

A history of the world - 1 Kings 15-16

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- [0 : 0 0] So, what is happening in the world? Is Britain leaving or staying? Are we going to get another referendum?
- Will Russia engage in war with the rest of Europe as they provoke Ukraine? And what about Iran? Will they become a world power as they develop their nuclear weapons?
- And what about the wars in Yemen and Syria? It seems that the conflicts there are getting worse, not better. Or what about the thousands of people that are waiting on the Mexican-US border?
- Or the tens of thousands around the world without homes? Or the 10,000 homeless people in this country? Turn on any news program and you will not be short on opinion or solution.
- What in the world is happening? Well, 1 Kings chapter 15 to 16 show us what is happening in the world.
- [1 : 1 7] These two chapters cover roughly 60 years and introduce us to no less than eight different kings.
- But this is no chronicle of events. This is history from God's perspective. What we see here is not isolated to the past.
- Rather, it is a picture that speaks about the present. 1 Kings 15 to 16 shows us what is going on in the world.
- Three things we see that are going on in the world from our text this morning. First, we see that the world is in dark decline.
- Sociologists will tell us that we are brighter, faster, stronger than at any other point in history. But that's not how God sees it.
- [2 : 2 1] After Solomon died, as we were looking at in the last couple of weeks, the great kingdom divided into two. We had Jeroboam, who was the king of Israel in the north, and Rehoboam, the king in the south, which was Judah.
- Their relationship is summarized in chapter 14, verse 30. Have a look at chapter 14, verse 30. There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.
- And that seems to set the tone for what's to come. Another eight kings follow. And if you just look at the headings, just to get an idea of where we're going, we've got two kings in Judah.
- Abijah, king of Judah, chapter 15. Next heading down, we've got Asa, king of Judah. And then we've got six consecutive kings in Israel.
- All the way through from Nabab, all the way to Ahab at the end of chapter 16. And it's a history that spirals into dark decline.
- [3 : 3 8] Abijah, the first king that we meet in chapter 15, is king for three war-torn years. Nadab, the first king of Israel, well, he only lasts two years, having been knocked off by internal rivalry.

Elah, which we meet in chapter 16, he seems to spend most of his time getting drunk, and lasts only two years, disposed by a military coup. And after him, we meet Zimri.

He only manages seven days. And rather be overthrown, he decides to set himself on fire. It's hardly peaceful or stable.

Instead of things getting better, they appear to be getting worse. Look at how it is summarised for us at the end. Chapter 16, verse 25.

But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and sinned more than all those before him.

[4 : 55] And if that was bad enough, just have a look down at verse 30. The next king. Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.

Verse 33. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

You see, the pattern of man is not onwards and upwards, but backwards and downwards. The world is in dark decline.

You see, we can take great pride in our achievements. If you've been watching the news, we can now send robots to planet Mars, 225 million kilometres away.

Driverless cars are no longer the stuff of science fiction. We've conducted organ transplants and limb replacements. In the past 100 years, the average life expectancy of the world has gone from 31 to 71.

[6 : 10] We've developed electricity, skyscrapers, we have the internet. We are better educated and more sophisticated than ever before in all of history.

But let's think again. In Yemen, 130 children die every day due to the ongoing war.

Of the 28 population, 28 million population of that country, 3.5 million have had to flee their homes. Just try and get that into your head.

In Syria, almost 500,000 have died or are presumed dead due to the genocide that is taking place there. Over half the population, that is 11 million people, have been displaced from their own homes.

Today, 40.3 million live in various forms of slavery, bonded labour, sex trafficking, forced marriages, children as young as eight.

[7 : 24] 2.3 billion of the world's population have no access to basic sanitation, which results in 5.5 million children under the age of five every year dying from preventable disease.

The world is in dark decline. Rather than getting better, we are getting worse. How did it get to be like this?

It seems that we follow on this same pattern. We just do more and more evil in the eyes of the Lord. Well, we're given two reasons as to why this dark decline.

First, worthless idols. Go back to chapter 14. The problem stems from the worship of idols.

So, in chapter 14, verse 9, Abijah, the prophet, is speaking to Jeroboam, who is king of Israel, and he says to him, verse 9, you have done more evil than all who lived before you.

[8 : 41] You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal. You have aroused my anger and turned your back on me. Idols are God's substitutes.

We remove God and we replace God with our own gods. In other words, as it says at the end of verse 14, you've turned your back on me. The God who made us, the God who loves us, who's designed us, and has put this universe together, has been pushed out.

We decide what is best and what is right for us. In our ignorance, we think we can run our lives in the world without God. But look at how the author describes our God replacements.

Chapter 16, the end of verse 13, they're described as worthless idols. idols.

Idols. Idols. The gods that we replace the true God with are empty and powerless.

[9 : 57] Worthless. despite all of these kings coming to power and their kingship over great nations, well, what happens? All the kings died and they're just replaced by another king.

All that they managed to gain, all their conquering of lands and of great wealth that they put together, all get stripped away and it's all passed on to somebody else.

In fact, with each king, the kingdom they leave is in a worse state than which they received it. You see, replacing God will never ever make the world a better place.

It only leads to dark decline. But there's another reason apart from worthless idols and that is this futile legacy. Jeroboam's legacy was clear.

It did not end well. He started this whole pattern of setting up other gods. But it doesn't seem to stop his successors. So look at chapter 15 verse 25.

[11 : 10] Nadab, son of Jeroboam, became king of Israel in the second year of Asa, king of Judah and he reigned over Israel for two years. What was he like?

Well, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Following the ways of his father and committing the same sin his father had caused Israel to commit.

Would things get better? Well, look at verse 34. Here we're introduced to Basha. the next king. And he did evil in the eyes of the Lord following the ways of Jeroboam who committed the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit.

And we can read on chapter 16 verse 19. Here we have Zimri. Zimri. And he committed evil.

Doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and following the ways of Jeroboam and committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit. And if we haven't quite put it together, look at Ahab at the end of chapter 16 verse 31.

[12 : 19] He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and he began to serve Baal and worship him.

Not only is it sad, it is so, so tragic. They could not see the tragedy of the sin of their fathers and they just followed blindly down the same tragic path.

And isn't that what we just see happening in our world today? Generation after generation walking down the same path. Doing what their fathers have done.

Removing God and replacing God with our own laws and our own desires. As a society, we've moved on from God. We've been there, we've done that, and we are not going back.

After all, we know what's best, don't we? We know how to make the world good and beautiful. We have wonderful things like abortion and euthanasia and drone missiles bombing at will.

[13 : 38] What a good and beautiful world we have made. be careful of worthless idols, their futile legacy.

It leaves the world broken and destroyed. so as we look at 1 Kings 15 and 16, we see what is happening in the world.

There's a dark decline, but we also see that there is a sovereign Lord. The author carefully recounts history for us.

We're just taking kind of some big themes out of these chapters, so we're going backwards and forwards, keep with me. So chapter 15, verse 1, in the 18th year of the reign of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah.

Verse 8, and Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David and Asa, his son, succeeded him as king. Verse 9, in the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah.

- [14 : 53] Verse 24, then Asa rested with his ancestors and he was buried with them in the city of his father David. Chapter 16, verse 8, In the twenty-sixth year of Asa, king of Judah, Elah, son of Basha, became king of Israel and he reigned in Tirzah for two years.

Verse 14, As for the other events of Elah's reign and all he did, are they not written in the books of the annals of the kings of Israel? I think we get the pattern here, don't we?

Kings come and kings go. They live and they die. But their rise and their fall are all overseen by the sovereign Lord.

First ruling word. While kings plot and plan, God rules. Look at what God says to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah back in chapter 14.

God has seen, God has watched as Jeroboam has done his own thing. He has seen the evil he has done by making up these God replacements and God has something to say to him.

- [16 : 15] Verse 14, chapter 14, The Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam.

Even now this is beginning to happen. verse 16, And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit.

So God has said Jeroboam and his whole family are going to be wiped out. Now look at chapter 15, verse 28. Here we see the rise of another king, Basha, who killed Nadab in the third year of Asa, king of Judah, and Basha succeeded him as king.

And what did he do when he became king? As soon as he began to reign, he killed Jeroboam's whole family. He did not leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed, but destroyed them all.

Why? According to the word of the Lord given through his servant Ahijah, the Shalonite. God's word is ruling.

- [17 : 30] Now, just because Basha moves in and destroys Jeroboam, that doesn't mean to say that Basha is now off the hook. Have a look at chapter 16, verse 7.

Moreover, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, to Basha and his house, because of all the evil he had done in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger by the things he did, becoming like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.

Verse 11, another king comes to power, and as soon as he began to reign, this is Zimri, as soon as he began to reign and was seated on the throne, he killed off Basha's whole family.

He did not spare a single male, whether relative or friend, Zimri destroyed the whole family of Basha. Why? In accordance with the word of the Lord, God had spoken against Basha through the prophet Jehu.

Kings may reign, but they are always under the sovereign rule of God's word. In fact, what God says will always come to pass.

- [18 : 49] Have a look at chapter 16, verse 34. In Ahab's time, heel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho.

Now, we'll remember Jericho from the past, about 400 years before these events that we're reading in 1 Kings. God's people came out of slavery and into the promised land.

The first city they came up against was Jericho, a pagan city, which they destroyed. And God said very, very clearly, we can see it on the screen, God spoke through Jeremiah at that time, he said, at that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath, cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho.

At the cost of his firstborn son, he will lay its foundations. At the cost of his youngest, he will set up its gates. Now read the rest of verse 34.

Let's read it again. In Ahab's time, Heel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son, Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son, Segub.

[20 : 12] Why? It's in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua, son of Nun. Centuries may have passed, but when God speaks his word, it is always active and it is always powerful, and it will always accomplish what he has set out to do.

God rules over the nations and over the kings of this world by his word. God and isn't this the same God that rules by his sovereign word today?

Remember what God said to the prophet Isaiah? You can follow on the screen. He, that's God, sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers.

He brings princes to naught, reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, then he blows in them and they wither and the whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

Every leader, every president, every Taoiseach is in the hands of God. No one gets to be ruler without God's say-so.

[21 : 36] And when they fall away, it is simply at God's command. Now that of course raises all kinds of questions for us.

If God is sovereign, then why does he let Syria's president Bashar al-Assad carry on the genocide like he is? Or why does God allow America to sell arms to the Saudis so that they can go and bomb the life out of Yemen?

Well, these things may concern us, and rightly so, but as we think about these hard questions, let us not forget there is only one sovereign king and one sovereign lord who holds every nation and every leader to account, who can use their evil ways to accomplish his purposes.

Everyone is accountable. Everyone will be responsible to God. The world may look like it's in freefall descending into dark decline, but let us be sure of this, God is in supreme control of all things and all people.

So, we see that the world is in dark decline, we see that there is a sovereign lord, and in the midst of it all, there is greater grace.

[23 : 15] It all appears very depressing, but not all is doom and gloom, because in the midst of darkness and decline shines the glorious light of God's grace.

grace. Our sovereign God, by his powerful word, is working his purposes out through history for our good and for his glory.

Remember, history is God's story. This is God's world that we live in. Let's see this grace first, faithful God.

Go back again to chapter 15. Abijah, Solomon's grandson, has come to power in Judah, and we're told what he is like in verse 3.

He committed all the sins his father had done before him. His heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his forefather had been.

[24 : 23] It's just part of the dark decline, isn't it? Here's another hopeless failing king, another futile legacy, and the expectation is, well, what's God going to do with this king?

Just write them off, have them destroyed? Well, you could do worse, I guess, but that's not what happens. Look at verse 4. Nevertheless, for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and making Jerusalem strong.

God says he will not write them off because or for David's sake. God had promised David in the years before that there would always be a king on David's throne, a faithful king who would bring blessing, a righteous king who would rule.

So why doesn't God write Judah off and condemn it to history? Because of God's faithful promise. That's what's holding the whole story of one king together.

God's faithfulness. Everyone that we meet fails spectacularly, yet in it all is God's persistent faithfulness, ruling history by his powerful word and fulfilling his promise.

[25 : 56] It seems there is nothing and no one that can derail what God is setting out to do. So greater grace is seen in God's faithfulness.

Second, the shining light. Because this promise of God's faithfulness, his promise to preserve, is like a shining light through the darkness of history.

Look at verse 4 again. God said he would give a lamp in Jerusalem. There would be a succession of kings, and even though they are bad and terrible and evil in many of their ways, we are reminded that each king that comes along the way is just a light, a flicker of God's promise that it will never be extinguished.

He will always have a king, and from that king would become God's king. We even get a glimpse of that if you look down at verse 11. That light begins to flicker a little bit brighter.

Verse 11, Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as his father David had done. out of all these kings, one king, out of all these other kings, only one who does right, God showing his persistence that yes, he will raise up a king who will do what is right and what is good.

[27 : 32] But we only need to read on and discover that Asa was not all that he ought to be. so we have a shining light of God's faithfulness through the darkness giving us a glimpse of what is to come.

And third, our glorious hope because in the course of time that flickering lamp that God had promised would become the light of the world. Remember how John introduces us to Jesus?

the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. Here is this promised light, the one that God said would come, that he persisted through all the failures down through the history of the world.

Amidst the darkness, that glimmer, that light begins to shine and becomes as brightest as Jesus Christ enters the world. You see, when the light of Christ shines into our lives and when the lamp of his truth cuts into the darkness of our hearts, we begin to see how worthless our idols are.

We see how futile life is without God. And as we turn to Jesus, so the light banishes the darkness of decline, giving us a new way to live.

[29 : 01] Turn with me, please, to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1. Remember what we read at the very beginning this morning?

here we see what God's true king would do.

Colossians 1 verse 12, joyfully, or giving joyful thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Here is God's king who brings glorious hope, taking people from this dark decline of emptiness and nothingness and a root that just ends in judgment and separation from God brings us into the kingdom of his son.

[30 : 28] What amazing redemption, what glorious hope there is. But you know what? This light, this lamp doesn't stop with Jesus Christ. Go back with me to Matthew's gospel, chapter 5.

Matthew chapter 5. 5. Because as we come to Jesus, as we submit to the true king, as we bow before him, then we in turn become the light to the world.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 14. Jesus says, You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The church, God's holy people, who have come to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, are transformed. The darkness is banished.

[31 : 53] Instead, the church is to be a shining, glorious beacon of hope to a world that is shattered and broken. That is what we are as we go out into the world, as collectively as we live, as God's people.

Shining lights. Beacons of hope. Amidst this darkness of decline. Showing people the true Saviour.

The true King. Who is in control of this world. And who longs that all people would turn to Him. So let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Let's pray. Father, we look out upon your world, and we do see the brokenness all around us.

The tragedy, the sadness, and all the pain. And your heart is broken. You grieve at what you see.

[33 : 24] And yet in Christ, shines the glorious hope for us and for this world.

We thank you that in Jesus, we have been brought into an eternal kingdom. The kingdom of His Son. And we pray that we would be people who shine forth your light.

And that together, you would use us collectively as your people here in Karigaline. And as we are scattered throughout this week, that we would be a light shining for you.

Pointing people to the hope, the glorious hope, that there is to be found in King Jesus. Help us, we pray. Be merciful and use us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's sing in response and encourage one another as we sing What Grace Is My...