

Prophets & Kings

Extraordinary lessons, seldom read

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Political history

- Rehoboam becomes king after Solomon
- People come to him to ask he ease their burdens and here is the advice of the older men:
- “If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” 1 Kings 12:7
- His younger friends the opposite advice—be tough! He takes their advice and the nations splits in two

Rehoboam, the secondary cause

- God had already decreed that Judah and Israel would split because of Solomon’s sins of idolatry
- Important lesson: God determines overall history, BUT individuals are still responsible for their actions
- Some acquit themselves well during times of intense personal and national trial as we will see with Daniel and his friends in the coming lessons
- God honors that and is with them
- Some do not and God judges them

Application of Servant Leadership—no matter what the circumstances

- Example of Jesus
- John 13—if ever a time he should have been served, this was it, but he washed the disciple’s feet
- ***Then he said, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Master,’ and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet. I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do. I’m only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn’t give orders to the employer. If you understand what I’m telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life. John 13:13-17***
- Trying to be the big whatever—may seem to work for a time, but it is never the way to real blessing

Kingdom does split

- Jeroboam leads Israel in rebellion
- Rehoboam starts to fight him, God tells him no, the division was God’s judgment and he is to go home
- Rehoboam does, but continuous skirmishes
- Humiliated by Shishak of Egypt—carried off all treasure, story of the bronze shields—
- This did not have to happen if Rehoboam had not broken his covenant with God, but he did and was judged for it—but shown mercy when he repented

God’s mercy

- *Then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the leaders of Judah who had assembled in Jerusalem for fear of Shishak, and he said to them, “This is what the Lord says, ‘You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak.’”*
- *⁶ The leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “The Lord is just.”*
- *⁷ When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: “Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak. ⁸ They will, however, become subject to him, so that they may learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands.”*
- *⁹ When Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, he carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including the gold shields Solomon had made.*
- *¹² Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord’s anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah. 2 Chronicles 12:5-9 New International Version (NIV)*

SO here we are—prophets and kings of the divided kingdom

- Review the role of prophets: as covenant enforcement mediators
- God gave the people his covenant when they came out of Egypt
- They were to worship and obey God; God would bless and protect
- Along with promised blessings, promised punishment if they did not obey
- The prophets were sent to remind people of this and the rest of the Old Testament is a combination of the history and the messages of the prophets

Challenging to study because.....

- In our Bibles, most of the history is in one place and the messages of the prophets in another place.
- There are exceptions to this where the messages of the prophets are included in the history
- The most prominent are Elijah and Elisha—major prophets who didn’t write books with their names on them, but there were numerous ones mentioned briefly
- Time challenges us mentioning all of them—but do take time in your reading to notice them
- After you read about Elijah and Elisha and we will combine the history with the books named after prophets and their messages
- Next time is about Jonah and there is so much more to his story than most people realize....but you’ll

have to wait until next time to hear about it

- But now let's set the stage for the next 14 podcasts

Physical Setting

- Israel and Judah, one kingdom from Joshua, Judges, Saul, David, Solomon 1456-980, 488 Years
- Divided after Solomon
- Southern kingdom of Judah with its capitol Jerusalem, Kings, varied good and evil, but God's promise to David's dynastic line kept, history in both Kings and Chronicles
- Northern kingdom of Israel, eventual capitol Samaria, Kings, always evil, not one dynastic line, constant fighting, overthrows; history primarily in Kings only

Bordering nations, main ones mentioned

- **But much in the prophetic books about surrounding nations**
- **Philistia**, nations that Israel never completely conquered, but should have, constant battles
- **Edom**, descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, continuing hatred
- **Moab and Ammon**, descendants of Lot by incest with his daughters, always enemies of Israel
- **Aram Damascus**, people closely related to Israel, language Aramaic taken over by Assyria, sometimes fought, sometimes allies

World Powers of the time

- **Egypt**—a foe, but sometimes an ally and a temptation, throughout all the histories and both Testaments
- **Assyria**—brutal nation; conquered Israel
- **Babylon**—conquered Assyria, various deportations of Judah, some quite benign until the final conquest

These passages are about real people who lived in very challenging times

Artists rendition of Sennacherib's palace

- Discovered ruins in 1870s
- Great excitement because of physical proof of Biblical narrative
- 600 x 630 ft in size
- A football field (including the two end zones) in comparison is 360 feet long and 160 feet wide
- Located across the river from Mosul in Iraq
- Much destroyed by ISIS

But much saved and recorded

- A violent and cruel people

Back to the history

- After split, Jeroboam could have had a lasting dynasty, but then doubted God and set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan
- *1 Kings 12: 25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Penuel. ²⁶ Then Jeroboam said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well revert*

to the house of David. ²⁷ If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah."

- Didn't trust God to keep what God had given him

Sets up golden calves in Bethel and Dan

^{1 Kings 12:28} So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."²⁹ He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰ And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.³¹ He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. ³² Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made.

- Set up his own religion with idols, priests, and parties
- Family judged and ultimately wiped out
- History following often refers to "the sins of Jeroboam..." a model of sin

Overview of what followed in Israel, where two major prophets will appear

- A series of evil and relatively inconsequential kings
- Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri
- Then an interesting group:
- Omrides Dynasty: Omri, Ahab, Ahziah, Jehoram

Samaria

- *^{1 Kings 16: 23} In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. ²⁴ He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.*
- Lasted through captivity (interesting story there), NT times and a small remnant today

Most famous Son—Ahab who marries Jezebel

- *1 Kings 16:29-33 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. ³⁰ Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. ³¹ He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³² He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built*

in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

God's response to the evil of Ahab and Jezebel

- Elijah bursts on the scene
- Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." 1 Kings 17:1
- And it didn't
- A showdown at the end of 3 years, but first some background on Baal

Baal – Caananite god of storms, thunder

- Ugaritic records show him as a weather god, with particular power over lightning, wind, rain, and fertility
- A lack of rain was a direct challenge to the power of this "god"
- After 3 years.....

The showdown

- After 3 years a showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal
- All the people called to witness it
- 400 prophets of Baal/One prophet of God
- No contest
- Elijah given great victory over the prophets of Baal

But Jezebel threatens him

- And he runs for his life, takes refuge in the mountains
- Thinks he is the only one who serves God
- God gives him work to do, part of which was to appoint Elisha, the prophet who would succeed him
- And God reminds him:
- "And incidentally, there are 7,000 men in Israel who have never bowed to Baal nor kissed him!" 1 Kings 19:18 Living Bible (TLB)
- Applications: God has so many doing so much we know nothing about
- Also, often after great victories (or even little ones) comes great emotional and spiritual exhaustion

Final words about Elijah

- Considered one of the greatest prophets in Israel
- Taken to heaven in a chariot of fire
- John the Baptist compared to him
- But the Bible reminds us:
- *Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. James 5:17-18*
- It's never about us, but about God
- God doesn't keep score on how many pray before

he answers—many praying, many can participate in praise, but only one needed

- But your prayers matter as much as Elijah's did—not because of you, but because you have the same God

Elisha the prophet who followed Elijah

- A great prophet—many miracles, led a school of prophets
- My 2 favorite stories:
- Story of Naaman and his leprosy—simple obedience can greatly demonstrate God's power 2 Kings 5
- Story of the war with Aram and the reality of spiritual warfare
- "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:16-17

Final comments about Elijah and Elisha

- We aren't told their whole story, or that of many and remember there, many prophets are not named or mentioned briefly
- We are told what God wants us to learn about God's dealings with his people
- God is in charge of the destinies of individuals and nations
- How he can do big, grandiose things: splitting the nation; prophets of Baal battle, victories for Israel
- And miracles for individuals: the widows oil, raising dead son, healing a pagan general

Final thoughts and applications

- Circumstances never absolve us of obedience
- God has given us his Word
- God always has his people—those who will teach, those who follow
- We are never alone
- No matter what the circumstance, we are to trust and live as his representatives
- ^{Phil 1:27} Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.
- ^{Phil 2:14} Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.
- May we all shine brightly for our Lord in this sad world and share with them the salvation that comes from knowing Jesus.