief commander, and the priest, Abiathar. However, others including Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet oppose him.

Nathan intervenes with Bathsheba and tells her of Adonijah's efforts to build support for himself inviting his brothers and others to his sacrifices (I Kings 1:9). Nathan counsels Bathsheba to go directly to David and confirm that Solomon will be the next king. Bathsheba is to remind David that he promised to make Solomon the next king. We really have had no previous mention of this. The account of Solomon's birth only says that "The Lord loved him" (II Samuel 12:24). So, in some sense, we're missing part of

the story. Certainly Adonijah has no knowledge that Solomon has been designated the heir.

While Bathsheba is speaking, Nathan enters to tell David about Adonijah's plans. Bathsheba at this point apparently leaves. Nathan now tells David himself of Adonijah's activities and makes it clear that this has created a division in the kingdom since Adonijah has invited some of the leaders, but not all, and certainly not Nathan, to his sacrifices in preparation for declaring himself king. David then summons Bathsheba and informs her that he has sworn by the God of Israel that Solomon will be the next king (this is news to us, the readers).

David then prepares a public declaration stating "Long live King Solomon" (I Kings 1:34). Nathan, with Zadok the priest and others, then places Solomon on David's mule and all the people respond (I Kings 1:39). Word then comes to Adonijah from Joab that David has declared Solomon to be the next king. Hearing this Adonijah fears for his life and grasps the horns of the altar (I Kings 1:50). This is in effect to take refuge in a holy place so that he will not be killed. Solomon promises him life on the condition that he proves himself worthy and does not embrace "wickedness". which in this case, would imply challenging the ascension. The way now is clear for Solomon to be crowned the new king of Israel.

II. The Kingdom Established in "Bloody Deeds" chapter 2

We now have David's actual last speech. He charges Solomon in words that are reminiscent of Joshua's charge to the people of Israel after Moses' death: "Be strong, be courageous and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses" (I Kings 1:2-3; Joshua 1:7-8). David then intones that if Solomon's heirs walk in faithfulness "there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel" (I Kings 2:4). God's actual covenant with David, as recorded in Psalm 89, is broader. God himself states that he will punish transgressors in the line of David but then adds, "I will not remove from him my steadfast love" (Psalm 89:33). God adds "I will not violate my covenant" (Psalm 89:34). Many of David successors, including Solomon, will violate God's ways, but God remains faithful. This faithfulness will climax in the birth of the Messiah.

David then goes on to warn Solomon of those in the kingdom who could prove treacherous. In an ominous instruction, David says that Solomon should not allow their gray head to "go down to Sheol in peace" (I Kings 2:6, 9). Solomon, however, is told to reward those who have been faithful (I Kings 2:7). We are going to see that Solomon's kingdom, like David, and like Jesus, will begin in "bloody deeds" (I Kings 2:32). David then dies in peace and the kingdom of Solomon is "firmly established" (I Kings 2:12).

The first bloody deed begins with Adonijah, who goes to Bathsheba and asks for Abishag the Shunammite as his wife (I Kings 2:17). Bathsheba agrees to present the

request to her son. However, Solomon perceives this as a veiled attempt to try and gain the throne since a king's concubine was royal property (I Kings 2:22). Solomon then orders Adonijah's execution (I Kings 2:25). This then completes the cycle of David's first three sons – Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah – all dying violent deaths.

Solomon is more merciful to Abiathar, who had also supported Adonijah. He is sent home in exile, banished from being a priest. This fulfills the prophecy over the faithless house of the priest, Eli, "The glory of the Lord has departed from Israel" (I Samuel 4:21). Solomon makes Abiathar the ominous promise, "I will not at this time put you to death" because he had carried the ark of the Lord for David (2:26).

The next bloody deed is the fate of David's long time commander, Joab. Solomon knowing that Joab had supported his brother Adonijah now plans to do away with him. Joab flees to the "tent of the Lord", and grasps the horns of the altar, which presumably is a guarantee of sanctuary. This doesn't help him however. Solomon orders his execution because Joab had killed "two men more righteous and better than himself," Abner (II Samuel 3:22-30) and Amasa (II Samuel 20:4-10a).

The bloody deeds end with the death of one last enemy, Shimei, a relative of Saul's who had earlier denounced David (II Samuel 16:5-14). Solomon, in effect, puts Shimei under house arrest (I Kings 2:36-38). Shimei, however, leaves his home after three years. Solomon then confronts him with all he has done in opposing David, and he is now violating his agreement with Solomon. Shimei is then killed (I Kings 2:46). This chapter ends with the words, "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

We are understandably shaken by all the "bloody deeds" recounted in this section. Two observations need to be borne in mind. There are real enemies to God's followers. They can even be found in the community of faith, ancient Israel or the New Testament church (Acts 20:28-30; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). We are not commanded to put anyone to death of course, but God himself can take action to purge his community. We should not take opposition lightly or be surprised by it (II Corinthians 11:14). Second, we are reminded again of the need for God's messiah. That is the only solution to the "bloody deeds." Yet, we need to recall that Jesus' life begins with the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem and ends with the cross. Jesus will not hold us guiltless for opposing him (Matthew 18:6-7). But it is only in Jesus that grace and forgiveness can be found: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

Questions for Discussion –

1. Why do you think so many enemies keep arising for David even from within his own family? Why do you think Nathan appeared to have become an ally for Bathsheba?

2. What is the significance of Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, becoming king and thereby becoming part of the line that leads to Jesus?
3. How do you relate David's charge to Solomon, "Be strong, be courageous" (I Kings 2:2) to the "bloody deeds" which follow?

I Kings chapter 3-5 – Solomon’s Wisdom

Solomon’s reign begins like a golden age. He has peace on every side. He asks the Lord to give him “an understanding mind” (I Kings 3:9) so he will be able to govern the people effectively. God is pleased with his request, and in addition, gives him riches and honor. In a famous example of his wisdom, he settles a dispute between two women each claiming to be the mother of a baby. Solomon undertakes the great task of his life, building a temple for the Lord. The fame of his wisdom spreads throughout the earth.

III. “An Understanding Mind” – I Kings chapter 3:1-15

Solomon is one of the most tragic characters not only in Scripture, but in all of world literature. This is not to give away the end of the story, but at the same time, we have a preview of what will be clearly stated later in I Kings as Israel divides into two kingdoms, and then sinks progressively deeper into idolatry until God has to bring judgment on both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. There is a hint of this tragedy right in the beginning of chapter 3. We read that Solomon makes a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt’s daughter.

It will be the many foreign wives of Solomon that will ultimately turn his heart away from the Lord (I Kings 11:1-4). Solomon will be remembered for his wisdom, his glory and his building of the temple (Matthew 6:29; I Kings 12:42; Acts 7:47). He is credited as the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Yet he is conspicuously absent from the list of Old Testament saints found in Hebrews 11. David and Samuel are mentioned, but not Solomon (Hebrews 11:32).

At this point though “Solomon loved the Lord” (I Kings 3:3). The people were sacrificing to God on “the high places.” These, however, were the pagan altars which the former people of the land had used to worship their false gods. Solomon himself goes to worship at these locations because that’s all there is at this stage. The Lord appears to Solomon in a dream (I Kings 3:5). Solomon asks the Lord for “an understanding mind” in order to govern the people, and to be “able to discern between good and evil” (I Kings 3:9). God is pleased with Solomon’s request noting that he does not ask for superficial things like wealth and long life (I Kings 3:11). God then pledges to add “both riches and honor all your life” (I Kings 3:13). But God adds the important condition, “If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life” (I Kings 3:14). In this reference to David, we have a foretelling of the prophets and Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Initially we may want to protest, “But David didn’t always walk in God’s ways. What about Bathsheba and Uriah? What about the census?” This anticipates the issue of justification by faith. We are saved by our faith not by our works. This was the difference between David and Saul. David always was the person after God’s own heart, even in his disobedience (Psalm 51). Clearly David and Solomon both had a weakness for women. Yet, the final issue for Solomon is not the women themselves, but the fact that they will turn his heart away from the Lord (I Kings 11:4). This was never the case with his father, David.

There is a sober warning here and throughout this opening section. The narrator is giving us hints of what is to come.

IV. A Tale of Two Prostitutes – I Kings chapter 3:16-28

We have next an adult version of a familiar story which in its sanitized version doesn't make a whole lot of sense. The Sunday School version (appropriate for children) tells of two women each of whom gives birth to a baby. One baby dies and both women then claim to be the mother of the surviving child. Solomon offers to cut the baby in two and give each one half. The true mother, however, cries out that he should give the child to the other woman rather than kill it. Solomon is praised for his wisdom as a result of this action.

Huh? In this treatment the story is rather grisly (would Solomon really give a command to cut a baby in half?). Clearly Solomon's proposed solution is absurd, so how does this demonstrate his wisdom? It is important to recognize several key features that are not in the "sanitized" version. First, the two women are prostitutes. Without this fact, the story doesn't really make sense. Second, this means that both the women's babies were the result of unplanned pregnancies. For a prostitute, a child was a liability. Providing for a baby interfered with her livelihood. Many prostitutes cared little for such children born, not only out of wedlock, but out of any caring relationship. Unwanted babies in the ancient world were left in garbage dumps (this would probably have been the case with the Valley of Hinnom, the symbolic prototype for hell (II Chronicles 33:6)).

Initially the prostitute whose baby dies because she lays on him (?) tries to take the other's child. Both claim the surviving child. The case comes before Solomon. In Solomon's strange proposed solution he is really asking, "Do either of you really care for this child, knowing that caring for a baby will interfere with your profession?" The prostitute, who is not the actual mother, really doesn't care. For her, the child apparently was only some kind of trophy. In response to Solomon's dividing the child she in effect says, "Go ahead and cut the baby in two" (I Kings 3:26). This would be the normal response of a prostitute. The real mother, however, genuinely cares and offers to give up the child rather than have it die. Solomon's strange solution only really makes sense given the reality that he is dealing with two prostitutes whose concern for their unwanted children usually only went so far. Solomon is able to discern that one of the women really wants the child **which would not have been the expected case**. Therefore, all Israel stands in awe at the wisdom of their king.

V. Solomon Builds a House for the Lord – I Kings chapters 4-5

We now have a detailed list of Solomon's officials. The point is to stress two things. First, the expansion of Solomon's kingdom now that victory had been won over their enemies. This was essentially David's life work. Judah and Israel have become as numerous as the sand of the sea (I Kings 4:20). Solomon is both wealthy and at peace. Second, the fame of his wisdom spreads throughout the world. The narrator stresses

the point that he was wiser than anyone else. He then lists other, apparently contemporary, wise figures none of whom are known to us (I Kings 4:31). We are told he composed three thousand proverbs which presumably comprises our Book of Proverbs.

We then read of Solomon's greatest achievement, the building of the temple. He is assisted in this by one of his father's friends, Hiram of Tyre. Hiram rejoices at Solomon's wisdom in dedicating himself to the building of the temple and he eagerly offers his assistance (I Kings 5:7-9). Hiram provides the wood from the "cedars of Lebanon" (I Kings 5:6). Hiram provides the building needs of Solomon in return for food. The two form a treaty (I Kings 5:11-12).

We are a little taken aback by the next statement that Solomon uses "forced labor" to accomplish the building (I Kings 5:13). He does, however, provide shifts for the workers, one month of labor followed by two months at home (I Kings 5:14). The passage ends with the statement that the foundation of the temple was laid and they were now prepared "to build the house" (I Kings 5:18).

Questions for Us –

1. Solomon makes two choices at the beginning of this story. One, asking for "an understanding heart" is praised by the Lord. The other, marrying a foreign wife, will turn him away from the Lord (Exodus 34:15-16). What can we learn from this?
2. Why do you think we have a tendency to try and "clean up" Bible stories like the account of the two prostitutes?
3. What lessons can we take from the account of the building of the temple?

I Kings chapters 6-8 – Dedicating the Temple

These chapters focus on the building and the dedicating of Solomon's Temple. We can easily become overwhelmed by all the measurements, materials and overall description of the temple. To appreciate this passage we have to look at its larger context in both the book of Kings and the overall pattern of Scripture.

VI. "So Solomon built the house" – chapters 6-7

These two chapters give us an extensive description of the materials and structure of Solomon's temple. We can simply get lost in all this detail. However, we have to note a number of things here that are of vital importance for the direction of God's people in the future. There are several key factors that we need to highlight:

1. God's Word to Solomon (I Kings 6:11-13) – God makes it clear that there is nothing special or even sacrosanct about the temple which Solomon is building. God here makes a **conditional** promise. The temple will only be the place of God's dwelling with his people if they fulfill their part of the covenant. God says that the people are to walk "in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and keep all my commandments by walking in them. . . ." Worship in the temple will have no value if the people are not walking in the way of the Lord and obeying him.

The rest of the Books of the King will document how Israel does not live up to these requirements. They become corrupted by the idolatrous nations surrounding them. As a result God's anger is directed at Israel forever (Jeremiah 15:14). The day will come when this beautiful temple with all its splendor will be completely destroyed (II Kings 24:8-17).

2. Solomon's Priorities – There is a foreshadowing of this in the statement that Solomon spent seven years building the temple of the Lord, but thirteen years building his own house (I Kings 6:37-7:1). We also read that Solomon builds a home for his wife, Pharaoh's daughter (I Kings 7:8). The narrator makes no comment on these two facts, yet their mention seemingly is preparing us for the account of Solomon's own apostasy (I Kings 11:1-6). Solomon will marry many foreign wives and he will worship false gods. The destruction of the temple begins with Solomon himself. This is a sober warning (Matthew 10:28).

3. The inner sanctuary of the temple contains the ark of the covenant. This will be the basis for the "holy of holies" which will continue in the second temple even after the ark of the covenant is lost. This symbolically is what Jesus enters once for all on the cross making final and complete atonement for sin (Hebrews 9:1-10:18). This is made specific with the mention of the covering above the ark (I Kings 8:7). This is referred to in Romans 3:25 as the place or the sacrifice for atonement, an atonement not only for Israel but for all who have sinned (Romans 3:23-24).

4. The mention of the molten sea (I Kings 7:23) has a model in heaven in the description of the “sea of glass, like crystal” (Revelations 4:6a). Solomon and his builder, Hiram, are following an eternal pattern in the construction of the temple.

5. The temple is not just a building. It includes pots, shovels, vessels, cups, lamps, and dishes, all of bronze and especially gold (I Kings 7:45-50). Even after the destruction of the temple itself, the value of these vessels and what they symbolize will not be lost. When after Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed and the people have been taken into captivity in Babylon, Belshazzar dares to use these same cups, dishes and vessels for his personal feast. God’s hand writes a warning on the wall announcing his death that very night (Daniel 5:1-30).

VII. Solomon’s Prayer – chapter 8

The actual dedication of the temple is a critical moment in Israel’s history. Not only the ark of the covenant, but all the “holy vessels” that had been in the tent of meeting (I Kings 8:1-4) are dedicated. The ark of the covenant includes the original tablets of the ten commandments. The glory of the Lord fills the temple like a cloud (I Kings 8:9-11)

Solomon then leads the people in prayer. He refers to the covenant which God made with his father, David. In reality we are dealing with two covenants here. The second covenant actually is the one Solomon refers to in I Kings 6:11-13 and he refers to it again here in I Kings 8:25. This is the conditional, temporal covenant which came through Moses. The summary of the covenant of the law is essentially “Do this and you will live” (Deuteronomy 30:16; Galatians 3:12). Yet, the reference to the example of David refers back to the more original covenant that God made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:1-21). It is important to remember that there are two covenants that God made. The first covenant is unconditional and is the one God made with himself (Hebrews 12:6-13). The second covenant was made with Moses and the children of Israel at Mount Sinai and is conditional on the obedience of the people. Paul has an extensive discussion of the difference between the two covenants (Romans 4; Galatians 3; Ephesians 2:11-21; Philippians 3:1-11; Colossians 2:8-15). This original covenant is actually the new covenant announced by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and expounded in detail in the Letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 8:1-10:18).

Solomon’s prayer here focuses almost exclusively on the second covenant, the covenant of the law made with Moses. The law itself was not finally an expression of salvation by works as it later became especially with the Pharisees, even those who became Christians (Acts 15:1). The law in its sacrifices provided for the forgiveness of sins. The first commandment is essentially a command to have faith in God (Exodus 20:3). Solomon’s prayer here is based on the requirements of the law of Moses, especially in the repeated refrain, “then hear in heaven and forgive” (I Kings 8:30, 32, 36, 39, 45). Solomon acknowledges the universal character of sin and the need for repentance (I Kings 8:46-47). The law itself emphasizes the importance of one’s heart

before God (Deuteronomy 30:6). Yet, in all this, Solomon is still only referencing the second covenant under Moses, the covenant of the law (I Kings 8:56-58).

This is important because his earlier reference to the promise God made to his father David harks back to God's original unconditional promise to Abraham. This is clearly reflected in Psalm 89. Here God states that he will punish David's descendents for their sins but adds,

“. . . but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips" (Psalm 89:33-34).

Yet, in this same Psalm, the writer laments God's judgment and asks, "How long, O Lord?" Nonetheless, in confidence he calls God back to his original promise of "steadfast love" (Psalm 89:38-52).

The celebration of the dedication of the temple is important, but incomplete. The king and all the people celebrate the house of the Lord (I Kings 8:63). They are "joyful and in good spirits" and rightly so (I Kings 8:66). But something is missing. The promises of the law, as good as they are, are not enough. As we will tragically learn (and we can't read these chapters without noting the references to what is coming) Solomon and the people will fail to live up to the promises they have made.

David was not obedient as we have seen. David, however, is upheld by God's promise alone. He states that "the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17). Solomon certainly has the idea of repentance and he emphasizes it throughout his prayer of dedication. Saul also repented (I Samuel 15:24). Yet, somehow David is sustained by something more as he expresses in the prayer that is included twice in Scripture (II Samuel 22; Psalm 18). Even David's assertion here that he has kept the ways of the Lord (II Samuel 22:22), which will not always be true, is still an expression of his dependence on God's promises and his "steadfast love" (II Samuel 22:51).

In the end David is sustained only by God's unbreakable promise (II Samuel 22:31; Psalm 89:1-4). Solomon's temple, as well as the second temple which replaced it, are long gone. The ark of the covenant no longer exists. They are not necessary. The promises made to Abraham are greater than those made to Moses and those promises, as well as whatever promises were found in the law, have all been fulfilled in Christ (II Corinthians 1:20). Jesus is called the Son of David, but never the Son of Solomon. There is a reason for that.

Questions for Us –

1. Why do you think we are given such extensive details about Solomon's temple?

2. Why is it so important that we base our relationship to the Lord on the unconditional promises that God fulfilled in Christ rather than the law? Does it matter if we are obedient or not?
3. What examples, positive and negative, can we learn from Solomon's dedicating of the temple?

I Kings chapters 9-11 – The Tragedy of Solomon

No king in Israel's history had greater wealth, influence and wisdom than Solomon. Yet God warns him against the temptation to worship other gods. Solomon is called to the example of his father, David, who "walked with integrity of heart and uprightness" (I Kings 9:4). Yet the tragedy is that Solomon follows the many foreign wives he has married and worships other gods. God then takes the kingdom away from him following his death. God will punish David's descendents, but not forever (I Kings 11:39).

I. A Blessing and a Warning – chapter 9

At the end of twenty years Solomon has finished both the temple and his own palace. God now appears to him a second time (the first time Solomon had asked for "an understanding mind," (I Kings 3:9). God has heard Solomon's prayer and has consecrated the temple built in the Lord's name. God now interrelates both his unconditional and conditional promise. Solomon's role is dependent on his keeping faith with the Lord. However God's promise to David, as we have seen, is unconditional (Psalm 89). If Solomon turns away from the Lord then this great temple he has built will become a "heap of ruins" (I Kings 9:8). Solomon is to model himself on his father David's "integrity of heart." As we saw, David violated God's law in very serious ways, but his heart was always toward God. Already here we see that our relationship to the Lord is not ultimately dependent on our works, but on our faith which is represented as a believing heart (Romans 10:9).

Following God's warning we now hear of a clash with Hiram who helped Solomon build the temple. Solomon gives Hiram twenty cities which unfortunately Hiram dismisses as "Cabul," which means "good for nothing." So much for church building projects throughout history. God's focus is always on the heart not the building. This section concludes with all the forced labor that Solomon conscripted for the building of the temple. Yet no Israelites were treated as slaves (I Kings 9:22). This indicates the tremendous expansion of Solomon's kingdom at this time.

There is another mention of Solomon's wife, the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh (I Kings 9:24). This may be the narrator's way of alerting us to the later problems of Solomon's foreign wives. Solomon also is going to the temple three times a year to offer sacrifices (I Kings 9:25). At the end of this chapter it appears that Solomon has reconciled with Hiram (I Kings 9:27-28).

II. ". . . to execute justice and righteousness" – chapter 10

We come now to one of the most famous stories involving Solomon but one that is only partially known. The queen of Sheba hears about Solomon and takes it upon herself to find out if all that she has heard is true. She comes with a "very great retinue" and her purpose is "to test him with hard questions" (!) (I Kings 10:1-2). However Solomon would have been a winner on Jeopardy. He answers all her questions. The queen quite literally

is overwhelmed with all his wisdom and knowledge (“there was no more spirit in her,” I Kings 10:5).

She then responds to Solomon in the famous words, “Not even half had been told me,” I Kings 10:7). She is impressed with all his prosperity and wisdom and declares how happy his household is and how the Lord has blessed him (I Kings 10:8-9). Her most significant statement is the one however that is often overlooked. More than all his wisdom and knowledge, she states in v. 9:

“Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness.”

This is Solomon’s true calling as it was with David, to execute justice and righteousness (II Samuel 8:15). God’s demand for justice and righteousness is found throughout Scripture (Genesis 18:17-19; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:17; 58:6-11; Jeremiah 22:3-16; Ezekiel 18:5-27; Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27). Justice and righteousness focuses on the care of the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger in the land and the oppressed. It is this which impresses the queen of Sheba most.

Solomon gives the queen lavish gifts out of his “royal bounty” (I Kings 10:13). After this she returns to her own land. It needs to be noted that in spite of speculations often raised there is no suggestion of a romantic relationship between the queen and Solomon. This chapter concludes with an account of the great wealth of Solomon’s. His kingdom has in fact become an empire. Solomon has a vast store of gold (I Kings 10:14-22). The point is made that all of Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, “none were of silver” (I Kings 10:21). The whole earth, we are told, comes to hear of Solomon’s wisdom. He is the author of the Books of Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. Yet we are reminded that this wisdom has come from God. It is from the Lord and, like all gifts, to be used for the Lord (I Kings 10:23-25). Solomon has many chariots and while his vessels are of gold he makes “silver as common in Jerusalem as stones” (I Kings 10:27).

III. Solomon’s Heart Turns Away – chapter 11

The greatness of Solomon does not last. He marries many foreign women and they turn his heart away from the Lord to worship false gods. The warning about this was given in the law of Moses (I Kings 11:2; Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Solomon descends into evil quite literally (I Kings 11:6). The crucial issue is his heart. His heart turns away from the Lord which was never the case with this father, David (I Kings 11:4). Solomon not only worships these gods, he builds altars for them! (I Kings 11:7). Among them is Astarte which is another name for the ancient goddess (Judges 2:13). This was the Canaanite name for the universal fertility goddess who, through the sexual practices associated with her, assured the success of the harvest and the cycle of life (Numbers 25:1-9). After the death of Saul the Philistines hang his armor in her temple (I Samuel 31:10). Chemosh and Molech were worshipped by sacrificing one’s first born child (Leviticus 20:1-5; II Kings 3:27). This is a total violation of God’s requirement of justice and righteousness.

God is of course angry with Solomon and plans to take away his kingdom but does not do it in Solomon's lifetime out of deference for David (I Kings 11:11-12). God, however, raises up opponents to Solomon in his lifetime. These include Hadad the Edomite, Rezon, son of Eliada and Jeroboam, son of Nebar. Hadad and Rezon have grievances against David which they carry out against Solomon (I Kings 11:14-25). However Jeroboam is given a prophecy by the prophet Ahijah who tears his new garment into twelve pieces symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel. Ten of these are given to Jeroboam. Jeroboam is given the conditional promise of an enduring house if he serves God as David did (I King 11:37-38). God however repeats his unconditional promise that he will not punish David's descendents forever (I Kings 11:39; Psalm 89:28-33).

Solomon tries to kill Jeroboam but God's hand is no longer with Solomon. Jeroboam flees to Egypt until after the death of Solomon (I Kings 11:40). Solomon dies after reigning forty years in Jerusalem (I Kings 11:42). He remains one of the most enigmatic and tragic figures in all of Scripture. He had so much yet lost it all. David, for all his sins, never turned to other gods. We are not told how Solomon descended from the pinnacle of his encounter with the queen of Sheba to the degradation which followed.

Is Solomon therefore cut off, blotted out of the book of life (Revelations 3:5)? We are not told. We can only hope and pray that God's unconditional promises to David extend to Solomon as well (Psalm 89:33-34; Matthew 1:6; Romans 11:32).

Questions for Us –

- 1 What do you make of Solomon's elaborate efforts to build the temple? Should this have been his priority given that later his heart turns away from God? What does the temple, and God's consecration of it, tell us about modern day church buildings?
- 2 Why do you think the queen of Sheba's final comment to Solomon refers to his executing justice and righteousness (I Kings 10:9)?
- 3 What lessons can we learn from Solomon's tragic end?

I Kings chapters 12-14 – The Return of the Golden Calf

There is a conflict over the throne of Israel between Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and presumably the heir, and Jeroboam whom God has anointed in the place of Rehoboam because of his father Solomon's apostasy. The kingdom divides between the ten northern tribes given to Jeroboam and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin which remain under Rehoboam. Yet all of Israel, including both kings, fall into apostasy and turn aside from the Lord. God's promise to David is sorely tested here.

VIII. A Tale of Two Kings

Solomon is dead and his son Rehoboam has assumed the throne in Jerusalem. Jeroboam, whom God has promised the rule of the ten northern tribes (I Kings 11:13), has been hiding in Jerusalem. He now returns and with all the assembly asks Rehoboam for leniency. They speak of the burden placed on them by his father, Solomon. Presumably this was the imposed forced labor required to build both the temple and the palace (I Kings 5:13). Rehoboam tells them to come back in three days to hear his decision. He then initially asks the advice of his father's older counselors. They advise him to "speak good words" to the people. However Rehoboam disregards them and asks the advice of the younger men "who had grown up with him." They foolishly advise him to be strict and even more demanding than his father was (I Kings 12:8-11).

How many times has this scene been repeated throughout history? Rehoboam exemplifies the impetuosity and pride of youth. Rather than listening to those who were older and wiser, he follows the bizarre advice of his peer group. The result, not surprisingly, is disastrous.

Angry at Rehoboam's attitude Israel returns to their tents (I Kings 12:16). To add insult to injury Rehoboam sends Adoram, his father's task master, to supposedly enforce the king's strict orders. The result is that "all Israel" stones him to death! The ten tribes then turn to Jeroboam as their new king (I Kings 12:20). The nation is on the verge of civil war. However, the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Shemaiah who tells the people to go to their homes which, surprisingly, they in fact do (I Kings 12:24).

Jeroboam who is now the de facto king of the ten northern tribes establishes his base in "the hill country of Ephraim" (I Kings 12:25). He is afraid that the people will return to Jerusalem to worship God in Solomon's temple. He is also worried that they may return to Rehoboam and under his influence Jeroboam might be killed as a traitor. To prevent this he builds not one but two golden calves and proclaims in the idolatrous words of Aaron in the wilderness, "Here are your gods, O Israel who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12:28; Exodus 32:4). To make matters worse Jeroboam introduces the worship of false gods on "the high places" and goes up to them to offer incense (I Kings 12:31-33).

Israel here plunges into depths of idolatry. The people tragically are following the example of Solomon rather than that of David. They will pay a fearful price for their faithlessness (Leviticus 26:14-33).

IX. A Tale of Two Prophets – chapter 13

An unnamed prophet is sent to Jeroboam to confront him about his idolatrous practices. The prophet foretells the birth of Josiah who will lead a reform of these pagan practices (I Kings 13:1-3; II Kings 22-23). Rather than heeding the word of the Lord Jeroboam tries to attack the “man of God” (I Kings 13:4). God however causes Jeroboam’s hand to wither. Jeroboam pleads that the prophet pray that his hand be restored. The prophet prays and his hand is restored. Jeroboam, seeking to show his gratitude, invites the man of God to his home to eat. The prophet however responds that God had instructed him not to eat food, drink water or return by the same way he came (I Kings 13:8-9).

What follows is one of the most puzzling stories in all of Scripture. Passing through Bethel the man of God is met by an old prophet who claims that he has received a word from the Lord saying that the man of God can in fact come to his home to eat. Yet he is lying (I Kings 13:18)! The man of God believes him and agrees to come to his house in direct violation of the word the Lord had given him. While he is sitting in the prophet’s house eating the word of God comes to him confronting him with his disobedience. The Lord foretells his death. Sure enough on his return home he is attacked by a lion which kills him. Yet the lion does not eat him. Instead the lion in effect stands guard over his body along with the donkey he had been riding which had been given him by the older prophet (I Kings 13:23-25).

Hearing of the death of the man of God (whom he had deceived) the old prophet comes and claims his body. He buries the man’s body in his own tomb with instructions to be buried alongside him. This strange story concludes with the old prophet verifying the prophecy of the man of God against the idolatry of Jeroboam. The chapter ends with the fact that Jeroboam has not taken the prophecy to heart and has only grown worse in his idolatry (I Kings 13:33-34).

So what’s the point? We see a dark picture in which everyone is faithless. Two kings and two prophets in different but very serious ways violate God’s word. The promises of God have been rejected. There will be fearful consequences of this. The lessons to be learned here are basically negative examples. As Paul says, “Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did” (I Corinthians 10:6). In our overly permissive age this is perhaps a lesson we definitely need to hear. The other lesson in all this is that God’s plan and promises are not dependent on human beings. Even God’s prophets can be deceitful. God however is always faithful.

X. God's Judgment – chapter 14

The judgment of God on Jeroboam begins with the sickness of his son, Abijah (I Kings 14:1). Jeroboam in an odd request asks his wife to go in disguise to the prophet, Ahijah, who had prophesied that he would be king in Israel, and ask about his son (I Kings 14:2-3). She does as he asks but Ahijah is not fooled. In spite of his blindness he recognizes Jeroboam's wife (name unknown). The message of impending judgment is based on the fact that Jeroboam has not followed the Lord as David did "with all his heart" (I Kings 14:8). God is then going to cut off all the descendents of Jeroboam because of his idolatry which was "evil above all those who were before you" (I Kings 14:9). Jeroboam's son dies but this is seen as a benefit since God finds something pleasing in the child. The implication is that the other members of Jeroboam's family will die in the open land, unburied, to be eaten by dogs or birds (I Kings 19:11). God will tear the kingdom away from Jeroboam as he had torn it away from the house of David (I Kings 14:8). Jeroboam dies after reigning for twenty two years and his son Nadab succeeds him (I Kings 14:20).

On the other hand, Rehoboam in Judah is no better. Rehoboam reigns for seventeen years but under his leadership Judah does more evil than all of their ancestors (I Kings 14:22). The fertility gods of the ancient world are worshipped in place of Jehovah including male temple prostitutes along with their female counterparts (I Kings 14:23-24; Numbers 25:1-2; Hosea 4:12-14).

King Shyishak of Egypt invades Jerusalem and takes away all the treasures of the house of the Lord which Solomon had built. Rehoboam is left replacing gold with bronze (I Kings 14:26-27). At this point Judah, the tribe of David, is no different than the idolatrous nations which God had driven out previously in order to give Israel the promised land (I Kings 14:24).

As if this isn't bad enough there is continuing war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam dies and is replaced with his son Abijam (I Kings 14:31).

We are left with the disturbing and troubling picture of all Israel falling into idolatry. There is now no difference between them and all the other nations.

What happens when the people of God are unfaithful? When the church is no better than the world? The hope that remains and, we must learn, the only hope is that God remains faithful. In the words of the apostle Paul, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself" (II Timothy 2:13).

Questions for Us –

1. What can we learn from Rehoboam's disregarding the advice of his father's counselors in favor of those with whom he grew up? What does this tell us about human nature?

2. What do you think God is trying to tell us in the tragic story of the two prophets?
3. Why are the people of God, both in the past and in the present, so often faithless?

I Kings chapters 15-17 – God Brings Relief

This next section is a study in contrasts. We read of a faithful king in Judah, Asa, who reigns forty one years in Jerusalem. During his reign however, there is a succession of kings in the northern kingdom of Israel (later Samaria), each one of which is worse than the last. These culminate in Ahab who is the worst example. When we look at the history of ancient Israel we should never be discouraged by the present state of the church. Things were worse in Old Testament times. Fortunately, God raises up the great prophet Elijah to call Israel back to the one true Lord.

XI. Only Asa chapters 15-16

Of the many kings mentioned in these chapters, only one is faithful to the Lord. This is Asa. His father Abijam was no better than Rehoboam. Abijam rules for only three years during which time he committed all the sins of his father (I Kings 15:3). He is compared, unfavorably, to David who we are told did what was right except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite (I Kings 15:5). Yet, we know this is not literally true. David's counting of the fighting men was regarded as a great sin (II Samuel 24:1-10). Yet, God in his grace appears to have forgotten it completely. God establishes his kingdom for the sake of David (I Kings 15:4). It is important to note that throughout this whole period there is continuing warfare between Israel and Judah (I Kings 15:6). Abijam dies and is buried in Jerusalem (I Kings 15:8). We then have one of many references to the "Annals of the Kings of Judah" (I Kings 15:7). This, however, is a lost work. All we have are the Biblical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

Abijam is succeeded by the faithful Asa, the only good king in this whole section. Asa certainly has his challenges. His own mother worships the goddess Asherah and he, therefore, has to remove her from the position of queen mother (I Kings 15:13). He also has to put away the "male temple prostitutes" (I Kings 15:12). Really? In Jerusalem? We can't complain about the corruption of our own time.

Asa's faithfulness, however, has its limitations. He does not put away the fertility idols, the "high places" (I Kings 15:14). In spite of this his heart is true to the Lord and he brings gifts into the temple (I Kings 15:15). Unfortunately, throughout his long reign, the warfare with Israel continues.

The kings of Israel, the northern kingdom, are a succession of disasters. In addition to idolatry they are violent and corrupt. Nadab is the son of Jeroboam. He follows in the evil path of his ancestors and is subsequently assassinated by Baasha who succeeds him as king (I Kings 15:28). Baasha continues the war against Judah to the point where Asa has to seek outside allies to protect himself and his kingdom (I Kings 15:16-24).

Baasha is as corrupt as his predecessors. God pronounces judgment on him to the extent that anyone belonging to his family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs and anyone dying in the country will be eaten by birds (I Kings 16:4)! Baasha is succeeded by his son Elah who reigns only two years, and is just as corrupt as his father. While

drunk, he is assassinated by his servant Zimri (I Kings 16:9-10). Once Zimri has gained the throne, he kills all of the descendants of Baasha. Zimri, however, reigns only seven days. He is opposed by Israel's troops and the populace in general. Omri, the commander of the army, leads a revolt against Zimri. In despair, he dies by burning himself in the king's house (I Kings 16:18-19). There is now civil war in Israel between the followers of Omri and the followers of a man named Tibni. Omri's followers, however, defeat Tibni and Omri becomes the undisputed king of Israel. It is Omri who buys the hill of Samaria and builds a city with the same name. In the time of Jesus, Samaria will be notorious as a place of apostasy and idolatry (John 8:48). Omri reigns for twelve years.

Omri is worse than all the kings who were before him, but even this dubious record is short lived. He is succeeded by his son Ahab who is even worse than he was (I Kings 16:25-30). To make matters worse Ahab marries Jezebel a princess of the Sidonians. She brings in the worship of false gods and Ahab supports her. In the time of Ahab, the ancient city of Jericho is rebuilt by one Hiel of Bethel. To gain the favor of his gods in the rebuilding, Hiel sacrifices two of his sons, one is placed under the foundation and the other under the gates. Joshua had prophesied this (I Kings 16:24; Joshua 6:26).

At this point, the situation in Israel is incredibly bad. Not only have the kings turned away from the one true God, they have turned to the worship of immoral and bloodthirsty gods. Why would anyone want to be faithful in such a situation? Where is God? Why does he not act?

XII. The Coming of Elijah – chapter 17

God has not forgotten his people (Jeremiah 51:5). God raises up the great prophet Elijah. Elijah goes to Ahab and tells him that there will be no rain and that this will only change when Elijah gives the word. God then sends Elijah to a place of refuge when he finds water and is fed by ravens (I Kings 17:5-6). Because of the draught the water dries up. God now sends Elijah to a widow in Zarephath.

Elijah asks the widow for food and drink, but she is on the verge of despair. She and her son have virtually nothing to eat. She is gathering sticks to cook with the little she has and she and her son are facing starvation (I Kings 17:12). Elijah responds to her with the most frequently repeated command in all of Scripture, "Do not be afraid" (I Kings 17:13). Elijah then performs the first of several miracles. Her food supply does not run out. She and her son are spared the fate of starvation.

This deliverance is short lived, however. The woman's son becomes deathly ill. In desperation, the woman blames Elijah for the son's condition (I Kings 17:18). There is no apparent reason for her doing so. Her gratitude has turned to anger and resentment. Elijah, however, does not take offense. He asks for the son and carries him up to his bedroom. The woman apparently agrees to this, even though it contradicts her earlier statement blaming Elijah. Yet, this is typical of people in crisis. Elijah lays upon the child and cries out in fervent prayer, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him

again” (I Kings 17:21). The Lord listens to Elijah and the child is healed (I Kings 17:22). This convinces the woman that Elijah truly is “a man of God” (I Kings 17:24). Elijah will be a model of prayer for future generations (James 5:17-18). God is about to do greater miracles through Elijah.

Questions for Discussion –

1. Are there positive lessons to be learned from the continuing corruption and degradation of the kings of Israel?
2. Why do you think the war between Judah led by King Asa and Israel led by King Baasha lasted twenty four years? What lessons can we learn from that for conflicts in our present world?
3. What does the story of Elijah and the son of the widow of Zarephath tell us about prayer?

I Kings chapters 20-22 – “Voice of the Prophet”

This section concludes the history of King Ahab of Israel who was more corrupt than all the kings before him (I Kings 16:33). Despite a brief moment of repentance he continues his path of degradation. The only hope in this section is the Word of the Lord which continues to come to the prophets.

I. The Battle against King Ben-haded – chapter 20

This chapter deals with an attack on Israel by the King of Aram, Ben-haded. Ahab surrenders quickly and easily. He demands nothing less than Ahab's silver and gold as well as his “fairest wives and children” (I Kings 20:3). We get a sense of the weakness of Ahab's character here (as if we didn't already know that) in his willingness to accept these extreme terms. Seeing how compliant Ahab is, Ben-haded, like all tyrants, is not satisfied and wants more. In addition now he wants to search Ahab's house and even the houses of his servants and basically take whatever he wants (I Kings 20:6).

This is too much even for Ahab who now calls together all the elders of Israel to ask their advice. Their answer is direct: “Do not listen or consent” (I Kings 20:8). Ahab then feels empowered to give a defiant message back to Ben-haded who pledges to destroy Israel (I Kings 20:10). Ahab even mocks him with the statement that one who puts on armor should not brag like one who has taken it off, basically wait and do your bragging after the battle, not before (I Kings 20:11). Ben-haded lines up his soldiers for attack (I Kings 20:12).

It is at this point that a nameless prophet appears with the assurance that God will give victory to Israel over Ben-haded (I Kings 20:13). The prophet says that all Israel needs are “the young men who serve the district governors” (I Kings 20:14). Ahab asks who shall lead them. The prophet answers “You.” Several things are apparent here. In spite of the widespread unfaithfulness and idolatry of Israel God has not abandoned his people. God even acknowledges the leadership of Ahab. Ahab is not only corrupt. He also appears to be a coward. Nonetheless the hand of the Lord is with him and Israel.

One clear advantage Israel has is that Ben-haded clearly has a drinking problem (I Kings 20:12). He is drunk by noon (I Kings 20:16). The young men of Israel then gain a great victory. Ahab himself is in the battle (I Kings 20:19-21). The prophet however warns that the battle is not over. Ben-haded will come again. This is an important spiritual lesson. On one hand God can work even through faithless servants like Ahab. On the other the battle, much less the war, is not over in spite of the victories we win. In the Christian life we experience victory but the enemy will always return until the final battle when Christ comes again (Matthew 24; Revelation 19-20).

In the spring Ben-haded plans another attack (I Kings 20:19). Ben-haded makes a familiar mistake in thinking God is limited. He says that Israel is protected by the “gods of the hills” (I Kings 20:23). His plan then is to fight Israel on the plains. This is a variation on the idea that God is limited. The prophet confirms that God once again will give Israel the victory, whether on the hills or the plains (I Kings 20:28). Sure enough,

once again Israel prevails. Ben-hadad counts on the fact that the kings of Israel are merciful (I Kings 20:31). He comes to Ahab in sackcloth. Ahab receives him and even calls him his brother (I Kings 20:32). Ahab makes a treaty with him and lets him go (I Kings 20:33-34).

God however is not pleased. Ahab has been too lenient and he is therefore disobedient. This point is made in an extreme way. God has one prophet say to another, "Strike me!" (I Kings 20:35-36). When the other prophet fails to do so he is killed by a lion! A second prophet complies with the request and the now injured first prophet confronts Ahab on the road with the story that he had been told to guard a prisoner with his life whom he carelessly let escape. Ahab pronounces a judgment on death on the prophet whom he assumes is a wounded soldier. In a variation on Nathan's confronting David with his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah the prophet reveals his identity and pronounces a death sentence on Ahab who returns home "resentful and sullen" (I Kings 20:39-43). The lesson here is that Ahab has made peace too easily with the enemies of God. God's mercy cannot be an excuse to condone evil. Ben-hadad's dressing in sack cloth was only a ruse to save his own life. These kinds of issues call for a great degree of discernment on our part. We should not be tricked by false repentance. The difficulty of this issue will become apparent in the next chapter.

II. Naboth's Vineyard – chapter 21

This is a familiar story again illustrating the corruption of Ahab and indeed Jezebel's power over him. Ahab desires a vineyard that belongs to the family of a man named Naboth. Ahab offers to buy it but Naboth won't sell because it is an "ancestral inheritance" (I Kings 21:1-3). Ahab, like a spoiled child sulks over the vineyard. Jezebel, learning of his desire, basically says, "You're the king. You can do whatever you want" (I Kings 21:5-7). She then proceeds to frame poor Naboth on a false charge of blasphemy and treason and has him stoned to death (I Kings 21:8-14). Ahab now can freely take the vineyard. Or so he thinks.

God sends Elijah to confront Ahab with his blatant crime (I Kings 21:17-18). Ahab calls Elijah his enemy (I Kings 21:20). Yet it is Ahab who has become an enemy of the Lord. Elijah pronounces nothing short of disaster on Ahab and his whole family. Those who die in the city will be eaten by dogs and any who die in the country will be eaten by birds. Jezebel herself will be eaten by dogs (I Kings 21:21-24)! The writer then reminds us of how corrupt Ahab and Jezebel are (I Kings 21:25-26). Indeed Jezebel will figure symbolically in the Book of Revelation as a corrupting influence in the church of Thyatira (Revelations 2:18-29).

Surprisingly then Ahab, on hearing of this impending judgment, proceeds to repent. God then relents and says that the disaster on his house will be postponed until the days of his son (I Kings 21:27-29). Ahab humbles himself but he apparently is not converted. He is still under the influence of his wife, Jezebel. Jezebel's fate remains sealed. She will be eaten by dogs!

III. The End of Ahab – chapter 22

The war with Aram continues (this is no doubt a consequence of Ahab letting Ben-hadad go free). In the third year of the war an alliance is formed with the southern kingdom of Judah. Ahab and King Jehoshaphat of Judah form an alliance. They are about to go into battle against the forces of Aram. Jehoshaphat suggests that they first consult the Word of the Lord. So no fewer than four hundred prophets are summoned. But all of them are corrupt! They basically tell Ahab and Jehoshaphat what they want to hear. They promise (falsely) a great victory (I Kings 22:11-12). Jehoshaphat, perhaps suspecting something, asks if these are all the prophets. Ahab replies there is one other, Micaiah son of Imlah (I Kings 22:7-8). However he complains that Micaiah never says anything favorable about him, no doubt because there is little favorable that could be said about Ahab!

Micaiah is called in but warned that all the other prophets have given a favorable word. Micaiah initially rejects this pressure but when he actually appears before the kings he gives in for some reason and simply repeats the party line (I Kings 22:13-15). Ahab is not fooled and demands that Micaiah tell him the truth, what God actually said. Micaiah then gives a prophecy of absolute disaster (I Kings 22:17). Ahab proceeds to complain again that this prophet never says anything positive about him. This however is only the beginning. Micaiah then reveals that God has planned to destroy Ahab. In a heavenly council God in effect asks for volunteers. One spirit steps forth and offers to be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets (I Kings 22:19-23). God sends the spirit to do exactly that. Micaiah ends his prophecy with the words, “the Lord has decreed disaster for you” (I Kings 22:23)

One of the other prophets comes forward and slaps Micaiah. Micaiah is then placed in prison under the supervision of Ahab’s son, Joash pending the outcome of the battle. Ahab, apparently fearing that the prophecy is true, attempts to disguise himself (I Kings 22:29-30). Jehoshaphat has no such disguise and is mistaken for Ahab. On closer examination the enemy realizes that Jehoshaphat is not Ahab. One of their soldiers inadvertently hits Ahab with an arrow (but this is according to God’s will, I Kings 22:20). Ahab begins to bleed all over his chariot. The wound proves fatal and Ahab dies. Ahab’s body is taken to Samaria and buried (I Kings 22:37). Yet to fulfill God’s early prophecy, the chariot that was soaked in Ahab’s blood is licked by dogs “and the prostitutes washed themselves in it” (I Kings 22:38). These prostitutes are cultic figures who according to their false religion may have believed there were magical properties in royal blood (Leviticus 17:10-11).

Jehoshaphat reigns in Judah for twenty five years. He is faithful to the Lord but the idolatrous shrines remain, the “high places” (I Kings 22:41-43). He also exiles the male temple prostitutes (I Kings 22:46). A point for further discussion in the light of the continuing debates in today’s church is that what we mean by homosexuality and even prostitution was not comparable to the context of ancient Israel or even later Roman times. These prostitutes were cultic figures and sex with them, either heterosexual or homosexual, was a way of worshipping the god they represented. Yet clearly the Bible

condemns all forms of sexual intimacy outside marriage as it also condemns divorce (Matthew 19:1-9; I Corinthians 6:9-10).

At the end of his life Jehoshaphat resists any further alliances with Israel (I Kings 22:47-49). He dies and is buried in Jerusalem, the city of David (I Kings 22:50). Ahab is succeeded by his son Ahaziah who continues the corrupt practices of the kings of Israel (I Kings 22:51-53).

Questions for Discussion –

1. What do these chapters say about forming false alliances? Ahab makes a treaty with Ben-hadad and even the prophet Micaiah is pressured into going along with the crowd. How can we maintain faithfulness to the Lord in a world of compromise and capitulation?
2. What does the story of Naboth's vineyard tell us about the nature of power? Why do you think Jezebel has such a strong hold over Ahab?
3. How would you relate God's response to Ahab's repentance to the Lord's later judgment on him at the hand of a "lying spirit" (I Kings 22:23)? Is something lacking in Ahab's repentance?