

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit Kings

Emerson Kennedy
June 7, 2026

Welcome! A little over a year ago, I was on the island of Kaua'i. While there, I found out that a particular life form exists all over that island—in the streets and in the mountains, where you'd expect them and where you wouldn't. Just tons and tons of these guys! When I first thought about what it could be, I thought, "It must be snakes, right? Or maybe some sort of great big spider?" No. All wrong. It is chickens! They are everywhere! Apparently, years ago, a storm came through and all the chickens got free. They bred and now there are wild chickens literally everywhere—in town, in the country, and in the mountains! If you hear something rustling, it's probably a chicken! Chickens are the unofficial mascot of Kaua'i, outnumbering humans by roughly 6:1. It's estimated that there are 450,000+ chickens on this island.

Why do I share that? Well, we're walking through the Old Testament in a series called "Not Alone." Today we have 1-2 Kings, and we'll continue to use the LIFE outline we've been using throughout this series.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

We're going to see LIFE in these books.

LITERAL

Essentially, this is Kings [view the online sermon for a photo related to the stock market crash].

Last week, we talked about Samuel, who listened to God; Saul, whose heart departed from God; David, whose heart was for God; and Solomon, whose heart was divided towards God. When Solomon took over, Israel was flourishing (1 Kings 10:23-24). Everyone was bullish on Israel! But the optimism was short-lived.

Because of his divided heart, "Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done" (1 Kings 11:6). Eventually, Solomon died and his son Rehoboam took over. You'd think that Rehoboam would learn from dad and granddad. But no. He enacted harsh policies and when the people asked him to lighten their load, he responded: "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:11). You see the pride? The arrogance? As a result, Israel split in two. A man named Jeroboam led a rebellion. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel went with Jeroboam and only two stayed with Rehoboam. No longer was it Israel; it was Israel and Judah—Israel in the north and Judah in the south [view the online sermon for a map].

Aside from a few bright spots like King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20) and King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23), most of Israel / Judah's kings were disobedient, foolish, and idolatrous.

Consider Jeroboam, a shrewd politician. Instead of dispelling Israelite religion, he twisted it. Jeroboam twisted real religion. For example, he set up new worship sites at Dan and Bethel with golden calf idols (2 Kings 12:29); he instituted priests from any tribe, not just the Levitical tribe as God commanded they be from (2 Kings 12:31); and he set up his own festival akin to but different from the one God instituted in

the Law of Moses (2 Kings 12:32-33). As a result, sin, division, and war ensued. “There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam” (2 Kings 14:30).

Consider Ahab. Fifty-six or so years after the Israel / Judah split, Ahab took the throne in the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab married a woman named Jezebel, a devout worshipper of Baal, a foreign god. As a result, all of Israel’s worship was diluted by or redirected to paganism. As just one illustration of his perversity, consider his interactions with a man named Naboth. 1 Kings 21 tells us Naboth had a vineyard that Ahab wanted. It was close to Ahab’s home, so he asked to buy it. Naboth did not consent. “But Naboth replied, ‘The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors’” (1 Kings 21:3). That line is important. God had made it that land couldn’t just be bought and sold willy-nilly. Land was God’s gift and was bound to *families*, not individuals. Naboth was adhering to God’s land stipulations, but Ahab was trying to circumvent them. Upon hearing the “no” from Naboth, Ahab went away upset. Then “Jezebel his wife said, ‘Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite’” (1 Kings 21:7). In other words, “You’re the KING. You can do as you please!” Long story short, she cast innocent Naboth as a criminal, killed him, and took his land by force.

Consider Ahaz, a king of Judah, the southern kingdom. He came to reign in 743 about 188 years or so after the split of Israel. Ahaz was a wicked king. Here are a few examples of his wickedness.

1. *He engaged in child sacrifice.* “He...sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations” (2 Kings 16:3).
2. *He led Judah into idolatry.* “He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree” (2 Kings 16:4).
3. *He made alliances with Assyria.* He said to Tiglath-Pileser, “‘I am your servant and vassal’” (2 Kings 16:7), in hopes that Tiglath would save him from his enemies instead of relying on God.

Need I go on? Each time a new king came to the throne was like each time we inaugurate a new president. People would think, “Maybe THIS is the guy!” But none of the kings of Israel, even the decent ones like Hezekiah or Josiah, could ever lead like they were supposed to. Israel, originally one, split in two. The people fell into idolatry and sin. The poor were oppressed. Finally, the people ended up in exile. For Israel (the northern kingdom), exile to the Assyrians occurred in 722. Then, 135 years later in 586, Judah (the southern kingdom) also was taken into exile, in this case by the Babylonians.

Again, here’s the essence [view the online sermon to see a photo related to the stock market crash]. NOT GOOD.

If *that’s* the trajectory of 1-2 Kings, then how can I rightfully say that there is LIFE in book of Kings? This brings us to our next point because despite the tragic narrative unfolding in this book, there is LIFE to be found.

INCARNATIONAL

The LIFE is found when we move from the literal to the incarnational. So, how do the books of Kings point us to Jesus?

The other day, I was reflecting on the truth that there are times when you have people who are able to do what it is that needs to be done. Think of IU football. Who’s the man to get the job done? Cignetti! Think of putting on good concerts. Who’s the woman for that job? Taylor Swift, of course! Or so I hear! Think of the United States of America...wait, don’t answer that! We just know when we have people who are oh so able to do what it is that needs to be done. But, *conversely*, we can think of countless scenarios

where we have people who *cannot* do what needs to be done. Take the Browns franchise, for example, which is always and forever in search of a quarterback. None of their quarterbacks have been the men for the job! As another example, think of a bad love relationship you've been in. What was the issue? They weren't the man or woman for the job, right? (It's *them* for sure, *never* ourselves!). One more: think of any husband when his wife asks him to take cutesy pictures of her. I can speak from personal experience: not the man for the job!

Friends, it is this latter category that ALL of Israel's kings fall into, even the good ones! Time and again, Israel's kings sin and falter. Even when God sends prophets like Elijah and Elisha, still things aren't great! Time after time, these kings are sinful, unjust, and vicious.

Think of Rehoboam. You know, the guy who said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier." Before he said that to the people, he asked two sets of advisors: old, wise advisors and young, zealous advisors. When he talked to the elder advisors, they told him "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants" (1 Kings 12:7). And of course, he said, "nah."

But now think of our Jesus. What does he do? Who is he?

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus, our King, became a slave. Our Sovereign became a servant. Christ left the wealth of heaven for the poverty of earth. Look! He who hung the earth is hanging from a tree! He who fixed the heavens in place is fixed in place! He who knows only peace endured treachery. He who knows only justice endured injustice. He who knows only goodness endured evil. He who knows only righteousness endured unrighteousness such that in Him we may become the righteousness of God!

Friends, there is no king like Jesus—past, present, or future. As Jesus himself said speaking of himself: "Something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42).

Like I said: there's LIFE in the Book of Kings!

FORMATIONAL

There's more yet as we move from the literal to the incarnational to the formational. How does this book apply to our lives? How does it form us? Can I step on some toes here? Ok, here goes.

Back in the spring, a series of political rallies was held. The participants were staunchly opposed to the Trump administration. Over eight million people gathered across all fifty states. Their slogan was "No Kings." You can see this here, here, and here [view the online sermon to see examples of the rally signs]. Whether you're pro-Trump or anti-Trump, there is something deeply American about that sentiment. In America, we don't like kings. We don't want kings. It's deeply rooted in our cultural DNA, our history, to be anti-king!

Think of how glamorous Mel Gibson looks in *The Patriot* compared to the villain, Colonel William Tavington. We're trained to valorize throwing off kings and hierarchies and authorities!

This cultural mindset infects us in two ways:

- (1) Everyone thinks they can BE their own king.

When Ash and I first got married. I lived into this. Without asking her permission, I, Emerson Kennedy, bought the rug for our living room. I had to have it. I'm sorry. Luckily, she's amazing and didn't care that much. So it worked out.

But let me tell you this: there are times when for one reason or another, subconsciously I think of myself as king and try to get my way, and that's not good!

- (2) Everyone thinks they can LIVE as a king.

Just like with King Ahab, sitting on each of our shoulders is a little Jezebel, saying to each of us, "You're king over your life! Get up and do what you want!" To that sort of mentality comes the constant refrain of Jesus in the gospels: "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15).

I have three application points:

- (1) Throw Jezebel to the curb and say, "Holy Spirit, I need your help."
- (2) Submit to Christ, the true King. Where in your life are you not submitting to King Jesus?
- (3) Follow him all the days of your life.

We cannot be our own kings (or queens). That doesn't work. This is what Kings is showing us. *There's LIFE in the Book of Kings!*

ETERNAL

This moves us from the LITERAL, INCARNATIONAL, and FORMATIONAL to the ETERNAL. In other words, how does this book point us to heaven / eternity? Look at how Revelation talks about our future:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (Revelation 22:1-3)

Would you like there to be a world pervaded by justice and righteousness? Would you like a world where there's no sickness, death, or disease? Would you like a world where sin is no more? Let's put all of that under the heading of KINGDOM.

Here's the truth: *there's no kingdom without the King.*

The Book of Kings points beyond itself, beyond its litany of bad kings, to the true King who will rule forever and ever with wisdom, with justice, and with perfect righteousness. A King whose wealth is infinite. A King whose wisdom is ever flowing.

Life can feel like it's only getting harder and harder. But know this: our King is coming. We are not alone. King Jesus reigns over all!

There's LIFE in the Book of Kings.