

A Kingdom in Crisis

I Kings 1

Introduction

Today, we begin a new series of studies through the books of I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles. I wonder how many of you have had devotions in the book of I Chronicles lately? How many of you know where it is? If I were to say, “Turn to II Chronicles,” how many of you would immediately turn to the table of contents to find the page number? How many of you would begin turning in your Bible, as if you knew what you were doing, praying that you would get lucky and find it before your neighbor?

Well, you can buy, like I have, little tabs that attach to each book of the Bible. You can then, immediately, effortlessly turn to any book. If I said, “Turn to the book of Amos,” you could do it with “no sweat,” by just finding that tab. As long as the book has not moved, you will find it quickly. Then, while everyone around you sweats it out, you can sit there smugly and smile at all the ignorant Christians around you. That is such a nice feeling for church!

For now, go ahead and start looking for the book of I Kings. I will give you a clue, it is in the Old Testament. So, if you are flipping through Galatians, Ephesians, or Philippians, you are not even warm.

As your pastor and teacher, I want you to know that I have done a little sweating myself over this series. I have had some personal reservations. For example, we have just finished studying the gospel by John and I had nearly seventy volumes to use as resources in my library. I counted, this past week, and discovered that, although I have purchased every evangelical commentary on II Chronicles, the number stands at seven.

Why Study the Old Testament Books?

So, the question you could ask, and many preachers have, by the way, is, “Why take the time to study books of the Bible that are, for the most part, neglected by the Christian community?”

These are books that are covered by a layer of hardened soil, as people scurry back and forth over them on their way to more “fertile” soil. Let’s face it, the pages in our Bibles are still stuck together in that strange location. So, why bother?! Let me give you two reasons.

A personal commitment to the Lord to preach and teach through the entire Bible

1. The first one is personal. Six years prior to the preaching of this sermon, I made a commitment to the Lord that I would preach and teach through the entire Bible.

I decided to get off the merry-go-round that pastors are almost forced to ride, to preach the titillating, the popular, the well known passages to their congregations. That decision was the result of conviction. In 1988, when our church was not even two years old and I had just finished a series, I was in my office asking myself the frustrating, age old preacher’s question, “What do I preach on next? What will interest the congregation? What book or passage contains rich nuggets and fascinating principles?”

I never heard a voice, but, that day, God’s Spirit smote my spirit with the thought, “What do know about My Word? Who are you to say what is

interesting? Who are you to decide what the flock will need? Preach through it all.”

Ladies and gentlemen, in these last six years, I have found nothing more challenging, sometimes frightening, but always rewarding, than to have started at the beginning. Admittedly though, as one man commented tongue-in-cheek at the last men’s retreat, he would be seventy years old before I finished. I told him, “Probably, but I expect you to stay with me the whole way.”

According to God, all of the Bible is profitable

2. There is another reason for teaching through the entire Bible and it is a much more important reason! God knew what He meant when He said that all of the Bible is profitable.

The Spirit of God did not stutter when He inspired Paul to write, in II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16,

All scripture is inspired by God and [all is] profitable . . .

Hold your finger in I Kings (now that you have found it, don’t dare let it go!), and turn to II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16. Circle the word “all” in this verse.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness

What the Bible is profitable for

So, what is the Bible is entirely profitable for?

Teaching or doctrine

1. The first thing Paul says the Bible is profitable for is for teaching or doctrine, which is propositional truth. Doctrine not only provides for us what to believe, but it also has a way of teaching us how to think.

The problem is that we are not thinking correctly and therefore, are not living correctly. It is impossible to behave biblically unless we believe biblically.

One author that I referenced, did a survey of all the doctrinal themes presented in the Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. The list was long, but some of his entries for I and II Kings included that God is:

- in sovereign control – I Kings 1;
- the only true and living God – I Kings 17;
- the creator of all there is – II Kings 19;
- the provider of life – I Kings 19;
- omnipresent – I Kings 8;
- omnipotent – I Kings 18;
- omniscient – I Kings 3-4;
- the One whom angels serve – I Kings 13 & 22;
- the One to whom the world is accountable – II Kings 19;
- a God of love – I Kings 10;
- a God of goodness – II Kings 20;
- a God of justice and righteousness – I Kings 2 & 8-10;
- the author of redemption – I Kings 8;
- a God of forgiveness – I Kings 21-22, II Kings 22;
- the One who hears and answers prayer – I Kings 13 & 17-18, II Kings 2, 6, 13 & 19;
- faithful to keep His promises – I Kings 11 & 16, II Kings 7, 10, 15 & 24;
- alone, worthy of worship – I Kings 9, II Kings 17;
- the One whose Word should be the center of the believer’s life – I Kings 6, 8, 9 & 11, II Kings 8, 17-18, 22-23.

There are many more. So, the question is not, “Is there anything for the believer in these overlooked Old Testament books, and do they have anything to say to us today?”

No! The question is, “How have we survived without ever having studied these books?”

Reproof or rebuke

2. Paul continues on to say that the Word is also profitable for reproof, or rebuke. In other words, it tells us where we have strayed and what we have done wrong. The Greek word could be rendered, “conviction; refuting error and rebuking sin”.

Some passages are heavy on the doctrinal side, while others are heavy on the reproving side.

Sometimes the Word says, “No,” but it always says, “No,” for a reason.

Steve Farrar tells a story, in his book entitled, *Standing Tall*, about a family who had taken shelter in their basement when a severe storm passed through their town. The radio warned that a tornado had been spotted. When the storm had passed by, the father opened the front door to look at the damage. A downed power line was dancing about in the street in front of their home. Before the father realized what was happening, his five year old daughter ran past him and headed for that sparkling wire in the street.

“Laurie, stop!” he yelled.

But Laurie just kept going.

“Laurie, STOP!”

But Laurie ran right for the enticing cable.

“STOP NOW, Laurie!” he screamed as he ran after her.

Little Laurie reached out and picked up that power line, and was instantly killed.

This was a daughter who did not listen, and a father who had never said, “No,” and meant it. And, that story is dramatized in living color, with similar tragic consequences, in I Kings and following.

Many times the Word will be the only influence in our lives that says, “No,” while we run toward the enticements, and while everyone else around us says, “Yes.”

Sometimes the scream of Scripture will interrupt our self-destructive race; it will cut through our heart like a knife and expose our sin, if we will listen. However, the Word does not stop there, it does more than just say, “No,” it says, “Yes,” which leads to the third word that the Scripture is profitable for.

Correction

3. Correction, which tells us what is right and how to return to the correct path. This word literally means, “to set upright; to stand us on our feet”.

Training in righteousness

4. The fourth word that Scripture is profitable for is training. This is training in righteousness and it shows us how walk and

to do what is right. It is patient, yet persistent.

We have reached the stage with our young daughter Charity, where we are teaching her how to use a spoon. It is amazing how gifted she is, in that, with very little instruction, she reaches for the spoon, holds it in her chubby little hand, dips it into her food and then, with incredible skill and coordination, turns the spoon upside down just before it reaches her mouth! We applaud, and then, once more, show her how.

The incredible thing about Kings and Chronicles is that these truths in which we are to be trained, are taught through the lives of people we will be studying. David, Solomon, Ahab and Jezebel, a host of Israel’s Kings, Elijah and Elisha provide a gold mine of truth taught through examples of failures and successes.

Now, notice the promise in II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 17.

so that the man of God [the believer] may be adequately equipped for every good work.

Is it possible that the Christian community is weak and unable to advance because we are ill-equipped? And, are we ill-equipped because we are stuffing ourselves with the pabulum of the popular studies; the latest Christian fad subjects?

The word “equipped,” or “furnished,” which is used in some translations, is an interesting word. The Greeks used the word to describe a boat that was outfitted for rough waters. It was also used to describe a wagon that was equipped for a difficult journey. In other words, to live your life apart from the study of the entire Bible, not just your favorite passages, is like taking a wagon ride across the country without enough food and water, or setting out to sea in a little sail boat that will overturn at the first gust of wind.

The implication is that your Christianity does not erase rough waters. You are equipped by this Book, not for calm seas, but for stormy waves; not for quick sprints through friendly territory, but for long journeys through enemy territory.

How can we get our wagons in order? How can we prepare to set sail?

The answers are found in the inspired, profitable, Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. So, turn back to I Kings and let us spend the remainder of our time today, mining the treasures of chapter 1.

While you are turning, let me help you get an aerial view of these four Old Testament books. I and II Chronicles repeat the material of I and II Kings, so we will study them chronologically.

These books cover roughly four hundred years. They:

- begin with the coronation of Solomon, and end with the destruction of Jerusalem;
- begin with the temple being built, and end with the temple being destroyed;
- begin with a unified, powerful nation, and end with a divided, enslaved nation.

In fact, at the end of these books, Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and takes, among others, young Jewish men back to Babylon as captives. We know the names of some of those captives to be, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and a teenager named Daniel.

Most expositors believe that the author of I and II Kings (which were originally one volume), was an aged prophet, by the name of Jeremiah. And, most believe that the author of I and II Chronicles (which were also originally one volume), was a priest, named Ezra.

Exposition – I Kings 1 Conclusions and Coronations!

Let us begin with an exposition of I Kings, chapter 1.

Prelude – I Kings 1:1-4

Look at verses 1 through 4.

Now King David was old [seventy], and advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. So his servants said to him, “Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm.” So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful; and she became the king’s nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her.

This is certainly an awkward place to start. I stared long and hard at these first few verses, but they just would not go away.

Now, most of the commentaries that I read, were written years ago. They made a definite attempt to explain away or reinterpret the frank, base nature of this paragraph. One commentator said, “This was a common form of medicine in ancient days for someone unable to be warmed.”

Yeah, right. It might have been common, but it was not commendable. I am sure that, if you were a seventy year old man and could not get warm, and your doctor prescribed this, you would get a second opinion, right? *Right?* If you even hesitated, I am certain that your wife would give you another opinion.

You need to remember, especially as we study another Old Testament book, that just because the Bible records events, does not mean the events are necessarily condoned. This was indeed, the common practice of kings, and chapter 2 strongly suggests that David made her a member of his harem, but that does not change God’s stated ideal for a married man or woman. His ideal was one man with one woman for life.

It will be David’s violation of God’s ideal and thus, his eighteen wives and many concubines, that not only will create a crisis, but will establish an example for his son Solomon. That disobedience will ultimately, destroy Solomon, for it was the wives of Solomon who turned his heart from following God.

There is one other thing that is worth mentioning. While we know nothing about this young woman, we do know that her life will be irretrievably ruined by her inclusion into David’s harem. As a beautiful young woman, she has the potential of being chosen by a young Israelite man; perhaps a godly man who serves Jehovah. She has the potential of marriage, raising her own family, and living her own life around her friends and relatives. But now, she has no choice. She cannot refuse the imperial summons, so there is no personal hope for a future. She becomes one among hundreds of women who were pampered, but virtually ignored, unless beckoned by the king.

Now, while harems are not a part of our landscape, the principle still exists today. If you are in a position of power and influence; if you are a manager or a boss to one or to many, recognize the impact you have on someone else’s life. Do not take advantage of their obedience to you; treat them with respect and dignity. The world has enough selfish tyrants who use and abuse people. Christianity turns leaders into servants; it replaces callous disregard with

compassion for other people who happen to be a little lower on the ladder than you.

While we can say a lot of things about these opening verses, one thing is clear – on the surface it is obvious that this great man of military might and prowess is now feeble, weak, and suffering. But beneath the obvious is the opening description of a man who is:

- distracted, when he should have been focused;
- being entertained, when he should have been intervening.

The crown is at stake; the kingdom is in a crisis.

The Revolution Begins – I Kings 1:5-10

So, let the revolution begin. Continue in chapter 1 of I Kings to verse 5.

Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him.

By the way, Adonijah should have learned from history. Absalom, his half-brother, did the same thing. In fact, Adonijah even uses the same number of chariots and horsemen that Absalom used.

If you are wondering what could drive a young man to dethrone his father and wreak havoc in the kingdom, verse 6 sheds incredible insight on this.

His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, “Why have you done so?” And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom.

I can assure you that everything that occurs in chapter 1 is either directly or indirectly related to that one heavy verse. As great a leader as David was, he is, for us in this chapter, the classic absent father. David is the father who refuses to exercise authority over the child, until the child ultimately, exercises authority over the father.

With Absalom, and now with Adonijah, David either pampered or ignored them. He gave them everything but himself. Imagine, as it says in verse 6, he “had never crossed him”; literally, David never pained him. David never got in Adonijah’s way; he never challenged him; he never disciplined him.

In the same way today, the revolutions that are confronting us find their roots in verse 6. The only

things that have changed are clothing styles and weapons.

One author wrote,

Somewhere and in some way, with every major social problem in America, a father has failed to give leadership to his family . . . the deterioration of our culture has accelerated dramatically because fathers who are willing to lead are now in the minority.

Listen to a United States Senator speak brave, almost prophetic words in 1965,

From the wild Irish slums of the nineteenth century Eastern seaboard to the riot torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history; a community that allows its young men and women to grow up without ever acquiring any stable relationship to male authority . . . that community asks for and gets chaos!

Male leadership begins with Dad. If it fails there and goes unchecked, it spreads to the school and community, and eventually, to the highest courts in the land. It spreads until, as one author wrote, “When authority finally breaks down, and the consequences for breaking authority cease to exist, then chaos is reality.”

Texas A&M University recently calculated the amount of time that a person committing a crime can expect to spend paying for that crime in prison. A person committing:

- murder can expect to spend one year eight months;
- rape can expect sixty days;
- robbery can expect an average of twenty three days;
- arson can expect six days sixteen hours;
- aggravated assault can expect just over six days.

Have you, like ancient David, in your home and in your world, lost the ability to say, “No!”?

So, in verse 5, Adonijah is going to attempt, with cold, ruthless hatred, to get rid of his Dad.

The next few verses flesh out who was on whose side. Look at verse 7 for those with Adonijah.

He had conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest; and following Adonijah they helped him.

Now, Adonijah holds a coronation for himself and announces his own ascension to the throne. At that feast, however, there were several noticeable absences. He never sent party invitations to several people. Skip to verse 10.

But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, and Solomon his brother.

Adonijah has waited for what he considered the perfect moment. It is now time to strike. David is weak and sickly, and he is sequestered away with his newest distraction. Besides, Adonijah has convinced powerful Joab, the five star general, to back him. He has lured Abiathar away from David. Abiathar is the priest who faithfully and loyally served David during his earlier years on the run from King Saul.

All the cards were in Adonijah's hand. What could David do?

Why Adonijah failed in the revolution

I will not take a lot of time to get into the intrigue of this drama, but Adonijah failed, in this revolution, on two counts.

Adonijah overlooked the promise of God through David

1. First, Adonijah overlooked the promise of God through David. In other words, the kingdom knew that Solomon was God's choice to replace David. It would be Solomon, God had said, who would build the temple.

Adonijah underestimated the nation's loyalty to David

2. Secondly, Adonijah underestimated the nation's loyalty to David.

The Counter-revolution Begins – I Kings 1:11-27

There were two people in the kingdom who would risk everything on these two things – that God's will and the nation's loyalty had not changed. Two people would instigate the counter-revolution. They were an old prophet, named Nathan, and one of David's wives.

Notice verse 11.

Then Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it?"

Tuck that thought into your minds, by the way. David was so out of touch that Nathan knew the coup attempt was underway, and David did not.

Continue to verses 12 through 14.

So now come, please let me give you counsel and save your life and the life of your son Solomon. Go at once to King David and say to him, "Have you not, my lord, O king, sworn to your maidservant, saying, 'Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne?' Why then has Adonijah become king?" Behold, while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words.

Practically speaking, the counter-plot they hatch is banking on one major hope, and it is something that had never happened before. They are hoping that David, for the first time in his life, will say, "No," to Adonijah. Frankly, they are not sure he will, even though his oath and God's will was for Solomon to reign next.

The plan is initiated by Bathsheba and Nathan confirms the news.

The Coronation is Held – I Kings 1:28-48

Now look at David's reaction, beginning in verses 28 and 29.

Then King David said, "Call Bathsheba to me." And she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. The king vowed and said, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, surely as I vowed to you by the Lord the God of Israel, saying, 'Your son Solomon shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place'; I will indeed do so this day."

Skip to verses 33 and 34 and continue reading.

The king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. Let Zadok the priest

and Nathan the prophet anoint him there as king over Israel, and blow the trumpet and say, 'Long live King Solomon!'"

“Whew,” point number one is fulfilled in this counter-revolution, David will keep his promise. But now, will God move the hearts of the people to follow a king-elect by the name of Solomon, who, at this point in time, is only around thirteen years of age?

Notice verses 38 and 39.

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the Cherethites, and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. Zadok the priest then took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!"

Now notice verse 40.

All the people went up after him, and the people were playing on flutes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth shook at their noise.

Can you imagine? Do you know what that means? God has not changed and the loyalty of the people has not changed.

Aftermath – I Kings 1:49-53

So, what was the aftermath of this? Look at verse 49.

Then all the guests of Adonijah were terrified; and they arose and each went on his way.

They did not even stay behind to help clear the dishes – and forget dessert! Adonijah is on his own.

Application – Questions From Ancient Kings To Contemporary Christians

We will continue this story in our next discussion. Let us stop here and pull some questions from this ancient, inspired book of I Kings to contemporary Christians today.

Are you denying God's Word or obeying it?

1. The first question is, are you denying God's Word or obeying it?

Perhaps, as you have listened, you have identified more with Adonijah than David. God's Word has been clearly delivered and yet, you are persistently involved in something or with someone else.

It is possible that no one else knows the plot you are developing in your heart; the revolution that you are secretly carrying on against the clear teaching of God's Word. My dear friend, you will never win!

If Adonijah had accepted the will of God, with his handsome appearance and natural leadership charisma, he could have been one of the instrumental leaders in Israel's glorious expansion under Solomon's rule. But, he had to have his way; he had to be king.

In our own lives, at various stages and in varying degrees, the question remains almost the same. It is, “Who will be the king? Who will rule our lives?”

Now, after observing David, there are some questions that I need to ask you. I have lived with them all week.

Are you isolated or accountable?

2. Are you isolated or accountable?

What struck me about David, as I read and re-read this chapter, was how Nathan, the prophet, and Bathsheba, David's favorite wife, had to, as tactfully as possible, bring up the issue of Adonijah. You would think that Nathan could have rushed into David's presence and said, “David, your son is attempting to overthrow you! Do something!”

At some point in David's powerful old age, he had become hard to reach. Do the important people in your life have to tiptoe around you? Are they afraid of advising you, interrupting you, or challenging you?

Can you be told “you are wrong”? Can you be challenged in areas where you are failing; areas that everyone around you can see but you?

Are you distracted or focused?

3. The third question is, are you distracted or focused?

Frankly, this sermon is an introduction to our next discussion. I am going to illustrate this point during that time.

But for now, are there things that are blinding your clear vision of reality? It could be another person; it could be the television; it could be a

consuming hobby or habit. Take a hard look at your “distractions” to developing godliness. Are you willing to set them aside for the sake of the kingdom?

Are you ignoring unpleasant areas or attending to them?

4. The last question is, are you ignoring unpleasant areas or attending to them?

Raising a child is hard work. Reaching a wayward child is even harder. It is easier to take an extra job or to come home late than to face the situation.

A lifeless marriage that, some time ago, slipped into neutral is painful to address. It is hard to face that there are wrongs to be explored; there are scars to be unveiled.

Hidden sin is hard to uncover and humbling to confess. Will you let them spoil inside you and sap your vitality and your spiritual hunger for intimacy with God?

There is a crisis at hand and, even though you may feel weak and feeble, ask God, who is our ever present help in time of trouble, to strengthen and infuse you with courage to address the crisis in your kingdom. Do it today!

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