THE BOOK OF 1 KINGS

The King Greater Than Solomon

1 Kings, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Greater Than Solomon: The Book of 1 Kings, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” You might know a couple of stories from 1 Kings. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, threatening to cut a baby in half. Elijah calling down fire from heaven. Maybe you’ve heard of Jezebel, whose name is still an insult three thousand years later.

1 Kings starts at the very top. Israel has its greatest king, its most beautiful building, its biggest empire, and its most famous wise man. Then, chapter by chapter, it comes apart. The wise king becomes foolish. The kingdom splits in two. Kings come and go, most of them bad. And into the darkness steps a strange, rugged prophet from the wilderness named Elijah, who takes on a king, a queen, and four hundred and fifty prophets of a false god, and then crashes so hard he asks God to let him die.

So why read it? Because 1 Kings shows that being smart, gifted, and successful isn’t the same as being faithful. It shows what happens when leaders forget God, and what it looks like to stand up for the truth when nobody else will. And it shows a God who is patient, persistent, and gentle with the worn out.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through 1 Kings in nine chapters: David’s last days and Solomon’s rise (1 Kings 1–2), Solomon’s wisdom (3–4), building

and dedicating the temple (5–8), the Queen of Sheba and Solomon's drift (9–11), the kingdom torn in two (12–16), Elijah, the ravens, and the widow (17), fire on Mount Carmel (18), Elijah's burnout and the gentle whisper (19), and Naboth's vineyard and Micaiah (20–22).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book 1 Kings is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first. And when the kingdom splits in chapter 5, look for the quick guide to Israel and Judah. You'll need it.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to date the building of the temple and how to understand the lying spirit in chapter 22, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes 1 Kings in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the eleventh book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

1 Kings raises real questions. I've presented the main views fairly on the dating of the exodus and the temple (1 Kings 6:1), on the execution of the prophets of Baal, and on the lying spirit in Micaiah's vision. I'd encourage you to share your own church's view with your teen, and to explain why other Christians see it differently. Because the divided kingdom confuses many readers, chapter 5 includes a quick guide to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Elijah's collapse under the juniper tree in 1 Kings 19 gets special attention. A Real Talk box explains that exhaustion, burnout, and depression are not signs of weak faith, encourages readers to talk to a trusted adult or a doctor, and points them to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Other boxes address peer pressure, standing alone for what's right, and the abuse of power in the story of Naboth's vineyard.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees Solomon's wisdom, the temple, and Elijah pointing to Jesus, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure 1 Kings in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will see in 1 Kings that wisdom begins with listening to God, and that the God who sent fire on Carmel also speaks in a gentle whisper to the worn out.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

1 Kings is history told as a story, with a clear point of view. The writer judges every king by one standard: did he do what was right in the LORD's eyes, like David, or did he lead the people into idolatry? It's not a complete record of everything the kings did. The writer often tells you where to find more details, in books like the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, which have since been lost. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book.

Where It Fits

1 Kings picks up right where 2 Samuel leaves off, with David old and dying. It covers about 120 years, from roughly 970 BC to about 850 BC: Solomon's reign, the split of the kingdom, and the first several decades of the two kingdoms that followed. 2 Kings continues the story all the way to the destruction of both kingdoms. 1 and 2 Chronicles retell much of the same history from a different angle, focusing on Judah.

Who Wrote It?

The book doesn't name its author. Jewish tradition says the prophet Jeremiah wrote Kings. Because 2 Kings ends during the exile in Babylon, most scholars think the final version was put together around that time, drawing on older royal records and prophetic stories, as part of a larger history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. That helps explain its big question: how did God's

people end up losing everything? Christians with different views agree that it is God's Word.

The World of 1 Kings

When Solomon takes the throne, Israel is at peace and stronger than it has ever been. Egypt and Assyria are relatively weak, so small kingdoms like Israel have room to grow. Trade routes run through the land, bringing wealth. Later, the neighboring kingdom of Aram, also called Syria, with its capital at Damascus, becomes Israel's main enemy. And the Phoenicians, a seafaring people from cities like Tyre and Sidon, bring both trade and the worship of Baal, a storm god believed to send rain and good harvests.

Two Big Characters

The first half of 1 Kings belongs to Solomon, the king who had everything: wisdom, wealth, peace, and the privilege of building God's temple. The second half belongs to Elijah, a prophet who had almost nothing but God's word, and who stood against a powerful king and queen who were leading Israel into Baal worship. Watching the contrast between them is one of the keys to the book.

Hard Stories and Safety Notes

1 Kings includes violence, war, injustice, and a prophet so exhausted and discouraged that he asks to die. Including a story in the Bible doesn't mean God approves of what happens in it. When we come to these stories, you'll find a box with a safety note. If you ever feel so worn out or hopeless that you think about not wanting to live, please talk to a trusted adult or a doctor. In the United States you can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, and in an emergency, call 911.

The Map

Chapter 1 (1 Kings 1–2): Long live King Solomon.

Chapter 2 (1 Kings 3–4): A listening heart.

Chapter 3 (1 Kings 5–8): A house for God's name.

Chapter 4 (1 Kings 9–11): Splendor and drift.

Chapter 5 (1 Kings 12–16): A kingdom torn in two.

Chapter 6 (1 Kings 17): Ravens and a widow.

Chapter 7 (1 Kings 18): Fire on Mount Carmel.

Chapter 8 (1 Kings 19): The gentle whisper.

Chapter 9 (1 Kings 20–22): Naboth and Micaiah.

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CHAPTER 1

Long Live King Solomon

1 Kings 1–2

1 Kings opens with a sad picture. “Now King David was old and advanced in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he couldn’t keep warm.” The giant-killer, the warrior king, the man who danced before the ark, is now an old man shivering in bed. His servants find a young woman named Abishag to take care of him and keep him warm. The writer makes clear that David had no sexual relationship with her. He’s simply too weak.

And when a king gets weak, people start making moves.

David’s oldest surviving son is Adonijah. With Amnon and Absalom dead, he assumes the throne should be his. So “Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’” He gets chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run in front of him, exactly what Absalom did before his rebellion. Then the writer adds a revealing comment: “His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, ‘Why have you done so?’” David had never once corrected him. David’s failure as a father shows up again.

> REAL TALK **Kids Who Are Never Told No**
>
> The Bible says David never confronted Adonijah, never asked him, why did you do that? It sounds nice to have a parent who never says no. But Adonijah grew up thinking he could take whatever he wanted, and it ended up costing him his life. Boundaries are a form of love. Parents who correct their kids

> aren't trying to ruin their lives. They're trying to help them become people who can handle power, disappointment, and responsibility. If your parents set limits you don't like, it might be worth asking what they're trying to protect you from. And if you ever end up in a position of leadership, remember: people who are never told no usually end up hurting themselves and others.

Adonijah throws a big sacrificial feast and invites the king's sons and important officials, including Joab, the army commander, and Abiathar the priest. But he leaves out a few people: Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, Benaiah the commander of David's bodyguard, David's mighty men, and his younger half-brother Solomon. That tells you he knows exactly who would oppose him.

Nathan acts fast. He goes to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and warns her. "Haven't you heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith reigns, and David our lord doesn't know it?" If Adonijah becomes king, Bathsheba and Solomon will probably be killed as rivals. Nathan tells her to remind David of a promise he made: that Solomon would be king after him.

Remember Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11? She didn't speak a word except to say she was pregnant. Now she walks into the king's room and speaks boldly. "My lord, you swore by the LORD your God to your servant, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.'" She tells him about Adonijah's feast and says that all Israel is waiting for him to announce his successor. While she's still talking, Nathan comes in and backs her up.

It works. The old king rouses himself one last time. He swears, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity," that Solomon will be king, today.

David gives detailed orders. Put Solomon on my own mule. Take him down to the Gihon spring. "Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel. Blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!'" And that's exactly what happens. "Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the Tent, and anointed Solomon. They blew the trumpet; and all the people said, 'Long live King Solomon!'" The crowd celebrates so loudly the ground shakes.

Across town, Adonijah and his guests are just finishing their feast when they hear the noise. A messenger runs in with the news: David has made Solomon king. The guests panic and scatter. Adonijah runs to the altar and grabs its horns, a way of asking for sanctuary. "Adonijah was afraid because of Solomon." Solomon agrees to spare him, as long as he behaves.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Solomon?**
>
> Solomon wasn't David's oldest son. In most ancient kingdoms, the oldest son inherited the throne. But in Israel, the king was supposed to be the one God chose, and the Bible had been showing God's preference for younger sons all along: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his older brothers, David over his. 1 Chronicles says God told David that Solomon would build the temple. And remember that when Solomon was born, God sent Nathan to give him a special name, Jedidiah, loved by the LORD. Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, is a living reminder that God can bring grace out of even the worst situations.

Then David's time comes. He calls Solomon to his bedside and gives him his final charge. "I am going the way of all the earth. You be strong therefore, and show yourself a man; and keep the instruction of the LORD your God, to walk in his ways." If Solomon obeys God, David says, God will keep His promise that there will always be one of David's descendants on Israel's throne.

But David's last words also include some uncomfortable instructions. He tells Solomon to deal with Joab, who murdered Abner and Amasa in peacetime, and with Shimei, who cursed David when he fled from Absalom. David had promised not to kill Shimei himself, but he leaves Solomon to handle it. Many readers find this troubling. It looks like David holding grudges to the very end. Others see it as David finally addressing the injustice he had been too weak to deal with during his reign, especially Joab's murders. Either way, it's a reminder that even the man after God's own heart was complicated to the end.

"David slept with his fathers, and was buried in David's city." He had reigned for forty years. "Solomon sat on David his father's throne; and his kingdom was firmly established."

The rest of chapter 2 is tense. Adonijah asks Bathsheba to ask Solomon if he can marry Abishag, the young woman who had cared for David. It sounds innocent, but in that culture, taking the former king's companion could be a claim to his throne. Solomon sees it as a second attempt at a coup and has Adonijah executed. Abiathar the priest, who had supported Adonijah, is removed from the priesthood and sent home, which the writer says fulfills the old prophecy against Eli's family from 1 Samuel. Joab, hearing what's happening, runs to the altar too, but Benaiah kills him there. And Shimei is put under house arrest in Jerusalem, breaks the agreement, and is executed.

> **REAL TALK** **Starting Clean**
>
> It's a bloody way to begin a reign, and many readers feel uneasy about it. Some see Solomon wisely securing a fragile kingdom against real threats. Others see the same ruthless politics every ancient king used, and a warning sign about the kind of king Solomon might become. The text doesn't fully

> settle it. What's clear is that the kingdom Solomon inherited came with a lot of unfinished business, much of it caused by David's failure to deal with problems when they first came up. Unresolved conflict doesn't go away. It just gets passed on. If there's something in your life or your family that needs to be dealt with, a conflict, an apology, a hard conversation, it's usually better to face it now, wisely and with help, than to leave it for later.

One more thing stands out in these opening chapters. God's promise to David is being kept, but not because the people involved are especially good. David is weak and passive until the last minute. Adonijah is grasping and entitled. Joab switches sides. The palace is full of scheming and fear. And yet the son God chose ends up on the throne, just as God said. That's a theme you'll see all through Kings. God works through flawed, messy, sometimes ruthless people, and His purposes still move forward. That doesn't excuse their sins. But it should give you hope when your own family or school or church feels like a mess. God isn't stuck because people are complicated.

By the end of chapter 2, Solomon is firmly on the throne. He is young, maybe around twenty, and he has just inherited the most powerful kingdom Israel has ever had. What will he do with it? The next chapter gives an answer that has inspired people for three thousand years.

KEY VERSE

I am going the way of all the earth. You be strong therefore, and show yourself a man; and keep the instruction of the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, according to that which is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn yourself.

1 Kings 2:2–3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. The Bible says David never corrected Adonijah. How do you think that shaped Adonijah?
2. Bathsheba went from silent in 2 Samuel 11 to bold in 1 Kings 1. What do you think changed?
3. David told Solomon to "show yourself a man" by keeping God's instructions. What do you think real strength looks like?
4. Is there unfinished business in your life that you need to deal with instead of passing it on?

TRY THIS *Ask a parent, grandparent, or older mentor what advice they would give you if it were their last chance. Write it down.*

CHAPTER 2

A Listening Heart

1 Kings 3–4

Chapter 3 starts with a mixed report. Solomon makes an alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. That's a big political win, but it's also the first hint of a problem that will grow. Then the writer says something warm: "Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father." But even that comes with a catch: "except that he sacrificed and burned incense in the high places." The temple hadn't been built yet, so people worshiped at local hilltop shrines. Some of those places would later become centers of idol worship.

One day Solomon goes to the high place at Gibeon, the most important one, and offers a thousand burnt offerings. That night, "the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask for what I should give you.'"

Think about that. God says, ask for anything. What would you ask for? Money? Fame? A long life? A cure for something? Revenge on someone who hurt you?

Solomon's answer is surprising. He starts by thanking God for His kindness to David. Then he's honest about how he feels. "I am just a little child. I don't know how to go out or come in." He's not literally a child, but he feels completely unprepared for the job. He's in

charge of a nation too big to count, and he knows he can't do it on his own.

So he asks for one thing. "Give your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this great people of yours?"

The Hebrew phrase for an understanding heart is literally a listening heart, or a hearing heart. Solomon isn't asking to be a genius. He's asking for a heart that listens: to God, to people, and to the truth, so he can tell right from wrong and lead well.

> **REAL TALK** **What Would You Ask For?**
>
> Solomon could have asked for anything, and he asked for wisdom. Not so he could be impressive, but so he could serve people well. James says something similar to us: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." You don't need a dream at Gibeon to ask God for wisdom. You can ask for it right now about your friendships, your choices, your future, your family. Wisdom isn't the same as being smart. Plenty of smart people make terrible decisions. Wisdom is knowing what's right and having the sense to do it. And Proverbs, many of which Solomon wrote or collected, says where it starts: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."

God is thrilled with the request. "This request pleased the Lord." God tells Solomon that because he didn't ask for long life or riches or the death of his enemies, but for understanding to do justice, God will give him "a wise and understanding heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, and after you none will arise like you." And then God adds a bonus: the things Solomon didn't ask for, wealth and honor, God will give him too. And if Solomon obeys like David did, God will give him a long life.

Solomon wakes up and realizes it was a dream. He goes to Jerusalem, stands before the ark of the covenant, and offers sacrifices. It's a good start.

Then comes the most famous test of his wisdom. "Then two women who were prostitutes came to the king, and stood before him." That detail matters. These women are about as low on the social ladder as you can get. And yet they have access to the king, and he takes their case seriously.

The first woman explains. We live in the same house. We both had babies a few days apart. Nobody else was there. During the night, her baby died because she rolled over on him. Then she got up while I was asleep, took my son, and put her dead son next to me. When I woke up to nurse my baby, he was dead, but when I looked closely in the morning, I saw it wasn't my son.

The second woman says no, the living child is mine. They argue right there in front of the king. "No! But the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son." There are no witnesses, no DNA tests, no way to know.

Solomon summarizes their arguments. Then he says, "Get me a sword." Everyone must have gasped. When they bring the sword, he gives the order: "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."

Immediately, the real mother cries out. Her heart is breaking for her son. "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and in no way kill him!" She'd rather lose him than see him die. The other woman says, "He shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide him."

And Solomon knows. "Give the first woman the living child, and definitely do not kill him. She is his mother."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Would Solomon Really Have Done It?**

Almost every reader agrees that Solomon never intended to harm the baby. The sword was a test, designed to reveal which woman truly loved the child. Real love sacrifices for the good of the one it loves. Fake love, or jealousy, would rather destroy than lose. Solomon's wisdom wasn't just knowing facts. It was understanding people's hearts. Notice too that the story shows Solomon's care for justice even for the poorest people in his kingdom. A wise ruler doesn't only listen to the powerful.

"All Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice."

Chapter 4 describes Solomon's kingdom at its peak. He organizes his government with officials and twelve districts that each supply food for the palace for one month a year, and the daily food list is enormous. Israel is at peace. "Judah and Israel were numerous as the sand which is by the sea in multitude," eating, drinking, and happy, each person under their own vine and fig tree, a picture of security and contentment.

And Solomon's wisdom becomes world-famous. "God gave Solomon abundant wisdom, understanding, and breadth of mind like the sand that is on the seashore." He was wiser than all the famous wise men of the east and of Egypt. "He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand five." He studied trees, plants, animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. You could almost call him the first great scientist in the Bible. "People of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon."

REAL TALK **Wisdom Includes Curiosity**

Notice how wide Solomon's wisdom was. It wasn't only about religion. He wrote songs and proverbs, and he studied cedars and hyssop, animals and

> fish. Christians throughout history have seen science, art, music, and learning as ways of exploring God's world. You don't have to choose between faith and curiosity. Whether you love biology, history, engineering, music, or anything else, studying it carefully and honestly can be a way of honoring the God who made it. The book of Proverbs, much of which comes from Solomon, is full of practical advice about work, money, friendship, words, anger, and laziness. It's a great book for teens. Try reading one chapter a day for a month.

It's worth noticing the order of things in these chapters. Solomon asked for wisdom first, and God gave him everything else as a bonus. Jesus later said something similar: seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and the other things you need will be given to you as well. When we chase success, money, or popularity first, we often end up empty. When we seek God first, He takes care of the rest, maybe not always with riches like Solomon's, but always with what we truly need. The danger, as we'll see, is that once the bonuses arrive, it's easy to start loving the gifts more than the Giver.

At this point, Solomon has everything: wisdom, wealth, peace, and God's favor. If only it could stay that way.

KEY VERSE

Give your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this great people of yours?

1 Kings 3:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. If God told you to ask for anything, what would you honestly ask for? Why?
2. Solomon said he felt like a little child who didn't know what to do. Why is admitting that a sign of wisdom, not weakness?
3. What's the difference between being smart and being wise?
4. How did Solomon's test reveal the real mother? What does it show about real love?

TRY THIS *Read one chapter of Proverbs each day this week. Pick one verse to write down and try to live out.*

CHAPTER 3

A House for God's Name

1 Kings 5–8

David had wanted to build a temple for God, but God told him that his son would do it. Now Solomon is ready. "Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to David my father."

Solomon makes a deal with Hiram, the king of Tyre, who had been David's friend. Tyre is famous for its cedar forests and skilled builders. Hiram's workers cut cedar and cypress logs in Lebanon, float them down the coast on rafts, and deliver them to Israel. In exchange, Solomon sends huge amounts of wheat and olive oil every year.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Cost of Construction**
>
> The temple was built with massive amounts of labor. Solomon drafted tens of thousands of Israelite workers to serve in Lebanon in shifts, a month there and two months at home, and used tens of thousands more to cut and carry stone. Later in 1 Kings, the people complain that Solomon's labor demands were a "heavy yoke." Building God's house was a good thing, but the way it was done sowed seeds of resentment that would eventually help tear the kingdom apart. It's a reminder that doing something for God doesn't excuse treating people badly along the way.

Chapter 6 gives the date: "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the

fourth year of Solomon's reign," construction begins. That's around 966 BC. Scholars debate how to read the 480 years. Some take it literally, which would date the exodus to around 1446 BC. Others think it's a symbolic number, twelve generations of forty years, and date the exodus later, in the 1200s BC. Christians hold both views.

The temple itself wasn't huge by modern standards, about ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high. But it was stunning. The walls were lined with cedar carved with flowers, palm trees, and cherubim, and the inside was overlaid with gold. There was a front porch, a main hall called the Holy Place, and at the back, a perfect cube about thirty feet on each side: the Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant would be kept. Two giant cherubim, fifteen feet tall and covered in gold, spread their wings over it.

One detail is fascinating. "The house, when it was under construction, was built of stone prepared at the quarry; and no hammer or ax or any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was under construction." All the stone was cut off-site and fitted together quietly. The building of God's house was surrounded by a kind of holy silence.

In the middle of construction, God speaks to Solomon. "Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes, and execute my ordinances, and keep all my commandments to walk in them, then I will establish my word with you." And then God promises, "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel." The building matters, but obedience matters more. God isn't impressed by gold. He's looking for faithful hearts.

The temple takes seven years to build. Then the writer mentions that Solomon spent thirteen years building his own palace, which was much bigger. Some readers think the writer is quietly pointing out Solomon's priorities.

Then comes the dedication, one of the greatest days in Israel's history. The priests carry the ark into the Most Holy Place and set it under the wings of the cherubim. And as they come out, "the cloud filled the LORD's house, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the LORD's glory filled the LORD's house." It's the same glory cloud that filled the tabernacle in the days of Moses. God has come to live among His people.

> **REAL TALK** **God's Glory Then and Now**
>
> When the temple was dedicated, God's glory was so overwhelming that the priests couldn't even stand. In the Old Testament, God's presence was especially connected to the temple. But the New Testament says something amazing: God's presence is no longer limited to a building. John says that in Jesus, God's Word "became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory." Jesus called His own body a temple. And Paul says that Christians, together and individually, are now God's temple, because the Holy Spirit lives in them. That means worship isn't just something that happens in a church building. It can happen anywhere you are.

Solomon then stands before the altar, spreads his hands toward heaven, and prays one of the longest prayers in the Bible. He begins, "LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above, or on earth beneath; who keeps covenant and loving kindness with your servants."

Then he asks a profound question. "But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"

Solomon understands something important. The temple isn't a box that holds God. The universe can't hold Him. The temple is a place where God chooses to meet with His people and hear their prayers. So Solomon asks God to listen whenever people pray toward this place. "Yes, hear in heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive."

He imagines all kinds of situations: someone accused of a crime, the army defeated in battle, a drought, a famine, a plague. And even foreigners who come from far away because they've heard of God's great name. Solomon prays that God will hear them too, "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD himself is God." The temple was never meant to be just for Israel. It was meant to draw the whole world to God.

Most strikingly, Solomon prays about a time when Israel will sin so badly that they'll be taken away as captives to a foreign land. If they turn back to God and pray toward this land and this city and this house, he asks, then hear them and forgive them. It's as if Solomon could see the exile coming. The writer of Kings, writing during the exile, wanted his readers to know: even now, God is listening.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hear and Forgive**

Solomon's prayer repeats one phrase over and over: hear and forgive. He doesn't pretend Israel will be perfect. He expects them to fail. His hope isn't that the people will never sin, but that God will be merciful when they turn back. 2 Chronicles, which retells this story, records God's answer: "if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." That promise was specifically for Israel and the temple, but Christians have long found in it a picture of how God responds to anyone who humbly turns to Him.

Solomon ends by blessing the people. “Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. There has not failed one word of all his good promise.” And he gives them a challenge: “Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God.” Perfect here means whole, undivided, fully devoted.

Solomon’s prayer also shows us how to pray. He starts with who God is: there is no God like You. He remembers what God has already done and promised. He’s honest about human failure. He asks boldly for specific things. He prays not only for himself but for his whole nation, and even for foreigners he’s never met. And he ends with praise and a call to faithfulness. You don’t have to pray a prayer as long as Solomon’s, but that pattern can help when you don’t know what to say: praise God for who He is, thank Him for what He’s done, confess honestly, ask for what you need, pray for others, and commit yourself to Him again.

The celebration lasts fourteen days, with an enormous number of sacrifices. The people go home “joyful and glad in their hearts” for all the goodness God had shown.

It’s the high point of Israel’s history. God’s glory fills the temple. The king is wise. The people are united and joyful. If you were a reader in exile, hearing this story, you’d feel the ache. This is what we had. How did we lose it?

KEY VERSE

But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

1 Kings 8:27 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God reminded Solomon in the middle of building that obedience mattered more than the building?
2. Solomon said that even heaven can't contain God. Why build a temple at all?
3. What does it mean that Christians are now God's temple? How should that change the way you live?
4. Solomon's prayer expected people to fail and asked God to forgive. How does that give you hope?

TRY THIS *Find a quiet place this week and pray Solomon's simple prayer for yourself: hear and forgive. Then thank God for one promise He has kept.*

CHAPTER 4

Splendor and Drift

1 Kings 9–11

After the temple is dedicated, God appears to Solomon a second time, just like He did at Gibeon. He tells Solomon He has heard his prayer: “I have made this house holy, which you have built, to put my name there forever; and my eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually.”

But then God gives Solomon a clear choice. If you walk before Me with integrity like David, I will establish your throne forever. “But if you turn away from following me, you or your children, and not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them,” then Israel will be cut off from the land, and this beautiful temple will become a ruin that people walk past and shake their heads at.

It’s a warning with a fork in the road. Hold on to it. The rest of this chapter shows which way Solomon goes.

At first, everything looks amazing. Solomon builds cities, fortresses, and a fleet of ships. He brings in gold from a faraway place called Ophir. And his fame spreads all the way to the kingdom of Sheba, probably in southern Arabia, around modern Yemen, or possibly across the Red Sea in Ethiopia.

"When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the LORD's name, she came to test him with hard questions." She shows up with a huge caravan of camels loaded with spices, gold, and precious stones. And she asks Solomon everything she can think of, riddles, hard questions, maybe questions about life and God and justice. "Solomon answered all her questions. There wasn't anything hidden from the king which he didn't tell her."

She's blown away by his wisdom, his palace, the food on his table, his officials, and the way he worships at the temple. The Bible says it took her breath away. She tells him, "It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts and of your wisdom. However, I didn't believe the words until I came and my eyes had seen it. Behold, not even half was told me!"

And she praises Israel's God: "Blessed is the LORD your God, who delighted in you, to set you on the throne of Israel. Because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore he made you king, to do justice and righteousness." A foreign queen sees clearly what a king is for. Not to get rich. To do justice and righteousness.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Queen of Sheba**

The Queen of Sheba became a legend. Ethiopian tradition says she and Solomon had a son, Menelik, who founded Ethiopia's royal line, a story told in a medieval book called the Kebra Nagast. Arabic and Jewish traditions have their own versions. The Bible itself gives only a short account. Jesus mentions her, calling her the Queen of the South: "she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here." Jesus' point was that this foreign queen traveled a long way to hear wisdom, while many people who were standing right in front of Jesus, the source of all wisdom, refused to listen.

Chapter 10 describes Solomon's wealth like a highlight reel of excess. He gets about twenty-five tons of gold every year. He makes two hundred large shields and three hundred small shields of hammered gold. He builds a giant ivory throne overlaid with gold, with six steps and twelve lion statues. All his drinking cups are gold. Silver is as common in Jerusalem as rocks. "So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom."

It sounds like the dream life. But if you know Deuteronomy, alarm bells should be going off. Deuteronomy 17 gave specific rules for Israel's future kings. The king "shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt." He "shall not multiply wives to himself, that his heart not turn away. He shall not greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." Read 1 Kings 10 and 11 with those rules in mind. Solomon is importing horses from Egypt. He's piling up silver and gold. And then we get to the wives.

> **REAL TALK** **Can You Have Too Much?**
>
> Solomon's wealth wasn't evil in itself. God had promised him riches. But Deuteronomy warned that kings who piled up money, horses, and wives would end up with hearts that turned away from God. The problem wasn't having things. It was what the things did to his heart. That's still true. Money, possessions, followers, and status can slowly become what you trust instead of God. Jesus said, "even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these," pointing to simple wildflowers. He wasn't saying stuff is bad. He was saying it can't give you what only God can. A good question to ask: do I own my things, or do they own me?

Chapter 11 begins with a sentence that changes everything. "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women." Pharaoh's daughter, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites, women from exactly the nations God had warned Israel not to marry into, "for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods."

Many of these marriages were political. In the ancient world, kings sealed treaties by marrying each other's daughters. A marriage alliance with Egypt or Sidon meant peace and trade. But "He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. His wives turned his heart away."

It didn't happen overnight. "When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father was." He built shrines for Chemosh, the god of Moab, and Molech, the god of Ammon, on a hill right outside Jerusalem, facing the temple he had built for the LORD. He did this for all his foreign wives, so they could worship their gods.

The wisest man in the world, the man who prayed the great dedication prayer, who wrote three thousand proverbs, ends up building altars to idols across from God's temple.

> **REAL TALK** **The Slow Drift**
>
> Solomon didn't wake up one day and decide to worship idols. It happened slowly, over years, through a thousand small compromises: one political marriage, then another, then a shrine to keep a wife happy, then another. Each step probably seemed reasonable at the time. That's how drifting works. Nobody plans to walk away from God. They just stop paying attention to the current. It can happen through friendships, relationships, entertainment, ambition, or just being busy. That's why the people closest to you matter so much, especially the people you date and eventually marry. They will shape what you love. Ask yourself honestly: who or what is slowly shaping my heart right now? And is it pulling me toward God or away?

"The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." Twice! Solomon had experiences with God that most people

only dream about. And it still wasn't enough to keep him faithful. Spiritual experiences are wonderful, but they don't replace daily faithfulness.

God tells Solomon the consequence. "I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant." But for David's sake, God won't do it during Solomon's lifetime, and He won't take the whole kingdom. He'll leave one tribe for David's family, for the sake of His promise and for the sake of Jerusalem.

Trouble starts right away. Enemies rise up in Edom and Damascus. And inside Israel, a capable young official named Jeroboam, whom Solomon had put in charge of forced labor in the north, begins to stir.

One day, Jeroboam is walking out of Jerusalem when a prophet named Ahijah meets him in a field. Ahijah is wearing a brand new robe. He takes it off and tears it into twelve pieces. Then he tells Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces." God is going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give ten tribes to Jeroboam. And Ahijah gives Jeroboam the same offer God gave David: "if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways," then God will build him a lasting dynasty too.

Solomon hears about it and tries to kill Jeroboam, who flees to Egypt and stays there until Solomon dies. After forty years on the throne, Solomon dies and is buried in the city of David. His son Rehoboam becomes king.

Some Jewish and Christian traditions hope that Solomon turned back to God at the end of his life, and some read the book of Ecclesiastes, with its reflections on the emptiness of wealth and pleasure, as the words of an older, wiser Solomon looking back. The

book of Kings doesn't say. It simply records that the most gifted king in Israel's history finished badly.

KEY VERSE

When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father was.

1 Kings 11:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. The Queen of Sheba said a king is meant to "do justice and righteousness." What do you think good leaders are for?
2. Read Deuteronomy 17:16–17. Which of those warnings did Solomon ignore?
3. Solomon's drift happened slowly. What are some small compromises that can lead you away from God over time?
4. Why do you think spiritual experiences, even seeing God twice, weren't enough to keep Solomon faithful?

TRY THIS *Make a list of the five biggest influences on your heart right now: people, media, activities. Next to each, write whether it pulls you toward God or away.*

CHAPTER 5

A Kingdom Torn in Two

1 Kings 12–16

Solomon is dead, and his son Rehoboam goes to Shechem, an important city in the north, to be crowned king of all Israel. Jeroboam has come back from Egypt, and he leads a delegation of the northern tribes to meet the new king with a simple request.

"Your father made our yoke difficult. Now therefore make the hard service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, lighter, and we will serve you." Solomon's building projects, taxes, and forced labor had been crushing. They're saying: lighten up, and we'll be loyal.

Rehoboam asks for three days to think about it. First he consults the older advisers who had served his father. Their advice is wise: "If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them, and answer them with good words, then they will be your servants forever." Serve them, and they'll serve you. It's a principle of leadership that still works.

"But he abandoned the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him." His buddies. The guys he grew up with in the palace, who had never had to work for anything. And their advice is basically: show them who's boss. Tell them, "My little finger is thicker than my

father's waist." Some scholars think the original phrase may have been even cruder. And then: "My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." Scorpions may have been a nickname for a particularly brutal kind of whip.

Three days later, Rehoboam gives the people his answer, word for word from his friends. "The king answered the people roughly."

> **REAL TALK** **Whose Advice Do You Listen To?**
>
> Rehoboam had two groups of advisers. One had experience and wisdom. The other had told him what he wanted to hear his whole life. He picked the second group, and it cost him most of his kingdom. It's a good question for any teenager: who are you listening to? Friends your own age matter a lot, and they can be wise. But if you only take advice from people who have the same experience and the same blind spots as you, you'll miss a lot. Look for people who have lived longer, who care about you, and who will tell you the truth even when it isn't what you want to hear. Parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, pastors, and mentors can see things you can't yet. And notice what the wise advisers told Rehoboam: real leadership means serving people, not controlling them. Jesus said the same thing.

The response is instant. "What portion have we in David? We don't have an inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, Israel!" The ten northern tribes walk away. When Rehoboam sends his official in charge of forced labor to deal with them, they stone him to death, and Rehoboam has to jump in his chariot and race back to Jerusalem.

The northern tribes make Jeroboam their king. "There was no one who followed David's house, except for the tribe of Judah only." Benjamin stays with Judah too. The united kingdom of David and Solomon, which lasted about eighty years, is over. It will never be reunited.

Rehoboam gathers an army to fight the north, but a prophet named Shemaiah tells him not to fight his own relatives, because this split is from the LORD. Surprisingly, Rehoboam listens. The kingdom stays divided.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Quick Guide to Israel and Judah**

After the split, the Bible uses names that can get confusing. Here's a cheat sheet.

The northern kingdom is called Israel, and sometimes Ephraim, after its biggest tribe. It had ten tribes. Its first king was Jeroboam. Its capital moved around and eventually settled at Samaria. It had a series of different royal families, many ending in assassinations. Every one of its kings is described as doing evil. It lasted about two hundred years, until it fell to Assyria in 722 BC, and its people were scattered.

The southern kingdom is called Judah. It had the tribe of Judah and most of Benjamin. Its first king was Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Its capital was Jerusalem, with the temple. All its kings came from David's family, just as God promised. Some were good, many were bad. It lasted about 340 years, until it fell to Babylon in 586 BC.

One more tip: before the split, Israel means the whole nation. After the split, Israel usually means the north. And when you read the prophets, a king of Israel and a king of Judah are two different kings ruling at the same time.

Now Jeroboam has a problem. The temple is in Jerusalem, in Judah. Every year, his people are supposed to go there to worship at the major festivals. "If this people goes up to offer sacrifices in the LORD's house at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me."

So he comes up with his own religion. "The king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look and behold your gods, Israel, which

brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" Sound familiar? It's almost word for word what Aaron said about the golden calf at Mount Sinai. Jeroboam puts one calf at Bethel, in the south of his kingdom, and the other at Dan, in the far north. He builds shrines on high places, appoints priests who aren't Levites, and invents his own festival to compete with the one in Jerusalem.

"This thing became a sin." It's such a big deal that for the rest of 1 and 2 Kings, the writer describes almost every northern king the same way: he walked in the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin. Jeroboam had been offered a dynasty like David's. He traded it for political security and a homemade religion.

> **REAL TALK** **Making Faith Convenient**
>
> Jeroboam's golden calves were a matter of convenience. It's too much trouble to go to Jerusalem, he said. Here's something easier, closer, and more under our control. People still do this. We like a faith that fits our schedule, doesn't ask too much, and lets us keep control. We keep the parts of God we like and replace the rest. Jeroboam probably told himself the calves still represented the God who brought them out of Egypt. But God doesn't let us redesign Him to suit ourselves. Following Jesus will sometimes be inconvenient. That's part of what makes it real.

The rest of these chapters move fast, like scrolling through a history feed. Jeroboam's son gets sick, and his wife disguises herself to visit the prophet Ahijah, now old and blind, who sees right through it and gives her a message of judgment. God tells Jeroboam, you have not been "as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart," but "have cast me behind your back."

In the south, Rehoboam's kingdom also goes downhill, and Egypt's Pharaoh Shishak raids Jerusalem and carries off the gold shields

Solomon had made. Rehoboam replaces them with bronze ones. It's a perfect picture of the decline: the gold is gone, and they're trying to make bronze look like it.

Some kings of Judah are better. King Asa, Rehoboam's grandson, "did that which was right in the LORD's eyes, as David his father did." He removes idols and even removes his own grandmother from her position as queen mother because she had made an idol. Even the writer's praise of David is honest: David did right "except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

In the north, it's chaos. Jeroboam's son is assassinated. That killer's son is assassinated. One king reigns for seven days before burning down the palace around himself. Eventually an army commander named Omri takes over and builds a new capital at Samaria. Omri was apparently powerful; Assyrian records called Israel the land of Omri for years after his death. But the Bible gives him only a few verses, because what matters to the writer isn't power. It's faithfulness. And Omri "dealt wickedly above all who were before him."

Then his son takes the throne. "Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the LORD's sight above all that were before him." He marries "Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians," a Phoenician princess, and builds a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. "Ahab did more yet to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him."

Things have never been darker in the northern kingdom. And that's exactly when God sends Elijah.

KEY VERSE

They replied, "If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them, and answer them with good words, then they will be your servants forever."

1 Kings 12:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Rehoboam ignored the older advisers? Who do you tend to listen to when you make decisions?
2. The wise advisers said leaders should serve. How did Jesus show that kind of leadership?
3. Why did Jeroboam make the golden calves? In what ways do people make faith more convenient today?
4. Using the quick guide, explain the difference between Israel and Judah after the split.

TRY THIS *Before you make one decision this week, ask an older person you respect what they think, and really listen to their answer.*

CHAPTER 6

Ravens and a Widow

1 Kings 17

Elijah arrives in the story with no introduction, no family background, and no warning. He just walks in on King Ahab and says: "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

That's a direct challenge to Baal. Ahab and Jezebel worshiped Baal as the storm god, the one who supposedly controlled the rain, the clouds, and the harvest. Elijah is saying: you think Baal brings the rain? Let's see. The God of Israel is going to shut off the sky, and nothing your god does will turn it back on. Even Elijah's name is a message. In Hebrew, Elijah means my God is the LORD.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Was Baal?**

Baal was one of the most important gods in Canaan and Phoenicia. His name means lord or master. People believed he was a storm god who rode on the clouds, threw lightning, and brought the rain that made crops grow. In a farming society with no irrigation, that was everything. If it didn't rain, people starved. Canaanite stories described Baal fighting the god of death every year; when he lost, the dry season came, and when he came back to life, the rains returned. Worship of Baal often included practices God's law condemned. Jezebel was a passionate Baal worshiper, and she was determined to make Baal the main god of Israel.

Then God tells Elijah to hide. Go east, to the brook Kerith, by the Jordan River. "You shall drink from the brook. I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

Ravens. Of all the creatures God could use, He picks ravens, birds known for being scavengers that were considered unclean under the law. But "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook." Twice a day, God's strange delivery service shows up right on time. Elijah's takeout comes by air.

Then the brook dries up, because there's no rain. The drought Elijah announced is affecting Elijah too. Sometimes obeying God doesn't exempt you from the hard things happening around you.

So God gives him new directions. "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain you."

Sidon. That's Jezebel's home territory, the heart of Baal country. God is sending His prophet into enemy land. And He's sending him to be cared for by a widow, one of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the ancient world, during a famine.

When Elijah arrives at the town gate, there she is, gathering sticks. He asks her for a drink of water. As she goes to get it, he adds, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

Her answer is heartbreaking. "As the LORD your God lives, I don't have anything baked, but only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jar. Behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and bake it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die." She's not exaggerating. She's preparing her last meal.

REAL TALK **When You Have Almost Nothing**

The widow of Zarephath had a handful of flour, a little oil, and a son she couldn't feed. She was ready to give up. Maybe you know what it feels like to be at the end of something: money, energy, hope, or patience. Maybe your family is struggling financially, or you're just exhausted. The widow's story doesn't promise that God will always fix things the way we want. But it shows that God sees the people at the very bottom, even outside Israel, even in the land of Baal. If your family is struggling to have enough food or other basic needs, it's okay to tell a trusted adult, a school counselor, or your church. Many communities have help available, and asking for help is not shameful.

Elijah says something that sounds outrageous. "Don't be afraid. Go and do as you have said; but make me a little cake from it first, and bring it out to me, and afterward make some for you and for your son." Feed me first.

That would be a selfish request, except for what comes next. "For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of meal will not run out, and the jar of oil will not fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.'"

She has a choice. Trust a strange foreign prophet's promise about his God, or hold on to the little she has. "She went and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she, he, and her household ate many days." Every morning, there's just enough flour and oil in the jars. Never a lot. Always enough. "The jar of meal didn't run out and the jar of oil didn't fail, according to the LORD's word."

Then tragedy strikes. The widow's son gets sick and stops breathing. She turns on Elijah in grief and anger. "What have I to do with you, you man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to memory, and to kill my son!" Like many grieving people, she wonders whether God is punishing her for something.

Elijah takes the boy from her arms, carries him up to the upstairs room where he's been staying, and lays him on his bed. Then he cries out to God honestly, asking why He would bring this tragedy on the widow who had taken him in. He stretches himself over the child three times and prays, "LORD my God, please let this child's soul come into him again."

"The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived." It's the first time in the Bible that someone is raised from the dead.

Elijah carries the boy downstairs and hands him to his mother. "Behold, your son lives." And she says, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the LORD's word in your mouth is truth."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jesus and the Widow**

Centuries later, Jesus preached His first sermon in His hometown of Nazareth and mentioned this story. "There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah," He said, but "Elijah was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow." The crowd was furious, because Jesus was pointing out that God had shown His kindness to a foreigner while Israel was worshiping Baal. God's love was always bigger than Israel's borders. Jesus Himself later raised a widow's only son at a town called Nain, and the crowd said that a great prophet had appeared among them. They were thinking of Elijah.

In a chapter about a king who worships a fake storm god, the true God shows what He's really like. He feeds His prophet by ravens. He keeps a poor widow's jars from running dry. He gives a dead boy his life back. Baal couldn't send rain. The LORD gives life.

KEY VERSE

The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the LORD's word in your mouth is truth."

1 Kings 17:24 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God sent Elijah to a widow in Sidon, Jezebel's home territory?
2. The widow was asked to give first, before she saw the miracle. Have you ever had to trust God before you could see how things would work out?
3. God provided just enough flour and oil each day, not a huge supply. What might that teach about trusting God day by day?
4. Why do you think Jesus brought up this story in His hometown? Why did it make people so angry?

TRY THIS *Look for a way this week to give something to someone who has less than you: food, time, money, or attention. Do it quietly.*

CHAPTER 7

Fire on Mount Carmel

1 Kings 18

Three years go by with no rain. The land is cracked and brown. Crops have failed, streams have dried up, and animals are dying. Then God tells Elijah it's time to go back and face Ahab, because He is about to send rain.

Meanwhile, Ahab is out searching for grass to keep his horses and mules alive. He's not out looking for God. He's looking for pasture. With him is Obadiah, the official in charge of the palace. And Obadiah has a secret. He is a man who "feared the LORD greatly." When Jezebel was hunting down and killing the LORD's prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in two caves, fifty in each, and fed them bread and water. He's working inside the most wicked government in Israel's history, quietly risking his life to protect God's people.

> **REAL TALK** **Faithful Where You Are**
>
> Obadiah didn't get to call down fire from heaven. He wasn't famous like Elijah. He worked a government job for a king and queen who hated God, and he used his position to save a hundred lives. Not every faithful person is a public hero. Some people serve God quietly in hard places: the only Christian on the team, the kid who sticks up for someone in a group chat, the employee who refuses to cut corners. Obadiah's story says that matters to God. You

> don't have to be on a mountaintop to be faithful. You can be faithful right where you are.

Elijah meets Obadiah on the road and tells him to go tell Ahab that Elijah is here. Obadiah panics. He explains that Ahab has been searching every nation for Elijah for three years. If I tell Ahab you're here, and then the Spirit of the LORD carries you off somewhere, Ahab will kill me. Elijah promises he'll show up. And he does.

When Ahab sees him, the first words out of his mouth are an accusation: "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" In Ahab's mind, Elijah is the problem. Elijah fires right back: "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the LORD's commandments and you have followed the Baals." You're the troublemaker, Ahab. Not me.

Then Elijah issues a challenge. Gather all Israel at Mount Carmel, and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table. Mount Carmel is a ridge near the Mediterranean coast, close to the border with Phoenicia, a place associated with Baal worship. Elijah is choosing to fight on Baal's home turf.

When the crowd gathers, Elijah steps forward and confronts them. "How long will you waver between the two sides? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The word translated waver can mean limp, or hop from one foot to the other. The people are trying to keep one foot with the LORD and one foot with Baal, just in case. Elijah's saying: pick one.

"The people didn't say a word."

REAL TALK **Stop Wavering**

The Israelites at Carmel didn't think of themselves as Baal worshipers. They probably still believed in the LORD. They just wanted Baal too, for the rain, for the crops, to fit in with the king and queen. Elijah wouldn't let them have it both ways. A lot of people try to live with one foot in faith and one foot in something else: Christian on Sunday, and something completely different on Friday night. Or believing in God but trusting money, popularity, or a relationship to make life work. Jesus said nobody can serve two masters. Silence, like the crowd's at Carmel, is often a sign that we know exactly what the right answer is and don't want to say it.

So Elijah lays out the rules. Two bulls. Two altars. The prophets of Baal pick a bull, cut it up, and put it on the wood, but don't light the fire. Elijah will do the same. "You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the LORD's name. The God who answers by fire, let him be God." The people like this. It's a fair test. Baal was supposed to be the god of lightning. If he's real, sending fire should be easy.

Elijah even lets them go first, since there are so many of them. The prophets of Baal prepare their bull and start calling out to their god from morning until noon. "Baal, hear us!" Nothing. They start dancing around the altar. Still nothing.

And here's where 1 Kings shows its sense of humor. At noon, Elijah starts trash-talking. "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is deep in thought, or he has gone somewhere, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps and must be awakened." The phrase translated gone somewhere may actually be a polite way of saying he's gone to the bathroom. Elijah is basically saying: shout louder. Maybe your god is busy. Maybe he's on vacation. Maybe he's in the bathroom. Maybe he's taking a nap.

It's mockery, and it's meant to be. Elijah is showing how ridiculous it is to trust in a god who can't hear, can't see, and can't act. The Bible often uses humor to expose idols. The psalms describe idols with mouths that can't speak and eyes that can't see. Isaiah mocks a man who cuts down a tree, uses half of it to cook his dinner, and carves the other half into a god to worship.

The prophets of Baal get desperate. They shout louder and cut themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until blood flows. They keep it up through the afternoon, raving all the way to the time of the evening sacrifice. "But there was no voice, no answer, and nobody paid attention."

> **SAFETY NOTE** **When Worship Becomes Self-Harm**
>
> The prophets of Baal cut themselves, thinking pain would get their god's attention. The true God never asks for that. He doesn't want us to hurt ourselves to earn His love, and He never stops listening. If you ever find yourself hurting yourself on purpose, whether by cutting, burning, starving, or any other way, to cope with pain, numbness, guilt, or anything else, you're not alone, and you're not beyond help. Please tell a trusted adult, like a parent, a school counselor, or a doctor. In the United States, you can call or text 988 any time to talk with someone who understands. God's love isn't earned by pain. Jesus already took the wounds for us.

Then it's Elijah's turn. He calls the people to come near him. He rebuilds the broken-down altar of the LORD that had been thrown down, using twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. It's a quiet statement: even though the kingdom is divided, God's people are still one family.

Then Elijah does something that seems crazy. He digs a trench around the altar, arranges the wood, and puts the bull on it. Then he tells the people to fill four large jars with water and pour it on the

offering and the wood. Do it again. Do it a third time. Water soaks everything and fills the trench. In the middle of a three-year drought, that water is precious, and he's pouring it out. And he's making it impossible for anyone to say the fire was a trick.

At the time of the evening offering, Elijah steps up and prays. No dancing. No shouting. No cutting. Just a short, simple prayer. "LORD, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant." And then: "Hear me, LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you, LORD, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again."

Then the LORD's fire falls. It burns up the offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licks up all the water in the trench.

The people fall on their faces and shout, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!" In Hebrew, that sounds a lot like Elijah's name.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Prophets of Baal**

After the fire, Elijah orders the people to seize the prophets of Baal, and they are executed at the brook Kishon. This is hard for modern readers. Christians have understood it in a few ways. In the Old Testament law, Israel was a nation under a covenant with God, and leading people to worship other gods was a capital crime, in part because Baal worship was tied to practices like child sacrifice. Many see Elijah carrying out that covenant law in a moment of national crisis, and note that these prophets were also agents of Jezebel's campaign to kill the LORD's prophets. Others emphasize that this belonged to a unique time under the old covenant and that the New Testament never calls Christians to use violence against people of other religions. Jesus even rebuked His disciples when they wanted to call down fire on a village that rejected Him. All agree that this story gives no one permission to harm people in God's name today.

Then Elijah tells Ahab to go eat and drink, because he can hear the sound of heavy rain coming. There isn't a cloud in the sky. Elijah climbs to the top of Mount Carmel, bows down to the ground, and puts his face between his knees to pray. He sends his servant to look out toward the sea. Nothing. Go back. Seven times.

On the seventh time, the servant reports, "Behold, a small cloud, like a man's hand, is rising out of the sea." That's all Elijah needs. He tells Ahab to get in his chariot and go before the rain stops him. Soon the sky turns black with clouds and wind, and a huge rainstorm pours down. The drought is over.

And then the last detail: "The LORD's hand was on Elijah; and he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." Elijah outruns a chariot for about seventeen miles in the rain. It's the greatest day of his life.

James, in the New Testament, uses Elijah as an example of prayer, saying he "was a man with a nature like ours." He wasn't a superhero. He was a person who prayed, and God answered. And as the next chapter will show, he was very much a man with a nature like ours.

KEY VERSE

Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you waver between the two sides? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people didn't say a word.

1 Kings 18:21 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Ahab called Elijah the troubler of Israel. Why do people sometimes blame the person who points out a problem instead of the person causing it?
2. What does it look like for someone today to waver between two sides?
3. Why do you think Elijah made fun of the prophets of Baal? Is there a place for humor in exposing false ideas?
4. Compare the prayers of the prophets of Baal with Elijah's prayer. What's the difference?

TRY THIS *Identify one area where you've been trying to keep one foot on each side. Make one concrete choice this week to stop wavering.*

CHAPTER 8

The Gentle Whisper

1 Kings 19

If you've ever had a huge high followed by a crushing low, this chapter is for you.

Ahab goes home and tells Jezebel everything Elijah did, especially that he killed all her prophets. Jezebel isn't impressed by the fire or the rain. She's furious. She sends Elijah a message: may the gods punish me if, by this time tomorrow, I haven't made your life like the lives of those prophets.

And Elijah, who just stood alone against 850 false prophets and watched fire fall from heaven, runs for his life.

That might seem strange. Why would he be afraid of one queen after everything he just saw? But it's actually very human. After an enormous adrenaline rush, people often crash hard. Elijah had been living in hiding for three years, carrying the weight of a whole nation, and had just gone through the most intense day of his life. He'd hoped Carmel would change everything. Instead, the queen is still in power and still trying to kill him. The disappointment hits as hard as the fear.

He runs south, all the way through Judah to Beersheba, at the edge of the desert, about a hundred miles. He leaves his servant there. Then he goes another day's journey alone into the wilderness and

collapses under a juniper tree, a scrubby desert bush; many translations call it a broom tree.

And he asks to die. "It is enough. Now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

That's one of the most honest prayers in the Bible. The great prophet of fire is done. He feels like a failure. He thinks nothing he did mattered. He's exhausted, alone, and hopeless.

> **REAL TALK** **Burnout Is Not Weak Faith**
>
> Elijah had just experienced one of the greatest miracles in history. He had more faith than almost anyone who ever lived. And he still crashed so hard he wanted to die. That should tell you something important: exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, and depression are not signs of weak faith. They can happen to anyone, including people who love God deeply. Bodies and minds get worn out, especially after long stress, big disappointments, lack of sleep, or carrying more than anyone should carry alone. Look at how God responds to Elijah in the rest of this chapter. He doesn't scold him or tell him to pray harder. He gives him sleep, food, time, and His presence. If you're feeling worn out, numb, or hopeless, please don't try to push through it alone. Talk to a parent or another trusted adult, and see a doctor, because some causes of depression and exhaustion are physical and very treatable. Counseling can help too, and getting help is wise, not weak. And if you ever feel like Elijah did, like you want your life to end, please reach out right away. In the United States, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you are in danger, call 911. You matter, and this is not the end of your story.

Elijah lies down under the bush and falls asleep. And then something tender happens. An angel touches him and says, "Arise and eat!" Elijah looks around, and there by his head is a cake of bread baking on hot stones and a jar of water. He eats, drinks, and lies back down.

The angel comes again, touches him a second time, and says, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."

Notice what God does first. Not a sermon. Not a lecture about faith. Not a rebuke for running away. Food, water, sleep, and a gentle touch. Twice. God knows that Elijah is not just a soul but a body, and that his body is completely spent. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is eat a meal and take a nap.

> **REAL TALK** **Take Care of Your Body**
>
> God cared about Elijah's sleep and nutrition before He addressed anything else. That's a good reminder for teenagers, who often get far less sleep than they need. Doctors generally recommend eight to ten hours a night for teens, and many get much less, thanks to homework, jobs, sports, and phones. Lack of sleep can make anxiety, sadness, anger, and hopelessness much worse. So can skipping meals, never getting outside, or never taking a break from screens. Taking care of your body isn't selfish or unspiritual. It's part of honoring the God who made you. Try putting your phone in another room at night. Eat real food. Move your body. Rest is a gift from God, not a reward you have to earn.

Strengthened by the food, Elijah travels forty days and forty nights to Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, where Moses received the law. He goes into a cave and spends the night there.

Then God speaks. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" It's not an angry question. It's an invitation to talk.

Elijah pours out his heart. I've been so zealous for You. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets. "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." Elijah feels completely alone. And honestly, he's not quite right. Obadiah hid a hundred prophets. But when you're

burned out, it often feels like you're the only one, and like everything depends on you.

God tells him to go out and stand on the mountain, because the LORD is about to pass by.

Then a huge, powerful wind tears the mountains apart and shatters the rocks. "But the LORD was not in the wind." After the wind, an earthquake. But the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, a fire. But the LORD was not in the fire.

"After the fire, there was a still small voice." Other translations call it a gentle whisper, or the sound of a low whisper, or even the sound of sheer silence.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Still Small Voice**
>
> The Hebrew phrase is hard to translate. It can mean a thin, quiet sound, a soft whisper, or even a kind of silence you can almost hear. The wind, earthquake, and fire recall Mount Sinai in the days of Moses, when God came down in thunder, fire, and smoke. Elijah had just seen God answer with fire on Carmel. But this time, God shows that He doesn't always come in the spectacular. Sometimes He comes in quiet. Christians have read this in different ways. Some see it as a lesson that God usually speaks gently, through His word and His Spirit, rather than through dramatic signs. Others see it as God's tenderness toward a broken man, meeting him quietly because he couldn't handle anything louder. Both can be true.

When Elijah hears the whisper, he wraps his face in his cloak and goes out to stand at the entrance of the cave. And the voice asks the same question again. "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah gives exactly the same answer, word for word. He's still hurting. One encounter with God didn't fix everything instantly. That's realistic. Recovery from burnout often takes time.

So God gives him three things.

First, a purpose. Go back. Anoint Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as the prophet who will succeed you. Elijah's work isn't over, but he won't have to do it all himself.

Second, a partner. Elisha will be his apprentice and friend.

Third, perspective. "Yet I reserved seven thousand in Israel, all the knees of which have not bowed to Baal." You are not the only one, Elijah. There are seven thousand faithful people you don't even know about. Paul quoted this in Romans to remind Christians that God always keeps a faithful remnant, even when it looks like everyone has given up.

Elijah leaves the mountain and finds Elisha plowing a field with twelve pairs of oxen; Elisha is driving the last pair. Elijah walks over and throws his cloak around Elisha's shoulders, a sign that Elisha is being called to take up his work. Elisha understands. He asks to say goodbye to his parents. Then he does something dramatic: he slaughters his oxen, burns his plowing equipment to cook the meat, and throws a feast for the people. There's no going back to farming. "Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and served him."

> **REAL TALK** **You Were Never Meant to Do It Alone**
>
> One of the reasons Elijah burned out was that he thought he was alone. God's answer was to give him a friend and to remind him of seven thousand others. You weren't meant to carry life by yourself either. God made us for community: family, friends, church, mentors. If you feel like you're the only one who cares, the only one trying, or the only one struggling, it might be time to let someone in. Who could be an Elisha for you, someone to walk alongside? And who might need you to be that for them?

Elijah went from the mountaintop to the bottom of despair in a single day. But God met him there with bread, water, rest, a whisper, and a friend. The God who answered by fire is the same God who whispers to the worn out.

KEY VERSE

After the earthquake a fire passed; but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:12 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Elijah crashed so hard right after his greatest victory?
2. What did God do first to help Elijah? What does that tell you about how God cares for us?
3. Elijah thought he was the only faithful person left. Why does burnout make us feel so alone?
4. Have you ever experienced God in a quiet way rather than a dramatic one? What was it like?

TRY THIS *This week, take one practical step to care for your body and mind: go to bed an hour earlier, put your phone away at night, or tell someone how you're really doing.*

CHAPTER 9

Naboth and Micaiah

1 Kings 20–22

The last chapters of 1 Kings focus on Ahab. Chapter 20 tells of two wars with the king of Aram, also called Syria. In both, God gives Ahab victory against huge odds, sending prophets to tell him what to do. But Ahab makes a peace deal with the defeated Syrian king that God had told him to destroy, and a prophet tells him it will cost him his life. Ahab goes home "sullen and angry." He does that a lot.

Then comes one of the most chilling stories in the Bible.

Next to Ahab's palace in Jezreel is a vineyard that belongs to a man named Naboth. Ahab wants it for a vegetable garden. So he makes Naboth an offer: I'll give you a better vineyard somewhere else, or I'll pay you what it's worth.

It's not an unreasonable offer, by today's standards. But Naboth says no. "May the LORD forbid me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" In Israel, land wasn't just property. God had given each family its land as an inheritance, and the law said it should stay in the family forever. Naboth isn't being stubborn. He's being faithful.

Ahab goes home, lies on his bed, turns his face to the wall, and refuses to eat. The most powerful man in Israel is pouting like a toddler because he can't have a garden.

Jezebel finds him and is disgusted. “Do you now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart be merry. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” In her Phoenician world, kings took what they wanted. She’s going to show Ahab how it’s done.

She writes letters in Ahab’s name, seals them with his seal, and sends them to the elders and nobles of Naboth’s town. The instructions are cold and calculated. Declare a day of fasting, as if some terrible sin needs to be dealt with. Seat Naboth in a place of honor. Then bring in two worthless men to testify falsely that he cursed God and the king. Then take him out and stone him.

And the leaders of the town do it. Every single one of them goes along with it. Two liars testify. Naboth is taken outside the city and stoned to death. 2 Kings later adds that his sons were killed too, so no heir would be left to claim the land.

When Jezebel hears Naboth is dead, she tells Ahab, go take possession of the vineyard. And Ahab gets up and goes.

> **REAL TALK** **Power, Injustice, and the People Who Go Along**
> Naboth’s story is about the abuse of power. A king wanted something. A queen used the king’s authority, fake religion, and false witnesses to take it. And a whole town’s leaders knew it was wrong and went along with it anyway, probably out of fear. Injustice usually needs more than one bad person. It needs people who stay quiet, follow orders, and look away. The prophet Micah later summed up what God wants: “to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Today, injustice can look like powerful people taking advantage of the poor, lies spread to destroy someone’s reputation, or groups turning on one person. If you see someone being targeted, lied about, or mistreated, don’t be one of the elders who went along. Speak up, support the person being hurt, and tell someone with the authority to help.

But God sees. He sends Elijah to meet Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, with a question that cuts right to the point: "Have you killed and also taken possession?" And then a terrible prophecy: in the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up Ahab's blood too. And the same judgment will fall on Jezebel and on Ahab's whole family.

Ahab's greeting tells you everything. "Have you found me, my enemy?" Elijah answers, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do that which is evil in the LORD's sight."

And then, surprisingly, Ahab repents. He tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, fasts, and goes around quietly and humbly. And God notices. He tells Elijah, "See how Ahab humbles himself before me?" Because Ahab humbled himself, God delays part of the judgment. Even for one of the worst kings in Israel's history, God responds to humility. That's how merciful He is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Even Ahab**
>
> It's striking that God responded to Ahab's repentance at all. The writer has just said there was no one like Ahab, "who sold himself to do that which was evil in the LORD's sight." And yet when Ahab humbled himself, God showed mercy. Ahab's repentance didn't seem to last, and the consequences still came. But this little scene shows God's heart. He takes no pleasure in judgment, and He is always ready to respond to anyone who humbles themselves. Nobody is too far gone to turn back.

Three years later comes the final story. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who is a good king, comes to visit Ahab. The two kingdoms have made peace, and their royal families are even connected by marriage. Ahab asks Jehoshaphat to join him in battle to take back the city of Ramoth Gilead from Syria. Jehoshaphat agrees, but says, "Please inquire first for the LORD's word."

So Ahab gathers his prophets, about four hundred of them, and asks, should I go to war? And all four hundred answer together: Go up, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. One of them even makes iron horns and acts out how Ahab will gore the Syrians.

But Jehoshaphat isn't convinced. Four hundred prophets saying exactly what the king wants to hear seems a little suspicious. "Isn't there here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of him?"

Ahab admits there's one more. "Micaiah the son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." That might be the most honest thing Ahab ever says. He doesn't want truth. He wants a cheerleader.

They send a messenger to get Micaiah, and on the way, the messenger gives him some advice: all the other prophets agree, so just go along with them and say something nice. Micaiah's answer is the heart of this chapter. "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak."

> **REAL TALK** **Standing Alone Against the Crowd**
>
> Micaiah was one man against four hundred. Everyone in the room wanted him to say yes. The king hated him. The messenger begged him to go along. And he refused to say anything except what God told him. Peer pressure is one of the most powerful forces in a teenager's life. When everyone in your friend group agrees, saying something different can feel impossible. But the truth isn't decided by a vote. Micaiah teaches us that sometimes faithfulness means being the only one who says no: no to the party, no to the gossip, no to the cheating, no to the lie everyone's telling. That takes courage. It also helps to have even one friend who will stand with you. And if the pressure is about something dangerous, tell a trusted adult.

When Micaiah arrives, the kings are sitting on their thrones at the city gate, with all four hundred prophets performing in front of

them. Ahab asks Micaiah the question. And Micaiah, with obvious sarcasm, repeats what the others said: go up and win. Ahab can tell he's mocking them. How many times do I have to make you swear to tell me only the truth?

So Micaiah tells him. "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd." In other words, the king will die, and his army will be left without a leader.

Then Micaiah describes a vision. He saw the LORD sitting on His throne, with the armies of heaven standing around Him. The LORD asked who would entice Ahab to go to battle and fall at Ramoth Gilead. A spirit volunteered to be a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets, and the LORD allowed it. So, Micaiah says, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all your prophets, and He has decreed disaster for you.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Lying Spirit?**
>
> This vision troubles many readers. Would God send a lie? Christians have understood it in several ways. Many see it as a picture of God's judgment in which He gives people over to what they have chosen. Ahab had surrounded himself with prophets who told him what he wanted to hear, and God allowed that deception to lead to his downfall, while at the same time sending Micaiah to tell him the truth. Paul describes something similar when he says that God sends a strong delusion to people who refuse to love the truth. Others read the vision as a kind of parable, describing in heavenly-court language the fact that Ahab's prophets were lying. All agree that God Himself cannot lie, and that the point of the story is that Ahab was warned plainly and chose not to listen.

One of the four hundred prophets walks up and slaps Micaiah in the face. Ahab orders Micaiah thrown in prison and fed only bread and water until he returns safely. Micaiah's last words are bold: "If you

return at all in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." Then he turns to the crowd: "Listen, all you people!"

Ahab is nervous anyway. So he comes up with a plan. He tells Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes into battle, while Ahab disguises himself as an ordinary soldier. Some ally. The Syrian king has ordered his chariot commanders to fight only against the king of Israel, so they chase Jehoshaphat, thinking he's Ahab, until he cries out and they realize their mistake.

Then, "A certain man drew his bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armor." A random arrow. Not even aimed. And it finds the one gap in Ahab's armor. You can disguise yourself from the Syrians, but not from God.

Ahab is propped up in his chariot facing the enemy all day, and he dies at evening. They bring his body back to Samaria and bury him. When they wash his chariot at the pool of Samaria, the dogs lick up his blood, just as the LORD had said through Elijah.

The book ends with brief summaries of Jehoshaphat, who did what was right in the LORD's eyes, and of Ahab's son Ahaziah, who walked in the ways of his father and mother. The story of Elijah and Elisha continues in 2 Kings.

KEY VERSE

Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak."

1 Kings 22:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the elders of Naboth's town went along with Jezebel's plan? What would you have done?
2. God responded to Ahab's humility, even after everything he had done. What does that show about God?
3. Ahab said he hated Micaiah because he never said anything good about him. Why do people prefer cheerleaders to truth-tellers?
4. When have you felt pressure to say what everyone else was saying? How did you respond?

TRY THIS *This week, when you're tempted to go along with something you know is wrong, practice Micaiah's response in your own words: I'm going to say what's true.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

1 Kings begins with the wisest king in history and the most glorious building in Israel, and it ends with a wicked king bleeding to death in his chariot. Solomon was wise, but not wise enough to stay faithful. The temple was beautiful, but Solomon himself admitted that heaven can't contain God, "how much less this house that I have built!" Elijah was powerful, but he burned out and needed someone to rescue him. Every good thing in the book points beyond itself to something greater.

Jewish readers treasure 1 Kings as the story of the first temple and of the prophets who called Israel back to God, and many still expect Elijah to come again. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, believed that what these stories pointed to arrived in Jesus. Jesus said the Queen of Sheba traveled far "to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here." Paul calls Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God." John says that in Jesus, God's Word "became flesh and lived among us," and Jesus called His own body a temple that would be destroyed and raised in three days. And on a mountain, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, talking about the death He would accomplish in Jerusalem. Solomon's wisdom, the temple's glory, and Elijah's fire all find their fulfillment in Him.

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He is the God who sends fire and the God who whispers to the worn out.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all drifted.

Even Solomon, the wisest man alive, turned his heart away from God. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. 1 Kings shows how sin tears kingdoms apart. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is greater than Solomon.

Solomon built a temple and then turned away. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again, so that we can know God and be with Him forever.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being wise, gifted, or good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Stop wavering.

Elijah asked how long the people would waver between two sides. Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I've drifted from You, and I've tried to keep one foot on each side. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that You are patient with me, and gentle when I'm worn out. Thank You that Jesus, who is greater than Solomon, gave His life for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. Forgive me, and give me a listening heart. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 1 Kings 3, 18, and 19, then read Matthew 12 and the story of the transfiguration in Luke 9.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Guard your heart. Solomon drifted slowly. Build habits that keep you close to God: daily prayer, Scripture, church, rest, and friends who follow Jesus.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Elijah asked how long the people would waver, and he waited for their answer. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if 1 Kings is right, the God who answered by fire and spoke in a still small voice is still speaking, and someone greater than Solomon is here.

The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 12:42 (WEB)