

1 Kings 14:21 - 16:28 // The King who Breaks the Pattern

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[0 : 00] So the second part of today's Bible reading, 1 Kings 16, 15 to 28, can be found on page 357.

It might be different from what's on your small leaflets, but we're looking at Omri, King of Israel, after we hear from Zimri, King of Israel, page 357 in your pew Bibles.

In the 27th year of Asa, King of Judah, Zimri reigned in Tirzah for seven days.

The army was encamped near Gibethon, a Philistine town. When the Israelites in the camp heard that Zimri had plotted against the king and murdered him, they proclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel, that very day there in the camp.

Then Omri and all the Israelites with him withdrew from Gibethon and laid siege to Tirzah. When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the royal palace and set the palace on fire around him.

[1 : 18] So he died. Because of the sins he had committed, 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.

As for the other events of Zimri's reign and the rebellion he carried out, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? Then the people of Israel were split into two factions.

They supported Tibni, son of Ginath, for king, and the other half supported Omri. But Omri's followers proved stronger than those of Tibni, son of Ginath.

So Tibni died and Omri became king. In the thirty-first year of Asa, king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel and he reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah.

He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemir for two talents of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemir, the name of the former owner of the hill.

[2 : 31] But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols.

As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did, and the things he achieved, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

Omri rested with his ancestors and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab, his son, succeeded him as king. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Thanks so much, Lamont. And let me add my very warm welcome to you all. A little bit cold here, so grab a blanket if you're feeling a bit cold, something you've got that whole Scandi alfresco vibe going on. Some of the kids at the 930 service wore the blankets as cloaks, pretending that they were Jedis, looked a little bit more like Jawas, if you ask me.

[3 : 41] But let's pray as we come to this passage. Let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, this is a long passage, and in many ways a dark and sobering one.

So we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would help us not simply to see human failure, but to see our very deep need for the true king.

So we pray, Lord, shine the light of the gospel on this passage and bring its truth home to our hearts. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Rehoboam, Abijah, Eza, Nadab, Basha, Elah, Zimri, Omri. It's a bit of a blur, isn't it?

Kings come and go, names merge together. And before long, you're thinking, hang on, who even is this now? Because suddenly the pace of the story changes completely.

[4 : 48] Up to this point, things have been moving pretty slowly. Eleven whole chapters on one king, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, the richest king in history, the builder of the temple, and yet not quite as wise as he thought.

700 wives plus concubines, I think we worked at. That was one every three weeks or something during a 40-year reign. Not exactly a sign of wise decision-making, not exactly a master class in wisdom.

Then his son, Rehoboam, arrives, and his strategy for holding together the kingdom was basically be harsher than my father. And his spin doctors are very pleased with themselves.

They come up with the slogan, my father scourged you with whips, I will scourge you with scorpions. Not a great PR campaign, and it goes about as well as you'd expect.

Civil war, the kingdom splits apart Israel in the north, Judah in the south. And from that moment, everything accelerates.

[6 : 01] No more long stories, just snapshots. A few verses, next king. A few more verses, next king. Some rain for years.

One of them lasts just a week. And after a while, it feels a bit exhausting. Different names, but same failures.

Nothing really changes. And that feeling is the point, because this isn't random history.

It's like watching a kingdom collapse in fast forward. Well, you know those time-lapse videos? We've got one there from yesterday. We're doing a bit of demolition in the back garden.

I say we, it was mainly my son doing the work. I was just carrying the wood away. And those time-lapse videos where a camera captures something over perhaps months or years and compresses it down into a few seconds.

[7 : 00] Something like that, which took us probably an hour or so, condensed down into 30 seconds. You see the whole process differently. And you get to see patterns.

And what looked slow and almost invisible in some of these time-lapse videos of a forest growing or something like that suddenly becomes obvious in the time-lapse.

You see the direction the whole thing was going all along. Well, that's what's happening here in our passage in 1 Kings. I want you to imagine that this passage is like time-lapse photography.

The author is speeding up the camera on Israel's history. So we stop focusing on events and start seeing the pattern.

We start seeing why the things are happening. And it's not like the time-lapse of a flower blooming in an Attenborough documentary.

[8 : 00] It's more like watching a building or a city slowly decay. And actually, that feeling isn't completely unfamiliar to us because when you live through change in real time, you often don't notice how much has shifted but speed it up over years, over 40 years, over 50 years, over one lifetime.

And suddenly, the trajectory becomes absolutely unmistakable. Things that seemed morally unthinkable a generation ago become normal.

Institutions people trusted seem fragile, seem precarious. Even parts of the church can seem theologically confused, compromised, or spiritually adrift.

And so somewhere in the background sits this uneasy question. Where is this all heading? Well, our passage helps us see.

Because when God speeds up the story of these kings, we don't just learn what happened. We see where the trajectory goes. And for the original readers sitting now in exile, this would have shattered any rose-tinted nostalgia about their monarchy.

[9 : 25] It exposes the rot that had been there for generations. And merely human kings were never going to save God's people.

That's the point. This passage is not just about decline. It's preparing us to long for a very different kind of king. So now the camera starts rolling faster.

And king after king after king turns away from the Lord. The very first thing you notice in this fast-moving history is that every king is being assessed.

Not just described, but evaluated. So let me show you what I mean. Look at chapter 15, verse 25. Chapter 15, verse 25.

Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, becomes king of Israel. He reigns for two years. And then in verse 26, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[10:25] And then Bashar comes along, verse 34. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Then another king, then another king. The same pattern, same verdict. It's a bit like those TV shows that rank the top 100 of whatever.

And in our house, we've been watching one. We've been watching 72 dangerous animals. Now, I'm not entirely sure what genre it is. Natural history documentary would probably be stretching it a little bit.

It's basically what's more dangerous, an Indian cobra or a plague rat. It's quite brutal. My son loves it. And each episode sort of pits together a handful of animals against each other.

They don't actually fight one another. But each animal is ranked against the other compared for things like strength and venom, deadliness.

And eventually one rises to the top and becomes the benchmark that the others are measured against. Well, that's what's happening here. Each king gets measured using the same criteria.

[11:33] We're given the same set of stats for each king. We're told things like how long they reign. So, Ezer reigns for 41 years. That's a pretty good innings.

Basha, 24 years. That's not too bad. Zimri reigns one week. Well, we're told how they die as well. Even the burial matters. The best case scenario is buried with their ancestors. That's the respectable ending, ending up in the family mausoleum.

Worst case scenario, inside a dog's stomach before you even reach the undertaker. But those aren't the details that matter most.

The real question is, what does God think of them? Did they do what was right in the eyes of the Lord or did they do what was evil?

[12:32] What does God think of them? And what's striking is just how little God seems impressed by the things that we seem impressed, by the things that impress humans.

So, take Omri in chapter 16, verse 24. Omri builds Samaria. That's the capital city of the northern kingdom.

By human standards, I'd say that's a pretty big deal. That's a huge achievement, a visible legacy, the kind of thing that people remember you by. But then Narita barely pauses.

Verse 27. As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did and the things he achieved, and then he moves on. Because ultimately, the decisive question is not, what did Omri build?

But was Omri faithful? And that's, I think, pretty sobering, isn't it? Because we naturally measure life by visible achievements.

[13:36] Career, academic success, influence, reputation, wealth, even perhaps success in Christian ministry. But God's question goes deeper.

Were you faithful? Were you faithful? Were you faithful? What if the thing that you're most proud of, and God barely mentions it?

Now, here's where it gets really interesting. Kings aren't just evaluated. They're compared. And the way it works with 1 Kings is a little bit like the 72 most dangerous animals.

You've got your benchmark kings. And in Judah, in the south, the benchmark is David, the king after God's own heart. So when Asa comes along, in chapter 15, verse 11, it tells us that Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done.

David becomes the gold standard of faithful kingship. But in the north, in Israel, the benchmark is completely different.

[14:50] Jeroboam, son of Neba, a terrible king, an awful king. We heard about him last week. The man who led Israel into false worship. Golden calves, alternative priests of religion, reshaped for convenience, but pulling people away from the living God.

And every night, every single king, rather, in Israel is benchmarked. against Jeroboam. Every time, the verdict is the same. They do not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who caused Israel to commit sin.

So for example, let's look at Zimri, chapter 16, verse 19. Zimri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and followed the ways of Jeroboam, committing the same sin Jeroboam, and what was so evil about Jeroboam?

What was it that made God so angry? Not simply that he sinned personally, it's that he led others into sin.

In his spiritual rule of the country, he institutionalized rebellion against God with his fake Christianity. He created a system of worship that redirected people away from the Lord, and God

hates that.

[16:24] Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin, and we're not allowed to forget it. And any time any king of Israel is mentioned, we're reminded of Jeroboam's sin and the continuation of that as these subsequent kings continue to propagate his alternative version of religion.

We're not allowed to forget that. So as the camera speeds up, what do we begin to see? Not just individual failures, but a whole trajectory, a whole line of leadership moving steadily away from the Lord.

The same compromise, the same rebellion, the same drift. And again and again, the verdict falls. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So once you see the pattern, you begin to see what that pattern produces.

And as the camera speeds up, one thing becomes absolutely unmistakable. Everything, everything begins to unravel. Everything unravels. And at first glance, I suppose you might think, well, that's just ancient history for you.

[17:44] There's assassinations, violent kings, coups, political chaos. But the Bible won't let us dismiss it that easily. Because when God's rule is honored, it doesn't look like that.

Think about David. God gave him rest from his enemies. Think about Solomon at his height. Peace, stability, wealth flowing into the nation.

But when kings turn away from God, that's when things begin to break apart. And we notice three things in our passage. First, power becomes unstable.

Power becomes unstable. As kings turn away from God, political life just seems to disintegrate.

Thrones no longer pass peacefully from father to son.

They're seized by force. So Nadab is stabbed in the back, metaphorically. Chapter 15, verse 27.

Basha, the son of Ahijah, plotted against Nadab and struck him down.

[18:56] And then Basha goes on to wipe out Jeroboam's entire household. Verse 29. As soon as he began to reign, Basha killed Jeroboam's whole family. He didn't leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed, but destroyed them all.

Then over in chapter 16, verse 15, Zimri launches a coup, and his reign lasts seven days. Seven days. That's barely time to unpack.

The kingdom feels unstable because it is unstable. The ground underneath has started giving away.

Every throne feels temporary. Every ruler is vulnerable. When leadership turns away from God, stability starts disappearing with it.

So instability. Second, the people become divided. Instead of unity, there's conflict between Judah and Israel. So chapter 14, verse 30.

[20:04] Chapter 14, verse 30. There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Then in chapter 15, verse 6, there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam throughout Abijah's lifetime.

And over the page in chapter 15, verse 32, there was war between Asa and Basha, king of Israel, throughout their reigns.

War, war, war. You know, this is where the tragedy really bites because this isn't simply one political nation against another.

This is God's people tearing each other apart. Be like St. Silas going to war against another church, against Harper or Greenview on the south side, for example.

So far gone from God that God's people start treating one another as enemies. And something has gone very deeply wrong because of an evil set of kings.

[21:13] And that's what sin does. When leaders turn from God, the damage is rarely contained at the top. It spreads outward into families, into communities, into churches.

Sin does that work of damaging and spreading like that. It fractures things. And maybe you've experienced something like that in the past.

But it gets worse still because third, the glory drains away. You can see it most vividly in the temple. So in chapter 14, verse 25, if you look with me.

1425. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace.

He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the garden duty at the entrance of the royal palace.

[22 : 28] Whenever the king went to the Lord's temple, the guards bore the shields and afterward they returned them to the garden room. So Egypt comes in and he plunders it and strips the temple bare, nabs all the gold, all the splendor of Solomon, gone.

What replaces the gold? Bronze. Bronze shields instead of gold. It's de-glorification of the temple. And even the bronze replacements replacements. They're a little bit nervous about them, a little bit nervous that somebody's going to come and nick them. So it has to be carefully guarded and locked away afterwards.

Then later, even what remains gets sold off on eBay. So look at chapter 15, verse 18. Asa took the silver and gold still left in the treasuries of the Lord's temple and of his own palace.

He entrusted it to his officials and sent them to Ben-Hadad, the son of Tabramon, the son of Hezion, the king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. Let there be a treaty between me and you, he said, as there was between my father and your father.

[23 : 44] See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. This is Asa, one of the better kings, the only good king in our passage. He flogs the family, silver and gold, to buy political alliances.

He starts trusting political expediency, political maneuvering instead of trusting God. Lord God, we're in a bit of a pickle, we're under pressure.

But instead of trusting you, instead of praying to you, instead of crying out to you, we're going to try and throw money at this situation. We're going to try and buy ourselves out of this mess.

The treasures of God's house have just become bargaining trips. And so slowly, you begin to realize what's happening. This is not just political decline.

It is spiritual collapse. Stability becomes chaos. Unity becomes division. And glory becomes loss.

[24 : 47] The wealth that once flowed in from the nations goes in reverse. Now flows back out again the way it came in. The glory is departing.

I guess if you were living through that in real time, you might barely notice it. It would feel gradual, normalized even.

But in this time-lapse view that we're privileged to have in the Scriptures, the trajectory becomes obvious. Everything is spiraling in the same direction, downward.

And I think perhaps one of the most sobering things of all is that nobody seems able to stop it. One king follows another. Some bad, some worse.

Even Azza, one of the bright spots in our passage, compromises when pressure comes along. So by this point in the story, we're meant to be asking, can any human king actually fix this?

[25 : 54] Or, do God's people need a different kind of king altogether? So how did it get like this? How does it go from Solomon and David to this?

And the answer is soberingly simple. It's the sin of the kings. Again and again, they turn away from the lords.

Again and again, they walk in the ways of Jeroboam. They don't drift alone. They drag the nations with them. Leadership matters. Leaders shape the direction of the people.

And that's one of the reasons why the Bible tells us we should pray for our leaders, our ministers, parents, small group leaders, kids' own leaders.

They need our prayer. Not expecting perfection, perfection, but praying for integrity, praying for faithfulness in those who lead us.

[27 : 04] But the passage takes us deeper still because this is not merely flawed leadership, but God is at work even through the chaos, even in it and through it.

So look at chapter 15 verse 29. chapter 15 29. As soon as Basha began to reign, he killed Jeroboam's whole family.

He didn't leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed, but destroyed them all. According to the word of the Lord given through his servant Ahijah the Shilonite. Then later, judgment falls on Basha's own house.

Chapter 16 verse 3, the Lord says, I am about to wipe out Basha and his house. Dogs will eat those in the city, birds will feed on those who die in the country.

Remember earlier how he said that your burial became a kind of commentary on your life? Well, this is the worst possible ending. And sure enough, in verse 12, Zimri destroys Basha's household

exactly as the Lord said he would.

[28 : 15] Zimri destroyed the whole family of Basha in accordance with the word of the Lord because of all the sins he committed and caused Israel to sin.

There's a kind of divine justice running through these chapters. In other words, this chaos isn't outside of God's sovereign control.

It's not like God is kind of wringing his hands in heaven powerless. He's bringing judgment to base. He's bringing judgment on a kingdom that has repeatedly rejected and repeatedly turned away from him.

So it's a really sobering picture, isn't it? Sin leading to ruin. Leading to ruin. Leading to ruin.

And yet, right in the middle of all this decline and chaos there are two quiet but unmistakable signs of grace.

[29 : 15] Little reminders in our chapters that God has not abandoned his people. First, the temple still stands.

So chapter 14, verse 21. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was king in Judah.

He was 41 years old when he became king. And he reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his name.

And in the middle of all the collapse, that little sentence matters enormously because it means that though the people may have deserted God, God has not deserted them.

The temple still stands, the place where God has chosen to put his name. The door is still open.

Prayer is still possible.

[30 : 20] God is saying, I am still here. I am still listening. The lines of communication are still open.

And maybe that lands personally for some of us here today. Because if you looked at your own life in time-lapse, some of us could honestly say that over the last few years, Jesus has really changed me.

Like the stories we heard earlier in the baptisms of Audrey and Olivia, where Christ has brought forgiveness, new life, and a new direction. That is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

But perhaps for others, if you looked honestly at the time-lapse of your life, you'd see drift. A time, perhaps as you look back when your faith felt more alive, when your heart felt a little bit softer towards God's Word, when you're closer to the Lord than you are now in your walk with Him.

And this passage says, the door is still open. It's not too late. You can still cry out, Lord, I've wondered.

[31 : 41] Lord, if I'm honest, I've made a bit of a mess of things. I don't know how to get myself out. Please forgive me.

please, Lord, bring me home. And God says, I'm still here. I still love you.

The temple still stands. Second, the promise to David still stands. So look at chapter 15, 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 by making Jerusalem strong.

For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

This is God's promise from 2 Samuel 7. Your kingdom will endure forever. And despite everything, David's line continues. Up in the north, we've got assassinations, coups, rival dynasties.

[32 : 53] But in Judah, the line keeps going. David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, and so on. Flawed kings, failing kings, but the line does not break because God does not forget.

his promises even when his people are faithless. And strikingly, I think, these reminders of grace don't come where you'd expect them.

They don't come during good King Asa's reign. They come during the darker days of the kingdom.

You see, whereas judgment follows sin, grace does not depend on any inherent goodness in us.

Which means God's faithfulness doesn't rise and fall with your circumstances or with his people performing well.

God is faithful. That's deeply encouraging, isn't it? Because if God only proved faithful when everything was going well with ourselves, what hope would you have?

[34 : 07] What hope would any of us have? What confidence would you have that God would be faithful to you when your life isn't going as you planned?

And even David, even the great benchmark! king isn't clean. So look at chapter 15 verse 5 again.

David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's

commands all the days of his life except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

Even David carried deep moral failure. Remember the story of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite? Adultery, deception, murder.

Even the best king falls short. And that means ultimately Israel needed more than a better David.

They needed a completely different kind of king. And that's exactly where this story leads. Because if you leave the time lapse running eventually you arrive at Jesus the king who breaks the pattern.

[35 : 19] The king who resembles David but is nothing at all like Jeroboam. Where these kings failed Jesus succeeds.

Where they led people into sin Jesus leads us back to God. Where they brought instability Jesus brings what Hebrews calls a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Where they divided God's people Jesus tears down that dividing wall of hostility and creates one new people in himself. Outsiders brought near by God's grace.

And where glory drained away from the temple in Jesus the glory of God returns in fullness. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.

It's not just another version of the same pattern. He is the end of the pattern. The true king the people were always waiting for.

[36 : 31] Which means this passage speaks directly into our moment. If the world around us feels unstable, morally confused, spiritually adrift, this passage says yes.

that's what happens when humanity turns away from God. But it also says this, your hope was never meant to rest in human leaders, political movements or cultural recovery.

Your hope rests in a king who never, never fails. And when the time lapse of history finally stops, when every kingdom has risen and fallen, when every human empire has crumbled, when every ruler is forgotten, there will still be one king who sat on his throne.

King Jesus. The king who never sinned, the king who never provoked the Lord to anger, the king who died for his people, rose for his people, reigns even now for his people.

One king shows us what happens when sinful kings rule. king. The gospel shows us what happens when the true king reigns.

[37 : 55] So don't build your hope on kingdoms that are passing away. Build your hope on the king who cannot be shaken.

Let's take a moment to pause and reflect and then we'll pray. Amen. heavenly father we're so thankful for Jesus our perfect king.

The king who broke the pattern of failure, compromise and decline. in a world that so often feels unstable, divided and uncertain, we thank you that Jesus reigns at your right hand and that his kingdom cannot be shaken.

Guard us therefore we pray from slowly drifting away from you. Help us to put our trust in Christ alone. Keep us faithful.

people. Please Lord grant integrity to those entrusted with positions of leadership and thank you that even when we fail, even when we go wrong, the door of mercy is still open.

[39 : 20] Thank you that through Jesus, sinners can be forgiven, brought home and made new. So help us Lord to live faithfully for King Jesus until the day he returns.

For we ask in his name. Amen.