

CHAPTER 11: 2 Samuel 11 thru 24, 1 Kings and 2 Kings

In the spring of the year, at the time when kings normally conduct wars, David sent out Joab with his officers and the entire Israelite army... But David stayed behind in Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 11:1)

David is not where he is supposed to be and this is when his trouble begins.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of his palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. Now this woman was very attractive. (2 Samuel 11:2)

David inquires about who this woman is and he learns that her name is Bathsheba and that she is Uriah's wife. David is familiar with Uriah. He is one of David's best soldiers and is currently away at war. Well, how convenient! David, being the king, can do whatever he pleases! Or so he thinks. He sends for Bathsheba and ends up having sexual relations with her.

The woman conceived and then sent word to David, "I'm pregnant." (2 Samuel 11:5) So what is David going to do? He decides to cover up his sin. He recalls Uriah home from the war and instructs him to go and spend some "quality time" with his wife. But Uriah is a loyal soldier. He refuses to go home while his brothers in arms are still out on the battlefield.

With his plan foiled, David goes to Plan B. He gives orders to Joab his military commander to place Uriah on the front line of the fiercest battle. He hopes that Uriah will be killed. His plan works. Uriah is mortally wounded in battle and dies.

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for him. When the time of mourning passed, David had her brought to his palace. She became his wife and she bore him a son. But what David had done upset the Lord. (2 Samuel 11:26-27)

Enter Nathan the prophet. In a famous confrontation Nathan exposes David as the guilty sinner he is. To his credit David takes ownership for what he did. He confesses and repents. This is quite a contrast to the way King Saul had reacted when he had been confronted with his sin by Samuel.

Then David exclaimed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord!” Nathan replied to David, “Yes, and the Lord has forgiven your sin. Nonetheless, because you have treated the Lord with such contempt in this matter, the son who has been born to you will certainly die.” (2 Samuel 12:13-14) This upsets David deeply. For a full week David fasts. He desperately implores God to spare the child’s life. But just as Nathan had predicted, the baby dies.

So David got up from the ground, bathed, put on oil, and changed his clothes. He went to the house of the Lord and worshiped... David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went to her and had marital relations with her. She gave birth to a son, and David named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved the child. (2 Samuel 12:20, 24)

As a result of David’s indiscretion his family and his kingdom begin to fall apart. The remainder of David’s life is a sad and tragic story, very much like what happened with Saul. David’s sin will have long lasting and far-reaching effects.

Over the coming years David has many sons and daughters. David’s sons end up repeating their father’s mistakes. First, Amnon, David’s oldest son, rapes his half-sister Tamar. When her brother Absalom discovers what Amnon did he becomes angry and eventually has Amnon killed. This is all happening in David’s family! With Amnon dead, Absalom is next in line to succeed David as king.

David’s relationship with Absalom becomes more and more strained and Absalom eventually leaves the palace. Over the course of several years Absalom secretly devises a plan to take over his father David’s throne. When the time is right he leads a rebellion. He fully intends to kill David, his own father, and seize power! David is forced to flee for his life and goes into hiding out in the wilderness.

Absalom’s rebellion leads to an ugly civil war. In the course of fleeing from David’s men Absalom’s long hair gets caught in the branches of an oak tree and he ends up suspended helplessly in midair. Defying David’s orders not to harm Absalom, Joab, David’s military commander kills Absalom.

When David learns that Absalom is dead his heart is broken. **The king became very upset. He went up to the upper room over the gate and wept. As he went he said, “My son, Absalom! If only I could have died in your place! Absalom, my son, my son!”** (2 Samuel 18:33) Once again David laments a man who had sought to kill him. David returns home and takes his place back on the throne of Israel. But David is a broken man, wounded deeply, and suffering the consequences for his own sin.

The book of Second Samuel concludes with an epilogue of sorts. The author recounts six stories as he flashes back to events that occurred during David's reign. These are not necessarily in chronological order.

In the first story there has been a famine in Israel for the past three years. David recognizes this is as being God's divine judgment. He seeks the Lord for the reason. God reveals to David that the famine is a result of one of King Saul's evil actions against the Gibeonites years before. In an effort to set things right with the Gibeonites King David allows them to execute seven of Saul's male descendants. But true to his promise of loyalty to his friend Jonathan (1 Samuel 20), David spares Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. With the Gibeonites now pacified, the famine ends.

In the second story David takes a census of Israel which displeases the Lord – it was not God directed. God allows David to choose the divine punishment from several options. David chooses to have a severe plague rampage the land. David is directed to offer burnt sacrifices in order to remove the plague. David makes this famous statement regarding sacrificial giving – **“I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt sacrifices that cost me nothing.”** (2 Samuel 24:24) And the result of David's prayer: **The Lord accepted prayers for the land and the plague was removed from Israel.** (2 Samuel 24:25)

The next two stories tell about David and his band of mighty men who went about fighting the Philistines. In one story a descendant of Goliath plans to kill David, perhaps as revenge for David killing Goliath. Thanks to the heroics of one of David's mighty men, the plan fails. The other story gives a list of 37 of David's mighty men of valor. Each man mentioned had been killed and they are remembered for their heroic acts. Ironically one the mighty men listed is Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, the same man David had killed in an effort to cover up his sin.

The last two stories are actually poems written by David. These serve as his memoirs. In one poem David reflects over his life and remembers times when God rescued him while Saul was pursuing him. **“The Lord is my high ridge, my stronghold, my deliverer. My God is my rocky summit where I take shelter, my shield, the horn that saves me, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior. You save me from violence!”** (2 Samuel 22:1-2) David refuses to dwell on the pain he experienced during that period of his life. Instead he celebrates how God ultimately delivered him.

In the next poem David nears the end of his life. **“My dynasty is approved by God, for He has made a perpetual covenant with me, arranged in all its particulars and secured. He always delivers me, and brings all I desire to fruition.”** (2 Samuel 23:5) David is prepared to meet God. He can see how God has been faithful to him. In his last words he looks ahead with hope to God's covenant promise to him. David looks

down his royal line into the future to a king who will one day rule and bring God's blessing to the nations.

This brings us to the books of 1 and 2 Kings (originally one book). It picks up near the end of David's reign. The opening line of 1 Kings says, **King David was very old...** David knows he is going to die soon. He has already made it clear to those in his closest circle that Solomon will be the king after him (1 Kings 1:13). However, David's oldest son Adonijah has other ideas. In a bold move he publicly announces himself to be the king of Israel. King David is not even dead yet! Adonijah's ill-conceived plan is quickly derailed and Solomon is rightfully anointed as Israel's new king.

Well, Adonijah realizes the gravity of what he has done and fears for his life. He seeks asylum from possible retribution by Solomon. What does Solomon do? He shows Adonijah mercy. **Solomon said, "If [Adonijah] is a loyal subject, not a hair of his head will be harmed, but if he is found to be a traitor, he will die." King Solomon sent men to bring him down from the altar. He came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon told him, "Go home."** (1 Kings 1:52-53) As long as Adonijah submits to Solomon's authority as the king, he will be allowed to live.

David is on his deathbed and imparts his final words to Solomon. He says... **"I am about to die. Be strong and become a man! Do the job the Lord your God has assigned you by following His instructions and obeying His rules, commandments, regulations and laws as written in the Law of Moses. Then you will succeed in all you do and seek to accomplish, and the Lord will fulfill his promise to me."** (1 Kings 2:2-3)

And with that David dies and passes on his 40-year long legacy of greatness to Solomon.

Solomon sat on his father David's throne, and his royal authority was firmly solidified. (1 Kings 2:12) Early in his reign Solomon "solidifies" his kingdom by carrying out several political assassinations. He even banishes a person from the priesthood. These actions seem harsh, but they are justified. Solomon administers justice upon many people who had dishonored his father David as the Lord's anointed king. **So Solomon took firm control of the kingdom.** (1 Kings 2:46)

This brings us back to Adonijah. Remember him? Solomon's power-hungry step-brother who had tried to take the throne? He just can't leave well enough alone! Adonijah connives to take a beautiful young woman as his own wife. The problem is that this woman had previously served as King David's nurse in his old age. She is royal property and as such she rightfully belongs to King Solomon. When Solomon is made aware of Adonijah's intent, he realizes that Adonijah wants more than just the woman.

He is after the throne of Israel! Adonijah has broken his agreement. Solomon has him executed for treason.

Solomon realizes just how difficult being Israel's king will be. So he asks God for wisdom to help him lead the nation. God is pleased with Solomon's request. He tells Solomon... **"I grant your request, and give you a wise and discerning mind superior to that of anyone who has preceded or will succeed you. Furthermore, I am giving you what you did not request – riches and honor so that you will be the greatest king of your generation. If you will follow My instructions by obeying My rules and regulations, just as your father David did, I will grant you long life."** (1 Kings 3:12-14)

Under Solomon's reign the nation flourishes. The people are happy and have plenty to eat and drink. He strengthens the nation's security with chariots and horses. He rebuilds the walls and gates of key cities throughout Israel. He constructs ships and develops a large navy that helps bolster trade. Solomon is a literary master composing 3000 proverbs and over 1000 songs. He has a brilliant scientific mind and writes manuals on botany and biology. Solomon accumulates massive wealth – gold, silver, ivory, spices and much more.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment; the breadth of his understanding was as infinite as the sand on the seashore... People from all nations came to hear Solomon's display of wisdom; they came from all the kings of the earth who heard about his wisdom. (1 Kings 4:29, 34)

King Solomon was wealthier and wiser than any of the kings of the earth. Everyone in the world wanted to visit Solomon to see him display his God-given wisdom. (1 Kings 10:23-24)

All of this is wonderful, but Solomon's single greatest achievement comes when he fulfills his father David's dream of building a house, a temple for the God of Israel. He spares no expense. Solomon's temple is a grand and glorious structure! It takes thousands of builders and craftsmen seven years to complete.

The Ark of the Covenant is moved into the new temple and placed in the most holy place. **Once the priests [who were carrying the ark] left the holy place, a cloud filled the Lord's temple. The priests could not carry out their duties because of the cloud; the Lord's glory filled the temple.** (1 Kings 8:10-11)

But despite Solomon's great wisdom, he makes some poor choices. **"King Solomon fell in love with many foreign women..."** (1 Kings 11:1). Solomon marries hundreds of the daughters of other kings. The purpose for these marriages is to establish political alliances. But Solomon allows his foreign wives to continue

worshipping their false deities rather than teaching them to worship the God of Israel alone. Over time Solomon's heart begins to turn away from God.

One of God's instructions to the nation of Israel back in Deuteronomy warned that this very thing could happen. **“You must not intermarry with [the neighboring nations]. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the Lord will erupt against you and He will quickly destroy you.”** (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Solomon ignores this warning and does what he wants to do.

Solomon did evil in the Lord's sight; he did not remain loyal to the Lord, like his father David had. (1 Kings 11:6) What a sad commentary!

So the Lord said to Solomon, “Because you insist on doing these things and have not kept the covenantal rules I gave you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. However, for your father David's sake I will not do this while you are alive. I will tear it away from your son's hand instead.” (1 Kings 11:11-12)

After Solomon's death his son Rehoboam becomes king. Rehoboam is motivated by greed and a lust for power. A man named Jeroboam heads up a delegation demanding that the heavy tax burden to the people of Israel be reduced. After consulting with his elders, Rehoboam foolishly refuses to reduce their taxes. Not only that but he threatens to make the burden even heavier! Jeroboam and his delegation have had enough! They break away and form their own kingdom.

The nation of Israel is now divided. The southern kingdom led by Rehoboam is comprised of the large territory of Judah and the smaller tribe of Benjamin. They remain centered in Jerusalem with all of its kings coming from David's royal line. The new rival kingdom to the north which is led by Jeroboam retains the covenant name of Israel. It comprises the remaining tribes. Eventually its capital city will be located in Samaria, about 25 miles north of Bethel. It must be noted that the Levites are split between the two kingdoms depending on which cities they are living in.

Jeroboam leads the northern kingdom into an apostate system of worship. He prohibits his people from going down to Jerusalem to worship God. He institutes a worship system that mimics the pattern given to Moses. He pays only lip service to the worship of the one true God. His apostate system includes unlawful sacrifices, two new temples and counterfeit festivals. Jeroboam even places a golden calf in each of the temples. Here we have an explicit connection to the golden calf back in Exodus – this is NOT a good thing!

In the southern kingdom things are not much better. Rehoboam is also evil and he leads his people astray. God's judgment falls upon Judah when Egypt invades Jerusalem and strips the temple of its gold. During his reign, Rehoboam and the nation of Judah continue to fight a civil war against Jeroboam and the nation of Israel. Rehoboam reigns for 17 years and is succeeded by his son.

After Rehoboam and Jeroboam, from 1 Kings 15 to the end of 2 Kings, the narrative jumps back and forth. It details what is going on in both Judah and Israel at the same time. Both kingdoms have 20 kings. As each of their kings is introduced, the author evaluates them as having done what is either "good" or "evil." So what determines whether a king is good or evil? It's simple: Is the king faithful to keep God's Law and covenant promises? Based on that criteria, the author determines that in northern kingdom of Israel there are NO good kings, none, 0 out of 20. And in the southern kingdom of Judah only 8 out of 20 are considered good kings. This is not a very good track record! These are the leaders of God's covenant people. They are supposed to be God's representatives to the nations! It's been noted before – as the king goes, so go the people.

We are introduced to several prominent prophets of God. Prophets act as God's spokesmen. They hold the various kings accountable for their actions. They denounce the rampant idolatry and injustice throughout the land. They constantly remind Judah and Israel that, as God's covenant people, they are to be a light to the nations. They exhort the kings and the people to obey God's Law. Frequently the prophets call on both nations to repent of their sins and return to God.

The most prominent prophets operate in the northern kingdom. Elijah is a wild-looking man who lives out in the desert. He is constantly going up against Israel's wicked King Ahab and his Canaanite wife Jezebel. They have instituted the worship of the Canaanite god Baal in Israel.

In one famous confrontation, Elijah challenges 450 prophets of Baal to a contest to determine whose "god" is real. Both the prophets of Baal and Elijah construct altars and then both cry out to their deities for fire to come. But only the one true God of Israel answers. **Then fire from the Lord fell from the sky. It consumed the offering, the wood, the stones, and the dirt, and licked up the water in the trench.** (1 Kings 18:38) When the people witness this incredible display they acknowledge Elijah's God as the one true God and kill all the prophets of Baal.

Eventually an aging Elijah passes the mantle of his prophetic ministry on to his protégé, Elisha. Before Elijah departs the scene Elisha asks Elijah for twice his prophetic authority and power. **Elijah replied, "That's a difficult request! If you see me taken from you, may it be so, but if you don't, it will not happen."** As they were

walking along and talking, suddenly a fiery chariot pulled by fiery horses appeared. They went between Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah went up to heaven in a windstorm. (2 Kings 2:11-12)

For years Elijah and Elisha confront Israel's rulers about their evil practices – their idolatry and injustice. But they are unsuccessful in turning Israel around spiritually. The northern kingdom spirals downward into apostasy. Their steady spiritual decline without repentance eventually leads to their demise. The powerful empire of Assyria swoops down and conquers the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria, Israel's capital city is destroyed and the people are scattered throughout the region.

This happened because the Israelites sinned against the Lord their God... They worshiped other gods; they observed the practices of the nations... The Israelites said things about the Lord that were not right... Their evil practices made the Lord angry. They worshiped the disgusting idols in blatant disregard of the Lord's command... So the Lord was furious with Israel and rejected them; only the tribe of Judah was left. (2 Kings 17:7-9, 11-12, 18)

With Israel now gone, only Judah remains as the remnant nation of God's chosen people. But Judah's days are also numbered!

In the remaining southern kingdom of Judah there are two good kings worth noting. The first is Hezekiah. After the Assyrians finish conquering the northern kingdom their massive army advances southward toward Judah and Jerusalem. The Assyrian king Sennacherib pressures Judah's King Hezekiah to surrender. Hezekiah turns to God for help and God miraculously intervenes. Overnight God strikes 185,000 Assyrian soldiers dead in their camp just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Sennacherib is forced to return home and ends up being assassinated.

Later in his reign Hezekiah is stricken with a terminal illness. He again turns to God and asks the Lord to spare his life. God graciously gives Hezekiah 15 more years. But Hezekiah does a foolish thing. When the king of Babylon hears about Hezekiah's illness, he sends an envoy to him with a gift. **Hezekiah welcomed [the envoy from Babylon] and showed them his whole storehouse, with its silver, gold, spices, and high quality olive oil, as well as his armory and everything in his treasuries. Hezekiah showed them everything in his palace and in his whole kingdom. (2 Kings 20:13)** This will prove to be disastrous.

Another good king of Judah is Josiah. Under his rule a lost scroll of the Law is discovered buried in the temple. Josiah begins to read it. He is convicted by its words and institutes religious reforms in Judah. These reforms lead to the removal of idols and pagan influences from the land. **No king before or after repented before the Lord as**

he did, with his whole heart, soul, and being in accordance with the whole law of Moses. (2 Kings 23:25)

Unfortunately for the nation of Judah, not all their kings are godly kings like Hezekiah and Josiah. In fact, most of them are bad. The king in between these two good kings is the evil Manasseh. He is a violent king promoting the worship of idols in God's holy temple. He even introduces child sacrifices. Infuriated by the things Manasseh had done... **The Lord announced, "I will also spurn Judah, just as I spurned Israel. I will reject this city that I chose – both Jerusalem and the temple, about which I said, 'I will live there.'"** (2 Kings 23:27) The southern kingdom of Judah has reached rock bottom spiritually and their fate is sealed.

As the book of 2 Kings nears its conclusion the empire of Babylon invades Jerusalem. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar makes Zedekiah his puppet king and leaves him to rule over Judah. Many of Judah's prominent residents are taken captive and exiled to Babylon. At one point King Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem attempt to rebel against Babylonian rule. Nebuchadnezzar mobilizes his army and lays siege against Jerusalem. After two long years, the city falls.

Zedekiah and the royal family attempt to flee the city but they are caught. **Zedekiah's sons were executed while Zedekiah was forced to watch. The king of Babylon then had Zedekiah's eyes put out, bound him in bronze chains, and carried him off to Babylon.** (2 Kings 25:7)

Jerusalem's walls are broken down. Its temple is destroyed. All those treasures that Hezekiah had shown to the Babylonian envoys years before are now carted off to Babylon. Many of Judah's citizens are exiled away from their home. This sad ending to the book leaves us wondering – what is God up to? His people are again living in a foreign land! How will God fulfill His promises to Abraham and to David? How can God possibly bless the world thru such a disobedient people?

But it doesn't end there. The author adds a footnote to the end of the story. And here it is... Fast forward 40 years. God's covenant people are still in exile in Babylon. We see Jehoiakim, a descendant of David. He would have been king had it not been for the Babylonian captivity. The king of Babylon releases Jehoiakim from prison and he brings him into the palace. He invites him to eat at his royal table for the rest of his life. And that's how the book ends. God's covenant people are in exile far away from home, but there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon.