

Note: Course resources utilized included NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible notes, ESV Bible and ESV Study Bible notes, John Sailhamer's Pentateuch as a Narrative, Stephen Dempster's Dominion and Dynasty, Tom Schreiner's The King in His Beauty, Carson, Moo, and Naselli's Introducing the New Testament, T. Desmond's Alexander's From Paradise to the Promised Land, Carson, Moo, and Morris Introduction to the New Testament, The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson from the Pillar New Testament Series, The Letters of John by Colin G. Kruse from the Pillar New Testament Series, Bethlehem College and Seminary Old and New Testament Survey, Thirdmill.org website and others (TGC and TGC Online Commentaries).

Introduction- 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

*Let's begin with prayer.*

*When God created Adam and Eve- they were royal figures, vice-regents, God's very own creature king and creature queen, commissioned to exercise dominion over God's creation. But these royals rebelled. As a result, they are forced into exile, expelled from the Garden.*

*Nevertheless, in Genesis 3.15 God promises to restore creation to a state of blessing through another ruler, an offspring of the woman who will crush the serpent's head.*

*Later we see the man of faith, Abraham, who in Genesis 17 receives great and far-reaching promises from God, not the least of which is the promise that through his family a ruler, a king would emerge, and through him blessing would come to the nations.*

*As the book of Genesis draws to a close our focus is directed toward the tribe of Judah, from which will come a king whose scepter shall not depart, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

*Later Moses, Israel's great prophet, speaks words that anticipate a future king- Deuteronomy 17:14-15 (ESV): 14 "When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' 15 you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose.*

*Here, the Lord, through Moses, lays down certain non-negotiables regarding the King's pedigree and character.*

*True to form, the people eventually ask for a king, but their motives are less than stellar. Their desires represent a craving to be like those pagan nations that surround them.*

*In the first place, they get Saul, who outwardly looks the part, but inwardly misses the mark- and over time proves that he is not the highly anticipated king that God would send.*

*After Saul, David ascends to the throne, a man after God's own heart, who rules with power and wisdom as he submits himself to the true King of Israel- the Lord Himself.*

*But David has his own shortcomings- his own notorious sins. Nevertheless, during David's good rule, the 12 tribes of Israel were unified into one kingdom. So blessed is King David, that God establishes a covenant with him, revealing to us with a new dimension concerning the promise of a coming king.*

*The covenant with David (2 Sam. 7) is a promise that a son from David's line will one day rule and reign, and this coming Davidic king will be the one to usher in restoration and blessing to the nations.*

*That brings us to 1 and 2 Kings. 1 and 2 Kings are two separate books in our English Bibles, however, in its original composition they form one book telling a cohesive, unified story.*

*It is here we are presented with the history of the kings of Israel, with special attention given to what transpires after David passes off the scene.*

*1 Kings opens with an aging king David, who is declining in strength, and an emerging political coup led by his son Adonijah- who earnestly desires the throne.*

*However, Adonijah is not the one appointed to succeed David. In willing and eager obedience to the revealed will of God (1 Chronicles 22:8–10)- David orchestrates the installation of Solomon to the throne.*

*It is Solomon who would bring Israel into new levels of prominence on the world stage. Together, David's and Solomon's reign constitutes a sort of climax within ancient Israel's history- a "golden age."*

*Shortly after Solomon is appointed as king, the Lord comes to Solomon and inquires of Solomon as to what he desires; and Solomon requests wisdom, which the Lord gave him liberally and without reproach. If a king is to rule well, he must rule with the wisdom that is from above.*

*Solomon's reign was marked by extraordinary measures of peace. It is often described as being Edenic. Israel in those days echoed the blessed state that was the garden paradise of Genesis 3.*

*1 Kings 4:24–25 (ESV): For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphshah to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. 25 And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.*

*What makes Israel most like the Garden of Eden wasn't, in the first place, peace and prosperity, but rather the presence of the Lord in the land.*

*Along these lines, 1 and 2 Kings introduce us not to the aging tent that was the tabernacle, but to the temple, an edifice that would be built under Solomon's guidance and attentive care. It would represent God's presence among His people.*

*The temple Solomon built represents the Lord's visible presence on earth, a place where heaven and earth touch. The Lord's fearful and holy presence was especially tied to the innermost sanctuary, where God's proverbial throne, the ark of the covenant, would reside. This inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, was this perfect cube overlaid completely with gold and constituted the holiest, most sacred place on earth. Two cherubim were stretched from end to end in the inner sanctuary (6:23–28; 8:6–7), just as cherubim guarded the divine presence in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:18–22) and guarded the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). This innermost chamber testifies to the truth that the LORD “dwell[s] in thick darkness” (8:12), underscoring the profound mystery of his presence on earth. As glorious as the temple was, and its glory was unprecedented- Solomon recognizes that the Lord cannot be limited to the confines of an earthly structure-*

*“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).*

*Nevertheless, the Lord has graciously condescended to put his name there.*

*And the temple would serve to teach the people about the holiness of God- that sinners cannot come nonchalantly into His presence. Because of God's absolute holiness, the temple required priests, representatives that were set apart. It would require a sacrificial system- providing atonement for sin in the interim, so that the people could enjoy God's presence. We saw these very same principles with the original tabernacle in the days of the Exodus and Leviticus.*

*Let's pause and reflect- we have here Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, a man of peace, unlike David, who was a man who shed much blood. We have the glorious temple that Solomon has built.*

*From a whole bible perspective, how do these things point us to Christ?*

*These things serve to point us to one greater than Solomon, the living embodiment of the Wisdom of God, Christ who is the Prince of Peace-, Christ who is the temple builds the new temple of the Lord—the church, in all his manifold wisdom, the place where God dwells in the New Covenant age.*

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*At this point in Israel's history, God's people are experiencing the covenant blessings promised in the Torah. They were a thriving nation. They were firmly fixed in the land of promise. And they had their king, a man of God's own choosing. They were experiencing rest from their enemies. And in the temple, God is making His presence and character known among them in a visible way and unprecedented way.*

*Now is the time, or so it seems, for the kingdom of Israel to begin mediating blessings to the nations.*

*1 Kings 4:34 (ESV): And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.*

*The anticipation is at a fever pitch. —*

*But things do not unfold in the way one might expect.*

*Although Solomon was a wise and powerful ruler, the king's character was found wanting.*

*As the narrative in 1 Kings moves forward, we begin to see that he is not the ideal king of Deuteronomy 17.*

*Deuteronomy 17:17 (ESV): 17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.*

*And this is precisely what Solomon did.*

*1 Kings 11:3–4 (ESV): He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. 4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God-*

*Solomon would worship other gods, including Ashtoreth and Milcom (11:5, 10). He built high places for sacrifices to Chemosh and Molech (11:7). David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah were appalling, but David never explicitly bowed down to other gods the way Solomon did, blatantly breaking the first commandment- "Thou shall have no other gods before me".*

*God promised that David would not lack a man to sit on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25), yet this was dependent on whether that king would obey the Mosaic covenant (1 Kings 2:3–4). And clearly this is something Solomon did not do.*

*Because Solomon's heart had turned away from the Lord, God tears the kingdom from him, removing ten of twelve tribes from under his rule. But God's promise- His covenant with David- was irrevocable, and the Davidic dynasty would continue despite Solomon's transgressions.*

*The promised kingdom would come, but one thing was for certain, it would not be realized in Solomon.*

*Not long after Solomon is exposed- we see the Eden-like peace that Solomon ushered in begin to slip away. Enemies are gathering on the horizon. It is here we are introduced to Jeroboam, a man who was industrious, capable, someone Solomon could trust.*

*The prophet Ahijah (11:29–31) prophesied that Jeroboam would rule over the ten tribes of Israel- telling Jeroboam that he too would have a “sure house, as I built for David” (11:38) if he obeyed the Lord.*

*Because of this-Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam. Solomon, a man who would drain the swamp in his early years, could not remove this man, Jeroboam from the picture. The Lord had spoken, and no man, not even Solomon could stay His omnipotent hand.*

*Eventually Solomon dies. Solomon reigned over all Israel for a total of forty years. And Rehoboam- his son- would take his place. With Solomon's death, the golden age of Israel's monarchy comes to a close.*

*On the whole, 1 Kings 1–11 presents Israel in a very positive light- a sort of climax in Israel's history.*

*However, amid unprecedented blessing, we are brought to see that even the best of outward circumstances are simply not enough to usher in the precious promises of God. Even if the king possesses the right pedigree- the right DNA, even if the king has the best mind, unparalleled wisdom, resolve, and energy- none are capable of ushering in the blessedness that God has promised- and all fall miserably short. Even the king's heart was deceitful above all things, desperately sick; who can understand it? And this teaches us that humanity needs a king clothed with more than outward splendor and glory- we need a king enveloped in inward, moral splendor as well.*

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*Beginning at 1 Kings 12- the kingdom begins to collapse- in large measure because of Solomon's sins- but the subsequent leadership within the nation would be an instigating factor as well.*

*It is here that we see this close connection between the downfall of Israel's kings and the fall of the nation. God's people need godly leadership, specifically, a King who will rule them in righteousness and peace. This is central to God's purposes of redemption. This king must be obedient to the Mosaic covenant, since the Mosaic covenant reflects the very heart of God.*

*That king wasn't Solomon. That king wasn't even David, the "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14).*

*What does this tell us about the character of the true King God was looking for?*

*The true King must be more righteous than David. He must be completely obedient to the Mosaic covenant. In short, he must be perfect.*

*Moving forward- Israel rapidly declines into moral decay- and would go on to experience the covenant curses promised in Deuteronomy 28:15–68- this would start with a divided kingdom, but steadily moving toward complete exile from God's Promised Land.*

*In the initial phases of Israel's collapse the nation would be torn asunder, dividing into a southern kingdom, known as Judah, and a northern kingdom, that retains the name Israel. The northern kingdom of Israel would be formed from 10 tribes, and would eventually be ruled by 10 different dynasties and 20 different kings, none of whom originate from the line of David. Jeroboam would be its first king, and Israel's capital city would be located in Samaria. The northern kingdom of Israel would also have two different worship centers, one in Bethel and one in Dan.*

*The southern kingdom of Judah was made up of the tribes of Judah, naturally, and Benjamin. It would know only one ruling dynasty, the Davidic dynasty- men from the line of David, but in due course would have 20 different kings from Davids' lineage. Jerusalem would be both the capital and its primary place of worship.*

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*Now, the divided kingdom, Israel and Judah, brings us face to face with an important theme that will constantly rise to the surface in the books of 1 and 2 Kings- the word of the Lord spoken through God's prophets will certainly come to pass. God's word is irrevocable.*

*The promise that the 10 tribes would abandon the Davidic dynasty indeed became a reality, not during Solomon's reign, but during the reign of his son, Rehoboam.*

*King Rehoboam began his reign in rather uncompromising fashion- and sought to make life hard for the people. Rehoboam spoke harshly to the people- forsaking the counsel of older men, with some life experience under their belts. Instead, he leaned upon the counsel of the young men, saying, 1 Kings 12.14-15: "My father (that is Solomon) made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat."*

*So we see here in straightforward fashion that the word of the Lord will certainly come to pass. King Rehoboam's early bravado set in place a course of events that would lead to the dissolution of the kingdom and in this way the prophecy spoken through Ahijah was fulfilled.*

*Jeroboam, Rehoboam's counterpart in the northern kingdom- was a man lacking faith, wisdom, and discernment as well. Although the recipient of a rather favorable conditional promise - 1 Kings 11. 37-38: "I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you."- he still acted treacherously.*

*The prospect of losing the people of the northern kingdom-provoked Jeroboam's fear. He was convinced that as the people would make the pilgrimage to the southern kingdom's capital, Jerusalem, in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord, that they may eventually pledge their allegiance to Rehoboam king of Judah, and then turn and kill him.*

*Rather than trusting in the words uttered by Ahijah the prophet- he established worship centers in both Dan and Bethel, making golden calves for Israel to bow down to- in clear violation to the second commandment- You shall not make for yourself a carved image. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. Here Jeroboam would establish a pattern of sin and idolatry that would reverberate throughout the history of the northern kingdom- as we hear the repeated refrain concerning subsequent kings in the northern kingdom of Israel- "He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin." Subsequent kings in the northern kingdom would perpetuate the religion that Jeroboam inaugurated.*

*The southern kingdom of Judah wasn't exactly a bastion of morality either. The southern kingdom would be plagued by their own high places, pillars, Asherim. Male cult prostitutes would carve out a presence in Judah as well.*

*The glory of David and Solomon become a distant memory within about a generation so it seems.*

*Abijam, Rehoboam's successor, was a failed king as well- his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God. But the Lord would grant a discernable measures of stability to the southern kingdom, as 1 Kings 15.4 -5 tells us that "for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."*

*So Judah would know only one dynasty compared to multiple regime changes in the north. Moreover, not all of David's descendants would wholesale abandon the Lord. King Asa would follow in David's footsteps of obedience and faith, putting away the male cult prostitutes out of the land and removing all the idols that his fathers had made. He also removed Maacah, his own mother from being queen- because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. King Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook Kidron. But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the LORD all his days. Years later, two other kings from David's line—Hezekiah and Josiah—made great strides toward turning the people from idolatry- but despite their extensive efforts- the reforms they brought about were short-lived.*

*In the northern kingdom- subsequent kings would persist in the sins of King Jeroboam and as a result, would meet the same fate that Jeroboam would meet. Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam's wife that the Lord would "bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung until it is all gone"- 1 Kings 14.10. Jeroboam's dynasty would not continue- made clear as Jeroboam's son, Abijam dies in childhood. In fact- because of Jeroboam's sin- the Lord speaks through Ahijah proclaiming that one day be pressed out of the land into exile- 1 Kings 14.15-16: "the LORD will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the LORD to anger. And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin." This sort of instability in leadership within the northern kingdom, eventually leading into eventual exile is the pattern we see through the books of 1 and 2 Kings.*

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*A conspicuous feature of the books of 1 and 2 Kings is the problem of Baal worship, a conflict that will persist from 1 Kings chapter 17 on through to 2 Kings chapter 12. Baal worship was a prominent feature of the northern kingdom, but would also spread to parts of Judah as well. In these chapters, we see the nation was turning from the Lord, and serving Baal.*

*Here is the problem that we encounter as the nation begins to turn from the Lord to Baal. The kings were in no position to lead the people in driving out and eradicating Baal worship, because they were largely complicit. Nevertheless, the Lord sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and He would see to it that Baal worship would not win the day.*

*Therefore, the Lord raises up prophets, specifically Elijah and Elisha, to lead the charge against this pernicious form of idolatry and paganism.*

*The prophets speak officially for God- correcting wayward kings through personal messages sent from the Lord himself.*

*During this period of precipitous moral decline, which was catalyzed by the nation's leadership, the primary role of the prophet is to hold up the Mosaic Covenant like a mirror, showing how far the king and the people are drifting from God's law. When a prophet speaks, the Lord speaks, and they are to speak only what God would have them say, irrespective of how the message will be received by the listeners- whether the people or king.*

*Amid the prophetic ministry that we see 1 and 2 Kings- the prophets would perform miracles, and would declare what would take place in the future with complete accuracy- these supernatural events and outcomes were meant to validate their message- showing the recipients of the message that it was indeed from God.*

*Elisha epitomizes this type of prophetic ministry- performing several miraculous deeds such as resurrection, feeding people during a time of famine, and healing.*

*So in 1 and 2 Kings we see this pattern of prophecy followed by fulfillment. By sending the prophets, God shows that he cares for his people. He is for their flourishing and concerned about their own best interests. Rather than abandon them, he reaches out to them through the prophets. But on the whole- their message was rejected.*

*As a result, we see a cycle similar to that of the Judges. In the southern kingdom of Judah, there are some periods of reform, but the general trajectory is downward- as both Israel and Judah tumble downhill toward exile.*

*But despite this downward decline, there is grace and divine patience throughout Kings- treating the Israelites better than they deserve. He gives the Israelites victories despite their wayward hearts. Even in judgment, he calls them back to himself.*

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*Beginning in 1 Kings 17, the prophet Elijah appears on the scene rather abruptly. He confronts King Ahab, a staunch supporter of Baal worship, a king who married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians. That should tell you something about Jezebel's worldview. These 2 are essentially 1 and 2 Kings' main villains.*

*King Ahab would go on to build an altar for Baal in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, and in doing so, provoked the LORD to anger more than all the kings of Israel who were before him. Although Baal was a supposed storm God, it is the Lord working through Elijah that commands drought- saying to King Ahab- "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." And the word of the Lord through Elijah proved true. For three years Ahab would hunt Elijah, the man of God, but to no avail. But in God's time, the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."*

*What is to follow is the stuff of legends- but it is not legend- it is absolutely true. When Elijah shows himself to Ahab, Ahab says to him- 1 Kings 18.17-19: "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."*

*At Mount Carmel, Elijah presses the people with a choice- "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And Elijah issues a challenge. Two altars, two bulls. On one side is Yahweh's prophets. On the other side are 450 of Baal's best spokesmen. The god who answers by fire, consuming the prepared sacrifice - He is God.*

*The prophets of Baal called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. Elijah even resorts to holy mocking, saying- suggesting that he may be asleep, or relieving himself, or on a journey. As Elijah prepares to call upon the name of the Lord, he would leave no room for doubt in the minds of everyone present, and proceeds to douse the altar and sacrifice with water, until it overflowed into a trench that surrounded the altar. Elijah prays- and the Lord answers- and "the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The*

*LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.” And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.*

*Mount Carmel signified a major victory, but the war against Baal worship was not over, not by a long shot. As news of the execution of the prophets of Baal reached Jezebel's ears, she made it her aim to do away with Elijah, and Elijah goes on the run. Even after the extraordinary victory over Baal worship- Elijah felt very alone in his allegiance to Yahweh. And he flees to Mount Horeb, where God met with Moses in the burning bush, and where God declared his covenant.*

*Elijah was seeking a word of reassurance from the Lord, reassurance that the Lord had not abandoned his covenant with Israel. But the Lord did not answer out of wind or out of earthquake or out of fire. Rather the word of the Lord comes to Elijah in the form of a low whisper with these words- “What are you doing here, Elijah?”- Implicit is that there is no new message. There is no new covenant to enact at this point. Implicit is that Baal worship would not be overthrown by means of sudden displays of power, like that witnessed on Mount Carmel. The Lord would wage a quiet war. God would raise up Hazael as king of Syria to judge Israel for its devotion to Baal, and God would raise up another prophet- Elisha- to carry the mantle of prophetic resistance and confrontation. This would be a long battle. But he assures Elijah that Baal would not win the day- for God will preserve a remnant- “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” This is the doctrine of election in its Old Covenant form- God has his elect- and those who are his elect will be preserved- and Baal will not triumph over them.*

It is this truth that we must cling to as the kings and nation continue run its rebellious course toward destruction and exile.

*2 Kings 17:6–23 describes the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel as the Assyrians sack Samaria, the capital, and the people are exiled out of their land in 722 B.C. in accordance with the covenant punishments God warned them about in Deut. 28:47–50.*

*2 Kings 18:11–12: 11 The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria ... 12 because they did not obey the voice of Yahweh their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed.*

*The final chapters of 2 Kings follows the fate of the southern kingdom, as it underwent various reforms by means of kings Hezekiah and Josiah. Judah would outlast her sister Israel by a little over a century. But the few decent kings that came from the Davidic line were only influential enough to curb Judah's wickedness temporarily. In*

*the end, thousands from Judah were forced into exile by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. - as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.*

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*As we move forward, the kings of Israel and Judah persistently broke the Sinai covenant, ultimately God exiled them from the good land that he had promised to them. By the end of the book, the nation's covenant curses outlined in Deuteronomy are coming into full effect- with the loss of land, leadership, temple, and freedom. The people who once said, "All that Yahweh has said, we will do" (Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 5:27; 26:17) have forsaken God and His word.*

*Perhaps one of the most important theological lessons from these books is this-*

*As the king goes, so goes the nation. We see that in a very real way, the various kings represent the people in God's economy. Blessing or curse moves from the top down in these narratives.*

*We can conclude, given that the entire nation ends up in exile, one of the overarching messages of 1 and 2 Kings is that the nation needs a better king, a new and better David. No merely human king can lead God's people. We need a king of a different caliber. Clearly, the NT picks up this theme, seeing Jesus as the true descendant of David, the one through whom the promises made to David and Abraham are fulfilled.*

*As Israel's history declines in accordance with the Mosaic covenant curses, in accordance with what Moses and Joshua and the prophets have spoken- God's promise of a Davidic king will also stand firm as well. While God's promise to punish his people for their sin must be fulfilled, so too must his promise of a Davidic descendant exercising dominion forever. This creates tension, but tension that brings hope. And there is a glimmer of hope especially as the book of 2 Kings draws to a close.*

*Even though the story of 1-2 Kings is the account of paradise forfeited- there is still hope for paradise regained.*

*The closing paragraph of 2 Kings jumps forward approximately 40 years, well into the Babylonian exile. Here we see something interesting taking place in the life of a certain man, Jehoiachin, a descendant from David, who became king at 18 years old, but eventually taken captive- carried away to Babylon, and imprisoned . Thirty seven years later- the king of Babylon releases Jehoiachin from prison and invites him to eat at the royal. At first glance, it doesn't seem like much in the big scheme of things, and offers little consolation to a nation who is once again under the yoke of oppression. But it is a moment that forces us to reflect. It is a dimly lit lamp in a dark place, a faintly burning wick, the sound of a low whisper- showing the attentive reader that God sees what has transpired, and has not abandoned his promise to David. Someone from David's line is*

*being exquisitely cared for even in exile, giving the reader the distinct impression that hope stemming from the line of David is not lost after all.*

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*Primarily because of time, I am going to limit my treatment of 1 and 2 Chronicles. From a narrative standpoint, there is some basic overlap between Chronicles and 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. So I will forgo rehearsing the narrative. Nevertheless, 1 and 2 Chronicles is not merely a repeat of other works in the Bible. It has been carefully shaped and composed and is God-breathed.*

*What is going on in 1 and 2 Chronicles, which in its original form represent 1 book, is the story of Israel's history told through the lens of God's promise to David, and told in relation to the all-important institution that is the Jerusalem temple.*

*The theology of Chronicles is designed to give hope to the post-exilic community of God's people. This intent shapes the message.*

*Two main things to keep in mind as you work through Chronicles-The King and the Temple. And here I lean upon the insights of Richard Pratt- Former Professor of OT at RTS-*

*In the Chronicler's view, God has organized his people around two central institutions: the Davidic throne and the Jerusalem Temple. These political and religious structures were fundamental to the life of Israel.*

*In his genealogies, the Chronicler gives special attention to David's lineage (1 Chron. 2:10-17; 3:1-24) and to the organization of the priests and Levites for the temple service (1 Chron 6:1-81). He emphasizes, similar to 2 Samuel 7, that God had chosen David's line as the permanent dynasty presiding over God's people (1 Chron. 17:1-27; 2 Chron. 13:5; 21:7; 23:3).*

*The Chronicler also focuses on the Temple as the dwelling place of the Name- God reputation and glory (2 Chron. 7:12, 16; 33:7). Therefore we see that the joy and splendor of music in Temple worship were chief concerns in the Chronicler's history.*

*With these emphases- the King and the Temple, the author of Chronicles is instructing his post-exilic readers not to lose sight of either institution. Both were absolutely essential for the full restoration of the Kingdom. After all, the Lord said to David, "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his Kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever" (1 Chron. 17:11-12). We see this focus play out in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which give attention to the rebuilding of two things- the temple, and the walls of Jerusalem, the city where the king would dwell. We will look more closely at these things in a minute.*

*But ultimately, God did not envision a mere edifice when he made this promise. Moreover, those from David's line are sinners through and through, unable to live up to such a high and holy calling.*

*Nevertheless, we see these two institutions merge in the person of Christ. Christ was born the Son of David, the rightful heir to the Davidic throne. Jesus met all the conditions of obedience placed on David's line. In the resurrection, Christ ascends to his throne in heaven. He leads his people into blessing and victory and reigns until all his enemies are defeated.*

*In respect to the temple and its, Christ offered himself on the cross as the perfect sacrifice of atonement for sin (Heb. 9:11-28; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:2), and he intercedes in the heavenly sanctuary of God on behalf of his people- a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord set up, not man.*

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*We now come to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah- what we must keep in mind when we read these books is their peculiar place in redemptive history. At this point of the storyline of Scripture, the great kingdom established by David and Solomon has already completely unraveled. During that process, God not only sent prophets to hold up the law of Moses in order to reveal sin, guilt and waywardness, but he also sent prophets to preach and predict about the end of the exile, and a coming restored kingdom, ushered in by a Davidic, Messianic, Suffering Servant who would atone for the sins of God's people, deal with God's enemies, and reign in justice and righteousness forever. Thus, as we come to the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, books that recount for us the return from exile and the initial restoration process, there is a world of expectation.*

*As we will see, these massive post-exilic expectations are not exactly met. In many ways the nation sort of limps along. The temple is rebuilt, but does not begin to touch its original splendor, with many challenges, the walls are finally rebuilt. Even though they are in the land, it still feels like they are in exile- under the thumb of other foreign powers. And the same old problem that got them into this mess, is still close at hand. The ultimate problem that God's people were faced with were not the shackles of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon- rather it was their own sinful, straying hearts.*

*In order for God's kingdom to be truly restored, it would take more than one man's permission to return and build the temple. God's people needed new hearts, which was a promise contained in the New Covenant.*

*Nonetheless, the release from Babylonian prison and the return to the land was an extraordinary kindness of God's grace, and must be appreciated. God was faithful to his promises in these events and God's people had much reason to rejoice.*

## *Ezra*

*The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends. As it opens, the balance of power in the ancient world had shifted from the Babylonian empire to the Persian. This was a remarkable turn of events for the people of God. In fulfillment of God's word- after 70 years of Babylonian exile, the Persian King Cyrus issued a decree that any Jews who wished to return to Judah and rebuild the temple could do so, and the king would even see to it that the inhabitants of the land would support the returning Jews in their temple rebuilding efforts. Even King Cyrus himself made it a point to return the vessels taken from the temple by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Exiles began the trek back to their homeland around 538 B.C.- as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) and Jeremiah (25:11-12, 29:10-14).*

*Ezra can be divided into 2 sections. The first section, composed of chapters 1-6, records events that happened before Ezra's time. In these chapters we see two waves of returning exiles, led by Sheshbazzar (Shesh baa zer) and Zerubbabel. It is important to note that Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, so God has indeed preserved the lamp and line of David throughout the Babylonian captivity. Jesus would later descend from Zerubbabel as recorded in Matt. 1:12-16- in fulfillment of the promises given to David concerning an everlasting dynasty.*

*As they arrive home, Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest unite to lead the temple rebuilding efforts. The laying of the foundation of the temple made for mixed emotions- there was both praise and weeping—praise because the temple signified God's presence and covenant love, but weeping because it would pale in comparison to Solomon's temple. Still, the people proclaim- Ezra 3:11 (ESV): "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel"- words used at the dedication of Solomon's temple hundreds of years prior.*

*Soon after the rebuilding efforts begin, various conflicts arise, bringing construction to a standstill (chs. 3–5). Those already inhabiting the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose. Moreover, King Artaxerxes issued a decree prohibiting efforts aimed at rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, for fear that such efforts would lead to rebellion and insurrection among the inhabitants of Judah. Nevertheless- with a little encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah- temple construction resumes around 520 B.C. And in 516 B.C., the temple, the symbol of God's presence among His people, was rededicated.*

*The second section of Ezra begins in Chapter 7. Roughly 80 years have elapsed since the temple was rededicated at the close of chapter 6. Here we see Ezra- a priest, a scribe and teacher- leading the second of three waves of returning exiles.*

*Chapters 7 and 8 of Ezra draw our attention to the fact that the hand of God was on Ezra for “Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” Ezra 7.10. Hence-the book of Ezra teaches us about the central place of the word of God in the life of God's people. Mere intellectual interest in the word is inadequate- we must be those who study the word so that we might do the word, and then teach others the same pattern.*

*By the time Ezra arrives to the land, the people have fallen into sin once again. Ezra's attention immediately goes to the issue of intermarriage between men from Judah and foreign women who dwelled in the land while worshiping other gods. God's people had disobeyed His command to live set apart lives- and took for themselves foreign wives. This was expressly forbidden in the Law of Moses- and if King Solomon taught us anything- it is that such intermarriages do not promote godliness and exclusive commitment to the Lord. But under Ezra's leadership and the sound of his preaching, which he bathed in prayer and confession, the people would repent, and the men would give up their foreign wives.*

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*Let's consider now the book of Nehemiah- and then make some overarching observations about both books-*

*Nehemiah starts where Ezra leaves off. In fact, Ezra and Nehemiah are treated as a single book in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Following Ezra's return to the land, we see Nehemiah, a high ranking official in the court of King Artaxerxes- preparing to lead another wave of returning exiles. Thematically, we begin to see some overlap between Ezra and Nehemiah early on. Both works devote attention to rebuilding efforts- for Ezra it is the temple, for Nehemiah it is Jerusalem itself.*

*The larger issue at stake in both books is not simply Israel's commitment to see these rebuilding efforts through, the shared concern of both Ezra and Nehemiah is securing devotion to the Lord, encouraging and pressing his people to do His will, pursue His purposes, and avoid another collapse into raw paganization and sin. Therefore, these two books, by recounting the history of Israel after the exile, are designed to promote faithfulness to the Lord, making the Lord's priorities our priorities, teaching us to abstain from the evil and destructive influences of the culture that surrounds us.*

*The book Nehemiah begins with a distressing report that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins. Upon hearing about this, Nehemiah wept and mourned for days, with fasting and prayer before the God of heaven.*

*Nehemiah perceived that sin was the ultimate cause of this disrepair, and he was eager to help. Nehemiah asks King Artaxerxes if he could journey to Jerusalem. And*



*though he must petition the king, Nehemiah understood that success in this endeavor means that the Lord must intervene- therefore, as a matter of first importance, Nehemiah petitioned the king of heaven before making the request to Artaxerxes. He is granted favor- and Nehemiah then travels to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Like the work to restore the temple in Ezra 3–6, fortification of the wall brings much opposition, but the project is eventually completed.*

*Along the way, Nehemiah enacted various reforms that address various injustices concerning moneylending; evidently there were practices that enriched some while impoverishing others. Nehemiah led by example. When he served as governor, he provided for the people at his own expense, rather than using his position and influence to enrich himself.*

*Throughout the book- Nehemiah's is a shining example of godly industry, hard work, thoughtful strategy- he is especially concerned that those who labored to rebuild Jerusalem would be protected from outside threats during this important work.*

*But through it all- we must not make the mistake of thinking that Nehemiah served in his own strength- out of his own resources; he was a man of prayer- praying for the Lord's protection, asking that the Lord would frustrate the adversaries, praying that the Lord would supply strength needed to finish the task (6:9). The entire narrative of Nehemiah underscores the importance of both prayer and industry- hard work. The book opens with prayer in Susa, and ends with prayer in Jerusalem. Chapter 9 contains this great prayer thanksgiving and adoration. Nehemiah prays often. In this book, there is neither complacency in taking action nor complacency in prayer.*

*After the wall is restored, the narrative focuses on the restoration of the people. Ezra the priest reads God's law, and the people respond by confessing their sin and renewing the covenant. The covenant renewal was a day of joy- but also a day of fasting and confessing of sins, of reading the Torah and of worshiping the Lord (9:1–3).*

*Later in the book of Nehemiah, we see Nehemiah incensed- outraged- as he discovers that Tobiah, a relative of Eliashib the priest, had taken up residence in the temple. Nehemiah, in a manner reminiscent of Christ driving out the money changers and clearing sections of the temple in his day, threw Tobiah's furniture out of the chamber, had the chamber cleansed, and brought back the goods that belonged there. Later, Nehemiah would discover that the Levites- the temple priests- were not being provided for, and so he wasted no time dealing decisively with that situation (13:10–13). He was a zealous man- and despite his pragmatism and industry- he never put mammon before God. This is especially evident in the way in which he dealt with how the people were profaning the Sabbath. The people were engaged in robust commerce on that day- treading wine presses- buying, selling, trading and transporting all manner*

*of goods- even doing business with outsiders on the Sabbath. He insisted that the Sabbath be kept holy, and was prepared to resort to physical coercion if necessary. As the book draws to a close, despite all that had transpired in the life of Israel- some in Israel were still intermarrying with pagans, even after making a covenant in which they renounced that very practice. And here we see that the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. Nehemiah addresses this sin with a proverbial rod- rather than a spirit of gentleness. He resorts to heavy discipline, zealous for the Lord's honor.*

*Nehemiah is certainly an interesting figure in redemptive history. He is not a prophet, but his book begins like a prophetic utterance- "The words of Nehemiah". And throughout- he engages in the prophetic work of reformation. He is not a king- but is integral in building and fortification, much like kings Hezekiah and Josiah. Nehemiah is not a priest, but his reforms extended to the priests and their care. He is zealous, but not a perfect man- nor is he to be emulated in every way- after all he did resort to pulling out people's hair. Nevertheless, he is a servant of servants, a man of integrity and honesty, courageous and self-sacrificing. And those are qualities that are worth emulating.*

*Where do we see Christ in these books?*

*I have already mentioned the Zerubbabel- Christ connection.*

*There are 2 other aspects worth mentioning.*

*(1) The leadership and labors of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah point forward to the work of Christ. As they self-sacrificially devoted their lives to leading God's people toward the blessings of covenant faithfulness, Christ leads and carries us toward everlasting blessings because of his covenant faithfulness. Like Christ, both Ezra and Nehemiah confront and correct sin within Israel, and like Christ, they identify themselves with God's sinful people, praying for them and laboring for them.*

*(2) The focus of temple rebuilding in Ezra, and temple service in Nehemiah, anticipate the person and work of Christ. The idea of Temple is still a central concept in the Christian faith. Christ cleansed the Temple. Christ is the Temple- the place where God and man meet. Christ established the church as the new and living Temple of God, and Christ now ministers in the heavenly Temple. In the new heavens and the new earth, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The themes of holiness, sacrifice and atonement, prayers, forgiveness, priesthood, and the presence of God, associated with the Temple in Ezra-Nehemiah, are all fulfilled in Christ.*

## *We now come to the book of Esther*

*Esther takes place approximately 60 years after the end of the Babylonian exile. The location is Susa, or modern day Iran, in the court of King Ahasuerus (Ah hashu wear us)—better known as Xerxes I, who ruled the Persian Empire from 486–465 B.C. At the beginning of the book, King Ahasuerus sends for his wife, Vashti, but she refuses to present herself before the people, the nobles, and her king. Xerxes is none too pleased, and decides to find a different wife, which opens the door to Esther becoming queen.*

*Early on Mordecai, a father figure and relative of Esther, uncovers an assassination plot against the king. He informs Queen Eather, who subsequently notifies the king (ch. 2). Later on- when Mordecai refuses to kneel down and give honor to Haman, a high-ranking government official, Haman is outraged and offended. Without openly identifying the Jews, Haman convinces the king to sign an edict decreeing death for all Jews— enacting a policy genocide under the pretense that these people are detrimental to the welfare of the kingdom.*

*As Mordecai discovers the plot, he pleads with Esther to speak to the king. But she is reluctant, fearing for her life, but ultimately agrees to approach the king. Esther risks her life by entering the king's inner court uninvited (4:11). Nevertheless, King Ahasuerus responds with approval toward Esther. Esther invites both him and Haman to a banquet. The two men attend the banquet, but Esther chooses not to reveal her request, instead inviting the men to a second banquet. As chapter 5 comes to a close, we still see Haman plotting Mordecai's death*

*At the beginning of chapter 6, the king realizes that Mordecai has not been rewarded for saving his life. In a remarkable and humorous turn of events, Haman himself is forced to honor Mordecai in the public square. The second banquet then takes place, where Esther asks the king to save the Jews—including herself—from annihilation. When the king asks who is behind the threat, Esther identifies Haman, who is executed on the same pole that he had built to kill Mordecai.*

*The king then gives Haman's estate to Esther and gives Mordecai the king's own signet ring, effectively allowing the Jews to strike down their enemies, who had since arisen in droves due to the genocidal edict (9:1). God's people are emboldened. Mordecai grows in power and influence,, and he instructs the Jews to remember these events with an annual celebration called Purim. The book concludes by informing us that Mordecai was now highest-ranking official in the empire—second only to the King.*

*What are some of the overarching themes in Esther- and how does this book point us to Christ?*

*To be quite frank- and many of you are aware of this- the book of Esther doesn't not mention God at all. But the explicit absence of God by name is part of its genius. Although reference to God is missing, his providential rule is not absent- God is powerfully present throughout the entire book. Even the actions of those who do not worship Him, even the sinister schemes of those who have no regard for the Lord and his people, are still subservient to God's greater purposes. Though others intend evil, God intends good. We see this type of absolute sovereignty come to its most glorious expression at the cross, where Christ was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.*

*Moreover- Esther is an example of this reversal of circumstances, that finds its fulfillment in our experience as those who are joined to Christ. We, as sinners, should expect nothing but death, but in the ultimate reversal, because of Christ's cross, we become the recipients of eternal life.*

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