

GOD, THE MERCIFUL KING

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Punishment is promised to all who disobey the Lord (1 Kings 9:4-9).
2. Mercy is extended to all who return to the Lord (1 Kings 11:30-39).
3. Salvation is provided to all who fall on the Lord (Titus 3:4-7).

Background Passages: 1 Kings 9:1-9; 11:14-40; Titus 3

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The sinner deserves God's punishment, but God has extended mercy.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God is merciful to withhold the punishment the sinner deserves and place it upon Jesus instead. Jesus, who did no wrong, paid the penalty of sin on the cross so that all who trust in Him are forgiven, not because of what they might have done but because of what Christ has done.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because our punishment has been withheld from us and placed on Christ as an act of God's mercy, we seek to extend mercy to all others, quick to forgive any wrongdoing, so that we might display the heart of the gospel before a watching world.

GROUP TIME

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: When Solomon finished building the temple of the Lord and his royal palace, he must have patted himself on the back. God then appeared to him and explained what would happen if he followed God like his father, David, did and what would happen if he didn't. Solomon decided not to listen to the Lord's warning. And in not listening, he failed miserably in the eyes of the Lord, so judgment was coming. Solomon was supposed to be the wisest man in the world, yet one misstep led to another. Oh, but for the mercy of God extended to us! Oh, but for His mighty plan and redeeming love to save us from our missteps and failures! Oh, but for the true King who leads us well as an example and a Savior for us!

INSTRUCT: Ask your group members to share stories of embarrassing times when the preparation of a recipe failed.

DISCUSS: **How often had you prepared that recipe before? What was the reason that particular recipe failed? How did you feel once you realized you had missed something essential to the dish?** (be prepared to be the first one to share your answers to these questions from your own experience to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: We all fail. Even the best cooks among us, at times, forget an ingredient or botch a recipe. Our failures in the kitchen can be spectacular. We all also fail in life. And in our moral failures, we find deeper consequences and greater heartbreak than just making a mess of a chocolate chip cookie recipe. Even the best of us fail. What does that mean for our lives?

OPTIONAL QUESTION: **What response does failure bring out in you?** (the inclination to try harder; despair and feelings of worthlessness; debilitation; the inclination to stop trying; the inclination to hide the failure and pretend it never happened)

POINT 1

PUNISHMENT IS PROMISED TO ALL WHO DISOBEY THE LORD (1 KINGS 9:4-9).

NOTES

4 And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, **5** then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’ **6** But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, **7** then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. **8** And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’ **9** Then they will say, ‘Because they abandoned the LORD their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the LORD has brought all this disaster on them.’”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Kings 9:4-9** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God repeatedly teaches in Scripture that **obedience** results in His **pleasure** and the fulfillment of His good **promises** for His people.

DISCUSS: Why does God repeatedly remind His people of the blessings of obedience? (so we are motivated to obey and do the right thing; because so often we choose to disobey and be disciplined; to clearly reveal His faithful love for His people; so we recognize God’s faithfulness to His promises)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-9** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The promise of blessings also comes with **warnings** for disobedience. The Lord is **faithful** to His Word and His covenants—He will respond to sin with **punishment**.

TRANSITION: Solomon did not heed God’s warnings, and often, neither do we. Punishment would come upon him and the nation for their disobedience, but we know with God, that’s not the end of the story.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 4-5 / Following the dedication of the temple, the Lord visited Solomon for a second time in a vision (1 Kings 9:1-2). God was responding to all that Solomon had done and sounding a warning for the future course of Solomon and his descendants. In verses 4-5, God reinforced the conditions that Solomon had to live under to continue enjoying His covenant blessings. In saying, **“if you will walk before me, as David your father walked,”** the Lord gave Solomon a pattern and standard to imitate. The way that pattern would be matched was not by mere external actions and conduct but with **“integrity of heart.”** In praise of King David, Psalm 78:72, explains that he shepherded Israel **“with [an] upright heart.”** David didn’t grudgingly check boxes on a to-do list; he was invested heart and soul in the role, in the people, and in his God. Likewise, Solomon’s wholehearted integrity would be demonstrated in his heartfelt obedience to God’s law, His **“statutes and . . . rules.”** Solomon was called, once again, to be a man wholly dedicated to the Lord in all things.

The promise that God held out to an obedient Solomon was not new; it was a restatement of the Lord’s covenant promise to David, **“You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.”** The reader is reminded of David’s deathbed admonition to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:4 and the continual hope that Solomon would meet this mark in order to see the promises of God fulfilled. But knowing the outcome of Solomon’s life from our previous studies, we have to wonder at this great and gracious promise of God being met with outright disobedience and rebellion.

VERSES 6-9 / Moving on from the promise of a dynasty for Solomon’s obedience, God began to lay out the consequences for disobedience, and the implications here expanded beyond the royal family to the entire nation and the temple itself.

The foreshadowing of verse 6 is heavy. God warned Solomon by saying, **“if,”** but the

specific actions identified give us more of a sense of **“when.”** **1** Solomon would indeed **“go and serve other gods and worship them.”** The consequences, as we know, would be disastrous not just to the royal house but to the entire nation, which would split in two. Yet here God spelled out an even greater consequence to come: the Lord would **“cut off”** His people from the promised land. Being **“cut off”** was used elsewhere to speak of casting out a sinner from the covenant community of Israel (Lev. 17:4,9; Num. 19:20).

Furthermore, God would **“cast out”** the temple that Solomon had built. The language here was used of a husband divorcing his wife. **2** God would remove His presence from the temple and the people. Instead of the temple being exalted, it would be desolate and in ruins. And people who remembered the temple’s former majesty would be appalled.

With God’s abandonment of Israel and the temple, the nation would become **“a proverb and a byword,”** a failure parable for every other nation. And ultimately, the nations of the earth would conclude not that Israel’s God was weak or incompetent but that Israel had **“abandoned the LORD their God”** in favor of other gods and so reaped His punishment.

The Lord’s words here echo the warnings in passages such as Leviticus 26:27-39 and Deuteronomy 28:36-37. God was faithful to His unconditional promise to bring Israel into the land (Josh. 23:14), but Israel’s continued tenure in the land was conditioned on their obedience to the Lord.

Yet note how God’s promise and warnings here to the king would impact the people. If the king disobeyed, the people would suffer the consequences. No doubt this involved a measure of regal influence, but through His covenant with David, the Lord had inextricably linked the Davidic king with the nation. As the king went, so went the people, to prosperity or punishment.

POINT 2

MERCY IS EXTENDED TO ALL WHO RETURN TO THE LORD (1 KINGS 11:30-39).

NOTES

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.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Kings 11:30-39** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 30-39** commentary to highlight the ways God demonstrated His mercy through His judgment of a divided kingdom as you emphasize that God is merciful (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #15: *God Is Merciful:* Mercy refers to God’s **compassion** and is often expressed in God **withholding** something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are **undeserved**, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God’s mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the **free** gift of mercy or grace.

DISCUSS: **How should we respond to the mercy of God, whether shown to us or others?** (with praise for our merciful God; with humility because we could never earn God’s mercy; with a desire to be merciful to others)

TRANSITION: The merciful God shows His mercy toward us ultimately in Christ’s work of salvation for us.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let none despair on account of the greatness of their sins, or of the judgments of God which are already inflicted on them. God will suffer none to ‘seek his face in vain.’ Let every one then bewail ‘the plague of his own heart,’ and offer up believing prayers ‘towards God’s holy oracle.’”³

—Charles Simeon (1759-1836)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 30-33 / In the midst of Solomon's departure from God and rebellion against God's law, the Lord acted to carry out His discipline against Solomon (1 Kings 11:11).

In 1 Kings 11:26-39, the human agents whom God would use to carry out His justice are brought center stage. Verse 26 introduces us to a man we discussed briefly in the previous session: Jeroboam, Solomon's labor foreman for his building projects. He was noted to be a "very able" man whom Solomon had his eye on because he was diligent in his work (11:28). The other key character here is Ahijah, a prophet of the Lord from Shiloh. These two met in an open field outside of Jerusalem, presumably at the initiative of the prophet (11:29).

To communicate his message from the Lord for Jeroboam, Ahijah carried out a prophetic illustration. In dramatic fashion, Ahijah seized his own new cloak that was to be the symbol of God's judgment in action. He then tore this cloak into twelve pieces, one for each tribe of Israel. Ahijah instructed Jeroboam to take ten of the pieces for himself, as they represented what God was going to do to the nation—**"tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon."** The ten pieces represented the ten northern tribes of Israel. God's judgment against Solomon was because he, and Israel with him, had **"forsaken"** the Lord to worship the false gods of the nations. The plural pronoun **"they"** in verse 33 points out that God saw the entire nation as complicit. As goes the king, so goes the kingdom.

Yet recall that while we see God's severe justice declared against Solomon, we also see a sweet mercy toward him. Unlike David's ascension over Saul, in which he would receive the entire kingdom, Jeroboam would have to settle for ten tribes. Solomon and his line would retain one tribe of the nation as their realm to rule. God's mercy was bound up in His faithfulness in keeping the covenant He made to David and honoring the city of Jerusalem, where He put His temple and name.

VERSES 34-37 / Through Ahijah, God continued to clarify for Jeroboam His judgment and mercy on Solomon: David's son would not lose the entire kingdom, nor would he see it split in his lifetime; that distinction would fall to Solomon's son. Take note that just as God had declared His judgment and mercy to Solomon himself (11:11-13), the Lord was now giving that same information to Jeroboam. The Lord had not withheld these details from Solomon, and now He was proclaiming the same plans to the one He would use to discipline Solomon and his son. The Lord is not malicious; He is firm, and He is merciful and kind.

God showed mercy to Solomon so **"that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem."** David himself was described as "the lamp of Israel" (2 Sam. 21:17), and the promise here reiterated the unconditional aspect of God's covenant with David: his throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:11-16). The culmination of this promise is in Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12). God's mercy on Solomon, on David, and to all people is fulfilled in Christ.

VERSES 38-39 / After the Lord presented to Jeroboam a conditional covenant parallel to the unconditional one made with David, we read of one last measure of mercy upon David's house. The Lord would discipline the descendants of David for their sins and failures as kings, which would lead to the division of Israel and eventually exile from the promised land, **"but not forever."** The hope of restoration, the hope of a forever King, is imbedded into the story.

For the original readers of 1-2 Kings, this note would have been incredibly meaningful. One day, God's mercy would repair the broken and divided kingdom. That restoration and unity are found in the Lord Jesus, who unites the people of God from every tribe, tongue, and nation and restores us to the Lord by His atonement for us on the cross. All who turn to the Lord freely receive His mercy.

POINT 3

SALVATION IS PROVIDED TO ALL WHO FALL ON THE LORD (TITUS 3:4-7).

NOTES

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Titus 3:4-7** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 4** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

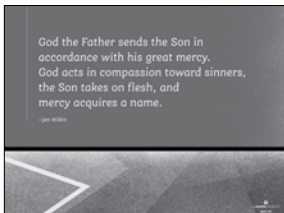
The kings of Israel were all **failures** in one way or another, and we are like them in many ways, foolish and disobedient. But God has made the way of salvation possible by sending His **Son**, Jesus, the fullness of God in **flesh**, our true **King**.

DISCUSS: In addition to sending Jesus, what are some ways God has shown His love and kindness toward humanity? (through His creation; granting conception and children; providing the sun and rain; showing patience for sinners to repent and be saved; restraining the wickedness of human beings)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

God's gift of salvation for those who repent and believe is accomplished by the **work** of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, our Savior. We are saved not by our works but in spite of our sin. We are saved by God's **mercy** and **grace**.

DISCUSS: Call attention to the quote on **PACK ITEM 14: MERCY HAS A NAME**, then ask: **How does the fact that we are undeserving of salvation magnify the glory of God's mercy in saving us?** (as we reckon with our sinfulness, we see ever more clearly how helpless and hopeless we were, and are, in light of God's holiness; that God the Father would send His Son to take on flesh and die in the place of sinners for salvation is beyond our comprehension and results in our humble, joyful praise of His glory; all that we could offer to God would only merit God's judgment and hell, yet He chooses to be merciful and save bankrupt sinners—there is no one like our God!)



COMMENTARY

VERSE 4 / Believing that salvation in Christ is the ultimate display of God’s mercy, we turn now to one of the most theologically dense passages in the entire Bible.

In this New Testament letter, Paul was teaching Titus, a young protégé, what to teach the church in Crete regarding both doctrine and faithful living (Titus 1:1–3:2). He then reminded Titus of humanity’s shared sinful history and corruption for two reasons: 1) to show how the behavior of believers should be different (3:3), and 2) to set up why the behavior of believers should be different.

Titus 3:4 provides the initial reason believers should be distinct from the horrors of verse 3 as it extracts us from the declaration of bad news into the majesty of the good news. Once we were “foolish, disobedient, led astray” (3:3). Yet something has changed us. This comes from the in-breaking nature of God Himself. Paul noted that God’s attributes of **“goodness and loving kindness . . . appeared,”** a shorthanded way of speaking of the incarnation of Jesus. (This is the second “appearance” text in Titus, the first being in 2:11-14.) So we have the virtues of God physically manifested in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God the Son. These virtues also describe the heart of God. God is wrathful against sin and will judge iniquity, yet God’s disposition toward His image-bearers is primarily kind and loving.

VERSES 5-7 / So, something has changed drastically in us as believers, and it involved the appearance of Jesus. But why are we different? Why are we no longer enslaved to our sins (3:3)? Paul identified the reason in Titus 3:5: **“He saved us.”** In the Lord Jesus, believers are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), we are free from sin and death.

Now the question is “How did God save us?” Paul answered this first by negating a false notion of how we are saved: **“not because of works done by us in righteousness.”** Explicit throughout Scripture is the reality

that human effort and good works are not meritorious for salvation. Rather, we are saved according to God’s **“mercy.”** Salvation is the result of God’s merciful disposition toward humanity in their despair and enslavement to sin. When we were disobedient like King Saul, dastardly like King David, and defiant like King Solomon, the Lord was, and is, waiting for sinners to fall on His mercy as their only hope, and those who do find Him ready and eager to save.

This salvation occurs **“by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”** This point emphasizes that it is God’s activity that saves. We contribute absolutely nothing to our salvation. The heart of a sinner is made new and clean by means of the work of God the Holy Spirit, who is also a gift of God the Father through **“Jesus Christ our Savior.”**

Our salvation from all our sin springs from the kindness, love, and mercy of God and results in our **“being justified.”** As a summary of verses 3-6, this phrase describes the believer being declared righteous by God and free of all sin. Again, Paul stated this action happens by God’s **“grace,”** not by anything we have done. It is purely an act of God toward undeserving sinners who come to Him through Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.

Paul concluded by revealing that as justified, or saved, people to whom God has shown mercy, we **“become heirs”** of God to eternal life. This is the language of adoption. In the Roman world, adoption was the means by which status and upward mobility were secured. Usually, nobles would find worthy and advantageous progeny to adopt to secure their legacy and wealth (e.g., Julius Caesar’s adoption of Gaius Octavian—Caesar Augustus). But God saves and makes heirs of those who do not deserve it and are not able to bring any wealth or upward mobility to His glory. From start to finish, God’s character is revealed as being merciful and gracious to undeserving sinners who come to Him for rescue.

MY RESPONSE

Because our punishment has been withheld from us and placed on Christ as an act of God's mercy, we seek to extend mercy to all others, quick to forgive any wrongdoing, so that we might display the heart of the gospel before a watching world.

HEAD:

The truth of this session is summed up in God's self-disclosure of His nature in Exodus 34:6-7. The Lord is slow to anger, compassionate, and full of love. But He also will judge sin and right wrongs. In our study of Solomon's life, we have seen the mercy and grace of God as well as His divine judgment come together. God's mercy and judgment do not contradict one another. Rather, they reveal a God who opens His heart of love to sinners who repent. His mercy and judgment were displayed fully in Jesus on the cross.

How does our God of compassion and mercy compare with the gods of this world?

HEART:

God's kindness should lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). As we reflect on Solomon's course of life and his failures, we also should pay attention to the abundant mercy of God in His judgment. We see God's mercy and grace extended time and time again to Solomon. Even greater mercy and grace have been extended to us in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. He has taken our punishment upon Himself and paid the penalty of sin once and for all. We can now worship, obey, and rejoice in Him forever.

Have you received God's gracious gift of mercy in Jesus Christ? How will you express your worship of our Savior today?

HANDS:

People who have received mercy should show mercy. Jesus taught us to pray along this very same line (Luke 11:4). Not only are we taught to pray this way, but we are called to act in forgiveness and mercy. We should have compassion on the lost, broken, hurting, weak, and stranger. God's mercy toward us compels us to display the love of God to everyone we encounter as a display of the power of mercy in us.

What are some ways you will show mercy in Jesus's name to those who seem the least deserving of mercy?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We have but one Saviour; and that one Saviour is Jesus Christ our Lord. Nothing that we are and nothing that we can do enters in the slightest measure into the ground of our acceptance with God. Jesus did it all. And by doing it all He has become in the fullest and widest and deepest sense the word can bear—our Saviour."⁴

—B. B. Warfield
(1851-1921)

POINT 2: MERCY IS EXTENDED TO ALL WHO RETURN TO THE LORD (1 KINGS 11:30-39).

+ VIDEO

Show the “99 in :99” video about the essential Christian doctrine God Is Merciful (2:00 in length) at this link: <https://www.gospelproject.com/god-merciful-video>.

POINT 3: SALVATION IS PROVIDED TO ALL WHO FALL ON THE LORD (TITUS 3:4-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“The only reason the believers are now different from their compatriots is because of the work of God their Saviour, who has made them new creatures (3:4-5; see also Eph. 2:1-10). This work began with the kindness and love of God our Saviour (3:4). God the Father sent Jesus, his Son, and at the end of his earthly ministry Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. Thus all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the work of salvation. This work is described as the washing of rebirth and as renewal by the Holy Spirit (3:5). The ‘washing’ refers not to baptism but to the cleansing involved in our purification and regeneration. This renewal is the work of the Spirit, who guarantees that we are now heirs having the hope of eternal life (3:7).”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

The gear and techniques of rock climbing can give us a helpful picture of what faith in the right object (or person) entails. Beginners in rock climbing will do a form of Top Rope Climbing that involves wearing a harness and latching onto a rope that is anchored to a fixed point on the ceiling, allowing a climber to ascend safely. A trained belayer will stand at the bottom, securing the rope as you climb and making sure that if you slip, you are caught by the rope. For people to rock climb safely, they must trust—or believe—that the belayer will catch them. When we are called to “fall on the Lord,” we are putting our trust in Jesus as the One who will save us.

References

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2. Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 8 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1995), 151.
3. Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: Vol. 3: Judges to 2 Kings* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 354.
4. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Power of God unto Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1903), 49.
5. Solomon Andria, “Titus,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1512.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

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- Unit 30:** Every Day the Lord Added to Their Number

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