

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Rich Phenow
Solomon's Succession
1 Kings 1-2**

We are launching a new series this summer called Hidden Gems, Treasures in Plain View. We will be looking at two books in the Old Testament, 1st and 2nd Kings. They were originally one Book before the Books of the Old Testament were canonized. These two Books occur together in the Old Testament right after 2nd Samuel and before 1st Chronicles. They are a collection of real historical happenings, life-transforming happenings, and stories that we may not have ever heard before. The stories are full of drama that talk about kings and kingdoms and prophets, about the building of the temple, and about the worship of false gods, but mostly they are about God's desire to be followed after, to be worshipped and loved by His chosen people, the Israelites.

This past week I came downstairs to hear the opening worship time for our Vacation Bible School. It was so wonderful out in the Great Room to hear the kids singing. They sang *Jesus Loves Me, This I Know*, not the way you know it, but with a lot of rock and a lot of rhythm and they sang this song, *B-I-B-L-E, That's the Book for Me*. Afterwards I went to my mailbox, grabbed some mail and headed back to my office, and I happened to see a little tribe walking down the hallway with a seventh or eighth grader leading the troop. She's holding the hands of two little kids and I overheard her say, "Mary, what's your favorite song that we sang this morning?" And little Mary says, "Oh, I love that B-A-B-L-E song, that babble song!"

I thought that was really cute and then I started thinking about that a little bit. For some of us, the Bible, especially the Old Testament and especially the Books of 1st and 2nd Kings, could sound and read like babble but they are not babble. We want to encourage you to read these Books. Get a study Bible with notes and a good introduction and read them and unearth hidden gems for yourselves because, really, they are all about God's desire to be in relationship with His people. As you will hear me say at the end of my sermon, I think they are very reflective of us and our culture today and what is going on for us.

My purpose today is to do two things: to give us a broad overview (and I'm going to kind of race through that because there is so much detail in these Books), and then I want to come back and focus on the first 11 chapters of 1st Kings, the golden age under the kingship of Solomon. Saul passes on his monarchy to David and David passes it on to his son Solomon. I'm going to talk in a greater way about that, but keep in mind as I do the overview that I am not a seminary professor, although I would have loved to have been one. I may be difficult to follow, but try to hang in there and I will try not to overwhelm you with too much detail. The overview starts with the fact that this time period covers about 400 years, roughly the time period of our American history. We are not certain who the author of 1st and 2nd Kings is, but some scholars believe there were multiple writers. All of the history of 1st and 2nd Kings is covered between the year 970 with the dying of King David, almost a thousand years before Jesus was born, and goes to

when the Babylonians seize the Southern Kingdom, about 560 B.C. That's about 560 years before Jesus was born.

Now there are three major time periods in these two Books.

- There is the **golden age** and again, that is from Saul's kingship to David's kingship to Solomon's kingship. Solomon becomes a wise king. He builds a temple but his greatness is also his downfall. That is the golden age.
- The **divided kingdom** starts in 1st Kings and carries over into 2nd Kings. The Israelites, the people of God, split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom, ten tribes, and the Southern Kingdom, 2 tribes, are led by different kings.
- Then the third period of time is the **beginning of the end**, the last days. The Northern Kingdom is destroyed and the Southern Kingdom is defeated by the Babylonians.

The main subject of these two Books is the kingdom people of God, the Israelites. It's a mixed story. There are good guys, good kings, and bad kings, and there are good prophets. All kinds of things happen, all kinds of drama. The idea of the monarchy is introduced into Israel through the kingship of Saul, passed on to David, passed on to Solomon, and then many, many kings after that.

The passing on of leadership is complicated by the fact that David's fourth son Adonijah is the logical choice to succeed David. David's first three sons had died. Adonijah knows that David's first choice is Solomon, so without David's knowledge, he appoints himself king and throws a huge inaugural party for himself. He has all these men and horses and chariots come to celebrate, but this rebel's plans for David's throne are unsuccessful because it is not God's will that he become David's successor. God's will is that leadership would be passed on to Solomon. Nathan, a prophet at this time, comes to David along with David's wife Bathsheba, and speaks to him on Solomon's behalf. Bathsheba, you will remember, had been David's lover. David had had an affair with Bathsheba and sent her husband into battle where he was killed. Now Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan have come before David to remind him of the promise he made that Solomon would follow him as king, and the baton is passed on to Solomon.

In the first 11 chapters, we'll go into greater detail in a little bit, it tells us that Solomon is a man of integrity and honesty, that he is a great leader and that he is one of the wisest men in the ancient world. He writes much of the Wisdom literature of Song of Songs and Proverbs, which we studied last summer. Solomon does great things. He builds a temple, the temple of Israel, which was patterned after the tabernacle the Israelites carried as they wandered through the desert. It was believed to have held the Holiest of Holies, the Presence of God. The temple, along with Solomon's palace, takes 13 years to build and is filled with gold and cedar from the majestic cedars of Lebanon.

Things fall apart for Solomon because he marries a lot of women from different countries. He builds statues and places of worship for these women to worship their idols. His story ends with him being a devoted follower of Yahweh, but mixing his allegiance to some of these false gods and leading many astray. He is a mixed bag, a great king on one hand and sinful and disobedient on the other.

Now some of the next generation of kings who follow Solomon are filled with great greed and lustful power. There is a civil war and the people of God, the Israelites, split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom is called Israel and the Southern Kingdom is called Judah. Another temple is built in the north with golden calves, and the people of God stray from His promises and worship other gods altogether.

During this period, there are about 20 kings and each one of them is measured by the yardstick of David. The author labels each new king throughout with this statement, "He did good in the eyes of God" or "He did evil in the eyes of God." Each king is found either to be faithful and worthy or of wanting greater power and adulation. Many of these kings turn into merciless murderers, sick with desire and greed, wanting nothing but wealth and power. In fact, all the kings in the Northern Kingdom were corrupt and only about half of the kings in the Southern Kingdom were faithful to God.

During the reign of the kings, we are introduced to some significant prophets. Two standouts were Elijah and his understudy and apprentice, Elisha. These are a couple of key figures. I won't spend a lot of time talking about them, but what the prophets are doing is calling the kings and the Israelites, the people of God, back to a relationship with God. They are the watchdogs of the covenant and they keep calling Israel to turn back from their wicked and selfish ways. Elijah is a great prophet, a bold guy, full of fire. He puts his life on the line and goes toe-to-toe with King Ahab and they become archenemies. Elijah calls out Israel's idolatry and wicked ways and calls God's people back to faithful followership of Yahweh.

Now his understudy Elisha is powerful as well. In fact, God bestows on him twice the power to perform miracles. He actually performs 14 of them. He brings a cow back to life. He takes a widow who has nothing but a little flour and oil and he multiplies the flour and oil so she has an endless supply, showing the power of God. Now this period of time starts to end. I'd love to give you more detail, but what I really want to do is compel you to see that these are fascinating stories. At the end, I think you will draw some amazing conclusions.

As this period winds down and the final curtains are being drawn, all of the Northern kings are corrupt. A bloody revolution led by King Jehu breaks out. Assyria invades the Northern Kingdom and wipes out or deports all the Israelites there because they were faithless and worshipped false gods. Now God's people are back to the same place they were in Egypt hundreds of years ago. Assyria comes knocking on the doors of the Southern Kingdom during the reign of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah is a great king and instead of going to battle with Assyria, he prays to God to protect them from the attacks. What a radical thing to do! The drama escalates when another king, Manasseh, who is full of evil, introduces child sacrifice.

This is all powerful stuff and what it does is illustrate for us the brokenness of the chosen children of God, the brokenness of humanity. It's a reminder of the brokenness of the human heart and how sin can affect thinking and behavior. Could this be a realistic picture of our world today? At the end of 2nd Kings, we are left with a number of questions. Will God keep His promises to David that he would be faithful to His people? Now that they are exiled and back in slavery, how will God rescue them? It's a delicate and tragic story that ends with a number of questions. I don't know about you, but I think we are left with questions. Will God redeem and reconcile our world?

The truth is that we know the answer to that question. We know that God does keep His promise because years later, we stand with the promise fulfilled in the personal expression of God Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. For almost 2,000 years God has been trying to have a relationship with His people. He calls them out. He chooses them. He loves them. He forgives them, and then they fail God and turn their backs and run away.

A few months ago, I think it was January, I don't know if you remember the story about a couple who were on a hike on their property in northern California. They had been walking the same trail for years but one day they came upon something on the ground. It was a bright, shiny can. The woman went over and opened this can and it was filled with gold coins, actually about \$10 million worth of gold coins. The fact of the matter was that the coins were stolen. They were U.S. minted coins from 1900. Now this is what the couple holding them said, "In a weird sort of way, we've been preparing for this treasure throughout our whole lives."

The Israelites and we, as well, have been preparing ourselves for a treasure throughout our whole lives, and this treasure isn't worth \$10 million but it is worth our souls. The treasure for me is taking some time and reflecting on the truth of these passages, God's inspired Holy Word. It means taking some time to reflect on Solomon and his leadership in these first 11 chapters. Again, I think the story of the kings and the prophets not only parallels ours but, specifically, the kingship of Solomon looks a lot like you and like me. For the next few minutes I would like to make three observations about Solomon, this great and yet broken man.

The first one is this, that Solomon was really a smart guy. He was the wisest of all the kings. In 1st Kings, chapter 3, it says this.

9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" **10** The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this [wisdom]. **11** So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, **12** I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

Solomon is granted incredible wisdom. In fact, there is a great illustration about his wisdom in the following chapter. What happens is, there are two prostitutes who are living together and each of them has a baby. One night one of the babies dies by being suffocated by the mother. The woman takes her baby who has died and exchanges it with the baby of the woman she is living with and takes that baby to herself. These two women go back and forth arguing about the baby and finally, one of Solomon's men brings the women before Solomon. One of the women says, "This is truly my child. Her child died." There is great confusion and Solomon says to one of his men, "Grab a sword and let's split this living baby in two so that each can have half." The soldier comes with his sword and is about to split the baby in two when the woman who is actually the mother says, "Please, please, don't kill my baby. Give the baby to her" because she wanted her child to live. The other woman said, "No, go ahead and split the baby in half. That way we will both have pain." Solomon said, "It is obvious that the woman who is willing to give her child away is actually the mother so give her the child." That was a moment of great wisdom, and I thought this is probably where we get the phrase, splitting of heirs. Pretty sophisticated, I know.

Secondly, Solomon is a great and wise man but he is also a political pleaser. He seals a political pact with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. She was the first of hundreds of wives he married for political reasons. Solomon didn't keep God's command to be faithful to Him. His actions remind us of how it is to know what is right and yet not do it. He marries all of these pagan women and goes on to worship the pagan gods of his wives. Scripture tells us he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. John Ortberg says that maybe Solomon really wasn't all that smart of a guy. He was great and yet he was broken. He built a great temple with such detail and yet he became a leader who essentially taxed and worked his people to death. Visitors from distant lands came to admire the wise king while his own people were gradually being alienated. He was greedy for wealth and the truth of the matter is, he was a rich man with a great mind who did some good things, but he also did some terrible things. Let me read a little excerpt from 1st Kings, chapter 10.

23 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. **24** The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. **25** Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. **26** Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

Lastly, Solomon was a worshipper of false gods. He was a rich man with about 1,000 wives and concubines. He had everything he ever wanted, but he was a mixed bag. His priorities were messed up. In 1st Kings, chapter 11, it says,

1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter

3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

Solomon began to worship and build shrines to the gods of his wives. Solomon didn't keep his promise. He was ineffective as a leader. He was tarnished. My question is simply this. How are you and I like Solomon? How can we be so smart and so intelligent, educated in academia and the world? How can we appear to be so together on the outside and yet so broken and inconsistent on the inside? I think I appear, at least I hope I do, to be a pretty nice guy. I hope you see me that way. I think I appear as a guy who has a lot of passion and compassion and loves people. There are certain ways that I want you to see me and I think there are certain ways you want to be seen by people.

I want to let you in on a blue-chip story that I hope and pray will stay in this room. Our two sons recently moved back home (they have been gone for two years living in a house with a lot of other guys), and our daughter Kiersti (who has been in South Africa) also moved back home, and I want to confess to you that I have been struggling lately. I have been a complete jerk. I've been impatient, I've been controlling, and I've been really bugged by these kids. I've yelled at them about the dishes, because the boys had this system to use all of the dishes and then three or four days later to wash all of them. Well, that's not working very well for me. Thank God, they're up at the cabin this weekend and can't hear this stuff. The boys left the patio door open

and the screen open and I'm counting mosquitoes that are flying in. The whole time the air conditioning is on. Things have been bugging me. I've been catty. I've been short and I've been negative, and so we sat down and had this come-to-Jesus conversation. Little did I know it was *their* come-to-Jesus conversation with *me* and not mine with them. "Dad, you know how hard it is for us to move home. You know how hard it is to be told of all these little things that we are not doing."

I've had to face the fact that I am one person to many and I am a different person to others. I think we are like Solomon, rich in wisdom and rich in resources and that oftentimes, we are political pleasers, compromisers, like Solomon sucking up to his wives. We do the same. How could *we* say *yes*? How could *he* say *yes* to God and compromise himself being unfaithful? "I'll keep my promise to worship You alone" and yet he turns toward the idols and sacrifices. Then I think about the truth about what the idols are in your lives and my life. Have the idols become our need for acceptance, our need for security? Have our idols become competition, needing to be better than others? Has our idol become our busyness, so that we always have so many important things to do? What and who are your idols? How are you like Solomon?

The truth is that we are inconsistent. We get off course. We lose our direction and much like the Israelites, we track with God for awhile and then we turn away and mess up. We love God for awhile and yet, we disobey Him. We go our own way and only engage God when we need Him. We ask the same questions that the Israelites asked at the end of the story in 2nd Kings. Will God restore His people? Will God redeem us? Will God bring us back to Him?

My wife Jody and I were based in Los Angeles for about five years when we were in seminary and graduate school. I had this privilege once a month of sailing out of Santa Monica Harbor with a Jewish man, Americo D'mundo, who lived down our driveway. He and I sailed one or two Sundays a month and he told me about this great race in Los Angeles every year called the Transpac Race. It leaves Santa Monica Harbor and heads to the harbor in Oahu. The Transpac Race is an amazing race and I would love for you to grab this book *Love Does* by Bob Goff and read about the story there. What happens is, these seven college guys set out in a small sailboat to cross the ocean to arrive in Oahu's harbor. The problem is, the night before they leave, they lose their navigator. They can't use any electronics; they can only use a sextant, a map, and read the stars. These guys are the last guys to finish the race, days after all the other boats headed into Oahu's harbor. It's amazing what he says in this book about how he finds his midcourse direction, how he puts a straight line between himself and Jesus and encircles that straight line with God's grace and love and forgiveness.

Today I want to ask you some questions. What course are you on? Are you off course like Solomon was? Are you so smart and in so much control of your life that you really don't need God? Are you someone like me who looks great on the outside, but is filled with maybe pain or resentment? Maybe it's disobedience for us. And are we political pleasers? Do we perceive others as people we need to be connected with because it will help us feel better about ourselves? Who and what are your idols? The answer is simply this; it's about being in the measure of God's goodness and grace. It's about the circle of His love and forgiveness shown to us in the very personal treasure of His Son, Jesus. The circle of His grace and His forgiveness is waiting for us and we are once and for all restored and reconciled because of the cross. I would encourage us all to keep pointing toward Jesus, to wrap ourselves in a circle of His love and forgiveness because we need that answer to our questions, which is greater than \$10 million worth of gold. Let's pray to God.

Gracious God, I pray that You will remind us through the example of Solomon that we are in many ways much like him. We look a certain way on the outside. We have amazing gifts, intellect and wisdom and affluence, but on the inside we are so in need of Your grace and love. I thank You for the reminder through Solomon's life that You answer the question of our brokenness through a cross, through a Savior who reminds us that we are forgiven and loved, new every morning. Thank You for the power of Your promise. Thank You that You are the answer to our questions. Come and embrace us now. Forgive us now. Remind us of Your goodness and mercy. We pray all this in Your strong and Holy Name, Jesus. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.