

Route Sixty-Six

Part Eleven

1 Kings

(John 5:39; Matthew 11:4-6)

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* ⁶ *And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me (Matthew 11:4-6).*

Introduction

As a young student I would read and not understand because I didn't have a clear picture of what I was reading about. Reading history was confusing until I began to grasp where the events took place, what led to them and what is happening now as a result. Biology and anatomy were confusing until I asked where these organs I was studying are in our bodies and what is their function? How do they interact with the rest of my body and why is this important? I needed to understand the big picture in order for the smaller things I was studying to come into focus.

When it comes to the Bible, the big picture question is put forth in the third question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Jesus dials it in even more specific in terms of the big picture when He indicates that the Bible is essentially about Him (John 5:39). This has

been our quest in Route Sixty-Six. Where is Jesus, at least in the Old Testament, prior to the virgin birth?

In the first five books of the Bible (the Torah, Law or Pentateuch) we read of the duty of man and his failure in fulfilling that duty, commonly called *the fall*. But we immediately see Christ in God's promises and covenants. In Genesis we read that the seed of the woman (Christ) will destroy the enemy of God's people. We see that this will be through Abraham.

In Exodus we see Christ in the Passover Lamb and in Leviticus in the Day of Atonement and the scapegoat. In Numbers we learn of the power of Christ in salvation through the bronze serpent that the afflicted people need merely look to for deliverance. In Deuteronomy we learn of Christ with the word being near us, in our mouth and in our hearts.

As we move from the Torah to the history of Israel, Jesus is seen in Joshua in that Joshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus) is the one who delivers into the promised land. We discussed how the altar of Gideon provided a foreshadow of Christ in Judges and in Ruth we learned of Christ, the kinsman redeemer. In 1 Samuel we saw Christ in David's defeat of Goliath and in 2 Samuel we learned of Christ in the Davidic Covenant, that there were always be a King on David's throne.

What we also see in all these books in the recurring theme of human failure. The duty that God requires of man is a duty man has never and can never meet adequately for salvation. The duty, which might in a general sense be called *the law* is addressed in question 14 of the Shorter Catechism:

Q. 14. *What is sin?*

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Conversely, the gospel is what God does for us. It is a saving grace distinct from but not separated from the law (those who have saving faith will seek to walk in obedience but are not saved by that obedience). And the instrument by which that saving grace is applied is faith and faith alone. Let us pray that God would grant us to know our duty and our hope as we briefly examine 1 Kings.

Survey of 1 Kings

First Kings begins with the end of David's life and reign. David's fourth son, Adonijah seizes the opportunity and postures himself to be the heir to the throne. The desire for power and notoriety can be one's undoing. Simon, the magician, wanted power which was met by a harsh rebuke from Peter (Acts 8:18-20). The disciples wanted to know who would be "**greatest in the kingdom of heaven**" and Jesus placed a small child in their midst (Matthew 18:1-4).

My young son and I were talking recently at the power of leadership in the context of coaching. I sought to explain that I generally don't view being a coach, a father or an elder as a position of power but as a call to serve and take responsibility. The supreme example of course is Jesus Himself, as head of the church and given all power and authority, but one who came to serve (Matthew 20:28). Adonijah's plans are quickly upset by the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba who bring David into the loop and David proclaims Solomon king.

A dying David exhorts Solomon to "**be a man**" and gives him advice on how to run the kingdom. The advice may seem harsh since it includes punitive and severe warnings and indictments against people who had served with David, but David recognized that certain people were an inherent threat, not only to Solomon, but to the well-being of the entire nation. Solomon was very young and needed to beware.

One of the very notable, early actions of Solomon (in light of his youth and inexperience in leading-saying "**I am but a child**" 1 Kings 3:7) was his request for wisdom. This is an attribute we should all seek.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

And even though we may not receive the supernatural gift of wisdom experienced by Solomon, the deeper we know, love, meditate and embrace Jesus, the richer our wisdom will be, for "**all the treasures of**

wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3). God was very pleased with Solomon’s request (and that Solomon did not use the opportunity to ask for long life or riches) and granted that Solomon would be the wiser than all before and after him (1 Kings 3:12). It is here that we read of Solomon’s wise judgment over the two women both claiming the same baby.

Oh, that our leaders would have, or even seek, the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon would later write that

The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

The necessary implication of a verse like this is that true wisdom and understanding cannot even begin until one is captured by the love, grace and mercy of God.

Solomon will now accomplish that which his father, David, desired but could not do, which is build the temple. The temple is described in great detail and is one of the most astonishing architectural endeavors in history. Not so much that it was it big. It was not. But the gold, the detail, the art was beyond compare.

In chapter eight the ark of the covenant is brought to the temple and Solomon utters a beautiful speech. Ancient man is so often characterized as naïve in his thinking that God was found in statues or natural elements like the sun. And there are many today who fail to recognize the finite and error laden views of their gods (which they will seldom call god but treat as god).

But Solomon, with great wisdom, articulates how heaven cannot contain God, much less a temple. He appeals to God that He might hear in heaven and forgive sinners when we come to know the plague of our own hearts; a way we begin every gathering for worship. He views the temple as instrumental in reaching beyond Israel and to foreigners. We once again see, in seminal form, the universal nature of redemption. It is Solomon’s desire that...

...all the peoples of the earth may know the Lord is God; there is no other (1 Kings 8:60).

In the first half of 1 Kings we are struck, not only with the wisdom of Solomon, but the riches as well. But in chapter nine, God calls Solomon to remain faithful lest Israel become a byword (an object of ridicule). Directly after this warning we read of Solomon entertaining the Queen of Sheba. She is enthralled by the wisdom of Solomon. She enjoyed asking him hard questions which he answered with excellence. She also noticed how well things were run in his house and how happy the servants who served in his presence were.

But similar to 2 Samuel, it is halfway through 1 Kings that we begin to see the downturn, or what has been called *Discontinuance Through Disobedience*. The kingdom would be forever divided into two kingdoms. We read of an almost always corrupt northern kingdom called Israel and an occasionally obedient southern kingdom called Judah. They would remain divided until the north went into captivity to the Assyrians and the south (150 years later) to the Babylonians (commonly called *the exile*). Why or how did this happen? What a lesson for the church! When we lose our zeal and love for Christ, we, similar to Israel, will find ourselves in turmoil. The Lord will remove our **“lampstand” (Revelation 2:5)**. And many churches are no longer churches at all. What was the beginning of this downturn?

Chapter eleven records that Solomon’s heart turned from the Lord to foreign women and their gods. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (a live-in woman with less rights or privileges than a wife). Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, Molech and other false gods were accommodated by Solomon. And this would cause God to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon’s son. Generally the church begins to crumble due to some carnality in the leadership. It might be money, lust or our desire to receive the **“praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43)**.

We also see in chapter eleven, the death of Solomon and the folly of his son and heir to the throne, Rehoboam. Rehoboam rejects the counsel of the elders to be a servant leader and heeds the advice of the young men who tell him to be tougher than his dad. How unlike Christ the King!

This leads to the divided kingdom (commonly called The Disruption). At this point Jeroboam begins to reign in the northern kingdom and devises a worship system according to his own heart. This is stark contradiction to the wisdom of God which instructs us in worship, **“not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes” (Numbers 15:39)**.

We live in an era where the church pays little attention to the biblical admonition that God is the one who regulates or determines what is to be done in worship. Following our own hearts can be a modern day evangelical mantra when it comes to worship. I haven't the direct quote, but Calvin was known to have said that he doesn't trust any worship that his flesh enjoys too much. It is possible that there is an overstatement there, but the point should be taken to heart. It would be a fine objective that our flesh be so sanctified that it truly enjoys a Christ ordained and regulated worship.

The remainder of 1 Kings chronicles the various good and evil kings of the two kingdoms (almost all of the northern kingdom being evil). Baal worship becomes very common and we read of Ahab and his horribly evil wife, Jezebel.

Then enters one of the most notable figures, Elijah. Here we read of the challenge between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Similar Christ's call to be either hot or cold (Revelation 3:15, 16)¹, Elijah calls out the fence sitting.

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word (1 Kings 18:21).

Elijah was a genuine inconvenient truth which continually disturbed Ahab who called Elijah a "**troubler of Israel**" (1 Kings 18:17). The truth can be troubling to those who peddle falsehoods. Elijah has been called the Old Testament's Martin Luther who was willing to challenge the whole priesthood and the state of religion in the entire realm. The New Testament speaks of Elijah more than any Old Testament prophet. He appears with Christ and Moses in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8) and was a fearless prophet of words and deeds. Yet we see him lovingly caring for the widow and supernaturally restoring life to her dying son.

¹ Interesting to note that many commentators reject the notion that "hot or cold" in Revelation 3 is referring to fervent for the faith or spiritually cold since He would never desire a coldness in faith. Yet Elijah appears to be doing that very thing here. Someone who is cold can be called to repentance. It is the lukewarm fence-sitter whose soul is in jeopardy due to their false assurance.

First Kings ends on a very sour note. The son of Ahab becomes king and does evil in the sight of the Lord. He served Baal and provoked the Lord. But the word of God has not failed. The failure of man does not equal the failure of God. He has made a promise to save His own, to redeem the world, and that promise will most assuredly come to pass. Let us fast-forward about 960 years to Jesus teaching in the synagogue where He compares Himself to these two premiere personalities in 1 Kings, Elijah and the one to whom the mantle (investiture of prophetic office) of Elijah was given, Elisha.

Jesus in 1 Kings

It may be true that Elijah was a type of John the Baptist, but this is for another time. As Jesus sits in the synagogue in Nazareth, where He grew up, and reads from Isaiah, He proclaims Himself the fulfillment of God's promise of a Deliverer, the Messiah. Their familiarity with Jesus caused them to question this, **"Is not this Joseph's son" (Luke 4:22)?**

It is here that He compares Himself to Elijah and to Elisha. There are two points Jesus makes in these comparisons. One is that "no prophet is accept in his own country" (Luke 4:24). When there was a three-and-a-half-year drought and famine throughout the land, Elijah was sent to a widow, a woman who belonged to a foreign nation, Sidon (1 Kings 17:9). Similarly, Elisha healed no lepers among his countrymen, but he healed Naaman, a Syrian (2 Kings 5:10).

What Elijah contended with, what Jesus even more-so contended with, and what we, as Christian must be read to contend with, is a culture (even a religious culture) who has no room for the true Christ.

What is also worthy of note in the discourse of Jesus as He compares Himself with Elijah and Elisha, is that He does not speak of the miracles of fire from heaven (1 Kings 18) or the bears who attacked the mockers (2 Kings 2:23-25). Though there are certainly lessons by our Savior addressing what it means to ever mock and reject the truth. No, Jesus appeals to acts of mercy; the feeding and caring for a widow and her young son, the healing of a leper.

How beautiful the picture of Christ, who came to love, to heal, to embrace and to redeem those who, by the grace of God, have come to grasp their desperate need for help; who along with David say:

**To you, O Lord, I left up my soul. O my God, in you I trust
(Psalm 25:1, 2a).**

Questions for Study

1. Is it important to grasp the big picture in our studies? What is the Bible principally about (pages 2, 3)?
2. Briefly review how we see Christ in the first ten books of the bible (page 3)?
3. What is sin? Answer by heart (page 3).
4. What is the danger of desiring power? How should legitimate power be used (page 4)?
5. For what did Solomon ask? Where is this found for us (page 4)?
6. Discuss some of the points of Solomon's speech (page 4)?
7. What was the beginning of the downfall for Solomon and his kingdom? What can the church learn from this (page 6)?
8. Following our hearts is often used to devise worship and make other decisions in the church, is this a good idea? Explain (pages 6, 7).
9. In what ways do we see Jesus in 1 Kings (page 8)?