

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 1, Introduction

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It is so great to be here, so good to see the faces of many of you. Thank you for your friendship and your interest. I felt a little bit concerned when Ron was praying because tonight I don't think there'll be much inspiration, but they say for real estate agents there is one word, location, location, location.

With the Bible, there's one word: context, context, context. God is a God of relationships. Things hold together.

The Bible is not just a list of unrelated propositions. The thoughts are connected. They're in a setting.

So, as we dive into the book of Kings over the coming weeks, I think it's really important that we have a sense of where this book fits in the biblical context, what it's doing, and what's going on. Now, let me say I read this book in our English Bible. It's two books, 1 and 2 Kings.

The only reason for that is that it was too long for a scroll. So, to get it onto a 30-foot scroll, you had to divide it in two. Same with Samuel.

So, it's really Samuel and Kings, and those are the books. Tonight, I'm using this machine. I'd like to use a whiteboard in the future.

Maybe the church can come up with that, but let's see. Let me get this wire out here so it's not quite as tense as it was. What about this title, The Covenant on the Ground? What Kings is doing is looking at how the covenant works in life and what that means in life.

That's one sense of it. It's the covenant in life, the covenant as it works. But also, this is a double entendre.

The covenant in these books is generally broken into little pieces. It's on the ground. The book explores what that means and how it works.

So, The Covenant on the Ground. What is the Hebrew order of the books in the Old Testament? This is important. There are three sections in the Old Testament in the Hebrew Bible.

The Torah, which we know well, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. We call it Greek Pentateuch. You may say you don't know any Greek.

Yes, you do. Penta, five, teach, law. So, you know Greek.

You can wow your friends and neighbors. That's the Torah. I like that Hebrew word because Torah means instructions.

It's not the law, the heavenly tyrant who says, you will do what I say, or I will smash you. Do you want the instruction manual on the human machine? Here it is. God's instructions for how life was meant to operate and how it will operate if we will follow it.

That's Torah. Then comes the prophets. This is where it begins to get a little odd for us because Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are the former prophets.

No, no, no, no. They're historical books. No, they're prophets.

Then come the latter prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12. What we call the minor prophets, some of you are in my Sunday school class here at this church, and I've been trying to rework your mind here. These are not the minor prophets.

These are the concise prophets as opposed to the verbose prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are the verbose prophets. The 12 are the concise prophets, but they're all on one scroll.

You can get them on a 30-foot scroll. So it's one book. So there are eight books in the prophets section: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12.

Now, we'll discuss why that is the case in just a minute. Then comes the third section, which is really a miscellaneous grouping.

They don't quite fit in Torah. They don't quite fit in prophets. So here they are in the miscellaneous collection.

Jesus mentions this when he says it appears in the Torah, the prophets, and the Psalms. Notice which is the first book in the Writings. That third section was often called the Psalms, including all the rest.

Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, and then five festival songs. These short books, each one was associated with a given festival that they read at that time. Ruth, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther.

Finally, then, we have the last three, which are really, in a sense, the post-exilic historical books. Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Chronicles is at the very end of the Hebrew Bible.

One of my favorite memories is when I was in graduate school, and I was taking a course on Chronicles. We were reading Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. And one of the students said to our professor, Dr. Gordon, why does the English say this? And he said, oh really? Give me your Bible.

Oh, where do you people keep your Chronicles anyway? He was looking at the end, expecting to find Chronicles there. Once again, I want to talk with you a little bit about that. Why are Kings and Chronicles separated in the Old Testament? But there it is.

Kings is part of the Prophets. Now, why is that? Why would these four books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, be included in a Prophets section? Well, the answer is because of the biblical understanding of Revelation. God spoke.

That's one of the fundamental truths of the Bible. The idols don't speak. They can't speak.

They have mouths, but they can't speak. When you read the ancient literature, you don't find the gods talking. They don't talk to humans.

They may talk to one another in myths, but they don't talk to humans. But this God, this God talks. This God talks about what he's doing, what he's going to do, what he has done.

And so, you cannot separate the acts of God from the words of God. And over and over again, God spoke through the Prophets. And he told me what was going to happen and explained what had happened.

And he does it through this intimate voice of the Prophets. So what the Israelites are saying by this order of books is that if you want to understand Joshua, you have to understand God predicted all this to Abraham. This is a fulfillment of prophecy.

If you want to understand judges, you have to understand they broke their covenant all in little pieces. And the results were predicted by the Prophets, by Moses, the greatest of the Prophets. Samuel, Kings, same thing.

These are prophetic books because God is at work speaking to them, explaining what's happening, explaining what's going to happen. And here's the difference between biblical Prophets and pagan Prophets. Pagan Prophets tell you what has to happen.

It's been predetermined. It's in the stars, or it's in the liver of the sheep that was just sacrificed, or it's in these flight of birds going by. It has to happen.

It's been predetermined from long ago. That's not biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy says you've got a choice.

You determine what the future is. Obey me, follow my instructions, and the future is blessed. Disobey me, refuse to follow my covenant, and the future is bad news.

Now think of that, folks. Think of that. You determine the future.

I determine the future. Oh, God's going to win. I've read the end of the book.

He wins. But how did he win? So these are prophetic books.

People live out what God has said and what God has revealed and experience the very predictable results of those actions. This is why in this order of the books, Lamentations is not in the prophetic books. Why is it in our order? Well, because it's believed that Jeremiah wrote it.

So, it follows Jeremiah, but it's not prophetic. It's a lament over the results of their choices. In the same way, Daniel, if you compare Daniel to, say, Jeremiah, you see the differences.

You don't have God saying through Daniel, here are your choices. If you obey, this will happen. If you disobey, that will happen.

No, Daniel is written, first of all, in the first half, to tell what happens when we choose to be faithful. And the last half, then, is encouragement for these people back from exile who are going to go through terrible times. And God is saying through Daniel it's going to be okay.

So, interesting. If you have questions as I'm sailing along here, please get your hand up. If you're confused, everybody else is.

So, please, they'll thank you. It is generally agreed today that Joshua, through Kings, is built on the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy really gives the key to these books.

But really, Genesis to Kings is the story of God's dealing with humanity in general, in the beginning, and narrowing it down to the Hebrew people. Central to all of that is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy teaches us, in the light of the Ten Commandments, certain things.

If you keep your covenant, you'll be blessed. If you don't keep your covenant, you'll be cursed. Now, we say, well, that's not very nice of God just to curse them because they don't do what he says.

Well, it's a little more complicated than that. They swore in blood they would keep this covenant. And they said, well, sure, Moses.

Why wouldn't we? There's nothing crazy here. There's nothing brutal here. Yeah, of course, we're going to do this.

Then he wrote it down and read it to them and said, are you going to do this? They said, yes, Moses, we already said that. He said, OK. Sacrificed 12 bulls.

There is a lot of blood in 12 bulls. Half the blood, half, he threw on the altar. And then he said again, are you going to do this? And they said, yes, for pity's sake.

If you don't hurry up, the Baptists will get to the cafeteria before we do. OK. Are you ready?

What did I just swear to do? May God strike me dead if I ever break one of these commandments. Now, God's instructions work for everybody, for the human race. But they are especially applicable to these people because they're chosen.

Guy went to heaven and said, may I speak with God? Peter said, well, who are you? I'm here for the Jews. I'm here to represent them. They have a question they want to ask God.

Will God see me? Well, well, I'll find out. The guy's sitting there singing Heaven, heaven. The guy comes back.

He'll see you. Are you God? Yes, my son, I am God. What can I do for you? Is it true that we Jews are the chosen people? Yes, my son, it's true.

Well, God, would you mind choosing somebody else? Being God's chosen is not necessarily all fun. To whom much is given, much is required. So, the Deuteronomic theology of history is built on the Ten Commandments.

If you're going to keep the covenant, you will know there's only one being in the universe who is worthy of worship, and it's Yahweh. If you're going to keep the covenant, you will know Yahweh is not part of this cosmos. Every human understanding of the cosmos has the spirits as part of the cosmos.

They may be, but Yahweh isn't. That's why you can't make an idol. You can't tie Yahweh to this cosmos in some form of ours.

He's absolutely other, and the honor of His name, not His label, His name, His character, His nature, will be the most precious thing to you. And all your time is His, and you show it by what you do with one-seventh of it. And, one more, you show you know God by how you treat other people, especially those who can't pay you back.

There it is. That's what Deuteronomy says. Do those five things, and you'll be blessed.

Refuse to do those five things, and it's going to hurt. That's what the dad asked the little boy who had jumped off the garage roof and was in the hospital with a broken leg and a broken arm. He said, what were you thinking? Well, when I was on the roof with my Superman towel tied around my neck, I thought, this is going to be fun.

Then, after I jumped, I thought, this is going to hurt. Yeah, but that's Deuteronomy's theology of history, and it is worked out in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. We'll see how it goes together.

Now, why are Kings and Chronicles separated in the Hebrew order? In our English order, I don't know about you, but I often think when I start Kings, well, I'm going to get a double dose here. But they're separated in the Hebrew order. Why? Well, the first reason is simply a matter of history.

Kings was completed, oops, no whiteboard. Kings was completed about 550 BC in the middle of the exile. Chronicles was written sometime after probably 450 BC, so there's 100 years between the two of them.

But more than that, the difference is mostly in perspective. Kings is asking the question, why did the promises fail? I mean, God promised we were going to be the rulers of the world. All nations would bow down to us.

We were going to be rich. Jerusalem was going to be the center of the world. And what happened? We lost everything.

What's up with that? That's what Kings is asking. I'll say this again in a few minutes, but as many of you have heard me say, repetition is the soul of education. In case you didn't get that, repetition is the soul of education.

Did I tell you repetition is the soul of education? Now, what was I going to say? Let's see here. Kings is looking at that question. Why have the promises failed? Chronicles is asking another question.

They're on the other side of the exile now. They're back in the land. And their question is, how do we go on from here? We thought we were the kingdom of God.

And that was easy because we had a Davidic king. We thought we were the kingdom of God because we had an independent nation-state and an army to guarantee it. Now, we have none of that.

We don't have any king, let alone a Davidic king. We're not an independent nation-state. We're out here on the edge of this worldwide empire of the Persians.

And what Chronicles does is not change history. Oftentimes, you will hear that said, well, Kings is the correct history, and then Chronicles sort of warped it. No, it's two looks at the same events.

And whereas Kings may say, well, that event is not important, for what we're trying to do here. Chronicles says, oh, that event is very important for our question. And what Chronicles says is it wasn't the kingdom that made our faith.

Our faith made the kingdom. So maybe we won't have a kingdom in the sense of a king and a nation-state and an army, but we can have the kingdom, the faith. Who are we? We're the ministers of the almighty God.

So, Kings and Chronicles are separated in the Hebrew Bible. Chronicles, the last book, what does it mean to be a holy priesthood, a royal nation, excuse me, a holy nation, a royal priesthood? What does that mean? And Chronicles is giving us the answer. So that's why the two books are asking two very different questions.

So, what's the purpose of Kings? This book that we're going to spend weeks on, what's the purpose? The final purpose, as I've already said, is to explain why the exile happened. What went wrong? But it's clear to me, say more about that in a moment, it's clear to me, this was a work in progress for some 300 years, starting with Solomon. So, what was the purpose before the exile happened? What was the purpose in those early parts of the book? And the purpose is to show the short and long-term effects of disobeying or obeying the covenant. And you begin to see accumulating, I better be careful here, I'm so wired up, accumulating, oh my, they disobeyed, they disobeyed, they disobeyed, somebody obeyed for a while, they disobeyed.

Ah, ah, ultimately, ultimately what Moses predicted, you keep this up long enough, and this good land will spit you out. We often, reading the Old Testament, get this picture of this very wrathful God, don't you look at me cross-eyed, I'll get you, I'll fix you. From the golden calf, the covenant is broken.

God has only one legal responsibility left after that, and that's to destroy these people. But for a thousand years, God said I'll give you another chance, I'll give you another chance, I'll give you another chance. And finally, when the end is upon them, we hear God crying out in Hosea, oh, Israel, Israel, how can I let you go? No, Yahweh is not short-tempered, Yahweh is incredibly patient.

And what Kings is doing is looking at that patience being extended and extended and extended until, finally, there's nothing left. I think this is particularly the case after Solomon. As we'll see in a few moments, the section on Solomon is out of all proportion to anybody else.

It's all about Solomon, 11 chapters. Why? I think it's pretty clear he's setting the pattern. Look at the incredible blessings that came to this man.

In the end, what I believe is the most tragic verse in the Bible, Solomon loved many women, and his wives turned his heart away from the Lord, and his heart was no longer perfect toward the Lord. How would you like that for your epitaph? I have the feeling that once that picture was in place, then there are people saying, hey, we need to see how this thing works. So, I say again, the final purpose was, why did the exile happen? But the intermediate purpose along the way is, what happens if you obey the covenant? What happens if you disobey it? Ah, disobey it long enough, and you're going to lose the whole ball of wax.

Now, it's not intended to be a history in our sense. It's way too selective. For instance, there is the second Jeroboam, who ruled from 796 until 742, 54 years, and was a pretty effective king from what we can piece together from extra-biblical stuff.

Kings gives him, as I recall, 10 verses, 54 years, and 10 verses, because in terms of the covenant, his kingdom was a failure. So, we don't have a history of Jeroboam. But that does not mean that the historical details in the book are therefore inaccurate.

And that's what you will often hear. Well, it's not a history. It's just sort of made-up story to make this theological point.

No, no, it's not a history. That's not its purpose. Its purpose is not to explain to us everything that happened in this 300-year period.

No, but what it does report of history from everything we've got is incredibly accurate. One of the pieces of evidence of that used to be seen as evidence that it was hopelessly biased, just sort of made up on the run. And that's the years.

Each king, king so-and-so, began to reign in year so-and-so of the king in the other country. And he ruled for X number of years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, most of the time, or he did good in the sight of the Lord.

Then a longer or a shorter discussion of what his doing good or doing evil amounted to. And then a closing. He died in the year of the king in the other country, and he reigned X number of years.

When you just add those figures up, it's a mess. They don't square. It just doesn't work.

But a guy in 1958 or 59 wrote a dissertation at the University of Chicago. And people have quibbled with his results ever since. They love to quibble with him.

But in fact, he explains it very, very well. And when you take his explanation, the years work out almost perfectly. Clearly, these folks had access to the royal records.

Now, you won't have to answer this on an exam. If you were in seminary, you would. But in Judah, if you started to rule in June, they didn't count that year in your total number.

And they counted the new year from October. In Israel, if you started to reign in December, they counted the whole year as the first year of your reign. And they counted the new year beginning in April.

When you put those two together, it's possible for two guys who were inaugurated on the very same day to have a four-year discrepancy in their years. When you figure all that in, it works amazingly. The other thing is, it's pretty obvious that there were a lot of co-regencies.

When, for one reason or another, the son is forced on the dad. We've got one clear example of that. Does anybody remember Uzziah? Uzziah was a good king who decided he was going to play high priest and got leprosy as a result.

And we're told that he spent the remainder of his reign in the palace while his son Jotham was over the house. Pretty clearly, Jotham and Uzziah are co-regents. But the Bible will count the whole period of time.

So, it looks like Jotham was not only co-regent with his dad, but he was co-regent with his son. It looks like Jotham only reigned independently for about five years. But his total reign is something like 19 or 20.

Again, you don't have to remember this, but just know that, in fact, these dates are incredibly accurate. And as I say, they indicate that whoever was involved in writing these things had direct access to royal records. So, is the Book of Kings a history? No.

Is it historically accurate? Yes. And there's a difference between those two. Now, the prevailing theory today, among Old Testament scholars is that I better be careful using the prevailing.

Anyway, the dominant theory, I guess, is a better way of saying it, which is that one person wrote the whole thing during the exile. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Deuteronomy during the exile. That's why it all has one theology of history.

And since we know Deuteronomy wasn't written until just before the exile, don't we? This new Book of Deuteronomy shaped this person's thinking, and they said, hey, I need to rewrite all of Israel's history in the light of this Book of Deuteronomy. I don't think so. Number one, because Deuteronomy was not written in 621.

Now, again, I'm not sure whether you're up on your dates or not, but Jerusalem went into exile, the final exile in 586 BC. Just before that, Josiah, good man, was cleaning out the temple. According to this theory, a prophet who really disliked what was happening in the nation wrote Deuteronomy in Moses's name and hid it in the temple so it could be found.

Is that what the book says? No. The book says Moses wrote this about 1400 BC. That's what the book says.

So, no, I do not believe that one person wrote the Book of Kings and Samuel and Judges and Joshua and revised Deuteronomy during the exile around 550 BC. No. But also, beyond the fact that Deuteronomy vastly preceded this, the four books are too different.

I mean, I don't think anybody can read Joshua and Judges and say the same guy wrote both of them. Judges is very formalized. Excuse me, Joshua is very formalized, very almost pompous.

Judges would really go down well as a sitcom on TV. Probably have to put a little more violence, a little more sex in it, but anyway. And Samuel is a more engaging narrative than Kings is.

The same guy wrote all four of them? I don't think so. It makes more sense, I believe, to say these books were written or compiled, put together by different people, all of whom had read Deuteronomy and knew that Israel's nature and character were to be determined by that covenant. I think that is a better explanation for why these books all share the same philosophy than that one person wrote them all together.

So, who wrote it? Chronicles is very explicit that these records were kept by the court prophets. One of them is a guy named Iddo, and that makes a lot of sense. Now, the

Israelite court prophets are different from the court prophets elsewhere in the ancient world.

Elsewhere in the ancient world, the court prophets are in the pay of the king, and their job is to make sure the king looks good. In Israel, the court prophets were not working for the king. Years and years ago, I saw a cartoon in Christianity Today that I've never forgotten.

The king is sitting on the throne looking really, really mad, and in front of him is a guy who's obviously a priest. He's kind of portly and got a black robe on, and behind him is a guy in very rough clothing, and the priest is saying to the king, I'm sorry, sir. You can't fire Nathan.

He doesn't work for us. Remember Nathan? You are the man. Whoops.

You are going to have a hard time cashing your paycheck if you work for the man, but no. So, it would make all kinds of sense to me that these court prophets, who are aware of this sweep of history as God speaks and acts, they also have access to the court records. So, it makes sense to me that these are the people who were doing this over the years, the older one passing it on to the younger, and so the thing gets larger and larger and larger.

As time goes by, as I say, I think it started with Solomon. Again, Nathan is right in the middle of that thing, and I think Solomon and his experience provided the stimulus to say, wow, we need to look at how this thing plays its way out. Okay, let me back up with that one.

Questions or comments? I've thrown a lot of stuff at you here. I hope I haven't buried you. Dr. Kinlaw told me once that if they don't have any questions, either you were so clear there are no possible questions, or they're so confused nobody knows what to ask, and it'll probably be the latter.

Okay, outline. Solomon, part one. First book, chapters 1 to 11.

He reigned for 40 years, and he got 17 pages in my English Bible. No other king in the book comes close to that amount of attention. The second part, and there are really only two parts in the book as far as I'm concerned, is Solomon and then the divided kingdom.

Book 1, chapter 12, to book 2, chapter 25. 350 years. 350 years in something like 60 pages.

The first part is Israel and Judah together. Now again, you may not know your Old Testament history at all well, but remember Solomon and David presided over a

single kingdom that extended from Beersheba in the south to Dan up in the north at the foot of Mount Hermon. Single kingdom.

When Solomon died, the kingdom broke into Judah in the south. Simeon by this time, Simeon is part of Judah, kind of absorbed into Judah. Judah in the south, and the other tribes, Israel.

The other tribes kept the name Israel, and the one tribe in the south was called by its name Judah. So that's the divided kingdom. That went on for 200 years, and we get about 36 pages.

So, 200 years gets just about twice what 40 years got. The first section is from the division to Ahab, 55 years, and that is 112 through 16, book 1, chapters 12 through 16—seven pages for 55 years.

Solomon got 17 for 40 years. Then comes Elijah and Elisha. These are two prophets, but it's really one ministry.

Over 90 years from 1, chapter 17, to 2, chapter 13. 25 pages for 90 years. Wow, what's going on here? Then, Israel's final years, book 2, chapter 14 to chapter 17, 70 years, four pages.

Then Judah alone, 2, 18 through 25. I made a mistake there. That should be 25.

150 years, 10 pages. Wow. So that's the outline.

Solomon and the divided kingdom. 40 years and 350 years. Again, sorry, I don't have a blackboard.

The northern kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722. That's what happens in book 2, chapter 17, 722. Judah goes on alone with the border of Assyria, six miles north of Jerusalem, for another 150 years until they finally fall to Babylon.

It takes 150 years for them to get to the point where they're doing the same thing their sister to the north was doing. Okay, now let me say one last thing, and I'll let you go. Are there good kings? Well, the answer is yes.

All Judean. Not one good king in the north, in Israel. Wow.

Now, this has caused some scholars to say, well, obviously, this thing was put together by Judeans. You know, history is written by the winners. But in fact, that's not evidently the case.

Most of the attention is given to the north. And interestingly, and I think you've heard this from Stan, every one of these good kings has a flaw. Every one of them.

Kings is clearly saying we will not be saved by any human. But these guys, because of them, Judah was given more time. Asa and Jehoshaphat, between them, ruled for... Jehoshaphat is Asa's son.

They ruled for some 65 years while the north was going through a bloodbath of one coup d'etat after another. These two guys gave Judah the foundation that was going to be so important for them in the future. Then Jehoshaphat, the little boy, saved by the high priest's wife from his grandmother's homicidal fury.

I'm going to be queen. And if that means I have to kill every one of my grandchildren, that's fine. But the high priest's wife, who was Jehoshaphat's nurse, got him away.

And from the time he was seven until the time he was 16, he was tutored by the high priest. But when the high priest died, he lost it. Nevertheless, when the North is going through a bloodbath with Jezebel and Jehu, Joash holds on in the South.

And then, of course, Hezekiah and Josiah. Hezekiah, in the north, is being taken by the Assyrians. The end has come.

Three-quarters of the people of God were dragged off into captivity. Will the same thing happen to Judah? It should. This is the mightiest army in the world, six miles away to the north.

But it didn't. And it didn't because of Hezekiah's faithfulness. And then Josiah.

Babylon is at the gates. Judah has sent away their grace. It's only a matter of time.

Josiah, I'm confident, made it possible for a group of faithful people who were going to suffer and die, who were going to be dragged off into captivity, not to lose their faith in the dark. So, these good kings, at key points, are critical for the endurance of the faith. And in spite of their flaws, in spite of their failures, God was able to use them for good purposes.

Okay, this is the very last paragraph of the book. I need to get a little Bible before I let you go.

The very last paragraph of the book. Chapter 25, 2 Kings 2. Jehoiakim, the last legitimate king of Judah, has been captured. The royal family has been carried off.

The temple is burned. Jerusalem is destroyed. It's over.

It's over—verse 27. In the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiakim, he was 18 when he went into captivity.

He's been in captivity for 37 years. He's 55 now. In the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, in the year Awel Marduk became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from prison.

He did this on the 27th day of the 12th month. If you've got any questions about whether this really happened or not. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon.

So Jehoiakim put aside his prison clothes and, for the rest of his life, ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day, the king gave Jehoiakim a regular allowance for the rest of his life. Now the scholars debate what this is doing here.

But I'm with those who say this is the final writer's way of saying it ain't over. Yes, Jehoiakim is still in prison. But he's been taken out of prison.

This son of David is being given a place of honor. Hmm. What does that mean for our future? If David hasn't been forgotten, maybe we haven't been forgotten.

What will the future look like? We don't know. But we dare to believe we have a future. So, in a book that becomes darker and darker and darker as it comes to the end, here's this moment, this final glimmer.

God's not done with us. God's not finished. He's still got plans.

Next week, we'll start on Solomon. I think handouts, right? For next week? Yes. Yes.

Good. Now I have not expected you to know the answers to these questions tonight. But I am going to expect you to know the answers to the questions for next week. So be challenged.

Let me pray. Father, thank you.

Thank you for being the God who speaks. You spoke the worlds into existence. You came as the word to us in Jesus Christ.

Thank you. Thank you for breaking into our time and our space, into our lives, and giving us a future. Thank you.

Help us, Lord, as we wrestle with your word and attempt to understand what it is that you're saying to each of us. Help us, O Lord, to be covenant keepers. Thank you for a new covenant, a covenant that is written on our hearts.

But we recognize that that gives us incredible responsibility. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, and help us to live your life in a fallen, broken world, not as cringing slaves who have to do something because the tyrant demands it, but as friends of God who want more than anything else in the world to please the Father and honor his name. In that name, we pray. Amen.