

After Darkness Light

*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.
(Matthew 4:16 ESV)*

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
(Luke 1:76–79 ESV)*

Paradise Lost (Again)

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1 Kings 11:1-13

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Kings 11:1; that’s on page 291 in your pew Bibles. It is often said that we read the Bible to find out who God is, who we are and how God has saved us through the person and work of Jesus Christ and that is true. One of the reasons that Christmas is so easily derailed into commercialism and sentimentalism – even in the church – is that we have forgotten who God is and we have forgotten who we are and therefore we do not appreciate as we should how God has saved us through the life and death of Jesus. Jesus breaks into the storyline of the Bible as a RAY OF BRILLIANT LIGHT. Matthew 4:16 says:

the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. (Matthew 4:16 ESV)

The people living in DARKNESS have seen a great light! The people living in the region and the shadow of death – ON THEM – a light has dawned! Who are these people? What was it about them that put them and us on the very edge and in the very shadow of death? Why were they so close to destruction? Why were they so utterly without hope? To what human problem was this little baby the perfect salvation of God?

That is the question that we will apply ourselves to over the next couple of weeks. We begin this morning at the beginning of the end – or perhaps you might say, at the end of the beginning. I’ll

begin reading 1 Kings 11 at verse 1 and we will read all the way through to verse 13; hear now the Word of the Lord:

1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. 3 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, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. 9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. 11 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. 12 Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.” (1 Kings 11:1–13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Let me take just a minute and make sure we understand this passage in terms of its wider context. This is THE turning point in the Old Testament storyline. If you know your Bible then you know that the combined reign of David and Solomon serves as a sort of “high water mark” in the Old Testament. Under David ALL of the enemies of God had been subdued and Israel now controlled all of the land that they had been promised. Don’t take my word for that – Solomon himself SAYS that in 1 Kings 8:56 at the dedication of the temple. In his prayer of benediction Solomon says:

“Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. (1 Kings 8:56 ESV)

We have EVERYTHING God promised to give us – the question now is can we keep it? Moses had been pretty clear about that too, he had said that God would bless them in their obedience and God would curse them in their disobedience – he could not have been more clear about that:

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have

not known.” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28 ESV)

So Israel was operating under a pretty simple system – obey God and experience his blessing. Disobey God and experience his enmity and curse – PRETTY SIMPLE. And under David and Solomon there had been a lot of obeying and therefore a lot blessing. Enemies were defeated, peace was established, land was possessed, prosperity was enjoyed and everything was looking up. The mountain of the Lord’s House was raised up higher than every other mountain and the nations of the earth WERE STREAMING TO JERUSALEM to receive blessing and instruction in the ways of the Lord – that’s what was happening in 1 Kings chapter 10. Look back one chapter in your Bible and notice the story. The story is about the Queen of Sheba coming from far away in Africa to visit Solomon and to receive wisdom and blessing. This is THE HIGH WATER MARK in the Old Testament.

Reading this story, you might actually think for a second THAT SOLOMON IS JESUS! You might think Solomon is the MESSIAH! He looks like the OBEDIENT SON who will bring blessings to the earth from the very hand of God! This is the APEX of the Old Testament story – by the way that is why it is SO significant when Jesus says in the New Testament:

The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:42 ESV)

The Queen of Sheba saw enough of the glory of God in the kingdom of Solomon that she came from the ENDS OF THE EARTH to be blessed through him – but now one far greater than Solomon is here. This mountain, Jesus says, is far greater than that mountain – therefore what is your excuse for not coming to me in order to be blessed? That’s what he’s saying but we are getting way ahead of ourselves.

For now, it is enough to understand that this is the APEX of the Old Testament story. This is the most obedient and the most blessed that God’s people will ever be in the Old Testament but it is about to go downhill fast.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women... (1 Kings 11:1. ESV)

Even in the Old Testament they understood this moment as the beginning of the end. In Nehemiah 13:26 when Nehemiah discovers that some of the people who returned to the Promised Land from exile had once again married foreign women he lost his mind – do you remember that? He says:

I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? (Nehemiah 13:25–26 ESV)

How could you do this? How could you do AGAIN what brought us into exile in the first place? Have we learned NOTHING about what it means to live with a Holy God? We’ll get to that story in a couple of weeks. That’s the END of the END – that’s the NADIR – the bottom of the hill, this is the top of the hill just past the APEX.

Now, as I said, we read these stories to learn about God, to learn about ourselves and to better appreciate how God has saved us through the person and work of Jesus Christ – we’ll use that as our outline and plan for this morning. Let’s ask first of all what this passage teaches us about God.

What Does This Passage Teach Us About God?

The first thing we should notice is that:

1. God is faithful to his promises

God made a promise to David back in 2 Samuel 7. He said

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12–16 ESV)

God promised David that he would deal differently with him and his sons than he had done with Saul. When Saul sinned he lost the kingdom. When David sins and when his sons sin, they are punished but God does not forsake them. He will preserve the line of David and bring forth from

it an eternal kingdom. That just might be the most important promise in the Bible and it is the promise that explains why God does not do to Solomon what he did to Saul. Solomon's disobedience was actually far worse than Saul's. Saul wasn't perfect in his obedience – he was always fudging at the margins – but he never worshipped foreign gods! He never even came close to this kind of betrayal. Why then did God not do the same and worse to Solomon as he had done to Saul? We are told in 1 Kings 11:13. It was:

for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen. (1 Kings 11:13 ESV)

God keeps his promises, even when we don't.

The second thing we learn about God in this story is that:

2. God is merciful and just

God didn't do to Solomon as his disobedience deserved. God had been very clear about the consequence for disobedience back in Deuteronomy 11. He said, if you obey me, I will bless you, if you disobey me I will curse you. God has always been clear about the consequences of sin. He said to Adam concerning the forbidden fruit:

in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17 ESV)

How then does Israel live? Given what Solomon does in this story, given where he led the people of God how did they escape total destruction? Well if you keep reading you discover not everybody did. The northern tribes are cut off from the whole and they go into a death spiral of disobedience and defection as a result of what happens in chapter 11. They are eventually destroyed and dispersed by the Assyrians and they are no more – there is a reason we speak about the lost tribes of Israel. They are gone and they are dead and their death spiral begins in this passage. And yet, in another sense Israel lives on. A remnant is saved according to God's Sovereign election and in this way – through the death of some and the salvation of others - God shows himself both merciful and just.

This has always been a hard truth – Old Testament and New; this is hard to get your head around.

In the New Testament Paul actually asks the question:

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Romans 9:14–15 ESV)

God is just and merciful – in ways and for reasons that we will never fully understand this side of heaven. That is the consistent message of the Scriptures and we meet it here in 1 Kings 11.

This story also teaches us some very important things about ourselves.

What Does This Passage Teach Us About Human Beings?

The very first thing we see in the text is that:

1. **Human thought, will and emotion are all hopelessly interconnected**

Human beings tend to believe themselves more intellectually independent than they actually are. We tend to believe ourselves more rational and deliberate in our thinking and deciding than is actually the case. The Bible says that your thought is distorted and affected by internal and external forces. Let me put this in street level English. Most people believe that they can trust their internal compass. We say things like "Follow your heart" or "live your truth" and we say things like that because we assume that our instincts and perceptions of reality are reliable and essentially uncorrupted. We think our compass really does point true north. But the Bible says it doesn't. Jeremiah 17 says:

"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

Jeremiah says that your heart – your thoughts, your will, your instincts, your compass – is totally spinning! Its **BROKEN – ITS SICK** and seemingly being cure. The NIV translates this verse:

The heart is deceitful above all things and **beyond cure**. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV11-GK)

Who even knows why they believe what they do? The heart is sick, the compass is spinning and only a fool follows a broken heart. The New Testament is even more clear on this. The Apostle

Paul says:

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; **indeed, it cannot.**
(Romans 8:7 ESV)

Paul actually says that the default set of your mind is NOT NEUTRAL it is actually born SET TO hostility towards God, meaning that your inner compass isn't just spinning it is actually pointed away from God and towards darkness and ruin – Jesus said the same thing. He said:

light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
(John 3:19 ESV)

Jesus says that the situation when he came into the world as the light is that people were LOVING THE DARKNESS! They loved the darkness AS IF IT WERE LIGHT! Their compass was pointed in exactly the wrong direction. It wasn't pointed home – it was pointed further into death and darkness.

This is why the Bible never tells you to trust your orientation or to live your own truth. The Bible says that human beings are attracted to and inclined towards what is killing them; therefore you cannot trust your compass! There is a giant magnet called sin that is affecting and distorting your perception of reality. That's the internal factor, but there is also an external factor.

The Bible says:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

Morality is relational. Thought is relational. Conviction and belief are relational – we think these are separate categories – we think that we think things and can hold those thoughts even in close communion with people who think otherwise. The Bible says we are fools. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals.

Over time you will think like the people you love.

So be careful with whom you fall in love.

Solomon was attracted to people he had been warned away from. The Bible says:

You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. (Deuteronomy 7:3–4 ESV)

Nothing erodes belief in God like loving someone who does not believe in God. If you don't believe that then you are believing something in defiance of history, experience and Scripture. In the end human beings believe what they love.

Now it isn't just husbands and wives who are affected by this reality, it's all of us. Think about it, why is it that in 2001 only about 13% of Evangelicals were in favour of same sex marriage but in 2016 just less than 30% of Evangelicals support same sex marriage¹. Think about that, all of the sudden about a third of Evangelicals believe something very different than we have historically believed. Why is that? Has the message of the Bible changed? No. Have the best practices of Bible study and biblical interpretation changed? No. Then what has changed? Far more of us now have friends and loved ones who are openly gay and our love for them is affecting what we believe about what the Bible says.

That's why Jesus said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26 ESV)

Your love for Jesus has to so far eclipse and surpass your love for every other person that your love for those people actually looks like hate – you have to love Jesus that much if you want to be his disciple. Why is that?

Because truth is personal; it's emotional and eventually, all human beings believe and affirm who they love the most.

We are not as free as we think when it comes to our beliefs and our convictions. Therefore, brothers and sister, guard your heart.

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/05/12/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

The second thing we learn about human beings in this story is that:

2. Human beings are remarkably unstable in their religious affections

Solomon started off really well. Back in 1 Kings 3 we read:

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father (1 Kings 3:3 ESV)

Solomon was definitely saved! He loved Yahweh and he even had charismatic experiences – God came to him in a dream – do you remember that?

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” (1 Kings 3:5 ESV)

That is the ultimate charismatic experience! A dream and the promise of wealth, health and prosperity – this brother was living his best life now – but it didn’t last. In chapter 11 we read:

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, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (1 Kings 11:4–5 ESV)

This passage is actually more shocking than you think. Most of us read that and we just hear it as saying that in his old age Solomon became a practicing polytheist – he worshipped a variety of gods – and that in and of itself is horrific but its actually far worse than that. The two gods that are mentioned first here represented all that was particularly hateful to God about the Canaanites. Ashtoreth or Asherah was the Canaanite goddess of fertility and the worship of Asherah involved having sex with both female and male cult prostitutes. We know this because later in 2 Kings during a time of reformation one of the grandsons of Solomon tries to undo the damage that Solomon did. The Bible says that:

he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah. (2 Kings 23:7 ESV)

Because of Solomon there were booths for male and female prostitutes INSIDE THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD – are you kidding me?

The worship of Milcom or Molech as he is called later in 1 Kings 11:7 is just as horrifying. Molech was the Canaanite god of the underworld – he was the lord of hell and he was associated with the practice of human sacrifice.

That is what Solomon got himself into as a result of marrying these women. How in the world does that happen? How do you go from loving and serving Yahweh to having sex with cult prostitutes and worshipping the god of hell? But that's what happened and that's what we are capable of as human beings – search your heart, you know that to be true.

That leads us to our final question:

How Then Shall We Be Saved?

That is the question you are supposing to be asking by the time you get to the end of the Old Testament. If our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked – if we can't trust our own instincts, thoughts, desires and convictions and if we live among unsaved people who are always inviting and encouraging us to do stupid things then what hope do we have of ever possessing and enjoying the blessings of God? How will this ever work? If that's what happened to Solomon – if that's what happened to the BEST OF US then what hope is there for the rest of us?

I mean, if Solomon couldn't keep it together - if he couldn't stay the course – then what hope do we have? He was incredibly gifted, he had charismatic experiences, he had King David as a father and spiritual mentor, he was rich and had every opportunity and blessing – if he couldn't obey God then what hope do we have?

That is the question you are supposed to be asking at the end of the Old Testament – by the way that is the question you are supposed to be asking at the start of the Old Testament too. If Adam and Eve couldn't obey God in a perfect garden with abundant supply and no human neighbours – how in the world can we obey God in the world as it is now? That is the question and as always JESUS is the answer.

Jesus is the light to people who are living in THAT darkness. Jesus is the light to people who are TRAPPED in that bondage. He is the obedient Son who fulfils all righteousness and secures for us every blessing of God. He is what Solomon wasn't. He is the perfect sacrifice who wipes away the record of our wrong and our rebellion. He pays for what Solomon did – and for what he did in his body on the cross. He is the one who defeats the king of hell and who sets the captives free. He is the one who rises from the dead and ascends up into heaven and takes his seat at the Father's right hand and GIVES US THE HOLY SPIRIT so that we can walk before God and persevere in faith as we were created to do.

He heals our incurable hearts. He buries our despicable record. He leads us in paths of righteousness and he brings us all the way home to God.

He is the Savior that we need. He is the LIGHT of the world and the HOPE of the nations and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.