

KERUX COMMENTARIES

1 & 2 KINGS

KERUX COMMENTARIES

1 & 2 KINGS

A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching

DAVID B. SCHREINER
LEE COMPSON



1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching

© 2022 by David B. Schreiner & Lee Compson

Published by Kregel Ministry, an imprint of Kregel Publications, 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Italics in Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added by the authors.

The Hebrew font, NewJerusalemU, and the Greek font, GraecaU, are available from www.linguistsoftware.com/lgku.htm, +1-425-775-1130.

All photos are under Creative Commons licensing, and contributors are indicated in the captions of the photos.

Maps on pages 47 and 174 are by A. D. Riddle. Used by permission.

ISBN 978-0-8254-2558-5

Printed in the United States of America

22 23 24 25 26 / 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Publisher's Preface to the Series / 7
Preface to 1 and 2 Kings / 9
Exegetical Author's Acknowledgments / 10
Preaching Author's Acknowledgments / 11
Overview of All Preaching Passages / 13
Abbreviations / 33
Introduction to 1 & 2 Kings / 41

THE COLLAPSE OF THE UNITED MONARCHY

SOLOMON SECURING THE THRONE

Succession of Solomon (1 Kings 1:1–2:11) / 61
Establishing the Throne (1 Kings 2:12–2:46a) / 71

SOLOMON'S WISDOM DISPLAYED

The Lord's Appearance (1 Kings 2:46b–3:15) / 79
Solomon's Wisdom in Adjudication (1 Kings 3:16–28) / 87
Solomon's Wisdom in the Affairs of the Kingdom (1 Kings 4:1–34[5:14]) / 93

SOLOMON'S BUILDING CAMPAIGNS AND OTHER ENDEAVORS

Preparations / (1 Kings 5:1–18[5:15–32]) 103
Building the Royal Precinct (1 Kings 6:1–7:51) / 109
Dedication Speech (1 Kings 8:1–66) / 119
The Lord's Second Appearance (1 Kings 9:1–9) / 127
More Royal Endeavors (1 Kings 9:10–28) / 133
Solomon's Legacy (1 Kings 10:1–29) / 141

DISSOLUTION OF THE UNITED MONARCHY

Solomon's Demise (1 Kings 11:1–43) / 149
Schism (1 Kings 12:1–24) / 157
Reign of Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:25–14:20) / 165

THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL

Dynastic Stability versus Instability (1 Kings 14:21–16:20) / 177

The Omrides Established (1 Kings 16:21–34) / 187

PROPHETS AND KINGS

Elijah and the Omrides (1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 1:18) / 195

Elisha and Kings (2 Kings 2:1–13:25) / 217

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL

The Arrival of Assyria (2 Kings 14:1–16:20) / 249

Samaria versus Jerusalem (2 Kings 17:1–20:21) / 261

JUDAH ALONE

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

Manasseh and Ammon (2 Kings 21:1–26) / 277

Josiah (2 Kings 22:1–23:30) / 285

THE END

The Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Kings 23:31–25:30) / 297

References / 307

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE TO THE SERIES

Since words were first uttered, people have struggled to understand one another and to know the main meaning in any verbal exchange.

The answer to what God is talking about must be understood in every context and generation; that is why Kerux (KAY-rukes) emphasizes text-based truths and bridges from the context of the original hearers and readers to the twenty-first-century world. Kerux values the message of the text, thus its name taken from the Greek *kērux*, a messenger or herald who announced the proclamations of a ruler or magistrate.

Biblical authors trumpeted all kinds of important messages in very specific situations, but a big biblical idea, grasped in its original setting and place, can transcend time. This specific, big biblical idea taken from the biblical passage embodies a single concept that transcends time and bridges the gap between the author's contemporary context and the reader's world. How do the prophets perceive the writings of Moses? How does the writer of Hebrews make sense of the Old Testament? How does Clement in his second epistle, which may be the earliest sermon known outside the New Testament, adapt verses from Isaiah and also ones from the Gospels? Or what about Luther's bold use of Romans 1:17? How does Jonathan Edwards allude to Genesis 19? Who can forget Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and his appropriation of Amos 5:24: "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream'"? How does a preacher in your local church today apply the words of Hosea in a meaningful and life-transforming way?

WHAT IS PRIME IN GOD'S MIND, AND HOW IS THAT EXPRESSED TO A GIVEN GENERATION IN THE UNITS OF THOUGHT THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE?

Answering those questions is what Kerux authors do. Based on the popular "big idea" preaching model, Kerux commentaries uniquely combine the insights of experienced Bible exegetes (trained in interpretation) and homileticians (trained in preaching). Their collaboration provides for every Bible book:

- A detailed introduction and outline
- A summary of all preaching sections with their primary exegetical, theological, and preaching ideas
- Preaching pointers that join the original context with the contemporary one
- Insights from the Hebrew and Greek text
- A thorough exposition of the text
- Sidebars of pertinent information for further background
- Appropriate charts and photographs
- A theological focus to passages

Publisher's Preface to the Series

- A contemporary big idea for every preaching unit
- Present-day meaning, validity, and application of a main idea
- Creative presentations for each primary idea
- Key questions about the text for study groups

Many thanks to Jim Weaver, Kregel's former acquisitions editor, who conceived of this commentary series and further developed it with the team of Jeffrey D. Arthurs, Robert B. Chisholm, David M. Howard Jr., Darrel L. Bock, Roy E. Ciampa, and Michael J. Wilkins. We also recognize with gratitude the significant contributions of Dennis Hillman, Fred Mabie, Paul Hillman, Herbert W. Bateman IV, and Shawn Vander Lugt who have been instrumental in the development of the series. Finally, gratitude is extended to the two authors for each Kerux volume; the outside reviewers, editors, and proofreaders; and Kregel staff who suggested numerous improvements.

—*Kregel Publications*

PREFACE TO 1 AND 2 KINGS

The book of Kings is a tragedy. There was so much opportunity for God's people in the Iron Age. They were strategically located. They enjoyed the legacy of a charismatic king who was able to build a national foundation and focus a group of argumentative tribes upon unifying goals and a common identity. However, from the opening chapters of Kings, it's clear that things are more complicated than what one would hope. And as the history unfolds, the viability of the nation comes to rest on a knife's edge. Kings, prophets, the average Joe and Jane, and God's designs collide over approximately five centuries to produce a tumultuous period defined by great moments of salvation and great moments of foolishness. Only toward the end of the period, at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, is the trajectory set without hope for reversal. With Manasseh, the son of one of Judah's great reformers, the legacy of David can no longer pacify the Lord's growing anger.

As one would expect, the book of Kings is about Israel and Judah's kings. However, it's more than just a discussion of royal leaders. It's also about those who interacted with them, on personal and national levels, and how choices can have lasting effects, personally and corporately. So, perhaps this is the enduring theological value of this book. In Kings, one observes how choices matter and how choices are not made in a vacuum. Our choices affect not only ourselves, but also those whom the Lord has placed in our sphere of influence. Yet as bad as our choices may get, Kings also shows that God's grace is still present, and his plan of salvation history will unfold. Yes. Kings is tragic. But it's a tragedy nuanced by a cosmic plan of redemption.

EXEGETICAL AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*This book is dedicated not only to my professors
who taught me the importance of wrestling with Israel's history,
but also my family, for their perpetual love and support.*

For whatever reason, ever since I can remember, I've been fascinated by history. During my primary education, I enjoyed learning about early American history, from its Revolutionary and frontier days to the brink of World War I. Consistently then, when it came to the Bible, the stories of David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, and others were the ones to which I continually returned. If anything, the historical narratives of the Old Testament seemed to be channels to easily enter the world of the Old Testament.

As I started to pursue a vocation in biblical higher education, I began to dive deeper into these familiar narratives. One thing I soon realized in this process was that virtually none of these major characters were flat, nor were the events that they experienced simple. David had a dark side. Solomon was a polarizing figure whose policies were both profitable and extremely problematic. Elijah was at times so myopic that it crippled his perspective and ability to minister. And the Babylonian exile? That was the result of a very complicated convergence of sociopolitical and theological factors. I could go on and on, but I trust you get the point.

I credit my professors at Indiana Wesleyan University and Asbury Theological Seminary for so many things, but in the case of ancient Israel's history, they exposed me to the difficulties of language, the data of archaeology, the confusing extrabiblical sources, the mysteries of the canon and canonization, and other realities in a way that was challenging but not hostile. Both schools were environments that stressed critical thinking for the sake of building a more sustainable faith. All of this helped me wrestle with ancient Israel's history and opened my eyes to the depths and richness of God's revelation to humanity.

If you have not yet learned to struggle well with Israel's history, I hope you'll learn. Ancient Israel's history is complicated, and it's certainly more than the flannelgraphs some of you may have experienced in Sunday school growing up. If you have learned to struggle well, I pray that you help others as well. And perhaps this is really my driving hope for this work. I want to help you discover the theological richness of wrestling with Israel's history.

With all this said, I would be remiss to not mention Herb Bateman IV, Shawn Vander Lugt, and the entire editorial team at Kregel. Herb took a flyer on me when he asked me to come aboard for the series, and for that I am grateful. Shawn has been absolutely excellent as the Managing Editor, as has been the rest of the editorial team. My prayer is that this project brings honor to the kingdom of God.

—David B. Schreiner

PREACHING AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*To my wife Stephanie
and sons Tate and EJ—for your
encouragement and love.*

Both in my experience as a student and a pastor, I have always been drawn to commentary resources that kept the teacher in mind. So when this opportunity presented itself, I enthusiastically signed up because the goal of this series is to combine the exegetical and the practical.

Philosophically, my approach will be more Christotelic than Christocentric. By that I mean that I will interpret passages with the understanding that they are leading to Christ, but I do so without awkwardly shoehorning Jesus's death and resurrection into every paragraph. I want to honor 1–2 Kings' place in the larger narrative of God's redemptive movement that is leading toward the cross, and ultimately the full establishment of his kingdom in the new heaven and new earth.

In that light, I offer my homiletical contributions not as some hard-and-fast standard. It is not as though one *must* use these outlines, illustrations, and key ideas exactly and exclusively. In fact, as I have preached through these books myself, I have found plenty of places where I needed to alter my own material to better fit my context and audience. My goal is that this will be a catalyst that helps pastors and teachers understand what is going on in the text and figure out how to communicate it effectively.

—Lee Compson

OVERVIEW OF ALL PREACHING PASSAGES

1 Kings 1:1–2:11

EXEGETICAL IDEA

David's physiological deterioration engendered a series of events that saw David sanction Solomon as his successor and present his son with a critical decision about what would define his reign.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The events of life often produce critical junctures, which force us to make choices that determine the ideologies that will define us going forward.

PREACHING IDEA

Despite uncertainties, following God's plan is the best path when at a crossroads in life.

PREACHING POINTERS

The book of 1 Kings begins by describing a time of transition within Israel. Like a sunrise turning into a sunset, David's reign is coming to a close. He is a shell of his former self, his family has splintered, and his kingdom is at risk. Similarly, for the original audience of 1–2 Kings, the people of Israel were facing significant transitions. As they sought to rebuild their lives, questions of leadership, morality, and national identity hung over them. The accounts found in Kings offered them historical examples of how to navigate this uncharted territory. Just as the question for Solomon was how to best navigate these issues and on what foundation he would build his own legacy, the people of the sixth and fifth centuries were compelled to consider what founding principles were going to guide them as they transitioned back into their homeland.

Our lives are also marked by critical periods where we face crucial decisions about how we will move forward. What should we do when we graduate high school? What is the best career path we ought to take? Additionally, how we date and who we marry are decisions that significantly affect the course of our lives. When layoffs unexpectedly hit us or when retirement looms over us, how will we respond? When we are at these crossroads, who will we listen to? What will be our guide? The best path to take is the one where we seek and follow God's plan and not our own.

1 Kings 2:12–2:46a

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The actions of Solomon decisively and finally secured his hold on the throne, although ambiguity surrounding motives, requests, and actions persist throughout the account.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The ambiguity surrounding Solomon's decisions is indicative of life; tackling ambiguity can ultimately produce a level of understanding about God's work in the world not otherwise possible.

PREACHING IDEA

We shouldn't give up—derailing God's plan is difficult to do.

PREACHING POINTERS

First Kings 2:12–46 is filled with questions that are both unanswered and unanswerable. Readers are left to speculate on what might be going on with almost every part of this passage. The original audience of Kings could relate. Uncertainty hung over nearly every aspect of their lives, as they tried to rebuild their cities and society. As documented in the books of Haggai and Zechariah, even in Ezra and Nehemiah, actions and decisions of leadership were hotly debated as the people returned to the land.

As uneasy as we may be with tension, these verses reflect common aspects of our own world. So many circumstances in life are not black and white, and we often find ourselves dealing with the gray area in between. We are compelled to try to interpret situations and actions of others when more than one motive may exist. Should we fear making the wrong conclusions? Will exercising our "free will" hinder what God wants? Thankfully, as this story teaches, God is still at work in the gray areas and we don't have to fear the unknown or worry about ambiguous decisions spoiling his plans.

1 Kings 2:46b–3:15

EXEGETICAL IDEA

With Solomon's kingdom established, he encountered the Lord and ultimately requested wisdom to rule; Solomon's request for wisdom is granted, but not without expectations.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Solomon's interchange with the Lord not only demonstrates how to pray, but also testifies to the character of God and how he relates to humanity.

PREACHING IDEA

God delights in meeting the needs of people who recognize their neediness.

PREACHING POINTERS

By 1 Kings 3, Solomon is now established as king over Israel. He has settled into power after the passing of his father and has tied up loose ends politically. He sits on his throne in security.

So now what? What will his legacy be, and what will he rely on? First and 2 Kings appealed to people who needed to consider the same questions. Jewish exiles returning from captivity were resettling in their homeland and needed to consider Solomon's example as they moved forward with their lives. Rather than security, wealth, or any other self-motivated request, the

Overview of All Preaching Passages

key to Israel's prosperity would be to humbly discern God's plan as they reestablished themselves as a people in their land.

When we are given new freedom, new power, or new privileges, how do we use them? Many people will default to using any advantage for their own personal gain. We burn through our work bonuses to buy the gadget or toy we've been coveting for a while. Students stop coming to class the moment the teacher mentions an "open-book final exam." Politicians work harder to stay in office than to actually represent the people who elected them. Many people make self-centered decisions in hopes of securing what they think will fulfill them, whether it is happiness, wealth, comfort, or recognition. We could endlessly chase after our own pursuits, or we could recognize what we really need and who can actually provide it for us. God loves to meet the needs of people who recognize their neediness and selflessly seek his plan rather than their own desires.

1 Kings 3:16–28

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Solomon hears the tragic case of an infant's death shrouded by maternal deception, but channeling his divinely apportioned wisdom, the king forces the truth to appear.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The qualities of wisdom exhibited by Solomon prefigures those exhibited by Christ and can still be invoked.

PREACHING IDEA

Some puzzles are only solved supernaturally.

PREACHING POINTERS

In the previous section, Solomon had asked for and received God's wisdom. This passage shows how he put it to use. The original readers of 1 Kings needed to follow the same process. As the returnees from exile were resettling the land, they needed to ask for God's special insight, be ready to receive it, and then put it to good use. The accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah record many of the difficult puzzles and problems those people were facing. After the exile, the spiritual and physical rebuilding of the country was a daunting task. God's people needed to turn to God for his help and wisdom if they were going to succeed.

Individually and corporately, Christians today face complicated puzzles that require God's supernatural insight. We need it when our doctor presents several different options to address our health problem. We need it when our coach is asking us to play a role that we neither like nor feel equipped for. We need it when we are trying to get our new business off the ground in a competitive market. Corporately, we need it as we see our culture change its views on hot-button issues like homosexuality, economic policies, immigration, and war. There may be no quick-and-easy answers, but we need to seek God's supernatural insight to navigate those situations and respond in ways that honor Christ. Will we choose, in faith,

what seems best to us even if others don't understand? Are we willing sacrifice for the greater good? Can we live out both biblical truth and biblical love? Solving some of life's puzzles will require supernatural insight.

1 Kings 4:1–34[5:14]

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Solomon's administration translated to a level of opulence that set Solomon above all his peers; however, his method of operation was not above criticism.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Progress at the expense of others does not comport with the character of the Lord or his intentions for the way his people are to live.

PREACHING IDEA

Don't let the light of success blind you to the pitfalls of power.

PREACHING POINTERS

Solomon continues to employ superior wisdom as he sets up his administration and pursues the prosperity of his nation. For us, this chapter might read as a dry record of Solomon's history. To the original audience, this would have been a high point in their nation's history. As the returned Jewish exiles rebuilt the cities that were in disarray and as they reorganized their government and society upon returning to the land, they would read of the glory of Solomon's reign and dream of the day when that grandeur would return. But discriminating readers would take note of the subtle clues within the text that warned of straying from God's directives. Achieving success is a wonderful blessing, but what did it cost in the past and what would it cost in their postexile world?

Success and the desire to attain it are woven into the very DNA of our world, especially in the United States of America. Just in the twentieth century, the United States came out victorious in two World Wars as well as the Cold War. This nation made itself into a nuclear superpower and was the first to put a man on the moon. Winning became assumed and superiority became an expectation. But like King Solomon, are there cracks in the facade of prosperity? Are there people groups neglected? Have morals been sacrificed for the sake of freedom and power? The Larry Nassar-USA Gymnastics scandal provides a revealing example. In pursuit of Olympic glory, an entire organization turned a blind eye to a sexual predator harming kids and abusive coaches fostering a poisonous environment. Gold medals were won, but lives were ruined. Success isn't a bad thing, but we cannot let it blind us.

1 Kings 5:1–18[5:15–32]

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The relationship between Solomon and Hiram channeled the resources necessary to build the temple.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Day-to-day encounters offer evangelistic opportunities.

PREACHING IDEA

Let your light shine—all the time!

PREACHING POINTERS

Solomon's deal with King Hiram of Phoenicia would prove critical for the building of the temple of the Lord. Beyond the transactional aspect of this chapter, there is potentially more to glean from this record of King Solomon's political duties. The people rebuilding Jerusalem and resettling the land could have merely focused on the work, the resources, and the commercial nature of returning from the exile. Yet this chapter offers them a reminder of the covenantal purpose God had for them dwelling in the land in the first place. From the promise to Abraham to the messages of the prophets, God intended them to be a "light to the nations" and to be a redemptive blessing to the Gentile world around them (Gen. 12:2–3; 22:17–18; Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Through informal interactions and official partnerships, they could reach those in spiritual darkness with the light of God. Rebuilding the land was more than just about creating a home; it was about establishing an influence so that all peoples could know Yahweh as the returning Jewish exiles did. God was providing them a new opportunity to be a light as they resettled their homeland.

Today, Christians have a similar calling. In Matthew 5:14–16, Jesus describes us as "the light of the world" whose good deeds will cause people to glorify God. Some people try to shine their lights only at church, while doing whatever they want the rest of the week. God expects us to be lights from Monday through Saturday, not just Sunday. We are called to reflect Jesus to the world whether we are at our jobs, at school, traveling, or relaxing at home. This chapter's business negotiations provide a great practical context for increasing our witness. How we conduct ourselves in meetings, over meals, and even in the day-to-day grind of our jobs can be a shining testimony of our faith in Jesus. We need to let our lights shine—all the time and everywhere we go.

1 Kings 6:1–7:51

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The construction of the temple and the palace is like other accounts found across the ancient Near East; yet in celebrating the glories of Israel's society and the Lord, the biblical account nevertheless tempers any unbridled celebration.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The construction of the temple and the palace anticipates the Babylonian exile, ultimately bearing witness to the potentialities of perpetual disobedience.

PREACHING IDEA

Details determine if our worship flourishes or fails.

PREACHING POINTERS

These chapters are full of details and descriptions recounting the construction of the temple of the Lord. They demonstrate that not only did the completed building facilitate worship, but the preparations themselves also had God's covenant in mind. The building materials and adornments purposefully symbolized God and his covenant with his people. In the end, it was their own failure to remain loyal to God that proved to be their downfall. So the mission for Israel upon returning from exile was clear: rededicate themselves to faithfully following the Lord in every respect. Their ritual sacrifices needed to be accompanied by acts of love and justice, otherwise rebuilding the second temple would be a futile effort (Micah 6:8–10; cf. Ezra 3–6; Neh. 12:27–47).

It might be easy to skim by these passages assuming that they have little bearing on our lives. That would be unwise because as this section shows us, details matter. Just as the details of the temple had greater meaning, so do the little things in our lives. Romans 12:1–2 teaches us that every aspect of our lives is worship. Therefore, all we do matters to the Lord. For example, what we say and how we say it matters. Negatively and positively, our speech reflects our hearts (Prov. 10:11; Eph. 4:22–32; James 3:10–12). Even our interactions with strangers and people “below” us are details that God takes seriously (Matt. 18:1–7; Heb. 13:2–3; James 2:1–10). As in the past, God still expects his people to be committed to obedience in all matters, big and small. Our disobedience won't necessarily lead to national exile as it did for the Israelites given the nature of their covenant relationship with God, but it will negatively affect all of us—in general as citizens of our country, but in particular as believers in Jesus and thus members of the body of Christ—if left unconfessed (1 Cor. 11:28–33; 1 Peter 3:7). How we handle the details in life will determine whether our worship flourishes or fails.

1 Kings 8:1–66

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The temple dedication not only celebrated Jerusalem as the center of the Israelite worldview, but also the intimate relationship between the Lord, his people, the temple, and the Davidic dynasty.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Jerusalem as the cosmic center of Israelite worship testifies to the character of God and prepares his people, as well as all the peoples of the earth, for the “new cosmic” center following Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension.

PREACHING IDEA

Genuine worship is life-changing.

PREACHING POINTERS

The dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8 is an awe-inspiring event where God and his people come together. The account places strong emphasis on God's glory and his glorious covenant promises. Later readers of this account, especially those of Ezra and Nehemiah's day, would

Overview of All Preaching Passages

have naturally compared the glory of the original temple with its replacement. Such a comparison led to disappointment for some (Ezra 3:11–13). Eventually the enthusiastic momentum of rebuilding dissipated and the danger of falling back into old habits would return (Neh. 13). This is why there is an emphasis on obeying God’s law in connection with God’s covenant with David. This worship wasn’t dependent on a building achievement nor was it intended to be a one-time event. This was a time of national renewal and commitment to the Lord. The people of Solomon’s day, the people of Nehemiah’s day, and all the people who would come after were to be mindful of the obedient commitment that is essential to worship.

Jesus is the true fulfillment of the promises that are in view in this passage. He secured our forgiveness, provides our blessings, and is the basis of the hope we have for the future. All of those themes ought to be main ingredients in our worship. Now, there are a multitude of ideas about what makes *good* worship, especially within the American church. There are many different styles, practices, and preferences. This passage offers a pointed evaluation for all of our current forms. Seeking to create the right feelings, the right atmosphere, and a perfect production are all good things in and of themselves. Yet they should be secondary to the themes God highlights in his Word. When we gather to worship, is there an emphasis on presenting and celebrating who God is? Is there a call to obediently respond to what God has done? Genuine worship is an encounter with God that impacts who we are and what we do.

1 Kings 9:1–9

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The Lord endorsed the construction of the temple, but quickly discussed the implications of the dynasty’s willingness to live by the covenantal ideal.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The vitality of God’s kingdom is renewed with every generation that chooses to learn important lessons and adhere to God’s expectations.

PREACHING IDEA

Our accomplishments *for* God won’t last without faithfulness *to* God.

PREACHING POINTERS

The original readers of this passage would have heard, seen, and felt the negative consequences that God promises included if his people failed to obey him. Their forefathers neglected faithfulness to the Lord, and now they were picking up the pieces. As they repaired the ruins of the once-great city of Jerusalem, there could be little doubt that God had meant what he said about “turning away” from God’s commands and precepts. It was to their national shame that the foreign nations had destroyed their cities and exiled their people. The glory of Solomon’s era was long gone because the nation and its leaders had failed to be faithful.

We do not face the same disaster as the nation of ancient Israel did then, but our mission is much the same. Like they were, we are called to faithfully obey God’s Word. At the core of our calling as disciples of Jesus is the concept of faithfully passing on the good news of Jesus Christ. Many

Overview of All Preaching Passages

passages—including Matthew 28:18–20, 2 Timothy 2:1–2, and Titus 2:1–8—underscore this mission. We are called to make disciples by teaching and modeling the way of Jesus to others, especially the next generation. Failure to do so will not bring national disaster because biblically speaking, God’s people are no longer defined in terms of a political state. But failure to be faithful to God’s calling will bring dishonor to ourselves by weakening the body of Christ. It is not enough to merely attach the label “Christian” to ourselves and think it is enough. Nor is it good enough to build sizable churches and ministries. With all the ministry and service accomplishments we might achieve, it is essential that we pair those with faithfully embodying the mission of God and equipping the next generations to continue God’s work. To ensure that our accomplishments leave a lasting legacy, we must be faithful to God in all aspects of our personal and public lives.

1 Kings 9:10–28

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Solomon’s policies sought to fulfill geopolitical ambitions, and in turn produced several realities that affected the dynamics of Israel.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Solomon’s policies testify to a timeless responsibility of leadership: how to balance traditional values with a responsibility to grow and innovate.

PREACHING IDEA

On the path of success, watch out for the potholes!

PREACHING POINTERS

Solomon pursues progress, growth, and innovation in this passage. These things would have been far-off goals and dreams to the returned Jewish exiles rebuilding their nation. Survival would have been at the top of their minds more than success, with all the work that needed to be accomplished.

That difference between the eras would have actually been advantageous to the wise reader of that day. Many would have been dreaming of “making Israel great again,” but astute observers could point to passages like this one and warn of the red flags that come with success. Its practical, detailed accounts of Israel’s business are more than just bookkeeping records. It reveals just how tricky leadership can be in times of success. Solomon deals with diplomatic relationships and returning favors with King Hiram. He orders more building projects and makes decisions about enlisting people from his kingdom into labor and military service. One can read of those decisions and see cracks in the facade that will become obvious later. One can also read this in context of God’s blessing and the king’s faithfulness (v. 25). Both readings can be true. The point is that leading often involves walking a fine line between compromise and courage.

No matter how positively or negatively we want to read it, this passage is a stern warning against blindly pursuing prosperity. Many people aspire to leadership, and every nation/business/ministry pursues success. Are we wise enough to recognize the dangers when

we've reached the top? Success will not protect us from mistakes. In fact, more success brings more responsibility. And failing to keep up our responsibilities will undermine our success and undo all the good we accomplish. As we pursue and achieve success in our ventures, we ought to be mindful of the pitfalls and potholes that hinder us along the way.

1 Kings 10:1–29

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The prestige and opulence of Solomon left the Queen of Sheba overwhelmed, yet it alluded to large fractures in Solomon's moral foundation.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The pursuit of excellence may compromise us or our communities if left unchecked.

PREACHING IDEA

Success is a spotlight that magnifies our glory and our shame.

PREACHING POINTERS

The last couple chapters have recorded some of the true high points of Israel's history. The temple's completion was a crowning moment in their spiritual history. In this section, Israel is entering their peak economic period. Yet warning signs have been popping up all along and can no longer be ignored. Solomon is transgressing God's commands and leading the nation toward trouble. The later readers of this and the preceding chapters would feel this tension. As they rebuilt their nation after the exile, they would naturally compare their progress to this previous season of national glory. A wiser, more critical mind would ask a more basic question: Should they seek a return to this kind of power and glory? Deuteronomy 17:14–20 stood as a warning against the extravagance described here. The constant cry of the post-Solomon prophets was for faithfulness and justice on the part of God's people (Isa. 58; Jer. 22; Hos. 4; Mic. 6). First Kings 10 is a record of Israel's glory, wrapped in reminders of God's expectations for his people when they are prospering.

These principles aren't hard to find in the New Testament either. Jesus often gave warnings against loving and pursuing money and wealth (Matt. 6:19–24; Luke 18:18–25). Paul encouraged sacrificial generosity as part of a larger message that we should be selfless in all we do, because of what Jesus has done for us (2 Cor. 5:14–15; 8:1–9:15; Phil. 2:1–11). Success and prosperity are not overtly condemned in the Bible. But what is condemned is the pursuit of success at the expense of God's desires. We are warned that achieving all our wildest dreams may not be all we think it will be. Is the degree I'm pursuing in line with God's true calling on my life or is it just to pad my resume? Are the expectations we set for our kids realistic and in line with God's Word? Have the career decisions I've made been about me or about making an impact for Christ? Success can bring us fame and renown, but it also can reveal our weaknesses and character defects.

1 Kings 11:1–43

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Solomon received a stinging indictment that ultimately rendered him an “evil king,” but the expected judgment was pacified by the legacy of David.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The Lord is both just and gracious in his interactions with his people and their leaders.

PREACHING IDEA

God’s grace and God’s judgment are not mutually exclusive.

PREACHING POINTERS

Solomon’s reign began with so much promise, but it ends unceremoniously in shame and strife. Spiritual compromise led to his downfall, and the nation itself would never be the same. While they were several generations removed, the people rebuilding in the postexile and Second Temple periods were living with the consequences of Solomon’s failures of leadership. His life would remind them of the importance of spiritual loyalty, especially as they evaluated their own leaders. Their hope was that a son of David would arise who would meet God’s ideals and standards.

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of what the Davidic kings were supposed to embody. He changed the paradigm as the divine Messiah. For us, national exile is not a potential punishment. Faithfulness is still expected, even though the nature of the consequences is different. God has expectations for us, which he has outlined in his Word to indicate what we should and shouldn’t do. If we sin, God still offers us abundant grace and forgiveness. But he does not promise the absence of any consequences. We might face jail time for our crimes and ruin close relationships because of our offenses. At the same time God disciplines us when we get out of line, he also graciously calls us to repentance. God desires to correct us and help us grow. He wants the thief to no longer steal, the cheater to no longer cheat, and the drunk to no longer drown in the bottom of a bottle. And he provides us the power to overcome our weaknesses and failures through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 5:18–20). God’s grace and judgment are not mutually exclusive, and they still have bearing on our daily lives. Our eternal hope is founded on the fact that they were both put on display at Calvary when God revealed himself as perfectly just and perfectly gracious. It is in light of that reality that we can now live into the mission God has given us.

1 Kings 12:1–24

EXEGETICAL IDEA

When Rehoboam rejected the request of the northern tribes to alleviate their terms of service, the kingdom split, and Rehoboam’s efforts to reunify the kingdom failed.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The choices of humanity collaborate with divine sovereignty to direct the contours of life within God’s providence.

PREACHING IDEA

Don't be surprised when God lets us feed on the fruits of our foolishness.

PREACHING POINTERS

The growing fractures in the kingdom of Israel finally reach their breaking point in 1 Kings 12. The northern tribes split from the southern tribes and reach the brink of civil war. The blame rests squarely on the foolish leadership of Rehoboam, though the author clearly indicates that God was still overseeing these political developments. Interestingly, the original audience was in an almost complete opposite position. They were coming out of the exile and seeking to put their nation back together. The example of King Rehoboam stands as an antitype—an example of what not to do if unification is your goal. They needed to be careful to follow the notion that “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.”

How does this matter for us? Our nation has gone through an awful civil war due to a number of factors and causes, including moral failings (i.e., the sin of slavery). But that was more than 150 years ago. Unfortunately, however, our propensity for foolishness did not disappear after the War Between the States. The United States of America has certainly developed into a major superpower on the world stage, but that is not necessarily to be understood as the result of God's blessing because of some kind of extrabiblical covenant between God and America as some Americans believe, nor is it an automatic guarantee of such blessing in perpetuity. Just like the leaders of any other post-Babel nation from antiquity to modern times, if our leaders make foolish decisions, we should expect the consequences. This is perhaps most relevant on the personal level. I can attend a good church, pray often, and serve regularly, which are all good and commendable things. But if I also have a spending problem that I let go unchecked, God won't miraculously erase my credit card balance when it rises to unhealthy levels. We shouldn't be surprised when God allows the logical consequences of our mistakes to become realities in our lives.

1 Kings 12:25–14:20

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Jeroboam's reign is remembered for the king's construction of an illegitimate and heretical religious system that ultimately secured devastating judgment.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The fear and self-preservation at the root of Jeroboam's disobedience is a potentially devastating pair of tendencies in light of humanity's fallen state.

PREACHING IDEA

Depravity leads to disaster, no matter what.

PREACHING POINTERS

Jeroboam's reign comes to a dramatic and ignominious end. Plagued by insecurity over Jerusalem's central place in their nation's religious life, he decides to set up an alternate religious system that was not sanctioned by the Lord. These selfish and fear-driven actions mark

the northern kingdom to such an extent that God announces his imminent judgment. National prosperity and security were certainly highly cherished goals for the returning Jewish exiles and those living in postexilic Israel. Would they, like Jeroboam, choose security over obedience? Would they compromise God's law in the interests of self-preservation?

The people of God have faced these kinds of dilemmas quite often throughout history. Of course, the specifics are often quite different. Today, Christians face these types of choices when considering who to support politically. What do we do if the candidate from "my party" espouses unbiblical views and positions? Beyond individual interests, our communities of faith must wrestle with these issues too. Will our church seek the Spirit's leading or will we split into factions that fight over our preferences? Operating by fear and self-interest is a mark that we are living by the flesh. Living that way for very long will inevitably lead to disaster. We can learn from Jeroboam's poor example and do the opposite when we deal with our own insecurities. Following our own rebellious path will only leave us worse off because depravity leads to disaster, no matter the excuses or circumstances. God calls us to live by faith. While his path may be uncertain, he promises that it will not end in disaster.

1 Kings 14:21–16:20

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Both Judean and Israelite kings generally failed to honor the Lord and his expectations, yet the intensity of judgment was pacified in Judah because of David's legacy and the occasional good king.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Judgment can only be pacified temporarily, for without complete repentance the root of sin will only grow and consume.

PREACHING IDEA

Half-measures of repentance won't cure full measures of rebellion.

PREACHING POINTERS

Both Judah and Israel find themselves in unstable political circumstances in this section. Unlike Israel, Judah does experience brief eras of positivity, because at times their leadership follows the Lord. The original readers of 1 Kings would have been able to clearly recognize the implications for their context. As they rebuilt their nation, they had two paths to choose from. The first was the path of loyalty and faithfulness to God's law. The second was the path of compromise and rebellion. They could imitate the spiritual reforms like Asa and find national success, or they could tolerate pagan worship in their midst and invite God's judgment. Leaders like Nehemiah and Ezra wholeheartedly served so that the former would be true, not the latter.

Today, living under the new covenant, much has changed in God's equation for dealing with sin. Sacrifices are no longer required, and national prosperity is not on the line. The essential acts of confession and repentance have not changed, however. Jesus's sacrificial death provides forgiveness, but it doesn't give us license to live immorally. James 4:7–10 and 1 John

1:7–9 are just two prominent passages among many in the New Testament underscoring the believer’s need to address their sin with God and turn from its enticing grip. But we can’t just go halfway in dealing with our sinful habits. The Bible uses commands like “cut it off,” “flee,” and “put to death” when it comes to sin in our lives (Matt. 5:30; 1 Cor. 6:18; Col. 3:5). This means: Take drastic action now! Don’t mess around with sin. Counseling or Alcoholics Anonymous meetings may need to be scheduled. Internet or cable access should be canceled. Quitting a bad habit “cold turkey” may be difficult, but it may be the healthiest way forward. We must deal seriously with our sinful habits and tendencies, whatever they may be. Half-hearted repentance won’t fix all-out rebellion.

1 Kings 16:21–34

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Omride policies brought an aggressive policy shift that sought to stabilize the region but also brought the entrenchment of Canaanite religion.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The egregiousness of Omride sins exists in their high-handedness, which fundamentally undermines the ethos of God’s people.

PREACHING IDEA

Prosperity is a tragedy when it comes at the expense of piety.

PREACHING POINTERS

On a strictly historical level, the Omride dynasty was wildly successful. The northern tribes finally found leaders who gave them stability and security. All was not well, however. King Omri and his son Ahab ushered in an era of religious apostasy that God’s people had never experienced. The lesson for the readers of 1 Kings couldn’t be any clearer: prosperity shouldn’t be pursued apart from piety. Throughout history, God’s people would have to hold those two factors in tension. The prophets often chastised Israel for defrauding the impoverished and vulnerable. The postexilic, Second Temple, and New Testament periods were all filled with political struggles for various levels of freedom and independence. Israel always had a spiritual conscience, however, and there were many who sought to spiritually discern how best to pursue those marks of success.

The church in the West has faced this balance between prosperity and piety in historically unique ways. Since the dawn of the twentieth century, American Christians have found themselves citizens of an economically flourishing and politically powerful nation. How have we used our strength and influence? The United States has been a global launching point for the gospel. Many ministries have been created that have sought to use material wealth to help the disadvantaged. However, in some cases, Western culture has been promoted itself rather than our Christ. In some cases, especially within North American evangelicalism, the rights and perspectives of women and ethnic minorities have not been fully acknowledged. In some cases, the church in the West has identified with political movements even when they go against Scripture’s admonitions. Those compromises result in a diminished witness, which is a true tragedy.

1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 1:18

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Elijah embodied the prophetic institution, which was defined not by individual personalities but by its theological and social responsibilities.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The essence of the prophetic institution continues when the Lord brings a specific word to a specific situation by means of Scripture.

PREACHING IDEA

God amplifies prophetic voices when we're having trouble hearing him.

PREACHING POINTERS

At this point in Israel and Judah's history, there is a big enough sample size to declare that the office of the king was failing to properly lead the people of God. King Ahab took over for his father, and like many kings before him he has only worsened the spiritual state of his nation. It is at this time that God raised up key prophets to deliver his message and call the people back to their covenant with the Lord. The message and the ministry of the prophets, especially Elijah, represents God's determination to keep his end of his covenant promises. As Walter Brueggemann (2001) puts it, the main function of the prophets was to "criticize" and "energize" God's people. They challenged the spiritually apathetic while encouraging the disillusioned with the hope of God's plan.

The exiled Israelites and those living in the postexilic world dealt with somewhat different circumstances. Their problem was not the presence of evil leadership—their issue was the lack of any internal leadership at all. That's why God raised up men like Ezra and Nehemiah as the people resettled their ancient homeland. Ezra and Nehemiah provided the godly administrative and spiritual leadership the people needed. As a pair, they encouraged the people in God's law and challenged those who doubted or opposed what God was doing. One can debate whether God still ordains prophets in an official, spiritual gift-type capacity. Yet, if one accepts Brueggemann's premise that prophets primarily served to criticize and energize, this author sees no reason to deny that prophetic voices are applicable and necessary for our day. The writings and ministries of those like A. W. Tozer and Dietrich Bonhoeffer certainly were prophetic in their day. The reality is that every generation has its own pockets of spiritual apathy and blindness. And every generation has pockets of faithful but discouraged believers too. It is for those times and for those people that God amplifies prophetic voices, so that those who need it most can hear God's message.

2 Kings 2:1–13:25

EXEGETICAL IDEA

As a prophet, Elisha served all levels of society to provide social, theological, and political insight, but Jehu's coup inaugurated a period where the basic vitality and effectiveness of

Overview of All Preaching Passages

God's people, including the continued existence of the Davidic line, were being compromised by internal and external pressures, which were all linked to shortsighted decisions and covenantal unfaithfulness.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's grace offers hope in life's precarious situations.

PREACHING IDEA

Desperate times call for divine measures.

PREACHING POINTERS

Turmoil and unrest mark this period of Israel's history. This larger unit is loosely tied together by Elisha's prophetic ministry, as he succeeds Elijah during a tumultuous time for both Israel and Judah. Elisha is described serving in a wide variety of situations, from helping commoners in crisis to advising kings regarding their military campaigns. Besides the prophet, several other leaders are noted for their activities. Some are graded positively, others negatively. What seems clear is that all aspects of life during this time were fraught with instability and anxiety. The Jewish people of the exilic and postexilic periods could relate all too well as they studied this part of their history. Disagreements, conflicts, and uncertainty were the norm as they resettled their homeland. Their one hope would be to follow godly servants and leaders like Elisha and trust the Lord to bring order to their chaos.

We do not lack turmoil in our world today, nor do we have to look very far for reasons to be anxious. Job layoffs, Wall Street fluctuations, and contentious political developments can all directly impact our lives and catch us unprepared. When desperate times arrive, it is natural to wonder what God is up to or even where he is. One helpful response is to take Mr. Rogers's classic advice and "look for the helpers." Has God raised up some individuals or groups that are providing support and service to those in need? Are there leaders who are embodying a response of steadfast faith when others are acting out of fear? Church work teams that help clean up in the aftermath of natural disasters exemplify this, as are Christians who volunteer at homeless shelters or with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. The common saying is, "Desperate times call for desperate measures." But for people of faith, desperate times call for *divine* measures. We can be the hands and feet of Jesus and make an incredible impact, especially in times of turmoil and unrest.

2 Kings 14:1–16:20

EXEGETICAL IDEA

After the departure of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, this period of the divided monarchy reverted to instability while the presence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire redefined the geopolitical landscape, putting Israel and Judah in potentially compromising situations.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Poor choices that produced a spiritually compromised existence for God's people is a symptom of the fall, yet this situation need not persist.

PREACHING IDEA

Sinful choices lead to serious catastrophe that only God's grace can rescue us from.

PREACHING POINTERS

Political turmoil continued for Judah and Israel, only now those kingdoms were without the divinely empowered prophetic presence of Elijah and Elisha. The focus is primarily on the numerous kings who rise and fall. Almost without exception, these kings stumble into trouble because of the decisions they make as they lead. As the record of 1 and 2 Kings advances closer and closer to the period of exile, the mistakes of their ancestors would become more and more relevant to Israel as they reestablished themselves as a people. Spiritually faithful leaders bring security and stability. Otherwise, this is what happens when rulers rule poorly: political infighting and external pressure from world powers.

As Christians today, we need to be careful about drawing too many political conclusions, as we are no longer identified by ethnic or political traits (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:28; Phil. 3:17–20). We will still struggle with these kinds of sins, however. The temptation to act out of ambition, pride, and selfishness is ever present for us as individuals and groups. Should I push hard for my preferred building proposal rather than wait for a consensus to settle on one of the options? Will my social media presence be driven to enhance my personal brand or for other more worthy causes? Will we do whatever it takes to get our church attendance up, even if it sacrifices some biblical principles? Will we sell out to support a political party or candidate because it will make our lives “easier”? Sinful choices will lead us straight into trouble, whether making decisions about how to lead our church, corporation, research group, family, or just our own lives. God's grace can temper the consequences at times, but catastrophe awaits those who lead by their own sinful desires.

2 Kings 17:1–20:21

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The Assyrian Empire's swift invasion and destruction of Samaria and Israel demonstrated Judah's relative superiority over Israel, yet King Hezekiah's decisions with the Babylonian envoy tempered any unqualified praise and foreshadowed the demise of Judah.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The portrayal of Hezekiah testifies that the success of one's faith journey and legacy for the next generation is contingent upon one's consistent commitment to Christ.

PREACHING IDEA

The difference between victory and defeat is a lived-out faith.

PREACHING POINTERS

This section is a study in contrasts. The Assyrian Empire swiftly conquers the northern tribes of Israel, while the southern kingdom manages to survive that threat. The record of 1–2 Kings has transparently shown all the failings and flaws of both groups as the harsh reality of exile loomed larger and larger over Israel's history. The unwritten question that the author seems

Overview of All Preaching Passages

to be posing for his readers is, “What is the difference between the two?” or more specifically, “Why did the exile come in stages?” Second Kings 17–21 offers an explanation. More than Israel, Judah maintained at least a semblance of faithfulness to the covenant—and under Hezekiah’s leadership, it was more than a semblance. He led significant reforms and remained faithful to the Lord even when his enemies were at his doorstep.

We are not facing an actual military conquest, yet we are engaged in warfare. As Paul describes in Ephesians 6:10–18, Christ-followers must be prepared for spiritual battles by putting on the armor of God. While there is much to say about that passage, what is generally obvious is that the illustration is meant to encourage believers to understand who they are in Christ and “fight” (i.e., live) accordingly. The student who faces antagonistic peers at school can maintain a strong witness by starting each day in the Word and prayer (Eph. 6:17–18). The housewife can parent her young kids with confidence by seeking the Lord’s help daily with each parental challenge and difficulty that arises (Eph. 6:16). The aging grandparents can influence the next generation by imparting godly advice, sharing honestly about their own mistakes and successes and how God’s grace saw them through it all (Eph. 6:14). Spiritual victory comes when we live out our faith. Defeat follows when we make our own choices and do our own thing no matter what God has said.

2 Kings 21:1–26

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Manasseh undermined the reforms of his father and secured the destruction and judgment of Judah, while Ammon’s reign intensified the sociopolitical tensions.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Past faithfulness is no guarantee of future faithfulness, but focused engagement on the Lord’s teachings increases the likelihood of future faithfulness.

PREACHING IDEA

Legacies are dismantled much more easily than they are constructed.

PREACHING POINTERS

After the godly reign of King Hezekiah, Judah experiences spiritual whiplash when his son and grandson take over the throne. His son Manasseh seems especially dedicated to reversing the progress and reform Hezekiah had instituted. He leads the nation headlong back into flagrant idolatry. It was at this point that God announced his coming judgment of exile on Judah—the exile that the first readers of 2 Kings would have been all too familiar with. After reestablishing themselves in their homeland, the Jewish people returning from exile now reading this account would have been reminded that all the work they had done could be fumbled away by those who came after them. The only way forward would be to spiritually invest in the next generation, to ensure that their sons and grandsons remained faithful to Yahweh.

Many Christians have lamented the direction of Western culture in the twenty-first century. Few have thought to consider whether Western Christianity is at least in part to blame. For much

of the late twentieth century in the United States, conservative Christians sought to carve out cultural influence through political means, by forming the Religious Right voting bloc. Might the results we decry in the 2000s and following decades be a direct consequence of previous generations of Christians pursuing political power at all costs? Subsequent generations seem to be disillusioned by that quest. Many have rejected the faith altogether. The positive legacies of twentieth-century Western Christianity—global missions, scholarship, musical worship, humanitarian aid, civil rights progress—are often disregarded because of the way Christian leaders put the emphasis on the wrong pursuits. Some Christian legacies of recent times need dismantling. But the world around us is increasingly dismissive of the whole, not just the particulars. The Western church needs to move ahead with a greater desire to leave a legacy that is faithful to the gospel. That will entail raising up disciples and leaders who will follow in our faithful footsteps, instead of walking away disappointed by the failings of their spiritual forebears.

2 Kings 22:1–23:30

EXEGETICAL IDEA

King Josiah's extensive spiritual reforms throughout the land of Judah and Jerusalem, while intensely focused on pushing the nation back to the Lord, could not sway the determinations of the Lord.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

In certain instances, no amount of repentance will alter the determinations of the Lord.

PREACHING IDEA

God's Word is final.

PREACHING POINTERS

Looking back, Judah's exile was inevitable. Even though King Josiah led extensive spiritual reform, it was not enough to avert God's coming judgment on his people for centuries of sin. As the people returned from this exile and studied this history, they would learn a double-sided lesson. Yes, the Babylonian exile was deserved. The nation's continued faithlessness earned that punishment that God had announced. Yet this period also offers a positive lesson, especially to the original audience of Jews returning from exile to resettle their homeland: Josiah's reign is an example to follow as they rebuild their society. His reforms followed God's Word, thus giving the people one final peaceful era before the end came. God's word of judgment could not be avoided, but it served as the template for a good king leading his people in repentance.

It is in that latter lesson where we find points of relevance for our lives today. Is God's Word our template, our compass that guides our lives? When a classmate stumbles upon essays online that fit the assignments for the class we are taking, will we cheat or will we let God's Word determine what we do? Scripture clearly tells us to "pray continually" in all circumstances and situations. Do we? Or do we try to figure out our own solutions to the issues in front of us? Like a fresh-faced cadet following the orders of his drill sergeant, we need to follow God's Word as our final authority in what we say, think, and do.