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**1 KINGS FOR YOU**



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## **1 Kings For You**

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## SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be...

- Bible-centred
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *1 Kings For You*:

**To read.** You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

**To feed.** You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

**To lead.** You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **grey** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary towards the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the one he is pointing you to.

*Carl Laferton, Series Editor*

**Bible translations used:**

- NIV: New International Version, 2011 edition (This is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated.)
- NIV84: New International Version, 1984 edition
- ESV: English Standard Version
- KJV: King James Version
- NASB: New American Standard Bible

All emphases in Bible quotations are the author's own.

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 KINGS

The message of 1 and 2 Kings is a message for our times. We live in the dying days of Christendom, the thousand-year period in which Christianity has been a dominant influence on Western culture. It was an influence often embedded in the structures of society and sometimes reinforced by the authority of the state. But not anymore. Today, Christians increasingly find ourselves on the margins of Western culture. Our beliefs and **ethics\*** are no longer mainstream. As people scorn our views, we find ourselves asking, *What's going on? Is God powerless to intervene, or has he abandoned us? Why has the Lord done such a thing?*

The situation in which 1 and 2 Kings were written was not dissimilar. 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book. Together, they tell the story of the kings of ancient Israel who came after **King David**. Things start well enough with **King Solomon**, who builds a temple as a sign of God's presence among his people. But then things get worse and worse. With just one or two exceptions, the kings who follow do not rule well. The kingdom divides into two as a result of human misrule and divine judgment. Eventually, the northern kingdom is exiled and lost to history. The southern kingdom continues until it, too, is taken away into exile by the Babylonian Empire. This is the story told in 1 and 2 Kings. And it ends in tragedy:

- The people are in exile.
- The king is deposed.
- The land is far away.
- The **temple** is in ruins.

We don't know exactly when the book of Kings was written because it is not dated. But we do know that it was written after the defeat of the southern kingdom because that's how it ends. So, it was probably written during the Babylonian exile.

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\* Words in **grey** are defined in the Glossary (page 145).

It's not hard to guess what the first audience of the book of Kings were thinking or the questions they were asking: *What's going on? How did we end up in exile, and will we ever get home? Is God powerless to intervene, or has he abandoned us? Why has the Lord done such a thing?* We find those questions articulated in 1 Kings 9:8-9 along with God's answer. God declares:

"This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.'"

Everything ends in tragedy. But in the darkness, the writer detects rays of sunlight. There is hope on the horizon—hope beyond judgment.

1 and 2 Kings are not the only account we have of the kings of Israel. Much the same story is told in 1 and 2 Chronicles. Why did God give us two parallel accounts in the pages of Scripture? They approach the story in slightly different ways to bring out slightly different points. Like all the best nerds, the author of Chronicles loves a list. He uses them to connect his readers to the past: to Adam, **Abraham**, **Jacob**, **Levi** and David. His account spotlights the **law**, the temple, the priests and the dynasty of David (often presented at its best). He highlights the glorious heritage of the post-exilic Jewish community to show what a great future they can have if they turn back to God. He's answering the question: *do God's people have a future?*

The writer of Kings is doing something slightly different. He looks back to answer the question: *what went wrong?* But the writer of Kings also looks forward. The agenda for 1 and 2 Kings is set in David's final words to Solomon. David is about to die, and so he calls on Solomon to be strong as Solomon steps up to rule in David's place. Then David adds:

“<sup>3</sup> Observe what the LORD your God requires: walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the **Law of Moses**. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go <sup>4</sup>and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’” (1 Kings 2:3-4)

The first half of this charge is full of phrases from the book of Deuteronomy (part of “the Law of Moses” mentioned in verse 3). That’s significant because Deuteronomy ends with a warning of curses that will fall if God’s people are unfaithful, and the ultimate curse is exile. The message of 1 and 2 Kings is that God’s word is certain and powerful. We’ll see that message coming out from the story again and again. The words of curse from Deuteronomy will certainly come into effect if the people are unfaithful. Indeed, they have proved certain in the story of God’s people; God’s people have been unfaithful, and so they have been exiled. What God says will happen is what happens—not simply because God is good at predicting the future but because it is God’s word that shapes history. But the second half of David’s message to Solomon in verse 4 is a reminder of another word God has spoken: the promise of an eternal King (“you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel”). If God’s word is powerful—as the story told in 1 and 2 Kings demonstrates—then his word of promise is also certain. And that means there is hope—a hope found in a coming king from David’s line: King Jesus.



Though it doesn’t always look like it, history is shaped by God’s word.

This is a message we need to hear today. Though it doesn’t always look like it, history is shaped by God’s word. What we see on the surface, as it were, is the church being marginalised and our faith being

ridiculed. But running through the undercurrents of history is God's word, still alive and at work in the world today. Both God's word of judgment and God's word of promise are certain, and history is heading to their fulfilment—the victory of Jesus and the vindication of his people. That means we need to shape our lives by God's word. We can't escape God's word. The only question is whether the word of God that we hear at the final day will be a word of judgment or a word of salvation.

# 1. THE KINGDOM IS ESTABLISHED BY GOD'S WORD

The book of Kings throws us straight into the intrigues of the royal court at the end of David's reign. There's one big question on the agenda—the question of succession. The story raises a bundle of challenges that remain as relevant as ever in the 21st century. There are three common dangers when it comes to thinking about politics.

1. *Naivety.* We can imagine that the future of our nation or planet depends on a political programme or party. The future will be bright if we can just get the right person in power or the right policies in place. This idealism is dangerous because, if everything depends on politics, then everything must be done to pursue that political agenda. Whether someone is “on our side” starts to matter more than their character. It's a small step from this to behaving as if the cause of Christ depends on gaining power or mobilising churches along partisan lines.
2. *Cynicism.* Among many people, respect for politicians is at an all-time low. It's common in conversation for people to dismiss politicians as self-interested and self-aggrandising. Polling in the mid-20th century showed that one third of UK voters believed politicians were only “out for themselves”; today, that figure has doubled. Just five percent of the population believe politicians are primarily focused on the interests of the country (Toby Helm, “Why trust politicians? How the UK voters lost faith in our leaders”, [theguardian.co.uk](http://theguardian.co.uk)) It's the same in the United States. Nearly

two-thirds of Americans believe elected officials entered politics to make a lot of money (Andy Cerda and Andrew Daniller, “7 Facts About Americans’ View of Money in Politics”, pewresearch.org). If the idealists expect too much, the cynics expect too little.

3. *Despair.* Many people watch the news with a sense of despair as crisis follows crisis and scandal follows scandal. Indeed, a growing number of people are disengaging from news coverage because they find it too depressing. Perhaps you find yourself wearied by the endless tide of bad-news stories about conflict, crime and climate change. Perhaps you fear for the future of your nation, your church and your family. Throughout the 20th century, most people expected to be better off than their parents. Not anymore.

At first sight, 1 Kings 1 – 2 can feel like a strange world. But it has lots of parallels to contemporary politics and some important perspectives on our naivety, cynicism and despair.

## David: a Powerless King

The book starts in a remarkable way. David is an old man, and, like many old people, he’s struggling to keep warm at night (**1:1\***). So his attendants organise a living hot-water bottle—a young woman called Abishag—to lie beside him (**v 3**). **Verse 4** says, “The woman was very beautiful ... but the king had no sexual relations with her”.

David had at least eight wives in his lifetime plus **concubines**. So this lack of sex is not restraint! The phrase “lie in your arms” (**v 2**, ESV) was previously used in Nathan’s portrait of David’s uncontrolled sexual desires (2 Samuel 12:3). The point is that David is now impotent; he is sexually impotent, but he’s also *politically* impotent. “The king had no sexual relations with her” is literally “did not know her”. The same word (“to know”) is used again in **verse 11**: “Then Nathan asked **Bathsheba**, Solomon’s mother, ‘Have you not heard that Adonijah,

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\* All 1 Kings verse references being looked at in each chapter are in **bold**.

the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it?" David does not know.

Adonijah, probably David's eldest living son, takes advantage of the power vacuum to declare himself king.

"Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, 'I will be king.' So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. (His father had never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?' He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.)"

(v 5-6)

They are small details, but for those who know the story of **Absalom**, they are ominous words. "His father had never rebuked him," says **verse 6**. When David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, the Lord had declared, "The sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10). And, when David's son Amnon raped his half-sister, and Absalom (another of David's sons) murdered Amnon in revenge, David was unable to intervene effectively because his moral authority had been eroded by his own sin (2 Samuel 11). History is repeating itself with Adonijah. The writer lines up the links between Absalom and Adonijah. Adonijah "got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him" (1 Kings **1:5**). Absalom had kitted himself out with a similar regal retinue of "chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him" (2 Samuel 15:1). What's more, the kings of Israel were not supposed to acquire horses like the kings of other nations (Deuteronomy 17:14-16; compare 1 Samuel 8:11). Adonijah is described as "very handsome" (1 Kings **1:6**), and it was said that "in all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom" (2 Samuel 14:25).

The writer is clearly portraying Adonijah as the new Absalom. And Absalom was the man who had (temporarily) overthrown God's king (2 Samuel 15). It's a big hint that Adonijah is putting "himself forward" in the place of God's chosen king (1 Kings **1:5**). Adonijah gathers his plotters at "the Stone of Zoheleth" or "the Serpent's Stone" (v 9, ESV). Adonijah is following the **serpent** in the **Garden of Eden**

in rejecting God's government (Genesis 3:1-7; Psalm 2:1-3). He is the latest manifestation of the devil's battle against the Lord's anointed king. To shout "Long live King Adonijah" is effectively to declare, *Be short-lived King David* (1 Kings **1:25**).

The Great East Window of York Minister has 81 panels portraying the **apocalypse** preceded by 27 panels depicting Old Testament stories which provide a **typological** background—events that prefigure the end-time conflict between Christ and Satan. The Old Testament frames come to a climax with Absalom. At first sight, that appears to be an odd choice. He's hardly a major Old Testament figure. But the point is that he's the son who deposed King David. And since David is the **prototype** of Jesus Christ, this makes Absalom a prototype of the **antichrist**, with Adonijah a mini-me version of antichrist.

If all this makes this story seem remote from our everyday concerns, consider the words of 1 John 2:18: "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come". John is talking about false teachers who have left the church to which he's writing. We need to beware

We need to  
beware of  
leaders who look  
impressive but  
whose characters  
and ambitions  
are ungodly.

of leaders who, like Adonijah, look impressive but whose characters and ambitions are ungodly. Christian leaders are not to "lord it over" others but to serve in the image of our great Servant-King, Jesus (Mark 10:42-45).

So the challenge of remaining true to God's King in the face of satanic hostility is as relevant today as it was when David lay dying. In 1 Kings 1, people are choosing. Adonijah's supporters muster for a feast a short distance from Jerusalem (**v 9**). Some join his move for the throne while some do not (**v 7-8**). Others are perhaps tricked into appearing to back Adonijah (**v 9**). Some are left out because their loyalty is known to lie elsewhere (**v 10**). Throughout the chapter, David

is referred to as “the king” or “my lord the king”. But, though David may not realise it yet, we know there is another who claims to be king at large in the kingdom.

The prophet Nathan warns Queen Bathsheba that Adonijah’s move could spell disaster for her and her son, Solomon. As we’ll see in 1 Kings, it was common for those who achieved power to wipe out the family of their rivals to prevent future rebellions (a fear implicit in Bathsheba’s words in **verse 21**). Lives are on the line here. So, Nathan and Bathsheba come up with their own counterplot to get David to act (**v 11-14**). It might have been safer for Nathan to keep his head down and see who emerged on top, but Nathan was a man of integrity, the man who had challenged David over his affair with Bathsheba, the very woman with whom he now co-operated (2 Samuel 12).

Bathsheba goes in first and says, “My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: ‘Solomon your son shall become king after me, and he will sit on my throne.’ But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it” (1 Kings **1:17-18**). The word “know” in the phrase “You ... do not know” is the same word again (**v 4, 11**). Then, in a choreographed move, Nathan bursts in and says, “Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?” (**v 27**) Same word again. Just as David can’t “know” Abishag, so he doesn’t “know” what’s happening in his kingdom. He’s powerless in the bedroom, and he’s powerless in the throne room. The writer even gives a reminder of David’s impotence in **verses 15-16** by reminding us of Abishag’s presence. David is Israel’s greatest king. He’s achieved so much, but in the end he’s impotent. He’s defeated many enemies, but he can’t defeat death (**2:10-11**).

The counter-coup works. David has Solomon anointed as co-regent—a joint king with David (**1:28-40**). The noise of the celebrations interrupts Adonijah’s festivities (**v 41-48**), and his guests melt away as they see the political tide turning (**v 49**). Adonijah is left begging Solomon for mercy (**v 50-53**). Adonijah “exalted himself,” says **verse 5** (ESV). But it is “the LORD” who humbles and

exalts (1 Samuel 2:7). Benaiah's prayer-turned-prophecy offers God's commentary on events: "As the LORD was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!" (1 Kings **1:37**).

Then David gives Solomon a wonderful charge in **2:2-4**:

"'I am about to go the way of all the earth,' he said. 'So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel."'"

This recalls the words of **Moses** to God's people (such as in Deuteronomy 4:40). It echoes the charge of Moses to Joshua, his successor (Joshua 1:6-7). It takes us back to God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7). Solomon is to reign under God's reign by obeying God's commands. Then God will prosper Solomon's reign and establish his dynasty. David may be losing his powers, but God's promise remains firm.

A day is coming when God's appointed King will rule over this earth. In the meantime, it is time for us to decide whose side we're on.

## Questions for reflection

1. Take the Factfulness Quiz at [factfulnessquiz.com](http://factfulnessquiz.com). Did the results surprise you? If so, why do you think this is?
2. What can politicians achieve? What are the limits of politics?
3. Where would you put your attitude towards politics on a scale where "1" is cynical about politics and "10" is confident in politics? Do you need to move your position on the cynical-to-confident scale?

## PART TWO

### Solomon: An Ambiguous King

As Solomon prepares to take the reins of power, David has called him to high ideals of kingship (1 Kings **2:1-4**). But what do you make of David's words in **verses 5-9**? Essentially, David says, *Kill Joab. Reward Barzillai. Kill Shimei*. Joab was the warlord who had led David's army. Barzillai was among those who had helped David when David was deposed by his son Absalom (2 Samuel 17:27-28; 19:31-38). In contrast, Shimei had cursed David when David was forced to flee from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16:5-13). David says Joab is stained with blood and Shimei is guilty of treachery. These are wrongs that are waiting to be put right, according to David. Maybe he's right, but it also feels like old scores being settled. The language David uses reflects this ambiguity. He lists Joab's crimes, for example, and then says, "Deal with him according to your wisdom". It's not an official death sentence, but the implication is clear—not least because David adds, "But do not let his grey head go down to the grave in peace" (1 Kings **2:5-6**). Much is going to be made of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings, but the first time his "wisdom" is called into action, it proves deadly.

David's 40-year reign finally comes to an end with his death (**v 10-12**). Then, depending on your point of view, Solomon either takes revenge or enacts justice:

- Solomon executes Adonijah the rival (**v 13-25**).
  - Solomon fires Abiathar the priest (**v 26-27**).
  - Solomon executes Joab the soldier (**v 28-35**).
  - Solomon executes Shimei the politician (**v 36-46**).
1. *Adonijah*. Adonijah is allowed to live as long as he behaves in a "worthy" way (**1:52**). But then, via Bathsheba, he asks for Abishag (David's former "hot-water bottle") as his wife (**2:13-21**). Solomon interprets this as **sedition** and has him executed (**v 22-25**). On the one hand, Solomon's actions feel like an over-reaction—an

excuse to eliminate a rival. On the other hand, taking a king's concubine in that culture was symbolic of taking the king's place (2 Samuel 16:21-22). Maybe Adonijah is in love, or maybe he's making another move for the throne. Is Solomon using this as an excuse to take revenge or punishing an act of treachery? And what about Bathsheba? Is she being naïve when she passes on Adonijah's request? Or is she shrewd enough to spot an opportunity to get rid of Adonijah?

2. *Abiathar*. Solomon then turns his attention to Abiathar the priest—a co-conspirator in Adonijah's coup (1 Kings **1:7**). Solomon says Abiathar deserves to die, but instead he's fired (**2:26-27**). Is this gracious restraint or ruthless action with a moral veneer?
3. *Joab*. Joab realises he's next on the to-do list (**v 28**). Joab was David's army commander, and he'd killed rival commanders against David's wishes (2 Samuel 3:6-39; 19:13; 20:8-13). He now flees to the temple because the law allowed people to find refuge at the altar in cases of unintentional killing (Exodus 21:14). But Joab's murders were intentional and in cold blood, so Solomon has him executed (1 Kings **2:29-35**). On the one hand, it feels like Solomon is taking revenge against an old enemy and removing another conspirator (**1:7**). On the other hand, it's hard to read the story of David in 1 and 2 Samuel without feeling that Joab is unfinished business (2 Samuel 3:39). Joab, after all, was a kind of warlord. So perhaps Solomon is enacting the justice against Joab that David lacked the power to enact. Is this tyranny or wisdom?
4. *Shimei*. Finally, there's Shimei. Shimei had cursed David when David was at his weakest (2 Samuel 16:5-13). At the time, David had shown mercy to Shimei (19:18-23). But his dying words tell a different story. Solomon places Shimei under house arrest (1 Kings **2:36-38**). But, as soon as Shimei contravenes its terms, Solomon has him executed (**v 39-46**). On the one hand, the response seems out of proportion—a ruthless act of revenge. On

the other hand, as with Adonijah, Shimei is initially shown mercy, and it's only when he breaks his conditions that he's punished.

Are Solomon's actions revenge or justice? Are they examples of tyranny or wisdom? I don't know. **Commentators** are divided. But I suspect the answer is probably *a bit of both*. David and Solomon's motives are mixed. Maybe there's both a concern for justice *and* there's a desire for revenge. Maybe they act both for the sake of national stability *and* out of self-interest.

This is reality. Politics is messy. If politicians break their word, then they deserve to be condemned. But often, to get things done, they join coalitions or work across party lines, all of which involves making concessions. Politics is messy. Christians in politics have to compromise. Sometimes they settle for less-than-best because it is still an improvement on the status quo. In 2008 Christian politicians in the UK campaigned (unsuccessfully) for an abortion limit of 20 weeks. That wasn't because they thought abortions before 20 weeks were okay. It was because that limit would have been an improvement on the current limit. Politics is messy.

Most politicians could earn more outside of politics. They enter politics because they want to change the world. But they also want to run the world. They're capable of great honour *and* dark treachery. They're driven by the common interest *and* partisan ideologies. They're motivated by ideals of public service *and* the lure of personal pride. Politicians are messy.

How might the story of 1 Kings 1 – 2 reshape our attitudes to politics and politicians today?

## **Recognise Human Limitations Instead of Being Naïve**

To get elected, politicians make big promises. But the world is a complicated place, and there's a limit to what they can do. At the height of his powers, David had to recognise his limitations (2 Samuel 3:39), and

1 Kings starts with David's power fading fast. Politicians are flawed, ambitious people—like you and me. Christians shouldn't be naïve about politics because we know that sin taints every aspect of life. If you invest your hopes in political leaders, ideologies or programmes, then you will be disappointed. People often declare, "Something should be done". But politicians can't work miracles. There isn't an endless pot of cash. There's a limit to what governments can accomplish. Governments can't change hearts; governments can't solve the problem of sin; governments can't conquer death.

## **Honour Human Authorities Instead of Being Cynical**

Another danger in politics is cynicism. Under Solomon's reign, "the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the sea-shore; they ate, they drank and they were happy" (1 Kings 4:20). Politics matters. While it's limited, it can bring change—for good or ill. So it's good for Christians to vote in elections, get involved in campaigning or stand for public office. 1 Peter 2:17 says, "Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor". The emperors during Peter's lifetime were not democratically elected, nor were many of them known for their goodwill towards Christians! But still Peter tells Christians to honour the emperor. In the same way, it's our responsibility to honour the government. Think what it means for you to honour a leader—especially one for whom you did not vote.

Our engagement in politics and casting our votes shouldn't be driven by self-interest. Voting out of self-interest makes us no better than the self-interested politicians we so readily deride. Instead, our vote should be an act of love for neighbour (Mark 12:28-31). In the Bible, the way a society treats the vulnerable is a touchstone for its social righteousness. So we should back people and policies we believe will promote the common good, particularly the welfare of the poor and vulnerable.

## Look to God's King Instead of Despairing

What about our sense of despair? These chapters remind us that we have a better hope than anything offered by politicians. After David's final words to Solomon, we're told, "David rested with his ancestors" (1 Kings **2:10**). It's an echo of God's **covenant** with David in 2 Samuel 7, which talks about what will happen "when ... you rest with your ancestors". God also promised, "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you ... and I will establish his kingdom ... I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever ... your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16; cf. 26). Three times he uses the word "establish".

The same word is used four more times in the remainder of 1 Kings 2 as Solomon's consolidates his authority—at the beginning, in the middle and twice at the end.

- "So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established." (v 12)
- "And now, as surely as the LORD lives—he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised..." (v 24)
- "But King Solomon will be blessed, and David's throne will remain secure [literally "be established"] before the LORD for ever." (v 45)
- "The kingdom was now established in Solomon's hands." (v 46)

God has established the kingdom of Solomon just as he had established the kingdom of David (2 Samuel 5:12) and just as he had promised to David (1 Kings **2:24**). In these chapters, we see the plotting of Nathan, the manipulation of Bathsheba, the vagaries of public opinion and the ruthlessness of Solomon. And God works through all these moral ambiguities to keep his promises.

God promised David that his son would rule over Israel, and so Solomon was duly established as Israel's king. But God has also

promised that one of David's sons will rule over God's people "for ever". The prophet Isaiah amplifies this promise:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

but with righteousness he will judge the needy,

with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth."

(Isaiah 11:1-4)

Jesse was David's father, so a shoot from the stump of Jesse is the promise of a Davidic king. It's a promised fulfilled in Jesus—God's forever King (Luke 1:30-33). Like Solomon, Jesus comes riding on a mule (1 Kings **1:33, 38, 44**; Matthew 21:1-7). Preaching at Pisidian Antioch, **Paul** says, "Now when David had served God's purpose in

his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors" (Acts 13:36). It's an echo of 1 Kings **2:10**. Israel's greatest king was powerless in the face of death. But Paul continues: "The one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay" (Acts 13:37).

Not only will Jesus rule for ever; he will also rule in righteousness.

We need a king who has risen again to conquer death and despair; we need Jesus, God's forever King.

Not only will Jesus rule for ever; he will also rule in righteousness. Isaiah promises that Jesus will reign with "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding" and "the fear of the LORD". Jesus has supernatural power. Equipped with Spirit-enabled insight, he can see

every situation clearly. Governed by “the fear of the LORD”, he is not swayed from doing what is right by self-interest or the opinion of other people. So Jesus reigns without compromise. He is the King who gives his life for his people. He “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This self-sacrificing love is the very opposite of self-interested pride. Jesus reigns with perfect justice, wisdom and love. And his reign **qualifies** and limits all other political claims and hopes. Every authority will one day give an account before Christ, the King of kings. Every hope will find its ultimate fulfilment not in an earthly political or economic programme but in the coming reign of Christ.

Jesus is the answer to our despair. Despite all the moral ambiguities of history, God is at work in establishing the kingdom of Christ through the mission of the church. “The good news is ... that God is in charge even of the dark side, even of political intrigue” (Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, p. 22).

- In the midst of human justice and revenge, God is establishing his kingdom.
- In the midst of human “wisdom” and tyranny, God is establishing his kingdom.
- In the midst of political coalitions and compromises, God is establishing his kingdom.
- In the midst of good, bad and mixed human motives, God is establishing his kingdom.
- In the midst of whatever is headlining in the news today, God is establishing his kingdom.

God’s purposes roll on in history because his promise is certain. Christ has already ascended to reign from heaven. One day, he will return to reign on earth. In the meantime, his reign is extended as we proclaim the gospel and people submit to his kingship in faith and **repentance**.

In 1 Kings **1:42-43** a man called Jonathan arrives with “good news” or a “gospel”. The good news is that God’s king (Solomon) is on the

throne. For Adonijah, that's not good news because he's a usurper. Today the good news is still that God's King (Jesus) is on the throne. That's not good news for those (like Adonijah) who continue to resist his rule. But his reign is good news for all who submit to him in faith, because Jesus is the King who gave his life to **redeem** his people and whose reign brings freedom and peace.

## Questions for reflection

1. Do you think Solomon's actions in chapter 2 represent justice or revenge?
2. "Honour the emperor," says 1 Peter 2:17. How do these words apply to your life?
3. What factors should shape how you cast your votes in elections? How can you use an election to talk about Jesus?