

# Where Did All the Good Kings Go?

*Kingship, Failure, and the God Who Whispers*

1 Kings 3 | 1 Kings 12 | 1 Kings 19

Something in us never stops looking for a good leader. It is not naivety. It is not weakness. It is, if anything, one of the most honest things about us. We were made for a King, and the absence of one — or the presence of a bad one — leaves a wound that doesn't close on its own.

This week's sermon walked through the arc of 1 Kings — from the brilliance of Solomon's early years to the catastrophic stubbornness of Rehoboam to the quiet mercy God shows a burnt-out prophet on a mountain. Together they tell one story: every human king will fail the weight of the crown. And the God who placed the crown on Israel's head in the first place has a different kind of kingship in mind — one that doesn't announce itself with thunder but arrives in a whisper.

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## **01 Solomon: When the Leader Lets You Down**

He starts the way you want a leader to start. Young, newly crowned, overwhelmed by the weight of the role — and his first instinct is to pray. Not for victory. Not for long life. Not for the wealth or military dominance that every other king in the ancient world would have seized. Solomon prays for wisdom to discern between good and evil. To know how to serve the people well. And God, moved by the selflessness of the ask, gives him not only the wisdom but everything else — wealth, honor, a legacy like none before him.

For a moment, it looks like Israel finally has its king. The kingdom flourishes. The temple is built — the house of God that David had always dreamed of but never lived to see. Peace settles over the land. The whole world comes to sit at Solomon's feet and be amazed at what God has done through this man.

And then, slowly, the heart divides.

Seven hundred wives. Three hundred concubines. Political alliances sealed by marriage to women whose gods traveled with them. Not because Solomon stopped believing in Yahweh — he never formally abandoned him — but because what God had given him turned out not to be quite enough. The gifts became the trap. The wealth became the distraction. And the wisest man alive began building temples to gods that demanded the lives of children.

The fall of Solomon is not a story about a particularly bad man. It is a story about what happens when any man, no matter how gifted, carries the full weight of a people's hope on his own heart. The heart cannot hold it. We keep watching our leaders and asking, how did someone so promising end up here? And 1 Kings 11 gives us the most honest answer available: no human heart can sustain what God alone is meant to carry.

*His wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God. —1 Kings 11:4*

## Discussion Questions

### SOLOMON: WHEN THE LEADER LETS YOU DOWN

1. Solomon's fall didn't begin with an obvious rebellion — it began with his heart slowly dividing over years. Where in your own experience have you seen that kind of gradual drift, either in yourself or in someone you looked up to? What does that say about the nature of the human heart?
2. God gave Solomon wisdom, wealth, and honor — and it still wasn't enough. Read 1 Kings 3:12–13 together. What do you think makes it so hard for people — and for us — to receive what God gives and rest in it, rather than reaching for more outside of what he's provided?
3. The sermon pointed out that when we see a leader fail, we often don't just lose trust in them — we project that disappointment onto God. Has that happened to you? What's the difference between being honest with God about that and just walking away from him altogether?

### 02 Rehoboam: Jesus, the True Successor

The people came to Rehoboam with a simple question: will you be different than your father? Solomon had been brilliant and heavy-handed. He had enslaved most of Israel to fund his building projects. They were exhausted. And here was the moment — a new king, a fresh start, a chance to lead differently.

The older advisors told Rehoboam exactly what to do. Serve the people. Speak good words to them. Be selfless, and they will follow you for life. It was the same wisdom Solomon had prayed for at the beginning — and now it was being handed to his son for free.

He threw it away. He listened to his friends instead. His little finger, he told the people, would be thicker than his father's thigh. Where Solomon used whips, he would use scorpions. The inheritance transferred — the name, the throne, the wealth — but the wisdom did not. You cannot bequeath a heart. And so what was already broken became more broken, and the kingdom split in two.

Rehoboam is the picture of every failed succession. The power passes down. The character doesn't. Generation after generation, the chain of broken kings extends — each one inheriting the sin of the one before, each one adding to it, none of them able to break it.

Until Jesus. What Jesus announces in the Gospels is not a better leadership philosophy. It is an entirely different kind of succession. He comes not from a line of men but from the Father — and what he passes on to his people is not political strategy or cultural wisdom but his own Spirit. Ezekiel had promised it centuries before: a new heart, a new spirit, God's own breath placed inside the people he rules. No human king could ever offer that. Jesus offers it as the very terms of his kingdom.

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... I will put my Spirit in you. —Ezekiel 36:26–27*

## Discussion Questions

### REHOBAM: JESUS, THE TRUE SUCCESSOR

4. Rehoboam's advisors gave him exactly the right counsel — serve the people, and they will serve you — and he rejected it. What makes it so difficult to receive wisdom that requires humility? Is there a place in your life right now where you've been given good counsel that you've been reluctant to act on?
5. Ezekiel 36:26–27 promises that God will give a new heart and put his own Spirit within his people — something no human king could ever offer. How does this promise change the way you think about following Jesus compared to following any other kind of leader? Where do you most need that new heart right now?
6. Think about the leaders — political, corporate, even spiritual — that your group has collectively placed hope in over the years. What happened when they disappointed you? And what does it say about us that we keep looking for a king even after being let down? How does Jesus interrupt that cycle rather than just extending it?

### 03 God: The Good King

By the time we reach 1 Kings 19, Elijah has done something extraordinary. He called down fire on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal danced and cut themselves and prayed to nothing — and nothing answered. Elijah prayed once, and the fire fell. The people fell on their faces. Yahweh won.

And then Jezebel sent a message. One message. And Elijah ran.

This is not a story about cowardice. It is a story about what happens when a person has poured out everything they have for God and then watches it seem to make no difference. Elijah is sitting under a juniper tree, asking to die, and the root of his exhaustion is not fear — it is grief. He had played every card he had, and the kingdom hadn't changed. He ran not from Jezebel but from the ache of feeling like it was never going to be enough.

God meets him at Horeb. He sends wind — the kind that splits mountains and breaks rocks apart. Then earthquake. Then fire. The full vocabulary of divine power, everything Israel had associated with God's presence since Sinai. And the text says carefully, deliberately: the Lord was not in the wind. The Lord was not in the earthquake. The Lord was not in the fire.

After the fire: a still, small voice. A low whisper.

This is how God has always ruled. Not in the performance. Not in the spectacle that gets your blood pumping and makes you want to cheer. God's kingship over his people has always been intimate — the kind of voice that doesn't announce itself from a distance but gets close enough to speak into the specific shape of your specific life. We keep wanting a king like all the other kings, loud and obvious and easy to believe in. God keeps offering something smaller and more durable: himself, whispering to hearts that are finally quiet enough to hear.

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in. —Revelation 3:20*

#### Discussion Questions

#### GOD: THE GOOD KING

7. After one of the most dramatic displays of divine power in the Old Testament, Elijah collapses and asks to die — not because the fire failed, but because nothing seemed to change. Have you ever experienced something like this — a moment of real spiritual clarity or victory followed by an unexpected crash? What did that feel like, and how did God meet you in it?

8. God was not in the wind, earthquake, or fire — but in the still small voice. Revelation 3:20 describes Jesus standing at the door, knocking quietly. What does it mean to you, practically, that God's kingship often works in whispers rather than performances? What would it look like this week to slow down enough to hear him?

9. The sermon ended with the idea that we often miss God's kingship because we're looking for the performance — the loud, the big, the visible. Where in your life right now are you most tempted to equate God's silence with his absence? What would it look like for your group to help each other listen for the whisper instead?