

1 Kings 11

Limits of the Text

1 Kings 11 is a complete literary unit; it begins with Solomon's apostasy and ends with his death.

Plot

1. Background – Solomon loved foreign women (1 Ki 11:1-3).
2. Crisis – Solomon worshipped foreign gods (1 Ki 11:4-8).
3. Resolution – God raised up adversaries (1 Ki 11:9-40).
4. Conclusion – Solomon died (1 Ki 11:41-43).

Towards Authorial Intent

The **plot** of the story points towards sin and judgment; Solomon worshipped foreign gods, so God raised up three adversaries against him, one of whom he promised part of the kingdom.

The **pace** of the story really slows down when Ahijah the prophet spoke with Jeroboam concerning what God was going to do.

There are two **dialogue** sections in this text, one of the Lord speaking to Solomon and the other of Ahijah speaking to Jeroboam. Both dialogues give the same message: Part of the kingdom will be torn from his son and given to another.

External Context

This chapter begins (and ends) a new section on Solomon, one on his fall, and thus will conclude Solomon's kingship. The next chapter will move on to his son and to the divided kingdom.

Interpretation

11:1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,² from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.³ He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.¹

Throughout the first ten chapters of this book, the author noted a few places where Solomon had not obeyed the Mosaic Law; he married a foreign wife (1 Ki 3:1), and he accumulated horses and chariots (1 Ki 4:26, 10:26). But overwhelming the story of Solomon thus far has been positive; he loved God (1 Ki 3:3) and had been diligent in fulfilling the Davidic covenant. But in this paragraph, the story takes a turn for the worse, a turn catastrophic for the future of the nation.

The problem started with politics. It’s not surprising that a rich, wise, powerful king like Solomon attracted political offers from other kings, and many of these alliances were sealed by marriage. Solomon should have refused these alliances and instead chose to completely trust God for the nation’s defense. Yet the author of Kings does not dwell on Solomon’s political failures; the real problem was his heart.

The heart is a rich Hebrew word that rarely refers to the physical organ but typically refers to something more abstract and immaterial; it encompasses all of the inner man, his thoughts, emotions, and will.² Five times this word is used in this opening paragraph, referring to what Solomon loved and desired; his heart was not wholly true to God and turned away after other gods. What does this mean? Although “David had sinned against God deliberately, his heart remained devoted to the Lord,”³ but in Solomon’s case “the Lord had ceased to be the major factor in his life.”⁴ Ex 34:13-16 and Dt 7:3-4 forbade intermarriage with Canaanites, because this would cause the children of Israel to follow after other gods. This same command was specifically reiterated for Jewish kings in Dt 17:14-17.

¹ ESV.

² Harris, 466.

³ Walvoord, 1:508.

⁴ House, 167.

Wayward hearts inevitably lead to wayward actions. Solomon worshipped other gods and built places of worship for them. Who were these gods? “Ashtoreth was a goddess of sex and fertility whose worship involved licentious rites and worship of the stars. She was a vile goddess (cf. 2 Kings 23:13). Molech worship involved human sacrifices, especially children, which was strictly prohibited by the Law (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5). Chemosh worship was equally cruel and licentious.”⁵

For ten chapters Solomon loved God and served him well, yet when he was old (1 Ki 11:4) his heart turned away. He is a reminder that faithfulness to God is for the young and old. At this point we are at the crisis in the story. How will God react now that his king, the one whom he blessed and who built his temple, has turned to idolatry? Would God judge even a king like this?

9 And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. 11 Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. 12 Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”

God’s first response to Solomon’s sin was to be angry. The first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). Jesus said the greatest commandment is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37-38). In forbidding the worship of other gods, God revealed himself to be a jealous God; his very name is Jealous (Ex 34:14). The One True God is an exclusive God, not a pluralistic God; therefore, it should not have surprised the readers of Kings that God was angry with Solomon. “His anger flows out of his jealousy for supreme place in his people’s worship and affection (and jealousy is simple the character of any love that is worth its salt when that love has an exclusive claim).”⁶

At this point Solomon deserved immediate destruction. Based upon the Law God would have been justified in wiping out both he and his wives. But God’s mercy limited his judgment—a theme we will see repeatedly in the book of Kings—though it did not eliminate it. The judgment was that the Davidic dynasty would lose part of its kingdom; “the commitments which God had previously made to David would still be honoured,

⁵ Walvoord, 1:508.

⁶ Davis, 114.

but in a drastically altered form because of Solomon's disobedience."⁷ The mercy was that this would happen to Solomon's son, not Solomon himself, and he would lose only part of the kingdom, not all of it. "It was for David's sake that God tempered His judgment with mercy, and did not allow the split in Solomon's day."⁸

14 And the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. He was of the royal house in Edom. 15 For when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he struck down every male in Edom 16 (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom). 17 But Hadad fled to Egypt, together with certain Edomites of his father's servants, Hadad still being a little child. 18 They set out from Midian and came to Paran and took men with them from Paran and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house and assigned him an allowance of food and gave him land. 19 And Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him in marriage the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. 20 And the sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house. And Genubath was in Pharaoh's house among the sons of Pharaoh. 21 But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me depart, that I may go to my own country." 22 But Pharaoh said to him, "What have you lacked with me that you are now seeking to go to your own country?" And he said to him, "Only let me depart."

23 God also raised up as an adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. 24 And he gathered men about him and became leader of a marauding band, after the killing by David. And they went to Damascus and lived there and made him king in Damascus. 25 He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon, doing harm as Hadad did. And he loathed Israel and reigned over Syria.

God's second response to Solomon's sin was to raise up adversaries. Previously Solomon had declared "the LORD my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune" (1 Ki 5:4; see also Pr 16:7); but now, adversaries began to gather on his borders. Hadad was from Edom on the south, and Rezon was from Syria on the north; both of these kingdoms began to rebel against Solomon, their overlord. These men fulfilled exactly what God had promised in the Davidic covenant: "When [a son of David] commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men" (2 Sa 7:14).

26 Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king. 27 And this was the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built the Millo,

⁷ Carson, 1 Ki 11:9.

⁸ Walvoord, 1:508.

and closed up the breach of the city of David his father. 28 The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. 29 And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. 30 Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. 31 And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes 32 (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), 33 because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. 34 Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. 36 Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. 37 And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. 38 And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. 39 And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.' " 40 Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

God's third response to Solomon's sin was to raise up someone to take part of the kingdom away from Solomon. Hadad and Rezon were foreigners, external enemies, but Jeroboam was from the tribe of Ephraim, an internal enemy.

The prophet Ahijah found Jeroboam and gave him a visual illustration of what was going to happen. The tearing of the garment was similar to what happened to King Saul in 1 Sa 15:26-28:

²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.

Even the verb was same; as God tore the kingdom from Saul, so he would tear it from Solomon (1 Ki 11:31).

The pronoun in 1 Ki 11:33 is plural; “they” have forsaken me. Solomon was guilty of idolatry, and so were his people. “In the book of Kings, kings are characteristically models for and representative of the behavior of their subjects.”⁹ God’s judgment would impact everyone, not just the king.

Anyone observant will realize that 12 minus 10 does not equal 1. Where did the other tribe go? There are two possibilities. One, Benjamin was so small that it was virtually a part of Judah. Two, “Judah itself does not require any mention because it was the tribe of the royal house;”¹⁰ thus the one tribe mentioned was Benjamin.

In the midst of this judgment, there is hope. God said, “David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem.” “Like a lamp kept burning perpetually in a tent or home, Judah would be a perpetual testimony to God’s choice of David, who was of the tribe of Judah (cf. 15:4; 2 Sam. 21:17; 2 Kings 8:19).”¹¹ He also said, “I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.” There is temporary punishment, but not permanent eradication. This would have been good news for the exiles reading Kings.

In promising to remove ten tribes, God had not broken the unconditional aspects of the Davidic covenant. “Note the beauty of the paradox: Yahweh does not deny his word—he remains faithful to his promise to David (2 Sa 7:12-13, 16); yet Yahweh does not deny his holiness—he is faithful to his threats (2 Sa 7:14).”¹²

God’s words through Abijah reveal much about the character of God. One, his judgment can be tempered by his mercy. James expressed this truth when he wrote, “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (Ja 2:13). Throughout the book of Kings we will see God delaying and reducing his judgment because of the actions of David or one of his descendents. Two, God is faithful to keep his promises, even in the midst of judgment.

God made a dynastic offer to Jeroboam, if only he would obey. “Jeroboam has a constituency in Israel, a significant foreign ally, and God’s promise to place him in power. Without question, then, he will soon be the major force in Israelite politics.”¹³ Solomon’s response was to try and kill Jeroboam. Whereas earlier in his reign he worked hard to accomplish God’s will, now he was trying to thwart it. He should have gotten down on his knees and repented.

This concluded the resolution to the crisis; God has judged Solomon’s sin by raising up enemies and by removing part of his kingdom.

⁹ Provan, 95.

¹⁰ Carson, 1 Ki 11:26.

¹¹ Walvoord, 1:509.

¹² Davis, 121.

¹³ House, 172.

41 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon? 42 And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. 43 And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

The conclusion of the story is short and formulaic, similar to the record of David's death in 1 Ki 2:10-12. Notice how quickly the author of Kings ends this part of the story; once God declared judgment, nothing else in Solomon's life was worth recording here, not even his repentance and return to God (see the book of Ecclesiastes). The author also mentioned one of his sources, the Book of the Acts of Solomon.

Solomon was one of if not the dominant character in the book of Kings. How might one summarize his life? The Bible Knowledge Commentary says, "Solomon was greatly blessed by God but he allowed God's gifts to dominate his affections. The fault lay not with God for giving Solomon so much, but with Solomon who, though he had the wisdom to deal with such temptations, chose to set his affections on the gifts and not on the Giver."¹⁴ Carson says, "In one sense, Solomon's reign had begun a new era, for he had built the temple and so transformed the worship and life of the nation. But in another sense, he brought an era to an end; because of his own disobedience he was the last king to rule over all the Israelite tribes."¹⁵

¹⁴ Walvoord, 1:510.

¹⁵ Carson, 1 Ki 11:41.

Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is a story of Solomon’s sins and God’s judgment.
2. National History – This is a story that lays the foundation for the dividing of the nation of Israel.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about God judging his people who live with him in a covenant relationship.

Jesus and the Gospel

This story reflects mankind’s **need for redemption** through Jesus and the gospel.

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? It’s possible to walk with God for a long time and then turn away from God. We can be so enamored with the gifts of God that we stop worshipping God himself.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God’s grace to meet our need? God is a jealous God, and he will not allow his people to worship anyone or anything else. God will judge us and discipline us, if necessary, to turn our hearts back towards him. Yet even while disciplining us, God is still merciful and faithful.

Outline

This outline is based upon Solomon’s sin and God’s responses:

1. Solomon turned away from God (1 Ki 11:1-8).
2. God promised to remove the kingdom (1 Ki 11:9-13).
3. God raised foreign enemies (1 Ki 11:14-25).
4. God raised a domestic enemy (1 Ki 11:26-43).

Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 11 in order to remind exilic Jews that God judged Solomon’s sin, though for the sake of David limited his judgment.

Teaching Outline

God judges his people, though he may restrain his judgment, and today I want you to praise God for both his judgment and his restraint. From this text in 1 Kings, we are going to see 4 truths about God’s judgment.

1. God judges in his jealousy (1 Ki 11:1-8). God is a jealous God and demands our exclusive worship.¹⁶
2. God judges in his mercy (1 Ki 11:9-13). God is a merciful God and does not always judge us as harshly as we deserve. Nowhere is this clearer than the cross.
3. God judges in his sovereignty (1 Ki 11:14-25). God does not need to send lightning bolts from heaven to judge us; he can simply use the people and situations around us.
4. God judges in his faithfulness (1 Ki 11:26-43). God's judgment of sin does not eliminate his faithfulness to his people; he still keeps his word and fulfills every promise.

¹⁶ To clarify my thinking, I have added some extra explanation to each point of the lesson.

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