

(Through the Bible) 1 Kings

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of leadership, forgiveness, and discernment in the life of a Christian, and how these qualities are necessary for building the kingdom of God.

Duration: 55:05

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Prayer Persistence"

Description

This sermon delves into the stories of Elijah, Ahab, and other key figures in the book of 1 Kings, highlighting the importance of standing before God, the need for true leadership, the dangers of compromise, and the power of persistence in prayer. It emphasizes the significance of humility, discernment, and honoring true servants of God, while warning against false prophets and the pitfalls of seeking worldly solutions over divine guidance.

Transcript

Let's turn to the first book of Kings. First Kings chapter 1. Here is a book which begins with a united, powerful nation of Israel under a godly king, David, a man after God's own heart, and ends with the kingdom divided and with a lot of evil kings ruling particularly over Israel. Ahab is the last one mentioned in this book.

Imagine something that begins with David and ends with Ahab, and how the people go astray. You see, this teaches us one thing, what we've been seeing consistently in all the other books as well. The condition of God's people depends greatly on the spirituality or lack of it in their leaders.

You see that everywhere in Revelation 2 and 3, where the elders were spiritual, the church was spiritual, the elders were carnal, the church was carnal, and whenever Israel had a godly leader, they moved in godly ways. When they had a carnal leader, they moved in carnal ways. A godly father will bring up his children in godly ways, and a carnal father will bring up his children in carnal ways.

So leadership is so important. It's one of the things that we see throughout the Old Testament, and a good thing for us to learn. So you see, God's great need is for leaders.

We read once that Jesus looked out and saw a multitude like sheep without a shepherd. It's the same today, as he looks out over India, he looks out over Christendom in India. India's Christian population itself is perhaps 20-25 million, and as God looks out over the Christian population of so many millions of people,

you know what he sees a lack of? Godly leaders.

And that's the challenge that comes to each of us. Satisfy the heart of God in this generation. In every generation, God wants leaders.

It's not enough to depend on the leaders of another generation. In your generation, God wants leaders. David could not rule over Israel forever.

He died, somebody else has to take over, and what type of person that's going to be? That's the great thing. Here is a godly man, God raises up, he gets old and he dies. What about the next generation? Have they just got knowledge? Have they just got the doctrine? Have they just got the temple rituals? But no godliness, no personal knowledge of God? Then the people go astray.

That's the challenge that should come to each of your hearts, to be like David, to be like Deborah. Okay, as we look at David's end of his life, we see one or two sad things. When David was dying, we read that Adonijah verse 5, 1 Kings 1.5, said to himself, he exalted himself and said, I'll be the next king.

He was one of the sons of David. So he prepared a chariot. He was not like his father.

His father waited for God to make him king. This man said, I'll make him the king. And why was he that type of person? Because here's the reason, verse 6, his father had never given him any pain.

That's what the margin of my Bible says. Had never punished him. He had never used a rod on him once.

And never asked him when he did something wrong, why did you do that? Can you imagine what's going to happen to a child if he's never punished by his father and the father never asks him, why did you do that? And particularly, he's a nice, good looking child. It says he was a handsome man. David was a wonderful man, but he failed totally as a father.

We can take warnings from that. You can be so busy on the battlefield that you have no time for your family, or you're so taken up with your ministry and the honor and things coming there that you don't see how your children are growing up. It's a sad thing if a man loses his children, saying he's serving the Lord.

When you have families, those of us who are married, let's take heed to these warnings from scripture. And this man Adonijah schemed and planned, but Nathan the prophet went to Bathsheba, verse 11, and said, have you heard, haven't you heard that Adonijah wants to be king? Does David know about it? David is now lying in his deathbed and people are taking advantage of the fact that he is helpless now. So Nathan the prophet brings the mind of God into that situation.

What a wonderful man Nathan was. How wonderful it is when a nation has at least one prophet who can go and say something to the nation. And Nathan, how wonderful it is when churches can have a prophet.

Seek to be one like that yourself, in humility and brokenness, learning from the qualities of these prophets in the Old Testament. And he went to Bathsheba and said, go at once to King David and say, didn't your Lord swear to your maidservant, didn't my Lord swear to your maidservant that surely Solomon shall be the king? And while you're still there, I will also come and confirm your word. So Bathsheba went and then said that.

And David realized while she was still speaking, verse 22, Nathan came and Nathan said, yes, Adonijah is wanting to be king. Then King David answered and said, call Bathsheba and certainly, verse 30, Solomon

will be the next king. Bathsheba bowed and went out.

Then King David called the priest, verse 32, and said, take the servants and take my Solomon, son Solomon, ride on my mule and bring him down and blow the trumpet and say, long live King Solomon. So Sadok did that, verse 38 onwards, and he anointed Solomon king. That was his struggle for succession.

Now, when we come to chapter 2, I want you to see here David charging Solomon with certain things. He says, now I'm going to die and be strong therefore, verse 2, and show yourself a man. Now I want to show you David's last words.

And they're a bit disappointing. The word of God is so honest when it tells us about the failures of its greatest servants. It says here, Solomon, I want to tell you a few things.

And instead of spending those last few moments telling Solomon how to be a godly leader, how to honor God, learn from my mistakes, and don't have too many wives, and be careful with women. Those were the type of instructions he should have given his son when he's taking over king, and be fair and all those things. Instead of that, he just gives a little introduction.

And then he says, now the thing that's on my heart is, you know that Joab, verse 5, he, you know what he did, he shed the blood of what he did to Abner, what he did to Amasai, to kill them. Act according to your wisdom, and don't let that man's gray hair go down to the grave in peace. Kill him.

He doesn't want to kill himself. It's like hiring somebody else to kill somebody you want to kill. And then, please show kindness to Barzillai, verse 7, because they assisted me.

Be kind to those who were good to me. But then there's another fellow, Shimei, verse 8, he's the one who cursed me. You don't remember what he did when Shimei cursed him? David said, God has allowed him to curse me, let me accept it.

And when David came back, Shimei said, please forgive me, and David said, I will not do anything to you. And he says to Solomon, see, I swore to him that I will not, verse 8, kill you. But I did not say that I will not tell my son to kill you.

He is being legalistic here in the court now. What I said was, I will not kill you, and I will not kill you. But Solomon, don't let his gray hair go down, verse 9, to the grave without blood.

Kill him. What are the next words? Verse 10, David died. Sad, no? That a man, his last words were he would take revenge on someone whom he had forgiven once, and legally scheming to kill him without breaking his promise.

What does this teach us? It teaches us that sometimes you think you have forgiven somebody. Your mind is strong and you can control yourself and keep that forgiveness, but as you get older, and your mind begins to weaken, what is really in your heart comes out. You've never really forgiven.

You know, it's quite possible that a lot of people you think you've forgiven, you've never really forgiven. Think about it. You've possibly never forgiven those people.

You may think you have, but you haven't. You know, forgiving those who have harmed us is a very difficult thing, and it's got deep roots. The Bible speaks in Hebrews 12 about a root of bitterness.

It develops roots very quickly. Think of the people who have harmed you, and really radically pull out every root, otherwise you'll destroy yourself. A root of bitterness can defile you and defile many people.

Get it out. Throw it away. In the days when you're strong, not when you're on your deathbed, you'll be too weak to do anything then.

This is the lesson we can learn from David's example here. So I thank God that the Word of God is very honest. It's very sad that David dies like that.

And then we read further about Solomon, that very soon, verse chapter 3, one of the first things written about Solomon. So Solomon kills Shimei. You know, it says, first of all, he obeys David.

In fact, Solomon began his reign by first of all killing Adonijah, the other man who wanted to be king, verse 19-27. And next, killing Joab, who was the commander of David's army, verse 28-35, and he was also his own cousin. Joab was his own first cousin.

He killed him because David told him to do that. And then verse 36, onwards to 46, he kills Shimei. So he deals with all those things.

He starts his reign with killing these poor people. Okay. And then the next thing, and the king said to Shimei, verse 44-46, you know all the evil which you did in your heart, it will return to your head, but I, King Solomon, will be blessed.

Well, I don't know about that. Anyway, in chapter 3, the next thing we read is Solomon formed a marriage alliance. If only David had spent his time giving him some advice on marriage, instead of telling him to take revenge, the story may have been a little different.

What sort of advice do you give your children? What are the things which are most important? Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David, and he finished building his own house, and the wall around Jerusalem, and the people were still sacrificing in the high places. But Solomon loved the Lord. This is a contradiction.

It says here, Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father, verse 3, except that he sacrificed and burned incense in the high places. This is how some people love the Lord. There is a lot of external love for the Lord, but in their private life, they are doing certain things which are not righteous, certain things which are wrong, and those are the things that finally destroy them, and that's what finally destroyed Solomon.

He was not transparent, to and fro. There are a lot of Christian workers like that. Outwardly, they're very zealous, they're doing this, that, and the other for the Lord, but in their private life, somewhere, some little area, some financial transaction, they're not straightforward, they're not righteous, finally that becomes like a big bomb and explodes and destroys them.

Learn warnings from all these examples. But God was good to Solomon, and God is good to many of us, even though he sees these little things, hoping that we will change. And the Lord appeared to Solomon one night, verse 5, chapter 3, verse 5, and the Lord asked him, what do you want? Whatever you want, give it to me, I'll give it to you.

And Solomon said, verse 9, give me an understanding heart, give me largeness of heart to take in all of God's people. That's what God gave him, finally. Give me a heart to judge your people, to discern between good and evil, because it's so difficult to judge.

And the Lord was so happy when he asked for that. He said, because you didn't ask, verse 11, for a long life, or for riches, or for the life of your enemies, I have given you a wise and a discerning heart, so that, verse 12, no one will be, was like you before you, and no one will arise after you like you. I've also given you riches and honor, and there'll be no king like you were, like you.

Now, that teaches us one thing. You know, the great need for us today in leadership, as I said the other day, discernment. And only God can give it to us.

Lord, give me discernment. What is the true state of these brothers in my church? What is the true state of the people in my church? Is this man whom I'm appointing as a deputy leader in the church, is he a godly person? Give me discernment. It's because of lack of discernment that a lot of Christian leaders appoint wrong people as their assistants.

The great need is for discernment, and here we read that only God can give it. And God does give it. A wise and a discerning heart is the great need of our time.

And Solomon got it for asking, for the asking. Why can't you and I get it for the asking? Doesn't God love us in the new covenant, and doesn't he have a burden for us, our building the church, more than he had for Solomon ruling Israel? He certainly does. And we see this wonderful example of his judgment in verses 16 to 28.

There was these two women who were prostitutes standing before him for judgment one day, and one woman says, you know, both of us were in the same house, and we both had children born. And the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth, verse 18. Only two of us were there.

And at night this woman rolled over her child, and it died, and she arose in the middle of the night, verse 20, and took my child and put it there, and put her child there in front of me. And when I rose in the morning, I found my child was dead. And the other woman said, no, my son is living, yours the dead one, you're telling a lie.

Now how do you decide in a situation like this? And there's where God gave Solomon wisdom. He said, what do you say? You both claim to the child. Okay, the king said, get me a big sword.

We will divide the child into two, this living child. Each of you can have half. And the woman whose child it really was, she loved that child.

She said, no, please, don't kill it. Give it to her. But the other woman said, no, kill it.

You'll have half, I'll have half. And immediately you know who is the true mother, right? What wisdom. The king said, give the child to the first woman.

And all Israel heard of that judgment, verse 28, and they feared the king because they saw God had given them wisdom. Now, how do we apply this today to a situation? Maybe you're working in a church and somebody wants to split it into two. And you say, yes, split it.

You have half, I'll have half. Are you the true mother? You're not. The true mother will say, no, please don't divide the church.

Let me pull out. You have the church to yourself. That's the one God sees.

Don't go into a church to split it. Pull out. Even if it's your child.

People are blessed through your ministry. Your child. Somebody lays claim to it.

Don't fight. God wants you to have it. He will kill the other woman and give you the child.

Don't worry. God can do that. But don't divide the child and cut it into two and say, you have half, I have half.

Go somewhere else. That's what I've done. I've disagreed sometimes with different churches.

I don't sit there and split it. I go somewhere else and I say, Lord, let me start from the beginning. Let me have another child instead of fighting over that one.

That's the application of that story for us today. And we read in chapter four in verse 29 that God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment. Oh, I wish that could be said about all of us.

And remember, Solomon was a very young man. And you young people can ask God to give you wisdom and discernment, not just knowledge, wisdom and breadth of mind or largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore, which means a large heart that could take in all of God's people. I believe that's the great need in our time.

Here is a brother who belongs to another denomination who disagrees with me on the form of baptism or disagrees with me on speaking in tongues. Never mind. God has accepted him.

Lord, give me the largeness of heart to accept that brother as my brother, even though he doesn't work with me, even though he doesn't agree with me in certain doctrines. I want largeness of heart to accept all of God's people. In other words, I want to accept those whom God accepts.

Sometimes you can reject a person because they have some, they have a certain conviction on something which is different from yours. Can you accept that person? I remember once when a sister came to me for baptism and she was wearing ornaments. I have a conviction that ornaments should not be worn.

That's God's teaching in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3. But here was this sister with ornaments. And the Lord said one word to my heart, have I accepted her? And I said, yes, Lord, you'll accept her. I know that she's already born again, but I had spoken to her.

And the Lord said to me, how can you reject one whom I accepted? I will not reject her. I baptized her with ornaments and everything. And she's still wearing it today.

And I said, that's not my business to judge her. I will accept people whom God has accepted, even if their convictions are different from mine on small things or big things. Are they born again? Has God accepted them? Now, if God has not accepted them, it's different.

Then I still love them as a neighbor, as a friend, but I cannot accept them into the fellowship of the church. But when God has accepted them, I cannot cut them off just because in some area they don't have light

where I may have light. I remember once in one matter, the Lord said to me, how long did you take to come to this understanding? So many years.

Why can't you meditation with that person? That also a little time to come to that understanding. We all need largeness of heart. When we are young, we are narrow minded, narrow hearted.

We accept only people who agree with us in every little detail. I was like that when I was young. I'm ashamed to say that, but I was like that.

One of the many foolish things I did. But as I've grown older and gotten to know the Lord better, I've discovered that I need to have largeness of heart to accept everyone. Now I want to see, I want you to see here in chapter six and chapter seven, how he built the temple.

I don't want to go into all the details of that. A lot of details given there about how he built the temple. I just want to find out one thing.

Chapter six, verse 38, the last part, it says he took seven years to build the temple. Chapter six, 38, the last sentence. And the next sentence, chapter seven, verse one says he took 13 years to build his own house.

So you know which direction he's going. Seven years to build the temple and 13 years to build his own house. So that's a pretty good description of how it is with a lot of people who serve the Lord today.

Seven years for the Lord to build his house and 13 years to build my house. In other words, their primary, it's not that they don't do the Lord's work. They do the Lord's work, but their primary interest is their own house and their own work.

And God is secondary. Thirteen to seven. That's about the proportion.

Two-thirds for myself and one-third for the Lord, in terms of my interest. And these are little indications how he quickly joined up with Pharaoh's, married off Pharaoh's daughter and started his ministry by killing people. And he could have disagreed with his father.

He could have told his, he could have said, well, my father told me to kill Shimei and Joab, but I don't feel free about doing that. And I don't do it. It would have been all right, but he did it.

He went and married Pharaoh's daughter. He went and spent 13 years building his house. Even though God had given him wisdom, the drifting had already started very right at the beginning.

Sometimes I've seen in the servant of God, the drift towards the world is there almost at the beginning. They're seeking their own right from the time they start serving the Lord. And then you see them years later, it's all developed in that way.

But once the temple was built, we read that the glory of the Lord filled that house in chapter eight, verse 10. It was like the old days of the tabernacle. When Moses built the tabernacle exactly according to the pattern, it says the glory of the Lord filled the house.

Now the temple, which was built in the same pattern as the tabernacle with the altar and the labor and the holy place and the most holy place, much bigger, much more grand. And the glory of the Lord filled it again. And Solomon prayed a wonderful prayer there in chapter eight, verse 22 onwards.

Yeah, there were a lot of good things in Solomon, but it was mixed. Here he was a very spiritual man out in front and in private, he had many wives and so on. I think it says somewhere that he had 300 wives and 700 concubines.

I don't know how he managed with all of those. But those are the things, they led his heart away from the Lord. And finally he finished building his house and his fame spread all over.

And the Lord spoke to him again. We read in chapter nine, verse three. And the Lord said to him, appeared to him a second time in chapter nine, verse two and said to him, I've heard your prayer and I've consecrated this house.

And verse four, again, the Lord speaks to him after seeing all this. If you will walk before me as your father, David walked in integrity of heart and uprightness, I will establish your throne and your kingdom forever. But if you were six or your sons turn away, I will cut off Israel verse seven from the land I've given them.

And this house, which you have built will be ruins. Verse eight. And everyone who passes by will hiss verse eight and say, why is the Lord done this? And they will say, because they forsook the Lord, their God.

And that's what happened in the days of Jeremiah, when Babylon king of Babylon came and destroyed that house. But God warned him, don't think that you can live as you like. And I'll just keep on blessing you.

And the Lord warns us when he sees us going astray. We have already started going astray. He warns us.

He wants us. He wants us through his servants. He wants us through a message, take heed to the warnings of the Lord, but Solomon did not.

In chapter 10, we read to the queen of Sheba coming and meeting Solomon because she heard of his wonderful wisdom. In chapter 11, we read in verse one, Solomon loved many foreign women, daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, Hittite women. And he had, here it is, sorry, I got it wrong.

Verse three, he had not 300 wives, 700 wives, verse three and 300 concubines. It was the other way around. And his wives turned his heart away from the Lord.

His heart was turned away after other gods and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord. And Solomon went after the goddess, verse five of the Sidonians and Milcom did detestable idol. And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And Solomon built a high place for this idol, verse seven. And he did for his foreign wives. He burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

How a woman can lead a man completely astray from God. It's not only Samson and Delilah, it is Solomon and all his foreign wives. That's why when you get married, don't just look for a pretty face and marry her.

See whether she's got a godly heart. Far more important in the long run, that pretty face can run your life and destroy it. A godly heart, a godly woman will do you good all the days of your life.

Warnings in scripture, I don't know whether you will take heed to them. There are a lot of people who listen to such messages. And when it comes to the time of their marriage, they still go and plump for some worldly type of girl.

Don't ever do that. And sisters, look for a godly man to be your husband. Don't just kneel to your parents when they suggest some unconverted person.

Your husband can lead you astray. You worship idols, maybe not physical idols, but the idols of money and power and pleasure in this world. And when he went away like that, God warned, told him, well, the Lord was angry with Solomon, verse 9. And he said to Solomon, because you've done this, I'm going to split your kingdom.

But because of your father, David, he was a godly man. Verse 12, I will not do it in your lifetime. You see, because of the godliness of the father, how much the children are bled.

And God raised up enemies against Solomon, verse 14, to trouble him. But Solomon did not repent. When Jeroboam was, he feared that Jeroboam was going to rebel against the king, verse 26 of chapter 11, Solomon tried to put Jeroboam to death, verse 40.

And Jeroboam ran away. He later on became the king of the divided kingdom. And Solomon died, verse 43.

But before he died, he wrote three books. Scripture, Proverbs, one of the finest books in the Old Testament. It's a new covenant book in the Old Covenant.

Amazing book. I would advise all young people to read Proverbs regularly, frequently. It's got 31 chapters.

You read one chapter a day, it will preserve you every month. Try and read it. It's a very, very good book, written by Solomon.

Ecclesiastes warns us of the dangers of worldly wisdom. Song of Solomon, a wonderful picture of our devotion to Jesus Christ. A man who wrote three books of the Bible finally went to hell.

Isn't that amazing? Do you think that every preacher who stands up and preaches wonderful anointed messages is going to heaven? A man who wrote scripture went to hell. I've said that in many places and people have come and asked me, how do you know Solomon went to hell? I say, let me take a biography of any godly man in the world. And if there are two biographies written of that man, like of Solomon, in Kings and in Chronicles, and it tells about how that man started off well and he backslid terribly in his life.

And if both those biographies, I'm talking about a secular biography of the world, concludes without mentioning anything about his repentance, I would conclude that that man died unrepentant. If Solomon had repented, the Holy Spirit would have written it that towards the end of his life, he repented and he turned to the Lord. It's not mentioned there at all.

Manasseh was a worse king than Solomon. He did terrible evil in the sight of the Lord for many, many years. I think he reigned even longer than Solomon.

But in the end of his life, he reckoned with, but towards the end of his life, he repented. Why is it we are so keen on sending Solomon to heaven? It's because we think that if we serve the Lord, he will definitely take us to heaven. Many will come to Jesus in the last day and say, Lord, we cast out demons in your name,

we prophesy in your name, we heal the sick.

And Jesus will say, depart from me. Solomon will say, I wrote scripture in your name. The Lord will say, depart from me.

See, I preached in your name. So what? I prophesied in your name. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity.

Let that be a warning to you that like Paul said, I can preach to others and be disqualified myself. 1 Corinthians 9 28. Solomon wrote books and he went to hell.

Let that be a warning to you. And then we read in chapter 12 onwards till the end of 1 Kings about the divided kingdom. I just want to show you one thing about Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who after Solomon died, he became the king.

And some of the people came to Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12 and said in 12.4, your father has made our yoke very hard. Now, please lighten our yoke. That means Solomon was a very hard king.

He was not like David. He was a hard king. And the king said, OK, come back after three days and I'll tell you what to do.

And after three days, during those three days, verse 6, King Rehoboam consulted with the elders in the church, in the kingdom, and the elders said, be kind to them and they will serve you happily forever. And then he consulted with the young people. You know, we have two options.

We consult with the older people and we consult with the younger people. And he consulted with the younger people and the younger people said, tell them, did my father, was he heavy on you? I'm going to be heavier. My little finger is going to be thicker than my father's loins.

Verse 10. If my father disciplined you, verse 11, with whips, I will discipline you with scorpions. And who do you think he listened to? Like all stupid young people, they listen to the young people instead of the older people.

They don't listen to the wisdom of elders. They listen to the younger people with their dreams. And so when the people came back on the third day, the king answered according to the advice of the younger people.

You read in verse 13 and 14. What was the result? When all Israel saw, verse 16, the king didn't listen to them. They said, we've got nothing to do with you, Solomon.

You can go and run your kingdom as you like. And 10 tribes broke away. What a fool Rehoboam was.

He split the kingdom by his own folly. And Jeroboam became the king and he moved to the northern end. The kingdom got divided with 10 tribes in the north, two tribes Judah and Benjamin in the south.

And Jeroboam, he realized that these people will now go to Jerusalem for their peace. So he made Bilshikah, verse 25, so that people could go there. And he put up an idol there and led people to worship idols.

There's one more thing I want to show you here in chapter 13. And that's the story of a young prophet whom the Lord gave a message saying, go to Jeroboam and give this message. I don't want to go into the details there, but don't eat or drink anything anywhere on the way.

Go like that and come back. Now in the same area, there was an older retired prophet who was a bit disturbed that God was now picking up this younger fellow to prophesy. And he was a bit jealous.

Sometimes older prophets can be a bit jealous of the younger prophets and they can destroy the younger prophets. This is a warning for younger prophets. And the older prophet went to this younger prophet and said, come with me.

Now, first of all, the king told him, come with me, I'll give you food. And the man of God said, no, verse 8, 13, 8, even if you give me half your kingdom, I won't come because the Lord told me not to drink any bread or water. But this old prophet came along and he said to him, verse 15, you come with me and eat bread.

He said, I can't come with you because the Lord told me not to come. But the older prophet told a lie. He said, I'm also a prophet like you, verse 18.

And the Lord told me, be careful of all these prophets who say the Lord told me, you can go astray. That's the warning in this chapter. Some old prophet comes to you and says, this is what the Lord has told me about you.

Don't believe it. God has given you the Holy Spirit. He can tell you directly.

He says, the Lord told me, come to bring him back and eat bread and drink, as if God changed his mind. And so this young man, like a fool, instead of listening to the Lord, listened to the older prophet and went back with him. And the result of that story is that young prophet was killed.

Please learn a lesson that not everybody who comes and says, thus said the Lord in a meeting or in a private consultation room is necessarily speaking from the Lord. Even if he was once upon a time a prophet, he's lost touch with God now. That's a warning.

Now we don't have time to go into all the details of the other little stories that are here in the book of Kings. Let's move on to chapter 17, where we read about Elijah. He was the great prophet there.

And there are a number of things we can learn from Elijah's life, which can be an encouragement for us. Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead. He stands before this wicked King Ahab of the northern kingdom Israel and says, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand.

That's the first thing I want you to notice. These true prophets, they did not fear kings because of one reason. They stood before the Lord.

They said, as the Lord lives before whom I stand, I'm not bothered whether you're a king, you're just a speck of dust before God. I live before God. You know, the great need in India, I tell you with all my heart, this has been my burden for years, is for young men who can be prophets like this.

Not just those who have a lot of Bible knowledge, which is very good. Your study of the Bible is very important. But more than that, in addition to that, you must live before God's face.

You must keep your conscience 100% clear, not 99%. You must humble yourself totally before God. Your face must be in the dust all the time if you want to live before God's face.

That's how Elijah lived. Brothers and sisters, if God can't find men, I hope he finds some of you sisters, who live before God's face and be a voice. You may not stand in the pulpit, but you can influence people from your home.

A voice for God in this day and age in India. That's what God means. I stand before the Lord, and I'm going to tell you what the Lord says.

And the Lord, he was a man who was obedient to what God said as well. The Lord told him, verse 3, go away from here. Turn eastward and go and hide yourself by the brook, hear it, and drink of that brook.

Because it was a time of famine, there was not going to be any rain. And he went and did that. And there it says, the ravens brought him bread and meat, verse 6. And he would drink from the brook.

So what happened was, every morning, maybe at 8 o'clock in the morning, a crow would come with food. And 5 o'clock in the evening, again, another crow would come with food. Amazing.

The crow would bring food, meat, non-vegetarian stuff. I mean, if a crow gave vegetables, that would be a miracle itself. But for a crow to give meat, it's really a miracle.

That's how God provided for Elijah. And what was happening was, gradually, after a few days, Elijah is not waiting for the Lord. He's waiting for the crow.

It's like some servants of the Lord who start out trusting the Lord for their financial needs. After some time, in the first week of the month, they're not looking for the Lord. They're looking for the postman who comes with the money order.

The postman will come in the first week with money order. This is exactly what is happening to Elijah. So you know what God does? One day, the postman gets sick.

The crow doesn't come. And Elijah, because God wants to shake Elijah's dependence on crows and wants him to depend on the Lord. And you are a blessed man.

In one week or one month, no money order comes. And you have to trust the Lord for your needs. I've been through experiences like that, and I thank God for the time when God took away my eyes from crows to him, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, who has said he will supply all my needs according to his riches in glory and prosperity.

The Lord says, okay, you're depending too much on crows now, Elijah. I'll send you somewhere else. I'll still take care of you, but my method changes now.

Go to Zarephath. And Zarephath is outside Israel. And he thought, maybe in Zarephath, there's some rich businessman who will be kind to me and support me.

And when he goes to Zarephath, he finds no rich businessman. He finds a widow who is just about to have her last meal before she dies. And the Lord says, she'll support you.

It's amazing God's ways. God does it because he's a jealous God. He wants you to trust him, not rich businessman, not postman, not crows.

He will take a weak person whom you don't expect to support you, and he will support you. And in that house, he said, well, we were just about to have our last meal and die. And Elijah said, don't be afraid.

Verse 13, make me a little bread cake from this first. And the Lord says, verse 14, the bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty until the day the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth. And it was exactly like that.

The bowl of flour was not exhausted, and the jar of oil did not become empty. It pays to honor God's servants. That widow recognized it that day.

I'm talking about a true servant of God. There are multitudes of false prophets. But if you honor a true prophet of God, you will never lose out.

That you can be sure. Many of God's servants, first of all, many of God's people, first of all, don't know how to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets. And when they do come across one, they don't know how to honor him.

Who is the loser? They themselves. Elijah would have survived anywhere. But because she learned to honor Elijah, she and her son also survived.

That's God's way. In chapter 18, we read about a man called Obadiah. It says here that Obadiah was a man who feared the Lord greatly.

Verse 3 of chapter 18. But he was the manager of Ahab's house. I don't understand how you can fear the Lord greatly and live as a manager of Ahab's palace.

See, there are a lot of people like that. They don't want to pay the price, like Joseph of Arimathea. He didn't want to leave the Jewish Sanhedrin and become a disciple of Jesus.

He wanted to secretly follow Jesus like Nicodemus and also sit and have honor in the Sanhedrin. Okay, they serve some purpose because when Jesus' body had to be taken down, he was a help. So Obadiah also served some purpose.

But these are not the wholehearted ones. He took care of some of the prophets. And this chapter speaks about the challenge that Elijah gave to Israel and said, he said, call everybody to Mount Carmel.

And Elijah told Ahab that in verse 19. And Ahab sent a message, verse 20, and called all the sons of Israel to Mount Carmel. And on Mount Carmel, you know the story, Elijah, he said, he put 12 stones together.

Before that, he told the prophets of Baal, there were 450. And he told them, okay, let's choose two oxen, verse 23. You choose one, I choose the other.

Make an altar, but don't put any fire under it. And you call on your God and ask him to send fire, and I'll call on my God. And the one who answers by fire, let him be the true God.

And all the people said, that's a good idea. Let's do that. And then we read the prophets of Baal began to jump and shout and scream.

Nothing happened. You know, a lot of people who jump and shout and scream are not necessarily spiritual. I hope you know that.

And Elijah, verse 27, mocked at them. He mocked at them. He knew this is an idol.

What are you screaming to? Call out with a loud voice, perhaps he's asleep, or he's gone to the toilet, or he's got to waken him up. That's what he told them. He made fun of them.

He said, what's this? And they cried out with a still louder voice and cut themselves and did all types of things. And it says they raved until from when midday was passed, they raved until about six o'clock in the evening. Nothing happened.

How many hours they prayed. You know, I sometimes think of this when I think of a lot of Christian meetings, people who don't have a good conscience, shouting hallelujahs. Brothers who can't get along with each other, standing in the same church and praising God with loud voices.

Husbands and wives who have a pipe and come to the Sunday morning service and praising God in unknown tongues and all that. Lot of noise, nothing happens. You can shout for six hours, you can have all night prayer meeting, nothing happens.

Because God looks for a good conscience. I always tell people, make sure God has picked up the phone before you continue speaking. If you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not even hear you.

Then Elijah came and he took 12 stones. Now remember, Israel was divided into ten and two, but Elijah took 12 stones. He believed in the unity of the body.

Verse 31, he took 12 stones according to all the tribes of Israel. And some people may have gone angry with that. This fellow is including those two tribes, Judah and Benjamin.

Elijah couldn't care less for that. He made it and he said, and he said, just to prove to you, there's no secret fire underneath. He said, pour water on it.

Four pitches. Do it a second time. Do it a third time.

12 pitches of water. And then he prayed. He didn't have to pray long, less than a minute.

Oh Lord, God, answer me. Let people know that I'm your servant and bring the, turn the hearts of these people back again. And fire came.

That's a true servant of God. And then Elijah told Ahab, okay, now there's going to be rain. There wasn't rain for all these years.

And he said, go. And Elijah went up to the mountaintop and he began to pray. And he crouched on the earth and put his face between his knees.

Verse 42. And he prayed and he sent his servant, see if there's any rain. No rain.

And he again sent his servant seven times. Then he said, there's a cloud. It speaks of persistence in prayer.

That's what we read in James. Elijah was a man of light passions like us, but he prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed. And the rain came.

He prayed and the heavens were closed and he prayed and prayed and prayed. He didn't give up until the rain came. Tremendous example for us of persistence in prayer, a man of light passions.

And then we read that he got up after that. And with all that exhaustion, he ran six miles in front of the chariot in verse 46. And he ran faster than the horses of Ahab and reached Israel before Ahab did.

Supernatural power. Now one would think that he should be so excited at this time, but he wasn't. We read here that Jezebel, when she heard what happened, and by the way, he killed all the other false prophets, 450 of them, just killed all of them over there, 850 killed them, made Israel worship God, did such a tremendous work.

And when Jezebel heard that all these agents of hers, the false prophets were killed, she got very angry. And she said, I'm going to chop off Elijah's head and sent the message to him. And this mighty prophet gets scared.

He didn't get scared of 850 prophets. He got scared of one woman. See, isn't it good that the Bible tells us honestly the weaknesses of its greatest men? I praise God for that.

God did not pick up supermen. He picked up ordinary men. He was exhausted.

He had lived through famine for three and a half years. He was exhausted there in Mount Carmel. And sometimes that can happen.

We can be discouraged. He was discouraged. He ran once again.

And he was exhausted and he laid down under a juniper tree, chapter 19, verse 5, and an angel came and an angel did not give him a message. The angel gave him food. Sometimes what a servant of God needs is food and sleep.

And he slept again. And he woke up a second time. Again, the angel, verse 8, did not give him a message.

He gave him food. God is very down to earth and practical in the way he deals with us. Sometimes we become super spiritual.

We think what people need is exhortation. Perhaps what they need is a little encouragement, a little food, a little gift. And that may encourage them more than any amount of servants.

We need wisdom. And he goes before God and says, Lord, verse 10, I've been zealous for you and now I alone am left. He was concerned that God's name is not being glorified.

And the Lord says, okay, you don't realize I've already prepared somebody to be the next prophet after you. That's Elisha. On your way, you must anoint him.

Verse 16, Elisha to be prophet after you. And there are still 7,000 people in verse 18 in Israel who have not bowed to Beal. But there was a difference between those 7,000 and Elijah.

Those 7,000 were people who did not bow to Beal, correct? But they could not bring down fire from heaven. It's one man who brought fire from heaven. This to me pictures two types of believers.

7,000 people who don't bow to idols, don't smoke, don't drink, don't do bad things. But they can't bring the fire down. One prophet is worth more than all these 7,000 believers.

Please remember that. God wants prophets in our land. And then we read about Naboth's vineyard in verse 21.

Ahab was coveting Naboth's vineyard and Naboth said no. And Jezebel, the wicked woman, schemes to kill Naboth and get the vineyard. And again, the prophet Elijah goes to Ahab and says, you are the man.

God's going to judge you for killing Naboth. He was a fearless prophet. The dogs will lick your blood, he says.

And Ahab gets scared and he tears his clothes, verse 27. And God says to Elijah, verse 29, do you see how Ahab has humbled himself? Okay. It will not happen in his days.

See, even a man like Ahab, when he humbled himself, God took notice of it because he teaches us one thing. God values humility greatly. The last chapter, 1 Kings 22, is about the foolish way in which Jehoshaphat joined up with Ahab in a battle and almost lost his life.

Even though a prophet called Micaiah came there and said all these false prophets are saying something wrong, the Lord says you should not go into this battle. They locked him up in a prison and Ahab was killed. And just like it says, the dogs licked his blood.

So we see the book of Kings begins with David ruling a united Israel and ends with a divided kingdom and Ahab and a compromising Jehoshaphat, no longer listening to the prophets. That's been the story in many, many churches. But if God can find prophets, that trend can be changed.

Let's pray.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/dvIKhZd440s.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/through-the-bible-1-kings/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net