

A Lamp in Jerusalem **1 Kings 14:21-16:34**

Occasionally you hear truth in strange places. In an episode of *The Simpson's*, Homer said of the Bible, "All these people are a mess except this one guy" (Ht: Chandler). Yes, indeed. The Bible shows us that we need a Savior. Even the best of men fail. Noah was a righteous man, who walked with God, but after God preserves him through the flood by grace, he gets drunk and passes out in his tent! Abraham lies about his wife, claiming she was his sister putting her in a vulnerable position with Abimelech. Jacob? His name means "cheater." Moses' temper drove him to kill an Egyptian. Peter cut a guys ear off, and denied Jesus. What about the men who wrote the Bible? They were sinners (and some were murderers!): Moses, David, Solomon, and Paul.

This reminds us that God can save and use anyone. This also reminds us to not put our ultimate hope in mere mortals. People will disappoint you. We all have feet of clay. Yes, Homer Simpson got it right, "All these people are a mess ... except this one guy" and that guy is Jesus.

In the book of Kings, we see this reality lived out. Many of the individuals in Kings are quite literally "a mess." But a promised King is coming, who will keep God's law perfectly. What makes Kings from being a depressing book is the promise that God is going to preserve a remnant, and this ultimate Son of David will come and reign forever. God will preserve "a lamp in Jerusalem" (11:36; 15:4). In this passage of Scripture, we are reminded of this promise.

I could entitle the message "Eight Wicked Kings and One Mostly Good King" or "A Really Bad Baseball Team" (or the Astros). We basically have a description of nine rulers, three in Judah and six in Israel. One of them, Asa, stands out as a mostly good example. Ahab is the finally batter in the line-up, and like the pitcher, he is the worst hitter. Here is the batting order:

3 Kings of Judah (Southern Kingdom):

- Rehoboam (14:21-31)
- Abijam (15:1-8)
- Asa (15:9-24)

6 Kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom):

- Nadab (15:25-31)
- Baasha (15:33-16:7)
- Elah (16:8-10)
- Zimri (16:10-20)

- Omri (16:21-28)
- Ahab (16:29-34)

The writer of Kings follows a pretty consistent pattern describing these kings. It is sort of like a Wikipedia page. We are given the identity of the king, the length of their reign, their relationship to the king in the other kingdom, the identity of the king's mother (in the case of Judah's kings), occasionally an explanation of the divine point of view, a statement of death, and recommendations for further study.

The reign of the three Judean kings cover about 60 years (930BC-870BC). Thus, we have a brief survey of many kings. We find two more sections in Kings appears like this, a long list of kings covering a lot of years, recording God's dealings with his people (2 Kings 8:16-13:25; 2 Kings 14:1-17:6).

After explaining the later part of Rehoboam's reign, and the short reign of Abijam, the writer explains the very long reign of Asa. His reign was long, and he brought stability. As a whole, the Southern kingdom of Judah was more stable – both inwardly and internationally – than the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It certainly was not honorable in every way, but it was more stable. The Northern Kingdom involved more idolatry and was exposed to other threatening nations, including Assyria. But the most important detail recorded by the author is God's promise made to David. Other matters are important, but this is most important. David set an example (albeit an imperfect one), and God made a promise to him. The other kings are compared to him. How will each King respond to God's covenant? This question lingers throughout the narrative.

The overall thrust of my application today is that we have a lot of lessons we can learn as we observe nine kings (especially the lesson to not waste your life on things that do not matter), but we have one overarching word of hope: God will preserve a lamp in Jerusalem. This should encourage us. God was and is faithful. Jesus came. He came to live and die and rise for sinners, and he forever reigns as our King. So, let us learn from these nine kings, and lest us worship and give ourselves wholeheartedly to the King of Kings.

To help us try to remember a significant detail about each king, I have given a nickname or a tag line to each one. The author has been talking about Jeroboam, but switches back to Judah in 14:21, but then he switches back to Israel's rulers. It is sort of like the MLB network that goes back and forth from game to game.

KINGS OF JUDAH (1 Kings 14:21-15:24)

#1: Rehoboam - "The Conformer" (14:21-31)

After a description of his dad, his age, and his seventeen-year reign, we read of his father's folly, namely, his marriage to Naamah the Ammonite. The writer of Kings finds this so important that he bookends this section with a note about this Ammonite mother (14:31). Bookends are significant in the Bible. They provide a lens by which we can read everything in the middle. Why is it that Rehoboam conformed to the culture and began to worship idols? It was partially due to the influence of mother, whom Solomon should have never married in the first place.

Rehoboam's folly illustrates how not to answer the two most important questions in life: (1) Who is my God? and (2) Who is my spouse? Concerning the first, he went the way of idolatry. Rehoboam did not have to follow his mother, but he did. We will see through all of these kings that they have a choice to make. He made the wrong choice. The chronicler puts the blame on Rehoboam saying, "He did not set his heart to seek the Lord" (2 Chron 12:14). In his evil, Rehoboam did not stunt the idolatry, but made matters worse. The idolatry introduced by Solomon and his foreign wives gets worse in Rehoboam's reign.

Concerning marriage, we see the effects of his father's stupid decision. This is an important note for all who are going to get married. Remember guys, your wife will raise your kids! Make sure you marry the right lady. I have this talk with my sons all the time!

Next, we read about the entire community of Israel. The writer says, "all of Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (22a). Even though we are examining kings, the people of God remain in view. They provoked God to "jealousy." Modern readers may have trouble with this concept of jealousy. But this is holy jealousy. God is not careless about his people. Like a husband who wants to protect his wife with a righteous jealousy, God wants to protect his people. God is jealous for his bride and jealous for his glory.

The writer says that the evil done by the nation was "more than all that their fathers had done" (22b). It is a dark day in Israel. The writer then outlines some of the dark practices: "they built high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree" (23), and "there were also "male cult prostitutes in the land" (24a). High places were altars to pagan deities, often located high on hilltops. They also put up Asherah poles, which were wooden representations of the female deity. Such idols were supposed to be destroyed (cf., Deut 12:3-4). Asherah was often seen as the partner of the male god, Baal (more on Baal in 1 Kings 17), giving an obvious sexual message. In light of the sexual nature of his cult, the presence of prostitutes was common at the shrines. Worshipers would fulfill their obligations to the fertility gods

(House, 194). The reference to “male cult prostitutes” means that ritual practices of sodomy were practiced (cf., Deut 23:17).

These practices were the very reasons why God drove out the other nations in the first place (24b), but now Judah conformed to their practices. Instead of exclusive allegiance to Yahweh, they adopted Canaanite idolatry.

How could this be? What would attract anyone to male cult prostitution? Obviously, we are sinful people, and as passions get perverted, but what we should note here is that the reason has to do with Rehoboam conforming to surrounding culture. Paul says, “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world” (Rom 12:2) and John says “Do not love the world” (1 John 2:15). Just because culture deems something acceptable does not mean God approves of it. Some say, “We have progressed. The Bible was written a long time ago.” No, God was opposed to these sinful practices then, and now.

The bottom line is God’s people are to live differently. Jesus said that we are “the salt of the earth” and we are no good if we lose our “saltiness” (Matt 5:13). We are all susceptible to popular sins of the culture, not just these idolatrous practices, like greed, racism, and laziness. But we are to be different. “Stay salty, my friend.”

In verses 25-28, notice how idolatry led to political problems. The nation encounters an enemy from Egypt: Shishak. The chronicler says that this attack was because Rehoboam “abandoned the law of the Lord,” which gets emphasized by the prophet Shemaiah (2 Chron 12:1; 5). Then the chronicler says that the people humbled themselves and God promised to grant them “some deliverance” (2 Chron 12:6-7). But Rehoboam had to give up treasures from the temple to pay him off. The king replaced them with bronze shields, which typifies the fading splendor of the nation.

Besides the idolatry, and the political weakness, we also read of the lack of peace established by Rehoboam. Unlike David, he could not defeat his enemies, and unlike Solomon he could not establish peace (House, 195). They were at war with Jeroboam “continually” (30a). In every way, the kingdom was in decline because Rehoboam “did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord” (2 Chron 12:14).

But even in the midst of decline, it says, “Abijam reigned in his place” (30b). You can read about this genealogy in Matthew’s gospel, as he introduces Jesus (Matt 1:7-8). In the midst of darkness, God preserves a light. A lamp continues to burn in Jerusalem.

#2: Abijam - "A Lamp for David's Sake" (15:1-8)

In the eighteenth year of Jereboam's rule, we read that Abijam reigned in Judah, and he apparently married within the faith. The writer says he married "Maacah the daughter of Abishalom [Absalom]" (1 Kings 15:1). However, he "walked in all the sins of his father" (2a). What does this mean? It means that his "heart was not wholly true to the Lord, as the heart of David his father" (2b).

God is after the heart. He wants you to be true to him. Like the other kings, he gets compared to David, and the writer says that he falls short. In 2 Chronicles 13, we read a bit more positive story about him. He opposed Jeroboam in Ephraim because they "relied on Lord" (2 Chron 13:14). Then he took "Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephron, with their surrounding villages" (13:19). Compared to David, he was less faithful. Compared to Jeroboam, he was better. Yet, the chronicler still agrees with the assessment in Kings since he too notes the idolatrous practice; he simply neglects to give an explicit comment on his personal godliness.

He does provide some relief from the north, but he still walked in the sins of his father. Why does God not wipe him out? The answer is given in verse 4-5. "Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him" (4; cf., 1 Kings 11:36; 2 Kings 8:19).

Lamps are common symbols of continuing God's presence (cf., 1 Sam 3:3), and of the continuity of a ruler (cf., 2 Sam 21:17; also of ancient Near East practice). A burning coal symbolizes family continuity (cf., 2 Sam 14:7). Today, one can visit the "eternal flame" at Arlington cemetery, commemorating John F. Kennedy. In our homes, the presence of light means someone is home. In Psalm 132:17, God promises to "set up a lamp for my anointed one." All of these images provide a stunning backdrop to statements made in Revelation, "the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev 21:23) (see Olley, 155).

The Lord is gracious, and the Lord keeps his promises. God promised to continue David's dynasty. This David was not perfect, for he sinned in "the matter of Uriah the Hittite" but he never turned to idols. Though the kings do not keep their promises, God does. Sacrifices continue to be offered for sins. Lambs are slaughtered. Atonement is provided. The light continues to burn, as all of this prepares the way for the Savior. Despite the sins of these kings, God was faithful, and now consequently, we have forgiveness of sins.

#3: Asa - "A Seeker of the Lord (for the Majority of his Life)" (15:9-14)

The writer tells of Asa's unusually long reign (forty-one years), and presents this king as a breathe of fresh air. Rehoboam was a confirmer, but Asa was a reformer. We read of his personal reformation, as the writer says, "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done" (15:11). Only Hezekiah and Josiah receive higher praise than Asa.

This is what matters in life: personal godliness. Are you living before the eyes of God with loving faithfulness to him? You see, Asa made a choice to live differently from his fathers. Perhaps you grew up in a hard family. Does not let that keep you from living for the glory of God! Kings does not promote fatalism. God is sovereign, but you are responsible. McCheyne said, "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness."

The next positive statement refers to his worship reform. Asa puts away the "male cult prostitutes" and "the idols" that existed previously (12). Asa does physically what we must do spiritually, that is, destroy the idols of our hearts. He so opposes Asherah poles so much that he gets rid of his grandmother, Maacah, "the queen mother" (13a) because she possessed one of these idols. Asa destroyed it. Thus Asa's reform cost him. And following Jesus will cost us too. You might have to break ties with family members in order to follow Jesus (cf., Luke 12). While you should be gracious and patient with your family, you must realize that not everyone will approve of you walking in the ways of Christ.

He also collects some gold and silver for the temple (15). He gives attention to this holy place.

The only negative point is that he did not remove the high places completely, indicating some inconsistency (14a). However, in 2 Chronicles we read that the high places were destroyed (14:3-5), at least the ones in Judah. It appears that he destroyed them in the southern kingdom, but those in the north still had non-Jerusalem places for worship. (Source) Nevertheless, the text says that his heart was true to the Lord.

The chronicler highlights his spiritual leadership saying that Asa "*commanded Judah to seek the Lord ... and to keep the law and the commandment*" (2 Chron 14:4, my emphasis). Asa points the nation in the right place.

Can I ask you, have you ever been serious about seeking the Lord? If not, follow Asa, and put away the idols, and seek the Lord. James says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). This happened to me in college. I had been around the church growing up, but I did not earnestly seek the Lord until then. Perhaps

you have some religious practices, but no living relationship with the God of the Bible. Let me urge you to follow this model of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We also read of another positive example of Asa's leadership when Zerah the Ethiopian came against him with his massive army, we read of the spiritual leadership of Asa. The chronicler writes that Asa "cried to the Lord his God ... 'Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, in and your name we have come against this multitude....'" (2 Chron 14:11). As a result, "the Lord defeated the Ethiopians" (12). Asa and his men pursued them until the Ethiopians fell (a miracle that you could exhaust Ethiopian runners!) (13).

Additionally, the chronicler notes that a prophet Azariah spoke to Asa saying, "If you seek him [the Lord], he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron 15:2). Asa responded to this message positively (8-18).

Despite the positive lessons we learn from Asa, we also learn a negative example. Asa falls later in life due to unbelief. Against the Ethiopians, he trusted in God, not human methods, and won the victory. But then we read of the sad account of Asa paying Syria's Ben-Hadad to break his covenant with Israel's Baasha, in order to protect Judah from Baasha's threat (1 Kings 15:16-24). When the pressure was on, he abandoned his convictions and made a terrible compromise.

On a purely human level, this looks like a military genius at work. Baasha had fortified Ramah, a strategic economic area just north of Jerusalem, and in response, Asa pays off the greedy Ben-Hadad with treasuries from the temple. As a result of Syria's attack on Israel's cities, Baasha leaves, and then Asa's people cart off all of the construction materials Baasha left behind, using these items to fortify Geba and Mizpah! Great move, right? Wrong. It may look good on paper, but in Chronicles, we read of how Hanani, the seer, rebuking Asa, saying,

Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. (2 Chron 16:7b-8).

The seer then describes how God is looking for those whose hearts are "blameless before him" (9). As a result of the stinging rebuke, Asa gets "angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison" and "Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time" (10). Finally, his final years included more tragedy as we read that he was

“diseased in his feet” and even with his disease, “he did not seek the Lord but sought help from the physicians” (12b). This verse is not a proof text to argue against using doctors; it is simply a statement of Asa’s lack of trust in God in his final years.

Asa, the wonderful king, fails to trust in God, turns on the seer, inflicts cruelties, and does not seek the Lord. What a warning to us! A person may seek the Lord, and command others to seek the Lord for many years, but then fall at the end of life. God is looking for “a long obedience in the same direction” (Eugene Peterson). Every day, we must begin afresh with God, repenting of sin, reading his word, and asking for his help. Let us pursue a life of faithfulness. We also learn that success in the eyes of the world may be unfaithfulness to God. Asa won a victory but did not do so the way God desired.

Nevertheless, Asa did slow the slide of Judah, and we read that his son Jehoshaphat reigned in his place (1 King 15:24). We will study his reign later in 1 Kings 22:41. God continues to keep the light burning in Jerusalem.

ISRAEL'S KINGS (15:25-16:34)

As we shift to the Northern Kingdom, we begin to note a lot of changes in leadership. We also see civil strife, darkness, and political conspiracies. In the mist of this, we read of the prophetic word frequently, old and new predictions coming true (House, 198). With the prophetic word, we see how God is in control of history. Beginning with Nadab, and ending with Ahab, we see that all of the northern kings are evil.

#4: Nadab - “Like His Bad Dad” (15:25-32)

I give Nadab this title because the writer says that the new king did evil in the sight of the Lord, and “walked in the ways of his father” (26). He has an opportunity to lead a reformation, but instead continues in the sins of his father.

The writer records that while he was besieging Gibbethon, Baasha, who conspired against him, struck down Nadab (15:27). Baasha goes on to wipe out the house of Jeroboam, which fulfilled the word of the prophet “Ahijah the Shilonite” (29). Thus, the sins of Jeroboam affected his descendants. House rightly notes, “Persons who lead a nation to embrace empty religious and ethical systems often create an environment of violence, greed, and oppression” (198).

The path to the throne does not involve conspiracy and murder. We know that God exalts some and puts down others. Jesus humbled himself and God the Father exalted him.

#5: Baasha - “The Basher” (15:33-16:7)

Baasha rules for twenty-four years after he assassinates Nadab. He is not the only king that comes into power by killing another king. He is the first king to reign in Tirzah (although previously mentioned as Jeroboam’s base, 14:17). It remained the capital until Omri moved to Samaria. It was a place rich with gardens and groves and abundant water. Reference to Tirzah is made in Song of Solomon 6:4, “You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love.” But Baasha “did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam” (34), demonstrating that while some are in the midst of beauty they do not worship the Creator of it. We see plenty examples of this in our own day with people worshiping creation instead of Creator (cf., Rom 1).

In 16:1-4, we read of another prophet. This time it is Jehu. He comes to bring a word against Baasha. He basically says the Lord gave him an opportunity to change things, but he acted like Jeroboam, and consequently, he would share Jeroboam’s fate (16:2-4). It was pretty simple: you live like Jeroboam, you will die like Jeroboam.

In verse 7, a curious statement is made. We read that he will suffer the fate of Jeroboam because of “all the evil done in the eyes of the Lord.” Understandable. But then the writer says “and also because he destroyed it” (the house of Jeroboam). I thought we read that when he took out Nadab and all of Jeroboam’s family that it was “according to the word of the Lord”? (15:29). Was Baasha not acting as an agent of God’s judgment? Yes. We see this tension elsewhere (cf., 1 Kings 21:21-24; 2 Kings 9-10). God accomplishes his purposes through wicked men, but their actions do not remove their moral responsibility. When Peter preached at Pentecost, he said a similar thing; lawless men killed Jesus, yet it happened according to God’s plan (Acts 2:22-23).

The problem with these Jeroboam-like kings was obedience, not information. They could never plead, “I did not know.” God wants his people to obey his word. Simply, childlike obedience to God’s word is what makes a faithful believer.

#6: Elah - “The [Drunken] Frat Boy” (16:8-10)

Still in Asa’s era, we read of another king, Elah, who reigned for two years. He is not viewed positively either. We read that he got drunk at the home of one of his officials, and gets killed by Zimri! Up to this point, we have read nothing about alcohol abuse; so Elah appears to add to the sins of the previous kings.

His drunken stupor took place while Zimri, his servant, was conspiring against him (9a), and apparently while Elah's army was in Philistia (16:15). But Elah was not with his army. He was getting drunk. Zimri struck Elah down and killed him. Thus, Zimri follows Baasha's example of killing to secure the throne. But Nadab died in the context of war, while Elah dies a complete dishonorable death.

Next we read that Zimri went on to kill the house of Baasha (11-14). This too fulfilled prophecy (12). Jehu told Baasha, Elah's father, that his house would be like the house of Jeroboam (7).

A few applications emerge from this story, particularly the sin of *drunkenness* and the problem of *diversion*. Drunkenness is prohibited in Scripture (cf., Eph 5:18), and it is dangerous because too much of it impairs judgment, and too much alcohol is simply wasteful (time, money, energy). In Elah's case, it is even more problematic since kings were to set an example of responsibility and maturity. Instead, Elah is reigning like a frat boy, getting hammered and neglecting his responsibility.

Elah reminds me of what Darrink Patrick calls, a "Ban" (*Church Planter*, 10-12). Patrick describes the problem we have with prolonged adolescence among males in our culture. We have guys who are neither boys nor men. They live suspended between childhood and adulthood, thus he says they are a hybrid of boy and man, a "Ban."

Remember David told the future King Solomon to "show yourself a man" (1 Kings 2:2). We pointed out that what makes a man is obedience to God's Word (cf., 1 Kings 2:3; Ps 1). Elah is not showing himself a man.

Unfortunately, a great number of Bans exist today. We need young men that will grow up, and show themselves a man. We need men who will get serious about Jesus, study the Bible; serve others; keep your pants on; stop looking at porn; fight injustice; serve the poor; and take the gospel to hard places. Young dudes, do not waste your life playing World of War Craft or playing drinking games. You are young only once, but immaturity can last a lifetime.

Finally, before we get self-righteous, let us remember that we also can have our attention diverted away from what is important. For some, the problem may not be with Jake Daniels; but with the New York Jets. I know some who can name starting lineups of their favorite college team for the past ten years, but have never taught their kids the basic doctrines of the faith. Elah gets diverted; let us pray for grace that we can stay focused on the kingdom.

#7: Zimri - "The Week-Long Warrior" (16:10-20)

Zimri reigns for only seven days (15). When the pro-Omri army hears of the assassination of Elah, they declare that Omri, the military leader, should be king (16). Zimri carried out a conspiracy without the army's support, and now he would pay. Omri and the people then besiege Tirzah, and when Zimri sees that the city has been taken, he "burned the king's house over him with fire and died" (18). The writer then tells why he did this: "because of his sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for his sin which he committed, making Israel to sin" (19). He was just as bad as the previous kings.

What is striking about this comment is that God held him just as responsible for not making appropriate changes, even though he reigned only seven days! (Davis, 188). Idolatry should have been dealt with aggressively and immediately. But Zimri, like the other kings, was more interested in power than faithfulness to God.

Another lesson we might draw here is about the fleeting nature of success. Zimri probably thought he was on top of the world, as he washed the blood of Elah off his hands. He had taken out the king, and was reigning in the beautiful land of Tirzah. And he was the king – for seven days. But how fleeting his success was. Our life is a vapor; let us make the most of it.

#8: Omri - "The Seashell Collector" (16:21-28)

Omri was a very important ruler. He reigned for twelve years (23). He had several challenges, like dealing with division in Israel; some were devoted to Tibni. However, Omri takes over after "Tibni died" (22). We do not know how he died. Old age? Illness? Murder? All we know is Tibni had a funeral, and Omri had a coronation (Davis, 189).

Omri also had the challenge of dealing with the ruins of Tirzah, which Zimri burned. We read that he reigned for six years there, but then he "bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver" and called it Samaria, after the name of the previous owner (24). Establishing Samaria as the new capital city of the Northern Kingdom was one of his most significant achievements. It was a strategic place, militarily and economically, overlooking important trade routes. It remained Israel's capital until Assyria plundered it in 722BC.

Unlike the drunken Elah, and the shooting star, Zimri, Omri was a real leader. He brought stability to the North. From a worldly perspective, he was an effective king. Foreign armies were kept out, he gave them the religion they wanted, and made foreign alliances with marriages, and they stopped fighting Judah (House, 203). Outsiders

recognized him as such, for the Assyrian documents refer to Israel as “the land of Omri” (Ibid).

But notice that the biblical writer is unimpressed with his political and military achievements. One can imagine him being praised by the modern media. Surely, he would get book deals and be on magazine covers. But the writer of Kings says, “Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him” (25). He too walked in the ways of Jeroboam (26). The writer would simply put something like this on his tombstone: “He reigned; he bought a hill; he did evil; he was buried.” If you want to know more, watch the documentary. It all amounts to a hill of beans if the leader is not pursuing faithfulness to God.

Davis points out, “The writer is not saying he is ignorant of Omri’s achievements – he is saying they don’t matter” (Davis, 191). “What good is it to gain the world and lose your soul?” (Matt 16:26). At the end of the day, he was playing “trivial pursuit,” wasting his life and his influence. Do not go the way of Omri. Others may admire you, but if you do not love God and neighbor, it does not matter. Assyrians had his name in their books, but his name was not in the Book of Life. Let that serve as a warning to us. What may look like success to others, may actual be a tragedy in the making.

John Piper has a now famous illustration about collecting seashells, which is where I get Omri’s tagline. Piper contrasts the life of a successful American couple with the life of two female missionaries serving in Cameroon. Ruby, over eighty years old, single her whole life, and Laura, a widowed medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, gave their whole lives to make Christ known. Their lives were taken in a car accident. Piper asked, “Was that a tragedy?” Two lives driven by a passion to make Christ known among the poor, even in their old age? Piper says, “No, that is not a tragedy. That is glory. These lives were not wasted. And these lives were not wasted.” He goes on to say, “I will tell you what a tragedy is.” He goes on to describe an article about a couple who took early retirement to move to Florida where they “cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells.” He says, “Picture them before Christ at the great Day of Judgment: “Look, Lord. See my shells.” He says, “That’s a tragedy.” (Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 45-46)

Take a vacation? Yes. Enjoy creation? Of course. Make this your ambition? Absolutely not! Do not waste your life on things that do not matter. Invest in the kingdom. Do not go the way of Omri.

At this point you might be crying, “This is boring!” All of these kings; these confusing names, and these different dates that are impossible to keep track of! Ryken says, “Maybe this is part of the point. These stories of these bad kings show the monotony of idolatry” (429). He adds, “The people who live the most interesting lives are the ones who live for God and not themselves” (Ibid).

#9: Ahab – “The Atrocious King” (16:29-34)

Ahab actually inherits a somewhat stable kingdom. His rule continues for twenty-two years (29). While we do not read of any crazy coups, his reign was atrocious. He was the worst of the kings during Asa’s reign. The writer says that Ahab did more evil than anyone before him (30).

Not only does he walk in the sins of Jeroboam, but he also marries a wicked woman, Jezebel of Tyre. She was a Baal worshiper, whose father’s name was “Ethbaal” (“Baal is with him”). Baal was a very attractive and influential in Israel, as we read about him throughout the Old Testament. Some believed Asherah was his female consort. Baal was known as the god of the storm, who granted fertility. Baal was a popular alternative to Yahweh since people were so dependent on the rain. “Holy prostitutes” were given to worshipers in hopes of bringing about fertility in the land and among people.

Atrocious Ahab sets up an altar for Baal in a temple he built in Samaria. He also serves Baal himself, the first Israelite king to do so. Solomon gave his wives some places to worship; Jeroboam makes altars for bulls; Ahab gives official endorsement to Baal worship. What is more, Jezebel, who wore the pants in the house, had four hundred prophets for Baal. She evangelized for this false god. She also persecuted and killed God’s prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13).

The writer concludes this section by providing an interesting note about the rebuilding of Jericho. A few important notes stand out. First, two children die in the process, either because there was a vile religious practice of child sacrifice, or as an act of judgment. The writer also notes that this happened “in Ahab’s day” implying that he endorsed this vile religious practice, as well as the rebuilding of Jericho as a fortress. This brings us to the second note; namely, Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who rebuilt Jericho (Josh 6:26). The writer refers to this pronouncement in the last half of the verse. Who would ever want to defy God’s word and rebuild it? Ahab, the atrocious king. God promised through Joshua that anyone who sought to rebuild it would lose their children, yet Ahab disregarded this word.

What characterizes Ahab's leadership? It is a total disregard for God and his word. Thus, the stage is set for Elijah, God's prophet in the following chapters to confront him, and exalt the true and living God.

Summary

How can we sum all of this history up? I am not sure! Let me try to do so by simply making two final points of application.

The Sinfulness of Sin. First, recognize that sin has short-term and long-term effects. Sin affects you and others, both now and in the future. It leads you into stupidity and bondage. Sin never sleeps. You cannot put your guard down. You never get to an age where temptation is not a problem. Do not think you can ever reach an age where you can cease from fighting sin. Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and seek the King afresh every day.

The Faithfulness of God. Second, in the mist of the darkness, we can step back and see that God is faithful. Despite the sin, folly, and rebellion we read of in Kings, God kept a lamp in Jerusalem. "All of these people are a mess" – and so are we – "except this one guy": Jesus. Praise God, we have a King who always did right in the eyes of the Father, then died on behalf of we who have done evil in God's sight. There is one way to be saved, forgiven, redeemed, and made part of the eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ, the Son of David. Embrace him as your Lord. Then you can know the power of the resurrection that enables us grow in godliness. We do not have to remain stuck in our own sin, doomed to repeat the sins of our ancestors. Through Christ, by the power of the Spirit, we can be made right with God, and given strength to live a life that matters. So, rejoice in the faithfulness of God, who kept his word, leaving a lamp burning, until Christ came. This King has a title that I do not need to make up: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.