

Course Study Guide

OT219 *2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make*

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Christian University

Lesson 1 Study Guide

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2 Samuel: David's Great Reign

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Objectives

David shepherded them [Israel] with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (Ps. 78:72). Second Samuel records David’s triumphs and his pains as Israel’s great king. You will also study the source of Christ’s title, “Son of David.”

When you complete this lesson, “2 Samuel: David’s Great Reign,” you should be able to:

- Describe David’s triumphs and defeats and connect them to his character.
- Explain how David responded to his sins in such a way that God would remember him as “A man who followed God with his whole heart.”
- List principles for godly living and leadership.

Scripture Reading

Read the Book of 2 Samuel.

Transcript

Course Title: 2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make

Lesson One: 2 Samuel: David's Great Reign

I. Triumph of David (1:1-10:19)

A. The Defeat of Saul on Mt. Gilboa (1:1-27)

Second Samuel opens with David hearing the news of Saul's death. The Israelites have been defeated in battle at Mount Gilboa by the Philistines. Things looked bleak. There was now no king as far as most of the people knew. But David understood that God had called him to be king. Indeed David had been anointed some years prior by Samuel to be the successor to Saul when Saul had been rejected as king. But David still had a keen appreciation for Saul, whom he had served as a military leader, and Saul's son Jonathan, who had been for a long time David's best friend.

In 2 Samuel 1, we read a beautiful musical lament that David wrote for Saul. This may have been one of his earliest writings; at least this may have been one of the earliest popular writings that David wrote among the songs and other things that he composed. He says in it, "O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted."

David was saying this about Saul, the person who had pursued him for years and tried to kill him. David shows himself to have a deep sense of where respect should be given, and that respect is a very important thing to appreciate. Later David will commit quite a number of serious sins; he is hardly an example of good personal moral behavior. But on the other hand, David never forgets who he is to respect and how that respect is to be given to God in all situations. He never forgets the importance of his loyalty to God. He showed that kind of loyalty as well to Saul.

B. King over All of Israel (2:1-14:33)

But now it is time for a new king and David is the obvious choice, at least for the people of his own tribe; that is, the tribe of Judah. They come to him at Hebron, which is the largest city in the southern part of the tribal territory of Judah. They ask him to be king, he agrees, and they formally anoint him there. This is now a public anointing, which recognizes David is to be the king of all the people of Judah. However, there were many northerners still loyal to Saul.

The tribes did not always have a sense of unity with one another; and there was a tendency for the northern tribes to think differently than the southern tribes, a tendency for them to look to different political leaders, a regionalism that separated north from south. The northern tribes thought that it might be appropriate to try to continue with Saul's family in the monarchy. They continued to look to Saul's children as potential successors to him. The Bible tells us in 2 Samuel that there really was a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul. A lot of the time it was a kind of cold war; but there was a rivalry. David knew that God wanted him to be king over all Israel. And many of his family and supporters and the vast majority of Judeans wanted that to happen, whereas large numbers of people in the north did not want a southerner as king over them. It would take seven years before, finally, David would be chosen as king over both the north and south. But eventually, he was.

C. City of David

The story describes for us how he was, indeed, made king over the entire nation, north and south, in chapter 5. Then after accepting the united monarchy of the entire nation, David proceeded to do something very interesting. Though the Israelites were scattered all around the Promised Land and had some places more under their control than others, and were on the run in some places and firmly entrenched in others, one city, indeed, the biggest city in the whole territory, had never been taken. This was the city of Jerusalem. The suburbs had been taken. Israelites had been living there for centuries since Joshua, but the central city itself, called in those days by the name Jebus because the Jebusites lived there, was still in the hands of the local Canaanite population.

David determined to capture it; he and Joab, who was his cousin and chief military advisor and leader, set out with the men of Israel to capture the city. David, of course, had grown up near it, just a few miles south in Bethlehem, and he knew how to get into the city. They did—they captured it against the defiance of the Jebusites who said, "You will never take our city," because the Jebusites had been successful in keeping Israelites out for centuries. Once David captured the city, he made it his capital. Jerusalem then became a kind of a special territory, a little bit like the way the Vatican is a special territory in Italy, kind of its own state—the way that Washington, D.C. is not part of any of the other 50 states, but a separate district. That is what Jerusalem became under David.

It became the headquarter's city for the monarchy, for the royal family. Since it was right on the border between Judah to the south and Benjamin, the southern-most tribal district in the north, Jerusalem was an ideal location, a border city in the king's hands, not really part of the territory of any other tribe; and from there David could rule. What is significant about this is that Jerusalem turns out to be the place that God had chosen to set His name. Jerusalem, in other words, as we see the story unfold, is the fulfillment of the predictions made way back in Deuteronomy 12 that God would eventually place His name, His authority, His presence, in a certain location within Israel. David made that happen.

Jerusalem becomes an important topic in Scripture; more and more it comes to symbolize the presence of God. It is, of course, the place where the Lord Himself in the New Testament was crucified and where He was resurrected. But Jerusalem comes to have the metaphorical significance of the place where we are with God, since it indicates His presence on earth. Eventually, Jerusalem even comes to indicate heaven in the book of Revelation.

D. Other Conquests

After conquering Jerusalem, David sets out to defeat the Israelites' most serious enemy, that is, the Philistines. David was always a good military leader and his skills certainly do not fail him now, especially because God is with him. It is David who actually completes the conquest. Joshua certainly had faithfully gotten it underway, but the limitations of sin on the part of the people had kept them from being entirely successful. And the way that the Israelites had turned away from God during the days of the judges and parts of 1 Samuel also were tragic factors in limiting the conquest and causing the Israelites to have only a tenuous hold on the Promised Land. Under David the conquest gets finished.

David sets out systematically to take town after town, and city after city, and region after region—to eliminate all foreign influences therein. He has tremendous success in driving away oppressors, to free the people, to liberate the land. From north to south, he has tremendous success. There is not a battle that David enters into in which he is not successful. The ark is recaptured from the Philistines and brought back into Jerusalem.

E. Davidic Covenant

We see in chapter 7, David wants to build a temple. He says to God, "I want to build You a house." Why would he want to do that? Well, it is because the people in ancient times in general were aware of the fact that it seemed appropriate to have a place where a god could manifest His presence; that is the general sense that ancient people had about a temple. But in particular, David really did love God and loved Him with his whole heart and cared about God's purposes. He wanted to honor God more than what was the case, in his mind at least, in the way that the tabernacle did so. The tabernacle, after all, was a portable tent shrine, and now Israel was settled. David had finished settling the people of God; and so, as he had captured Jerusalem, he wanted a place right there in the center of the people—a visible presence of God's abiding with them. The temple would do that. God said, "No, I do not want you to build a temple. Part of your job for Me has been war, and you are associated with war. I want My house to be a house of peace."

In addition, God actually wanted to do something first, something more important than getting a building built. He wanted to make a promise, to David and through David, of importance to the whole world. That is what we find in 2 Samuel 7. This chapter contains what is called the Messianic Covenant, the Davidic Messianic Covenant. It is the chapter in which God says to David, "You will not build a house for Me, but I will build a house for you"—trading on the fact that the word in Hebrew for house can also mean "family" just as it can in English. "I am

going to make it so that there will never fail to be a successor of yours over My people.” Now, on the one hand, this could be interpreted in a rather trivial way as a promise that there would be many kings descended from David, that his family would be a dynasty of kings. But on the other hand, the grandness of the language clearly leads us to expect, as it led ancient Israelites long before the time of Jesus, that God was also predicting something greater than just a dynasty.

He was predicting an eternal kingship, a kingship that would never end. Somehow, out of this chapter, we know that a son of David was to come, and he would rule forever over God’s people. Of course, the fulfillment of that is Jesus of Nazareth. It was He, just like David, born in circumstances that would not lead one to expect him to be king and not recognize him early on as king. But indeed with the approbation of God and representing God in the flesh, He was, in fact, the great king in fulfillment of this promise. Once David becomes king and receives this promise, we know that David will stand as a kind of archetype for the kingship of Christ. Thus David’s life is a harbinger of the life of Christ—not, however, from a moral point of view. It is from the point of view of the office he holds and of the favor of God upon him, but his moral life sadly is far from exemplary.

II. David’s Transgression (11:1-27)

Though David has victory after victory, and though David is magnanimous and effective in victory, there comes a time when we read these words from chapter 11: “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. . . . But David remained in Jerusalem.” In other words, there comes a time when arrogance begins to characterize David as a king. “Yes, I am supposed to go. Yes, that is what kings do (it is the theory that the king leads the troops into battle, always at the forefront). But I am going to stay home this time and let Joab do it.”

What David does, in lust, is eventually takes a married woman and sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, and then he schemes to cover it up by getting her husband killed. It is Bathsheba that he lusted after; her husband is Uriah. He commands Joab to have Uriah, who was a soldier, placed in the forefront of battle against what we would call today the area of Jordan—the ancient capital of Amman. There, fighting against the Ammonites, Uriah is in fact killed.

David then takes Bathsheba to be his wife, but the problem is he cannot do anything without God knowing it. So Nathan, the prophet, comes on behalf of God and says to David, “What you have done is a horrible sin and here is the consequence for you: The sword will never depart from your house.” There is another use of the word house in the sense that David’s family in general would now be subject to internal warfare. Much of the rest of the book of 2 Samuel describes events in which David’s family—and thus David himself—suffer the consequences of that sin.

III. David's Trouble (12:1-24:25)

A. Family Discord

David was not a very good father, not a very model parent. He did not intervene as he should have when his children needed guidance. He tended to let them sort of play off against one another. He didn't set a model for them and apparently did not pay too much attention to them at all. In consequence of that, this prediction came true in spades. For example, in chapter 13 we read of how David's oldest son, the crown prince Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar.

B. Absalom's Revolt

Then we read of how Absalom, the third-born, furious that this had happened, assassinates Amnon. Absalom eventually, after fleeing for a while because he had killed the crown prince, returns to Jerusalem. Sensing that David has become more and more distant as a leader, more and more isolated, more and more selfish, more and more arrogant, Absalom begins to go around to the people and suggest to them that perhaps he would make a better king than his father. He does favors for the people; he is there and available to render judgments, or give advice, or to try to solve problems. Soon he is very popular. David's ratings have slipped down near the bottom and Absalom's are skyrocketing. In chapter 15, we read of how he launches a conspiracy against his own father—in other words a revolt, a rebellion.

At first it is successful. David has with him only a few close advisors and Philistine mercenary troops who are his personal bodyguards. They have to flee, cross the Jordan River, head over into the land of Gilead; and Absalom flees after them, having gathered an army. One of David's advisors actually tricks Absalom into waiting longer than necessary to go after David. Here is David's third-born son chasing his dad to kill him because he hates his dad so much and he wants to be king. What a sad situation. Absalom does not succeed because the wary and wily Joab, David's chief military advisor and leader, ends up being able to catch Absalom and assassinates him when Absalom gets caught in a tree riding his mule around chasing David. With the leader of the conspiracy, revolution dead, the troops slink home and David also essentially slinks home as well.

C. More Rebellion

He is not popular; he did not suddenly become popular just because his son got killed in battle. David does reign a number of more years. He even has some kinds of successes and benefits attend his way, but sadly it is not a happy ending to his career. Other rebellions come against David: one led by an influential Benjamite named Sheba who is chronicled for us in chapter 20. Then more wars come; the Philistines again seek power and influence and territory, and they fight against David. As of chapter 21 in 2 Samuel, things are kind of back to where they were in the days of Saul. God has taken seriously the great sin that David committed.

D. Census and Plague

After a couple of chapters (chapters 22-23) we have some poems that David wrote, including his beautiful last words, and also a list of some of the men who fought with him who were his generals and colonels and majors, as it were, in the military. We find at the very end of the book of 2 Samuel David engaged, again, in a serious sin. This time it is not adultery and murder; this time it is imperialism. David decides to count all the fighting men in Israel, to have a military census. At first, he is opposed in this, but he insists on doing it. Why would David, who has people ready to fight for him anyway, want a complete count of every single person of fighting age? The answer is he wanted to go beyond the Promised Land.

The holy war that God allowed and sanctioned, the very special and limited war that God approved in the Old Testament, could be fought only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, and David had already done that. Now he is thinking of an empire—a bigger territory, of branching out, of capturing yet other nations, of becoming a great imperial king. God will not allow it, and so God brings a plague upon the people of Israel. David, brought short by this plague, aware that his sins have found him out once again, is immediately repentant. He pleads to God for mercy, and God is merciful. The plague ends and it comes to a stop right at a threshing floor, a great sort of stone dome at the height of the city of Jerusalem. The threshing floor was owned by a local Jebusite named Araunah, and David buys it from him. He puts an altar there, and thus he has purchased land for what will be the site of the temple that his son Solomon will build.

E. Concluding Thoughts

David actually dies a couple of chapters into the book that we call 1 Kings, though it is a continuation of the story. His life comes to a tragic end there, but we should not think of his story as being a story of tragedy. It was a story of sin. It was a story of immorality. It was a story of ups and downs, great potential, and the frittering away of that potential by personal sins, a story of a king who soon becomes so unpopular that his own son drives him from office, and gets the vast majority of people eager to kill David.

But because God is behind the events, it is also a story of wonderful victory. It is a story of the beginning of the hope for a Messiah. It is a story of the expectation for a son of David to reign over Israel; and David launches that. His victories remind us of the victory of Christ. And we notice that, even in his sin, he never forgets his position of respectfulness, dependence upon, and loyalty to God. He repents when his sin finds him out. He senses his guilt and asks God for mercy, and God used him mightily to establish the Israelites in their land in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. That is where we see the situation at the end of 2 Samuel.

Discussion Questions

While you are attempting to explain the Davidic Covenant to your third grade Sunday school class, little Johnny asks a question: "How can God make a covenant with someone who did such bad things?" What is your answer?

What can we learn (both positive and negative) from the life of David?

Where do you see God's faithfulness to His people and His covenant with them demonstrated in 2 Samuel? Explain.

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*. 2nd ed.
Discovery House Publishers: 2012.

Read Chapter 15: “The Story of David” (2 Samuel)

Philip Yancey Devotional King of Passion - 2 Samuel 6

“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets” (2 Sam. 6:14-15).

An unavoidable question dangles over the Bible’s account of David’s life. How could anyone so obviously flawed—he did, as we shall see, commit adultery and murder—be called “a man after God’s own heart”? The central event in this chapter may point to an answer.

David consistently acknowledged that God, not a human king, was the true ruler of Israel, so he sent for the sacred ark of the Lord that had been captured by the Philistines half a century before. He would install it in Jerusalem, the new capital city he was building, as a symbol of God’s reign.

It took a few false starts to get the ark to Jerusalem. Without looking up the regulations given to Moses, the Israelites tried transporting the ark on an ox cart, as the Philistines paraded their gods, rather than on the shoulders of the Levites, as God had commanded. Somebody died, David got mad, and the ark sat in a private home for three months.

Nevertheless, when the ark finally did move to Jerusalem, to the accompaniment of a brass band and the shouts of a huge crowd, King David completely lost control. Bursting with joy, he cartwheeled in the streets like an Olympic gymnast who has just won the gold medal and is out strutting his stuff.

Needless to say, the scene of a dignified king doing backflips in a scanty robe broke every rule ever devised by a politician’s image builders. David’s wife, for one, was scandalized. But David set her straight: He was dancing before God, and no one else. And, king or no, he didn’t care what anyone else thought as long as that one-person audience could sense His jubilation.

In short, David was a man of passion, and he felt more passionately about the God of Israel than about anything else in the world. The message got through to the entire nation.

Life Question: If you had been in the crowd watching David dance, how would you have responded?

Glossary

Ammonite — The usual name of the descendants of Ben-ammi, the son of Lot by his daughter (Ge 19:30-38). They inhabited the country east of the Jordan and north of Moab between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, from which they had expelled the Zamzummim (Dt 2:20-21, 37; 3:11).

Davidic Covenant — God gave a promise to David and his descendants that they should have an everlasting kingdom and be known as His sons (2Sa 7:12-17; 1Ch 17:10-14; Ps 89:3-4, 26-27, 34).

Hebron — A city in the southern end of the valley of Eshcol, 20 miles SW of Jerusalem on a sloping hill (er-Rumeideh), which is 3,040 feet above sea level. It was the favorite home of Abraham and is where Sarah died and was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Ge 23:17-20).

Jebusite — The name described an ethnic group living in the uplands of Canaan (Nu 13:29; Jos 11:3). Their principal city (Jerusalem) was known to them as Jebus, which led to their being known as Jebusites (Ge 15:21). David captured the city and made it the capital of his kingdom instead of Hebron.

Jerusalem — It is also called Salem, Ariel, Jebus, “city of God,” “holy city,” and “City of David.” The name in the original dual form means “possession of peace,” or “foundation of peace.” The dual form probably refers to the two mountains on which the city was built, Zion and Moriah. It is situated on the central mountain ridge of Palestine, almost exactly opposite the north tip of the Dead Sea, 36 miles east of the Mediterranean and 16 miles west of the Dead Sea (in a straight line). The city’s altitude is between 2,100 and 2,526 feet above sea level.

Quiz

1. At the end of 2 Samuel, David sins by:
 - A. Taking a military census
 - B. Taking revenge on his enemies
 - C. Failing again to discipline one of his children
 - D. Committing adultery again
2. David first becomes king of his own tribe of:
 - A. Judah
 - B. Israel
 - C. Benjamin
 - D. Ephraim
3. David is publicly anointed king first at:
 - A. Jerusalem
 - B. Shiloh
 - C. Gilgal
 - D. Hebron
4. David responds to the news of King Saul's death with:
 - A. Relief
 - B. Resentment
 - C. Respect
 - D. Rejoicing
5. David's son Absalom:
 - A. Was David's oldest son
 - B. Raped his half-sister Tamar
 - C. Led a rebellion against his own father
 - D. Committed suicide
6. During the reign of David, Israel's most serious enemy was the:
 - A. Amalekites
 - B. Philistines
 - C. Midianites
 - D. Assyrians
7. How did God confront David about his sins of adultery and murder?
 - A. He appeared to David personally.
 - B. He spoke to David through one of David's wives.
 - C. He spoke to David through David's close friend Joab.
 - D. He spoke to David through the prophet Nathan.

8. In the springtime, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he normally would have been leading the troops in battle. What mindset was beginning to characterize David?
 - A. Fear
 - B. Laziness
 - C. Arrogance
 - D. Irresponsibility
9. Jerusalem was located:
 - A. In the heart of the southern tribal region
 - B. In the heart of the northern tribal region
 - C. On the border of the southern and northern regions
 - D. Just east of the Jordan River in the Transjordan region
10. What legacy did God promise David?
 - A. David would build a temple for the Lord.
 - B. David would always have a successor to reign over God's people.
 - C. David's moral life would always be considered exemplary.
 - D. David's family would be protected from violence and strife.

Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. D 4. C 5. C 6. B 7. D 8. C 9. C 10. B

Lesson 2 Study Guide

OT219 *2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make*

1 Kings: Israel's Decline & Division

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Objectives

Solomon's great beginning and sad ending set the scene for civil war in Israel (chapters 1-11). After his death, God's nation tore itself in two and drifted away from God. The tragic results of disobedience are graphically portrayed.

When you complete this lesson, "1 Kings: Israel's Decline & Division," you should be able to:

- Describe Solomon's great wisdom and folly.
- Explain how Israel became the two nations of Israel and Judah.
- Describe the tragic consequences of rejecting God's will.
- Trace and explain Israel's and Judah's declines.
- Describe the role of Israel's prophets in her religious and political life.
- Formulate principles for building personal obedience to God's Word.

Scripture Reading

Read the Book of 1 Kings.

Transcript

Course Title: 2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make

Lesson Two: 1 Kings: Israel's Decline and Division

I. Succession (1:1-2:11)

A. Introduction

First Kings is certainly logically named because it is all about kings. You have the story of Solomon in 1 Kings 1-11. And then starting with chapter 12 and following all the way through to the end of 2 Kings, we have the stories of forty additional kings. Solomon, David's eighth-born son, became his successor. The fact that he was number eight gives you a bit of an indication of how much intrigue and difficulty there was in the succession.

B. David's Last Days

Indeed, the question of who will succeed David is what 1 Kings raises in the beginning of the book. David's fourth-born son, Adonijah, thought of himself as the logical successor. The firstborn son, Amnon, had been killed by the third-born, Absalom. The second-born son had apparently died at a young age. Absalom had been killed in battle by David's general, Joab; and so Adonijah, number four, was ready to take over. At the beginning of 1 Kings, David is old and he has hypothermia; he cannot get warm, and his advisors do something that shows their own lack of moral judgment. In those days, it was thought by the pagans that a king had the right to reign only as long as he was sexually active.

So, to try to prove that David should still be king, they have a nationwide beauty contest, and thus come up with the prettiest young thing they can find in ancient Israel, a woman named Abishag. They bring her to the king and have her go to bed with him. But in fact, the king is far too preoccupied trying to keep warm to have any romantic interests in this new wife. That is proof to Adonijah that he ought to be king—his dad is washed up. So, he schedules a big ceremony and feast and has himself anointed and proclaimed as king. When the noise of this reaches the palace, people there immediately fly into a panic because David had already promised Solomon that he would be king.

But could the decrepit David now carry this out? With the help of Bathsheba, who appears in these latter days to be David's favored wife, the group that supports Solomon has him anointed. Indeed, that catches on more popularly because, even though David is feeble, it is his own decision that they emphasize. Solomon actually becomes king in the popular mentality, and Adonijah has to recognize that his attempt at becoming king fizzled.

II. The Reign of Solomon (2:12-11:43)

A. Securing the Throne

Now, if the rivalry was just the eighth-born son against the fourth-born son, and then they shook hands, made up and all was settled, that would be one thing. But it was not so at all. Instead, we observe that Solomon works firmly to establish his power ruthlessly against all opposition. Eventually, on a fairly thin pretext, Solomon is able to have Adonijah put to death. Solomon puts to death other rivals to the throne as well, even Joab, who had been David's extremely successful military commander. With David's permission, he was also assassinated. At the end of chapter 2 in 1 Kings, we read this statement, "The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands." It came as the result of several occasions in which rivals to the throne, or rivals to political power, or anyone that Solomon thought might get in his way, were systematically eliminated.

B. Wisdom and Folly

Solomon had a tremendous advantage; he was interested in and skilled in wisdom. Now, wisdom has nothing to do with IQ. Biblical wisdom is not about IQ; it is not about experience; it is not about knowledge; it is not about academic skill; it is unrelated to those sorts of topics. "Wisdom," as the Bible defines it and as the English word rather poorly translates the Hebrew word for wisdom, is the ability to make the right choices. That is what wisdom is. It is choice-making ability, and of course the Bible tells us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—the theme of Proverbs—reminding us that we will not make the right choices in life unless God is at the beginning of our choice-making. To choose Him and to fear Him orients all our ability to make the right choices.

But God gave to Solomon that ability. Solomon was already a somewhat ruthless king. He was already somewhat determined to eliminate opposition to himself. But he's imperfect like the other kings were imperfect, and God's not going to stand in the way of Israel's blessing by renegeing on the chance to do good things for the lineage of David according to His promise in 2 Samuel 7. So Solomon, the successor to David, starts off wonderfully.

He gives wise rulings in difficult cases. The people are both fascinated and thrilled with their new king. However, taking advantage of his popularity, he also does something in chapter 4 that is not ideal. He reverses the tribal district system that had been in existence since the days of Joshua that had been revealed by God in the book of Deuteronomy. Instead, in chapter 4 we read how he appointed federal governors over the special districts that he created, districts that did not coincide with the original boundaries of the tribes in the Promised Land. We see, on the one hand, a king who is very wise and can make the right choices; but on the other hand, a king who takes into his own hands things that God had originally specified were to continue the way that God planned them.

We see a king who is enormously capable at helping people and ruling for them in difficult court decisions, in teaching proverbs to people, indeed in being so wise as it says at the end of chapter 4 that his wisdom spread to all the kings of the world—but who also spent an awful lot of time and energy building up his own personal wealth. Perhaps Solomon's greatest accomplishment is the building of the temple. David had wanted to do it, but God said, "No. Instead, I have something more important for you. I am going to build up your house; you do not build mine." God had promised that your son and successor, that is Solomon, would do that job.

C. A Temple for the Name of the Lord

With chapters 5-6 and following, we find descriptions of Solomon's determination to build that temple, and to put it into the best possible condition it could be, to make it a house for the gathering of the nations. It is a wonderful success story. He gathers together workers; he makes arrangements with Hiram, the king of Tyre, in what we would call today Lebanon, in those days Phoenicia. Building materials are provided for the temple, many of them brought by sea to the seacoasts and then tracked over land to Jerusalem. Quarrying is undertaken and a vast complex with a temple upon it is finally constructed.

It is a beautiful temple; it is lovely and it is successful. It took seven years to build, as 1 Kings 6 describes. Then we read these rather ominous words at the beginning of chapter 7: "It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." It took seven years on the temple but thirteen years on his own house. Another contrast is Solomon doing the right thing for God in the temple, but then not doing the right thing in terms of paying so much attention to himself.

Further, chapters 7-8 describe the beauty of the tabernacle and its fine appointments; they describe how the ark was brought into the temple and Solomon's wonderful and theologically astute prayer of dedication for the temple. In chapter 9, God appears to Solomon and encourages him and warns him that if he is faithful he can have a long life of blessedness and success and prosperity. If, on the other hand, he is not faithful, there will be difficulties that come to him.

D. Solomon's Splendor

In chapter 10, we read of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, this queen from the south, who had heard about Solomon but wanted to come and see for herself if he really was so wise. Could someone know so many proverbs, be so skilled at the interpretation of life, be able to describe the way choices should be made? Could this person, who was the collector and/or author of so many of those proverbs that are in what we call the book of Proverbs, really be as impressive as his reputation suggested? He was; and he had splendor in terms of his officers, in terms of his workers, in terms of the palace, and in terms of the public works projects that he had undertaken. There were just all sorts of things that he had accomplished for the people. On the other hand, we also read that, sadly, he had bankrupted the nation. So there came a time when

he could not pay Hiram of Tyre what he owed him for building materials and construction help. He had to end up giving part of northern Israel over to Tyre as a payment for it—again, another kind of contrast.

E. Solomon's Spiritual Demise

In chapter 11, we read about Solomon's spiritual and moral demise. After descriptions of many aspects of his greatness we read this: "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter (Pharaoh's daughter having been his chief early wife)." He loved Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and the Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." It says, "his wives led him astray." As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. David had plenty of imperfections but always was loyal to God; he worshiped the Lord alone. David trusted in the Lord alone, and knew that in the Lord alone was righteousness.

Solomon, however, followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites, etc. Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not follow the Lord completely as David, his father, had done. The chapter goes on to describe how Solomon actually introduced idolatry officially into Israel, how he built shrines for idol worship on the various hills around Jerusalem. At the end of Solomon's reign, around 931 B.C., we have a situation where people are worshiping the Lord, the true God, at the temple in Jerusalem. But they are also starting to worship this god, and that goddess, and various other deities at shrines that Solomon also built for them. So the great builder—the builder of the temple, the builder of the palace, and the builder of many of the public works projects around Israel—also became the builder of the pagan worship centers around the city of Jerusalem. Obviously, this was unacceptable to God, and God not only raised up a number of adversaries who fought him, but he also raised up a northerner named Jeroboam, who had been one of Solomon's officers, to oppose him and to seek to take the ten northern tribes away from Solomon's influence—in other words, the leader's revolt that would produce secession by the north from under the monarchy of Solomon.

III. Division of the Kingdom (12:1-14:31)

A. Jeroboam and Rehoboam

When Solomon died, this very thing did happen as God had said it would. God said to Solomon, "Because of what you have done I am going to rip the nation from you, and I will leave one tribe"—and He did (the tribe of Judah), as an indication of loyalty to His promise to David that there would always be a successor to him on the throne. "But most of the nation will no longer be governed by a king descended from your father David and you."

In chapter 12, Jeroboam led that revolution, and it did work. It was successful and the northern tribes broke away from Solomon's son Rehoboam once Solomon had died. Thereafter, we

observe what amounts to a continuous civil war—sometimes hot, sometimes cold, but continuous—in which the north and the south are at odds. They were never again united, so there were only three kings who reigned over the whole country. There was Saul, there was David, there was Solomon; and after Solomon's death then the country splits apart, never again to be reunited during its political lifetime as a normal nation on the earth. And, there are going to be kings in the north and kings in the south.

B. Summary of Northern and Southern Kings

It turns out, conveniently for our accounting system, that there were twenty northern kings until the north was destroyed and conquered and exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There were a total of twenty southern kings in the succession to Solomon, who reigned all the way to 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the south. It is the story of those twenty northern kings and those twenty southern kings that occupies the rest of 1 Kings and indeed on into 2 Kings.

C. Prophets: Part of the Story

1 Kings is also the story of prophets. One of the things you have to keep in mind is that God does a lot through prophets in these books. Sometimes these are anonymous prophets; sometimes they are prophets who are identified, such as Elijah and Elisha. But the books of Kings are not only about kings; they are about the interaction, very often, of kings and prophets. There is one other big factor to keep in mind and that is the superpowers: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon—the great three powers of the Fertile Crescent, the region in which the Israelites lived. We will see increasingly that those powers have influence upon the way that the course of events goes in Israel and Judah.

D. Calf Worship Instituted by Jeroboam

When the nation divides, Jeroboam, not wanting to send his people to worship at Jerusalem, which after all was a unifying place, sets up a counter-religion—a bogus substitute religion. Well, how will the people worship? Jeroboam decides that they will go right back to the practice that had taken place as described for us in Exodus 32 and 33 at Mt. Sinai when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments up on the mountain and Aaron and the Israelites were worshiping golden calves down at the bottom.

Following that old tradition of worshiping God by golden calves, he has golden calves made as idols, sets them up at the northern city of Dan and the relatively southern city of Bethel; and there, he causes the Israelites to sin. After about chapter 13, we see that the northern ten tribes are not worshiping the Lord in the true and right way but are worshiping by means of idols. And we are going to see that, as a result, it is impossible for any northern king to do right in the eyes of the Lord fully. Some would be better than others, but generally all twenty of them will be condemned. When you read about this king or that as a northern king, the summary statement made of him early on will be, “and he, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”

IV. Kings of Judah and Israel (15:1-22:53)

On the other hand, some of the southern kings were good. Of the total of twenty, the statement is made of eight of them that they “did good in the eyes of the Lord,” although there are often qualifications listed. Nevertheless, if you add it up, of the forty kings of the divided monarchy that followed Solomon, sadly we observe that thirty-two of them did evil in God’s opinion and only eight came even close.

A. Dynasty of Omri

A powerful dynasty in the north is the dynasty of Omri. This dynasty is effectively represented by his son Ahab. Ahab dominates quite a few chapters toward the end of 1 Kings. He was really the north’s most evil king; he was sold into idolatry by his own way of thinking. He married a Phoenician princess named Jezebel and effectively gave into her hand the religious leadership of the nation. Jezebel proceeded to persecute the prophets of the Lord. In spite of the counter-religion, in spite of the worship of idols, there were righteous prophets trying to bring the people back to faithfulness to God. Ahab, and Jezebel especially, however, were so successful in suppressing those true prophets that by chapter 17, we find the situation in which only one is actually able to show his face in public (most of them have gone underground and are in hiding). That one is God’s prophet Elijah.

B. Elijah and Elisha

For many chapters, starting in chapter 17, what Elijah does or what Ahab does kind of interact one with another. Soon enough, it is Elijah’s successor, Elisha, who is the central figure. And for a time, toward the end of 1 Kings and the beginning of 2 Kings, you are reading more about prophets than you are about kings, because God wanted His people to know His Word; He wanted His truth to be understood. Strongly, a prophet like Elijah represented the Lord. Fiercely, though he stood for God and impressively though his miracles and those of his successor, Elisha, were visible to the people, sadly however, the attractions of idolatry were terribly powerful. And those attractions kept the people of Israel away from worshiping the true and living God almost all the time.

C. An Uneasy Alliance

There is even a story in 1 Kings 22 of how both the northern and southern kings, for a short time, have made peace; so King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat are together going to war against a common enemy. They cannot even get a true word from the Lord because all the prophets are false. They finally get one lone prophet named Micaiah to come and prophesy the truth and they hate it when he does.

D. Conclusion

The northern and southern kings do not believe Micaiah. He predicts disaster for them. Indeed the book comes to a close right after that story of disaster, with King Ahab being killed in battle

across the Jordan River to the east, and with the death of Jehoshaphat some years later, and the sad situation of an Israel unable to be obedient to God (i.e., turning to idolatry increasingly, not listening to true prophets, worshiping at locations that are illegal, and by worshiping golden calves that are not God's will but the very opposite thereof). One gets the impression that this cannot last. One gets the impression, even as 1 Kings ends and 2 Kings begins, that this nation is going downhill and is going to be in big trouble.

Discussion Questions

If God were to write an obituary upon Solomon's death, what would He say?

One of Solomon's downfalls was the influence of his foreign wives. Do you have any dangerous influences in your life? What can Christians do to guard against dangerous influences?

What is the importance of the role played by the prophets in the book of 1 Kings? Why do you think God chose to speak through the prophets?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*. 2nd ed. Discovery House Publishers: 2012.

Read Chapter 16: "How to Lose a Kingdom" (1 Kings)

Philip Yancey Devotional Northern Kingdom - Introduction

Following the death of Solomon in 931 B.C., Israel split into two parts, north and south, both of which tragically slid toward destruction over the course of the next 350 years. The northern kingdom retained the name Israel and established its new capital in the city of Samaria. Unfortunately, all of the kings of Israel rejected the covenant with God and instead pursued materialism, militarism, and pagan worship.

Since the rulers proved to be immoral, God turned to the prophets to communicate His message of love and judgment to the nation. Beginning with Elijah and Elisha, the Lord made one attempt after another to woo back His chosen people from their ongoing and growing unfaithfulness. These first two prophets were followed in turn by Joel, Amos, and Hosea, all of whom called on Israel to repent and renew the covenant. Yet the eloquent pleas of the prophets fell on deaf ears and the nation refused to change. As economic crises and political pressures arose, the rulers of the northern kingdom continued to rely on false gods and military alliances to secure their future.

Just as the prophets had predicted, this strategy led to ruin. In 722 B.C., the ten tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians and carried off into captivity. The Bible makes clear that Israel was destroyed not because of military weakness, but because of its spiritual and moral collapse. The inhabitants of the northern kingdom discovered to their own regret that God took seriously His promise in Deuteronomy 31, either to bless or to destroy His people, depending upon their faithfulness to Him.

Glossary

Bethel – (Hebrew “house of God”) - A city located west of Ai on the main north-south route near where the boundaries of Benjamin and Ephraim met. It was situated 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

Dan – A city near the southern foot of Mt. Hermon to which the Danites migrated (Jdg 18). It was the northernmost limit of ancient Israel, as indicated in the common phrase “from Dan to Beersheba.” (Jdg 20:1; 1Sa 3:20)

Glory – (Hebrew, *kabod*) - In the ancient Near East, gods and kings were described as being surrounded with glory; their headdress or crown in particular is adorned with glory and majesty. Majestic glory evokes both reverence and fear. The terrifying aspect of Yahweh’s kabod is especially prominent in the revelation at Sinai (Dt 5:24). The kabod of Yahweh has both a concrete meaning (a fiery phenomenon from which radiance shines forth) and an abstract meaning (honor, dignity, majesty). The concept of glory is employed supremely in the Old Testament as a characteristic attribute and possession of God (1Ch 29:11). When Solomon’s temple was dedicated, the cloud was identified with God’s glory (1Ki 8:10; 2Ch 5:14). God’s glory implies His power (Isa 2:10, 19).

Israel, Kingdom of – (931 B.C. - 722 B.C.) - Jeroboam lead a revolt against Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, that resulted in the establishment of an independent northern kingdom. This included the larger portion of Palestine proper.

Judah, Kingdom of – (931 B.C. – 586 B.C.) – Jeroboam led a revolt against Solomon’s son Rehoboam that resulted in a split of Solomon’s kingdom between 10 tribes in the north and 2 tribes in the south. The Southern Kingdom included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. They remained loyal to King Rehoboam and maintained Jerusalem as their capital city. The kingdom of Judah existed until 586 B.C. when it was conquered by the Babylonian Empire.

Phoenicia – A country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, approximately where modern Lebanon is located. The inhabitants of the region called themselves (and were called by their immediate neighbors) either “Sidonians” for their principal city (Jos 13:6; Jdg 3:3), or “Canaanites.”

Sheba – Sheba is variously located. Northern Arabia, northeast of Median, where a Wadi es-seba may echo the name. More likely, Sheba is Saba on the southwest coast of the Arabian Peninsula (modern Yemen), south of Ma`in and west of Qataban and Hadramaut, southern Arabian states. The third possible site is in the Horn of east Africa across the Red Sea from Saba, near present day Djibouti, traditionally part of Ethiopia.

Tyre – An important Phoenician city; modern Sur, located between Sidon and Acco.

Quiz

1. How many of the northern kingdom's twenty kings "did good in the eyes of the Lord"?
 - A. 0
 - B. 4
 - C. 8
 - D. 12
2. How many of the southern kingdom's twenty kings "did good in the eyes of the Lord"?
 - A. 0
 - B. 4
 - C. 8
 - D. 12
3. Israel divided into two kingdoms after the reign of this king:
 - A. Saul
 - B. David
 - C. Solomon
 - D. Rehoboam
4. Solomon spent thirteen years:
 - A. Fighting a war against Hiram, the king of Tyre
 - B. Seeking the Lord for wisdom
 - C. Building the Lord's temple
 - D. Building his personal palace
5. The prophet Elijah stood up against this king who, with the influence of his wife Jezebel, was the northern kingdom's most evil king:
 - A. Jeroboam
 - B. Omri
 - C. Manasseh
 - D. Ahab
6. The southern kingdom was also referred to by the name of its predominant tribe:
 - A. Ephraim
 - B. Judah
 - C. Benjamin
 - D. Dan
7. This man became the first ruler of the northern kingdom:
 - A. Rehoboam
 - B. Jeroboam
 - C. Ahab
 - D. Omri

8. This son of David proclaimed himself king just before David died:
 - A. Adonijah
 - B. Amnon
 - C. Absalom
 - D. Shimei
9. What led to Solomon turning his heart after other gods?
 - A. His great wealth
 - B. His alliances with foreign kings
 - C. His foreign wives
 - D. His pride regarding his gift of wisdom
10. Wisdom, as the Bible defines it, is:
 - A. Intellectual ability
 - B. The ability to make right choices
 - C. The attainment of knowledge
 - D. The attainment of experience

Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. C 4. D 5. D 6. B 7. B 8. A 9. C 10. B

Lesson 3 Study Guide

OT219 *2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make*

The Old Testament “Story” & Its Sources

Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Objectives

Certain of the Old Testament books carry the “story line” of God’s relationship with Israel, while other books offer insight and explanation to the story without advancing the chronology. In this lesson you will gain a big picture of the Old Testament story. You will also survey the rich “other” sources of historical data that inform us about the cultures that surrounded and interacted with God’s covenant people.

When you complete this lesson, “The Old Testament “Story” & Its Sources,” you should be able to:

- Name the Old Testament books that move its story ahead chronologically.
- List and discuss five eras of Old Testament history.
- List and discuss various archaeological sources that provide rich resource data for understanding the Old Testament.

Scripture Reading

Read the Book of 1 Chronicles.

Transcript

Course Title: 2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make

Lesson Three: The Old Testament “Story” and Its Sources

I. Introduction to the Historical Books

The English arrangement of the Old Testament historical books includes Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. In the Hebrew arrangement, Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and Kings constitute a group referred to as “The Former Prophets.” Labeling them as prophetic rather than historical suggests these books were considered to be primarily theological in nature rather than annalistic. These books share a prophetic view of history where cause and effect are tied to the blessings and curses of the covenant. The remainder of the books—Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther—form part of the section of the Hebrew canon called “The Writings.”

II. Historical Overview of Old Testament Times

History may be defined as the interpreted record of the socially significant human past, based on organized data collected by the scientific method from archaeological, literary, or living sources. God as an actor in history will preclude the idea of history happening within a closed system. Of course, one must keep in mind that any historical record will include some events and exclude others, usually on the basis of availability of data and the special interests and concerns of the historian.

This selectivity is eminently discernible in the Old Testament account of Israel’s history. The primary thrust of the Old Testament record is theological in nature. Those facts relevant to the grand themes of the divine purpose (for example, redemption) were retained while other possibilities were excluded. The Old Testament is not a history in the chronicling, political sense of the term, but a descriptive account of God’s work in human affairs.

When reading the Old Testament historical books it is important to get the sweep of things, the big story. This is a remarkable story, an immensely moving passage through time—about 2,000 years of it, ending nearly 2,000 years ago. It is important for students of the Bible to have an understanding of the overarching structure of ancient Israel’s history. The major segments of that history include: the patriarchal wanderings; the Egyptian sojourn and Exodus; the settlement of Canaan; the institution and development of the monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon; the division of the kingdom; the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians; the destruction of Solomon’s temple and the southern kingdom by the Babylonians; exile in Babylonia and Egypt; return to the land; and the rebuilding of the temple.

A. Patriarchal Age to Exodus (2000-1200 B.C.)

The Middle Bronze Age (2000 - 1600 B.C.) of Canaan that Abraham entered into was dominated by scattered city-states. In Syria there were power centers at Yam-had, Qatna, Alakh, and Mari, and the coastal centers of Ugarit and Byblos seemed to have been already thriving. In Palestine only Hazor is mentioned in prominence. As the period progressed, there was more and more contact with Egypt, and extensive caravan travel arose between Egypt and Palestine.

The Hebrews voluntarily entered Egypt under Joseph, but subsequently were reduced to slavery. Suffering in Egypt, the Israelites cried to Yahweh for deliverance, which came in the person of Moses. After a series of plagues that God sent upon the land of Egypt, Moses led the people across the Red Sea into the Sinai Peninsula. The most important event of the Hebrews' forty years in the wilderness was the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. There, Moses received the Decalogue, and the tabernacle was constructed according to instructions received through divine revelation.

B. Settlement in Canaan (1200 - 1000 B.C.)

Victories in the Transjordan formed a prelude to victories in the Promised Land itself. After crossing the Jordan River, Joshua set up his base camp at Gilgal. His military strategy was designed to divide the Canaanite forces. Victories at Jericho and Ai in central Palestine divided the inhabitants of the land and provided a wedge from which the Israelites gained effective control. Although the land was not wholly occupied by the Israelites during Joshua's lifetime, it was distributed among the twelve tribes on both sides of the Jordan River. The Levites, whose concern was public worship, were not given a tribal inheritance, but were assigned forty-eight cities with the respective pasture lands.

The Israelite tribes formed a loose confederation during the period of the judges. The tribes settled in their respective territories and had to defend themselves against distant marauding bands and the local Canaanites who had not been dispossessed during the time of Joshua. During the twelfth century B.C. a migration of Philistines from Crete and the Aegean region took place. They settled along the coastal regions of southern Palestine and became the greatest threat to Israelite independence. The lack of strong central government was keenly felt during the time of the judges.

C. United Kingdom (1000 - 931 B.C.)

The books of Samuel record the beginnings of Israel's golden age, the one period of history during which Israel became a world power; however, Samuel was disheartened when the people asked for a king. It seemed to be a rejection of the theocracy, and of Samuel himself. Samuel was directed by Yahweh to anoint Saul, a Benjamite, as the first king of Israel. Saul was successful in maintaining the equilibrium with the Philistines throughout most of his reign, but after the battle of Mount Gilboa (in which Saul was killed) the Philistines occupied most of the central portion of Canaan.

When David came to the throne, one of his first tasks was to regain control of the Israelite territory. This was accomplished from his newly conquered, fortified base in Jerusalem. As a result of David's military successes, his son Solomon inherited an empire that stretched from the Euphrates in the north to Egypt in the south. Though Solomon's wisdom was widely recognized and the prosperity of his realm unparalleled, the empire decayed under his guardianship and was on the verge of collapse when his son Rehoboam took the throne.

D. Divided Kingdom (931 - 586 B.C.)

Rehoboam refused to come to grips with the economic chaos of the nation. Jeroboam, a former officer under Solomon, returned from exile in Egypt to lead a revolt that resulted in the establishment of an independent northern kingdom. This included the larger portion of Palestine proper, as over against the rival kingdom of Judah. The boundary between Israel and Judah ran south of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa.

The three kingdoms that developed from the breakup of Solomon's kingdom in western Palestine—Aram (Syria), Israel, and Judah—strove for supremacy. Nearly concurrent with the rise of the Aramaeans came the resurgence of Assyrian imperialism. During the reign of Hoshea, Israel rebelled against Assyria. Shalmaneser's campaign to the west began a three-year siege of Samaria, the capital. Upon its fall, the survivors were deported, the city destroyed, and the northern kingdom of Israel was annexed entirely into the Assyrian Empire (722 B.C.).

Judah continued for almost a century and a half after the fall of Samaria; however, during much of that period it was a tributary to Assyria. Nabopolassar the Chaldean revolted against his Assyrian lords and established one of the greatest empires of antiquity. The last kings of Judah rebelled against his son Nebuchadnezzar, which precipitated an eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem. This ended with the destruction of the city and its temple and the deportation of the citizens to Babylon (587 B.C.). With the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

E. Exile and Return (550 - 450 B.C.)

The Jews who were deported from Jerusalem were permitted to settle in their own communities in Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied to such a community located at Tel-abib on the river Chebar near Nippur. During the years of exile, Israel became a religious community unrelated to any political entity or cultic center. This caused changes in its thinking and in its political institutions that have continued to the present. Although some Jews would later return to Jerusalem, the majority continued to live at a distance from the Holy Land. Their ties were cultural and religious, but not political.

The history of Israel between the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the first group of exiles following the decree of the Persian king, Cyrus the Great (538 B.C.), is largely unknown. The temple utensils were retrieved from Esagila, the temple of Babylon, and entrusted to a Jewish prince who had been appointed governor of Judah, Sheshbazzar. About 50,000 Jews

returned to their homeland with the blessing and help of Cyrus. The leadership of the returned exiles passed to Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Joshua) the priest. They built the altar of burnt offerings and began the offering of daily morning and evening sacrifices on the site of the former temple (Ezr 3:2-3). The rebuilt temple was dedicated in 515 B.C.

III. Major Archives

Archaeology has substantiated many historical events recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. When modern excavators came across the Assyrian libraries buried in Mesopotamia, they discovered that the Assyrians were indebted to literary collectors and librarians from the Old Babylonian times. The Babylonian collectors had themselves gathered Sumerian as well as Babylonian tablets in a library. The famous Royal Library discovered at Nineveh we now know had a long history. Since the archives provide written records and literature, they have more to offer students of the Bible than any other kind of archaeological find.

More than a dozen major archives have been discovered in the ancient Near East, as well as a number of smaller archives, especially from the cities of Assyria and Babylonia. Most of these finds have been royal archives, but some have been personal archives such as those found at Nuzi. No Israelite archives have been unearthed as yet, though a few collections of ostraca have been found, notably at Samaria and Lachish.

A large portion of many of the archives was made up of economic texts, comprising mostly the documentation of various business transactions (for example, receipts). While these at times can contribute to biblical studies, much more significance is attached to other classes of literature. Mythological texts, treaties, wisdom literature, epics, historiographical documents, and even occasional references to prophecy have all come to light. Religious texts such as omens, incantations, hymns, and prayers have often been included among the tablets and provide a background against which the faith of Israel can be studied.

A. Ebla (Tell Mardikh)

Tell Mardikh is an exceptionally large mound, covering 140 acres and rising some fifty feet above the surrounding area. It is situated in northern Syria on a plateau halfway between the modern cities of Hama and Aleppo. Ebla was the capital of a great Canaanite empire that flourished during the third and second millennia B.C. Under the great king Ibrum, the kingdom of Ebla controlled all the territory between Egypt and the Persian Gulf, including Palestine and Syria, Sumer and Akkad.

In 1964 scholars at the University of Rome decided to carry out an archaeological excavation in Syria, at Tell Mardikh. After many years of less than spectacular results, 42 tablets of the Ebla archive were discovered in 1974. In 1975, another 15,000 or so tablets were unearthed, and the 1976 season produced an additional 5,000. The tablets were in various sizes and shapes and date back to the third millennium B.C.

The tablets fall into five categories: economic-administrative texts, including rations for palace personnel, offerings for temples and deities, lists of tributes paid to Ebla, etc.; (2) lexical texts, including school exercises, lists of animals, fishes, birds, geographic places, rolls of professions and personal names; (3) historical and juridical texts; (4) literary texts, including mythological stories, hymns to deities, incantations, and collections of proverbs; and (5) syllabaries, texts designed for learning Sumerian, for example, grammatical texts with verb paradigms in Sumerian and Eblaite.

B. Mari (Tell Hariri)

Mari was an important political center in northern Mesopotamia in the third and early second millennia B.C. The ancient city has now been identified with Tell Hariri, which is located some fifteen miles north of the Iraqi border and less than two miles west of the Euphrates River. This position permitted Mari to benefit from the intersection of the caravan routes that led from southern Mesopotamia to the Upper Euphrates and the route that led westward to the Mediterranean coast.

The outstanding architectural discovery of this period was the royal palace of Zimri-Lim, a contemporary of Hammurabi, king of Babylon. The palace covered an area of eight acres. A part of the palace was set aside for administrative offices, and the archives of this complex have yielded some 25,000 cuneiform tablets. These include economic, legal, and diplomatic texts. Several of the Mari texts reveal striking similarities to biblical prophetic texts. A god (especially Dagon) reveals himself spontaneously to a diviner-prophet, and, speaking in the imperative, sends the diviner with a message to the king.

C. Nuzi (Tell Yorghan Tepe)

In 1925, Edward Chiera of the Oriental Institute began excavations at Tell Yorghan Tepe, a few miles southwest of Kirkuk in Iraq and recovered approximately 1,000 cuneiform tablets from the ruins of what proved to be a wealthy businessman's home. The tablets recorded the business affairs of the family during the fifteenth century B.C. Included on the tablets was the name of the town—Nuzi.

The Nuzi documents were written in Akkadian but with a generous sprinkling of Hurrian words, so that the texts have become a valuable resource for reconstructing the language of the Hurrians. They are of particular interest to students of the Old Testament because they record social customs that are very similar to those recorded in the Bible in connection with the patriarchs; significantly, these tablets come from the same general area of Mesopotamia as the family of Abraham.

D. Amarna (Tell el-Amarna)

Illumination of the social and political situation in the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age, including the activities of the Habiru, has come from Tel el-Amarna in Egypt. The Amarna

era in Egyptian history (ca. 1375-1350 B.C.) is connected with Amenhotep IV, the “heretic pharaoh,” who introduced new religious ideas in Egypt. He changed his name to Akhenaten, which encouraged the sole worship of the Aten and actively discouraged the worship of the other gods of Egypt.

The cuneiform tablets found there constituted a part of the diplomatic correspondence between the Amarna pharaohs and the rulers of the major power centers of Asia—the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Mitannians, the Kassites, the Cypriotes—and the kings who ruled the city-states of Syro-Palestine. Valuable information on the nature of the Canaanite language in the Amarna period has also been gleaned from the tablets.

The numerous references to the activities of the Habiru as a disruptive social element in Canaan has stirred much scholarly debate. The name varies in form from Sa-Gaz in the Sumerian language to Habiru (more correctly Hapiru or Apiru) in Akkadian. References to the class of people designated by the term have been found in texts ranging back into the Early Bronze Age, from such diverse sites as Mari, Haran, Hattusas, Ugarit, Alalakh, and Amarna. Although some have tried to equate these peoples with the Hebrews, there is ample evidence to question the proposed equation of Hapiru = Hebrew.

E. Ugarit (Tell Ras Shamrah)

Ugarit was an ancient city-state on the Mediterranean Sea north of modern Latakia. Excavations of the site of Ras Shamrah, which have brought to light a city on the Syrian coast from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., are of great importance for biblical studies. The importance lies in the retrieval of texts in the local script and language, which has revolutionized both the linguistic knowledge of Northwest Semitic in its most ancient stage (and consequently Hebrew), and the knowledge of the terminology, style, and content of Canaanite literature of mythological and religious nature.

The Ugaritic texts testify to a number of social conventions that were also found in ancient Israel, including rituals of death and mourning, slavery for debt, and the practice of blood revenge. Of even greater interest are the legends and myths of Ugarit. There are two legendary epics about the ancient kings, Keret and Danel, and mythological texts about the gods of Ugarit—Baal and Anath; El, the patriarch of the gods; Athtart; Mot, the god of sterility and death; and others. The myths and legends of Ugarit permit us to glimpse the conceptions of the supernatural that infused Canaanite life and thought and to observe their cultic rites and practices.

F. Nineveh (Ashurbanipal's Library)

In the spring of 1850, Austen Henry Layard and his assistant, Hormuzd Rassam, made a significant find at Nineveh—thousands of clay tablets representing the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. The famous library was collected by Ashurbanipal “in order that he might have that which to read.” He had been educated in both Akkadian and Sumerian.

The contents of the library may be divided into two main categories: the royal archives, and literary works in general. The royal archives contained letters written by the king and others written to the king by sovereigns, princes, and state functionaries on all sorts of matters. Also found were contracts made with and by the royal house and economic texts dealing with every phase of palace life. The literary texts may be divided as follows: (1) philological—syllabaries, lexicons, and grammars of Assyro-Babylonian and Sumerian; (2) juridical—legal texts dealing with social practices and points of law concerning familial relationships, ownership of property, contractual agreements, etc.; (3) historical—annals of the kings; and (4) religious—including myths of Creation, the Flood, hymns, prayers, lamentations, and wisdom motifs.

IV. Monuments and Inscriptions

In addition to archival material, ancient monuments and inscriptions have contributed to our knowledge of the history of Israel. Some of the monuments and inscriptions unearthed by archaeologists name kings of Israel or Judah. Others refer to events that are known from the pages of the Old Testament. The following examples are among the most significant artifacts of this kind.

A. Mesha Inscription (Moabite Stone)

A stele of black basalt found at modern Dhiban (Old Testament Dibon) in the Transjordan, contained an inscription of about thirty-four lines commemorating various military and building activities of Mesha king of Moab in the ninth century B.C. This inscription is the primary evidence for the Moabite language, a Canaanite dialect in the group of Northwest Semitic languages. It is closely related to Hebrew in grammar and vocabulary but has affinities with Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic.

When King Mesha of Moab came to the end of his reign, he had a monument inscribed recounting all his accomplishments. Called the Moabite Stone, the inscription includes a report of how Moab had come under the domination of Israel during the reign of Omri, but had regained its independence and recaptured some territory from Israel during the reign of a later king. It provides the only extrabiblical reference to the concept of placing things under the ban (Hebrew *herem*) as Joshua did at Jericho (Jos 6:17-19). The herem was a strongly religious activity, involving a vow or promise to give the spoils of war to the deity who had commanded the attack and insured victory. In addition, it also contains the oldest extant extrabiblical occurrence of Yahweh as the name of the God of Israel.

The inscription is of primary importance as extrabiblical testimony to the relationship between Israel and Moab in the ninth century. It is a valuable supplement to the account of Mesha's revolt against Israel in 2 Kings 3:4-27. He attributes his success to the god Chemosh, who was regarded as the source of victory or defeat. Mesha also described his extensive construction of new towns and rebuilding of others previously destroyed. He apparently used Israelite captives in these endeavors.

B. Stele of Shalmaneser III

Shalmaneser III (who reigned from 858-824 B.C.), son of Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 B.C.), grandson of Tukulti-Ninurta II (889-884 B.C.), was one of the founders of the Assyrian Empire. He was faced with opposition on the north, west, and south fronts, and finally, in his closing years, with civil insurrection. He left detailed records, so that it is possible to reconstruct much of his reign. Inscriptions speak of Shalmaneser's western campaigns against coalitions that included kings Ahab and Jehu of Israel.

The first direct contact between Assyria, the major power of Mesopotamia in the Iron Age II period, and Israel occurred in the time of King Ahab but is not mentioned in the Bible. The inscriptions of Shalmaneser III record the battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River in 853. Among the confederacy that opposed Shalmaneser's army was King Ahab, who was one of the leaders of the opposition. The Black Obelisk discovered at Nimrud, which preserves the accounts of Shalmaneser's campaigns from his eighteenth to thirty-first years pictures Jehu—or more likely, his representative—bowing before him with the tribute signifying submission to Assyrian suzerainty. This occurred in 841, Jehu's first year on the throne, after the obliteration of the line of Ahab.

C. Sennacherib's Prism (Taylor Prism)

Sennacherib, son of Sargon II and father of Esarhaddon, was king of Assyria and Babylonia from 705-681 B.C., and Layard's excavations in 1849-50 revealed the palace of Sennacherib and the famous Taylor Prism, which records the annals of Sennacherib, including his siege of Hezekiah's Jerusalem. Sennacherib details his success against 46 cities of Judah and his deportation of more than 200,000 Israelites. He also boasts of imprisoning Hezekiah in Jerusalem by subjecting the city to siege, "As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to the yoke . . . Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage."

The prism gives no hint of Sennacherib's suffering a defeat and does not record the outcome of the siege on Jerusalem, but it does note how he received tribute from Hezekiah. Hezekiah "did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, etc." Thus, the inscription confirms the military details as presented in the Bible (2Ki 18-19; 2Ch 32; Isa 36-37), but fails to provide any substantiation of the role ascribed to the Lord or the victory claimed in Scripture. Likewise, it says nothing to contradict the version of the events recorded in Scripture.

D. The Cyrus Cylinder

Biblical connections with Persia are limited to the exilic and postexilic periods. The Iranian plateau knew a long history of fragmentation before the establishment of the Persian Empire in the sixth century B.C. By 550 B.C. the Median ruler, Astyages, was defeated by the Persian leader, Cyrus the Great. From this Medo-Persian base, Cyrus went on to establish the Persian

Empire. Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., and consequently the Jews in exile in Babylon came under Persian control.

Cyrus instituted a new approach to foreign policy. This policy was built on the philosophy that offering increased autonomy to subject peoples would increase loyalty to the empire, not undermine it. The Cyrus Cylinder, a clay cylinder containing the royal decree granting various peoples permission to return, does not mention Judah specifically, but Scripture reports that Judah enjoyed such a benevolence (2Ch 36; Ezr 1). Part of the inscription reads, “May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me [to him]; to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: ‘Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son.’”

Discussion Questions

If you have the ability to do so, perform an Internet search on the Philistines. After completing your search on the Philistines, summarize your findings about them in a few sentences. Upon analysis, devise three strategies for dealing with the “Philistines” of today.

How do archaeological discoveries aid our understanding of the Old Testament text?

What part of the Old Testament “story” stands out most to you? What concepts from it can you apply in your life?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*. 2nd ed. Discovery House Publishers: 2012.

Read Chapter 18: "David and the Ark of God" (1 Chronicles)

Philip Yancey Devotional New Breed of Heroes - 1 Kings 17

"Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth'" (1 Kings 17:24).

In the end, Solomon's weaknesses seriously eroded the kingdom of Israel. His lavish public projects laid a heavy tax burden on its citizens and forced him to conscript some of them as virtual slaves. His moral failures undermined the spiritual unity of the nation, and the brief, shining vision of a covenant nation gradually faded away. After Solomon's death, the nation split in two and slid toward ruin.

The remaining part of the Old Testament can prove especially confusing: The two nations had 39 rulers between them and a couple dozen prophets besides. To avoid getting hopelessly lost, keep these basic facts in mind: Israel was the breakaway northern kingdom, with a capital city of Samaria. All its rulers proved unfaithful to God. Judah was the southern kingdom, with its capital in Jerusalem. In general, its rulers, descendants of David, remained more faithful to God and His covenant, and consequently Judah survived 136 years longer than Israel.

Although the Bible discusses all 39 rulers by name, after Solomon stories of the kings speed up into a forgettable blur. God turns instead to His prophets.

Elijah, the wildest and wooliest prophet of all, first makes an appearance in this chapter. He illustrates better than anyone else the decisive change: Where King Solomon had worn jewelry and fine clothes and lived luxuriously in a gilded palace, Elijah wore a diaperlike covering of black camel's hair, slept in the wilderness, and had to beg—or pray—for handouts. He came on the scene when Israel was thriving politically, but floundering spiritually. Queen Jezebel had just launched a campaign to murder all true prophets of God and replace them with a thousand pagan priests.

This chapter shows glimpses of Elijah during his fugitive days. Although he was a moody prophet, subject to bouts of depression and self-doubt, he clearly had God on his side. The salvation of Israel would depend on how well they listened to prophets like Elijah.

Life Question: What do you learn about Elijah's personality in this chapter?

Glossary

Assyria — The upper Tigris River region, which took its name from its capital city Asshur. Later, Nineveh and Calah (Nimrud) also became capital cities. The fertile heartland of Assyria lay between the Syrian Desert, Anatolia, and the Kurdish hill, and was separated from Babylonia to the south by the Harmrin hills.

Babylon — Capital city of Babylonia. It lay on the bank of the Euphrates River, the land of Shinar, in the northern area of Babylonia (now southern Iraq) called Accad or Akkad. Its ruins, covering 2,100 acres, lie about 50 miles south of Baghdad and 5 miles north of Hillah.

Babylonia — Southern Mesopotamia (modern southern Iraq) was the site of the first civilization, first called Sumer and Akkad and later Chaldea. It was bounded on the east by the Persian hills, to the west by the Syrian Desert, and to the south by the Persian Gulf (also called Shinar).

Idol — A material object representing a deity to which religious worship is directed.

Idolatry — Worship or honor paid to any created object. The forms of idolatry are (1) Fetishism, or worship of trees, rivers, hills, stones, etc. (2) Nature worship, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, as the supposed powers of nature. (3) Hero worship, the worship of deceased ancestors, or of heroes. Idolatry was essentially materialistic based on the idea that humans would feed the “gods” in exchange for agricultural fertility.

Samaria — In the heart of the mountains of Israel, about six miles northwest of Shechem, stands the hill of Shomeron. Omri, the king of Israel, purchased this hill from Shemer, its owner, and built on its broad summit the city to which he gave the name of “Shomeron,” i.e. Samaria, as the new capital of his kingdom instead of Tirzah (1Ki 16:24).

Syria — The area occupied by a loose federation of Aramean (Syrian) villages and city-states. “Syria” in general refers to the region north and northeast of Palestine to the Euphrates and extending into the land between the Euphrates and the Habor Rivers. Its capital was Damascus.

Quiz

1. After the fall of Samaria, Judah continued on as a nation for almost:
 - A. A century
 - B. A century and a half
 - C. Two centuries
 - D. Two centuries and a half
2. Ancient Near East archives discovered by archaeologists have included:
 - A. Economic texts
 - B. Persian texts
 - C. Israelite texts
 - D. Religious texts
3. It is commonly believed the Philistines migrated to the land of Canaan in the:
 - A. Twelfth century B.C.
 - B. Thirteenth century B.C.
 - C. Fourteenth century B.C.
 - D. Fifteenth century B.C.
4. The boundary between Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) ran:
 - A. East of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa
 - B. West of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa
 - C. North of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa
 - D. South of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa
5. The first king of the United Monarchy was:
 - A. Saul
 - B. David
 - C. Solomon
 - D. Rehoboam
6. The most important event of the Hebrews' 40 years in the wilderness was:
 - A. The continuous supply of manna
 - B. The giving of the law at Mt. Sinai
 - C. Moses' inspired leadership
 - D. The faithfulness of the older generations
7. The Nuzi archive is important for patriarchal studies because it sheds light on the:
 - A. Religious affairs of a family
 - B. Religious affairs of a nation
 - C. Business affairs of a family
 - D. Business affairs of a nation

8. The primary thrust of the Old Testament record is:
 - A. Annalistic in nature
 - B. Anthropological in nature
 - C. Theological in nature
 - D. Eschatological in nature
9. This archaeologist and an assistant found the library of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal:
 - A. Kathleen Kenyon
 - B. Austen Henry Layard
 - C. Ephraim Stern
 - D. Yigael Yadin
10. Which of the following is not a significant Old Testament artifact?
 - A. Mesha Inscription (Moabite Stone)
 - B. Stele of Shalmaneser III
 - C. The Cyrus Cylinder
 - D. Mithraeum at Caesarea

Answers: 1. B 2. A 3. A 4. D 5. A 6. B 7. C 8. C 9. B 10. D

Lesson 4 Study Guide

OT219 *2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make*

2 Kings: Israel's Decline & Destruction

Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Objectives

This lesson traces the consistent slide of Israel and Judah from their covenant with God, which resulted in their invasion and destruction. Second Kings describes the times of the writing prophets and provides the backdrop for their condemnation of idolatry and injustice and their call to repentance.

When you complete this lesson, “2 Kings: Israel’s Decline & Destruction,” you should be able to:

- Explain why God’s people worshiped idols.
- Describe God’s response to idolatry and injustice.
- Describe Israel’s and Judah’s declines and fall to Gentile powers.
- Explain the importance of worshiping God instead of any idol.

Scripture Reading

Read the Book of 2 Kings.

Transcript

Course Title: 2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make

Lesson Four: 2 Kings: Israel's Decline and Destruction

I. Introduction: Attraction of Idolatry

The book of 2 Kings is a book that follows directly after 1 Kings. Again, it is one of those situations where the division between the two is essentially for convenience. They really go together as a single book and in Jewish tradition, 1 and 2 Kings are together as a single book; that is the way they are described and understood.

Early on, we read about the Lord's judgment on a king named Ahaziah. The problem, as usual, is idolatry. In order to understand what happens in 2 Kings, it is useful to understand why it was that the Israelites kept turning to idols. Why was it that these people time after time, generation after generation, no matter what had happened, no matter what a prophet said or did, soon enough would revert right back to idolatry? What made idolatry so powerful in their thinking? What made these people soon—and sooner rather than later—get interested in becoming idol worshipers again? Why could not they stay with the Lord? From a human point of view, the answer is that the idolatry that they understood was a powerful attraction for them.

A. Provided a Guarantee

Here is the way they thought of it: First of all, they thought of it as guaranteed. In their way of thinking, an idol guaranteed the presence of a god. If you could have that idol right there when you prayed, when you bowed down, when you kissed it and so on, that meant that the god was represented right there with you. It is a little like in modern times talking on the telephone. When we talk on the telephone, we say "I talked to so and so." Now what we really did was to talk to a piece of machinery. We said our words into a receiver, and we heard words out of the receiver, but the receiver made noises that represented for us the person we were talking to. They thought that same kind of way about idols. They thought of them as truly capturing the essence of the god or goddess, so to have the presence of the god or goddess was desirable. Now the Lord, on the other hand, refused to be represented by any such thing; and people found it hard to think of worshiping an invisible God. They were not sure that He was there.

B. Allowed for Selfishness

The second attraction was that it was selfish. True Israelite religion, as revealed by God to Moses and thereafter, required that people have ethics, that people live in a godly way. This was not required at all of people in the system known as idolatry; it was effectively a materialistic system. One thing that people believed that gods could not do in the ancient world was feed themselves. Now, the Israelites did not think this way—those who were

orthodox; but all idolatrists did. They thought the gods had all kinds of power and could do anything but feed themselves, so the ability to feed the gods was one hold you had over the gods. They assumed that if they brought food to that idol, the god who that idol represented would have to bless them in return. So they had a control; they had a connection; they had a quid pro quo kind of arrangement.

C. It Was Easy

Also, idolatry was easy, since you did not have to keep all kinds of commandments. The only thing you really had to do was worship frequently and generously. If you gave to the idol, what you understood the idol wanted, that was all was required. You could be morally a complete loser; you could misuse and abuse others for your own gain and profit. It did not matter. Keep the idol happy and that was all that was required. No ethical standards were imposed.

D. It Was Convenient

Also, idolatry was convenient in the sense of everybody being able to worship whenever he or she felt like it. The Israelites had to go three times a year to one central sanctuary if they were orthodox and really worshiped the Lord. Corporate national worship was required and the procedures were elaborate. In idolatry, you could worship anywhere almost any time of day. There were, as the prophetic books described it, idol shrines “on every high hill and under every green tree.” They were everywhere. It is a little like the sign “five barbers, no waiting.” Shrines everywhere, no waiting. Sometimes a shrine would be just a little assemblage of some rocks under a tree and a little altar there on which a meal could be cooked, and one single priest and worshipers would go and worship the idol that was placed there by that priest and think that they had gotten through to a god or goddess.

E. Regarded as Normal

Idolatry was regarded as normal. The Israelites were really an exceptional people to be told to worship an invisible God without using idols. Everybody else used idolatry; everybody else was caught up in that system. The powerful nations of the world, the great superpowers were the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians. The wealthy nations like Tyre, the city-state of Tyre—fabulously wealthy from its sea trade—worshiped idols there by the dozens. The Canaanites, among who the Israelites lived, worshiped idols. All the nations around them—the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Arameans—they worshiped idols; so it was strange, unusual, weird, and different not to engage in that practice.

F. It Was Logical

Also, idolatry seemed logical. How could one god do everything that Moses had taught the people the Lord, the true God, could do? How could one god do all that? It simply did not make sense. There ought to be many, many gods and goddesses. Just as you need many advisors to a king and many workers for a project, surely there are all sorts of gods and goddesses. And

each one needs his or her idol; and the idols help to remember who they are and to keep them straight, and so on. If you lived in the ancient world, you would probably do what most people then did. You would worship three kinds of gods: you would have a personal god; you would have a family god, who might be the personal god of one of your ancestors; and then you would have a national god. Now the Israelites never stopped worshiping and believing in the Lord as their national God.

II. Syncretistic Nature of Israelite Religion

A. Yahweh: Israel's National God

All during 1 and 2 Kings, even right down to the destruction of the north by the Assyrians and the destruction of the south by the Babylonians, they still would consider the Lord to be their national God in times of battle. In times of national danger, with regard to national events, they would worship Him. But when it came to personal matters—getting out of an illness; or getting your personal needs answered; or having a good crop this year; for family matters, things that would be shared in the rest of your clan or family—then you would worship this god or that goddess and not the Lord. That kind of thing that we call syncretism, the combining of various religious practices, was what characterized Israelite religion. It seemed logical to them. “Let the Lord (Yahweh, as we pronounce His name in the Hebrew) do His thing on the national level; but when it comes to me or to my family, well, we are not going to go with a general practitioner like Him.” Idolatry was also pleasing to the senses. It is nice to be able to make idols; it is nice to be able to have pictures of things all over the walls of the temples and shrines; it is nice to bow down to them and to kiss them and so on. It is pleasing to see things overlaid in gold or silver—that was an attraction. There was nothing to look at when you worshiped Yahweh, and that did not appeal to people.

B. Symbolic Meals

There was also indulgence. True religion demands symbolic meals. The apostle Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 11 that if you are hungry, you do not go to Communion to stuff yourself; it is a symbolic meal. You discern in that meal the death of Christ; whereas, in ancient times, it generally was the case that people loved to indulge themselves. They would eat heavily in connection with idol worship; the bigger the meal, the better. They would drink heavily. Amos describes people drinking beside the altar of their gods—wine that they had taken away from poor people who had harvested that wine in the grape harvest and had it as their only means of livelihood to sell it. These people, having defrauded the poor, were now glugging down the wine as they lay beside the pagan altars. That kind of indulgence is what was very popular.

C. Symbolic Acts

The final attraction was sexual. In most pagan worship, the opportunity for sex with a shrine prostitute was also provided. This was thought, in the mentality of that day, that mythological way of thinking, to stimulate the powers of nature. Everything that was created was procreated;

in other words, it was born into being. People thought that you could, by the symbolic act of sex with a prostitute, actually sort of stimulate, and by sympathetic magic, you could cause the gods in heaven likewise to mate and to have offspring. These offspring would be the plants of the field or the trees or the goats or the sheep or whatever. Imagine the attraction of that sort of thing where people can actually indulge baser passions and get religious credit for it. All these reasons, corrupt and misleading as they were, far from the truth as they were, were attractive to the Israelites and caused, what we see so often in 2 Kings, the people again and again turning away from the true God and to idolatry.

III. Endings and Beginnings: A Tale of Two Prophets (1:1-8:15)

A. Conclusion of Elijah's Ministry

When Elijah, who had stood alone for quite a time against that paganism and those attractions of idolatry, is described as taken up into heaven in 2 Kings 2 we know that this is an approbation of God; this is an indication of God's favor for the message that prophet spoke. We also read that Elisha, his successor, asks for succession in terms of "a double portion of your spirit." This can be misunderstood. It doesn't mean that you can have various levels of the Spirit of God—as if one person has level x and somebody has level 2x or whatever—but rather the double portion was always the portion of the heir. The double portion of the prophet is what the heir inherited.

It is a simple, natural way for Elisha to say, "May I be your spiritual heir? Do you as a prophet believe that God is telling you that I am to succeed you?" Elijah said, "I do not know. I have not been given that word from the Lord, but I do know this: If you see me taken from you, that will be a sign." So, in fulfillment of that prophecy, indeed Elisha did see him taken, and Elisha then succeeds Elijah.

B. Ministry of Elisha

Many of the stories we read about in the early chapters of 2 Kings are stories about those things that Elisha does—particularly miracle stories: turning water to oil so that a widow can have livelihood; or cleansing water that is poison; or causing an ax head to float; or feeding a large number of people, almost in anticipation of Jesus' miracles of feeding the 4,000 and the 5,000.

IV. The Kings of Israel and Judah (8:16-17:41)

A. King Maker and Breaker

One of the roles of the prophet was king maker and king breaker. When God decided that He wanted to have a king, He had a prophet anoint that king. That is how David became king; Samuel anointed him. Also, a prophet could announce that a king's time was over as Samuel had done to Saul. In the case of Elisha, he is a king maker; that is, he works for God to announce God's purposes. And one of the kings that he anoints is a king of Syria named Hazael.

He is sent by God to anoint him, but he hates to do it. He says in the process, “I know all the harm you will do to the people of Israel.” In other words, God used this prophet to anoint one of the enemies of Israel, because God’s wrath against His people was so great that He was going to bring that enemy against them in punishment.

Another person that Elisha anoints is named Jehu. And this King Jehu will bring to an end that powerful dynasty of Omri that had included Ahab and other influential kings in the north. What Jehu does is to declare a great ceremony, “We are going to worship Baal, and we are going to have a great feast in his honor.” He gathers together all of the family members of the dynasty in the north at that time, and he also gathers the southern kings, and then proceeds, in the middle of the feast, to kill them all. Fortunately, not all of them get killed; so there still is a successor for David in the south as God mercifully provides. But this is a very interesting time. Here is a northern king named Jehu who hates the worship of the false god Baal. In other words, the influence of Elijah and Elisha was such that for a time the north turned away from ardent Baal worship and closer toward the worship of the true Lord, the God of Israel. Unfortunately, it did not last long; it did not last long at all—and it did not last in the south as well. We see during the section of Kings that goes from chapters 11-14 on, not many good kings either in the north or the south obeying God, keeping His commandments, eager to follow His covenant.

B. Assyria on the Move

By the late 700s, toward the end of the eighth century B.C., the superpower Assyria, began to assert its dominance. A king named Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, began an empire-building plan in 745 B.C. His desire was to conquer all the territories he could. A reason for this was economic—not the only reason, but it was one of them. The Assyrians needed money for building projects, for the establishment of a powerful defense, for the indulgences of the king; and one way you can get money is to go take it by conquering another territory. Conquer somebody else’s country, take everything out of it that you can when you conquer it, and then impose taxes on it annually so that they will have to pay tax and tolls and tributes of various kinds. You will have plenty of money then by impoverishing them to pay for the kinds of things your government wants to do. That was one of the motivators for Tiglath-Pileser, and so he set out to conquer every country he could conquer. And the more he conquered, the more he could impress people into his military and say to them, “You will either be killed or you will fight for me.” The bigger the army he had, the more money he had to finance the army with, the more imposing his power would become.

C. Pekah and Rezin Form a Coalition

Soon enough, both Israel and Judah were threatened. At the same time, they were turning to idolatry, to the false gods and goddesses and almost never turning to the Lord to deliver them. So we read in 2 Kings 15-16 about the shenanigans that they pulled in those days, about their desperate acts trying to solve things, trying to gain power against the Assyrians. One of the most comical (if it were not so tragic) events is what we call the Syro-Ephraimite War. What

happened is this: a king named Pekah in northern Israel aligned himself with a king named Rezin in Syria, and the two of them formed a coalition of all the nations in the area to try to fight off the Assyrians.

The time was 734 B.C. They naturally went to Judah to ask them to join in this coalition. “We are going to be able to beat the Assyrians; we are going to get freedom from them; we are going to have independence; we no longer will have to pay these enormous taxes, tolls, and tributes.” These things looked good, and it looked good and was even appealing to King Ahaz, but God’s prophet Isaiah said, “No way!” God wants you to trust in Him, not in these political military alliances. Let God defend you. And Ahaz listened to Isaiah the prophet; and so he says “no, we will not join you.” Well, what would you do? They said if we have got Judah right in our midst, right in the center of the coalition, refusing to fight with us, let us attack them. We will conquer them. We will put our man on the throne of Judah, instead of this resistant guy, Ahaz; and then we will be truly united and attack the forces of the Assyrians. What would you do if you were Ahaz when that happened? He immediately sent messengers to the Assyrians saying, “Help! Because I will not fight you, they are attacking me.”

D. Fall of Samaria

This was not what God wanted; this was not what Isaiah had prophesied. Indeed, Isaiah rebuked Ahaz for doing that, but it did bring in the Assyrians. And the Assyrians did attack the members of that coalition, and they reduced at that time (734 and 733 B.C.) the northern part of Israel, the ten northern tribes, really down to one. They annexed virtually all of the north except for the tribal territory that we call Ephraim. You will see sometimes in the books that come from around that period reference to “Ephraim this” and “Ephraim that,” because the north was reduced to that territory. You will also see references to Samaria because the capital city was in Ephraim, and really it was not a lot bigger than a city-state. It was nothing like the original boundaries. Most of the north was in the hands of the Assyrians. Then further, in chapter 17, we read the story of how just a decade later the Assyrians finally finished the job. They came and took also the territory of Ephraim and its capital city, Samaria, so the north was gone. By 722 B.C., the north was gone and it is now just part of the empire of Assyria.

V. From Accession of Hezekiah to the Captivity of Judah (18:1-25:30)

A. Hezekiah

So what is to happen to Judah? Thereafter, a good king named Hezekiah on the throne of Judah, is usually faithful to God. His key advisor is the prophet Isaiah once again, and he listens to Isaiah nearly all the time. He makes some serious mistakes though, even after God spares Jerusalem when it is attacked by the Assyrians, so that in the vast Assyrian Empire in the western part of the Fertile Crescent only Judah is free—an isle of independence in the midst of conquered territory after territory after territory. But, Hezekiah does make some mistakes.

One of them is to show envoys from Babylon around Jerusalem. In chapter 20, you read how he, hoping that these Babylonians might turn out to be kind of rivals to the Assyrians and perhaps rescuers of the situation. He seeks an alliance with them and does everything he can to make envoys from their king, Merodach-Baladan, like him and like the Judeans. The danger is that, of course, Babylon will eventually conquer Assyria and will be the enemy, not the friend.

B. A Short Time Remaining

Chapter 21 tells of how, after Hezekiah's death, the worst king of the whole bunch comes to power and reigns fifty-five years and is so influential in bringing full-blown idolatry, corruption of all sorts, practices that are completely inimical to everything that God had taught. It can be only a matter of time until the nation of Judah, also the remainder state, that last part that has not yet been conquered, will also be conquered and its people exiled. One king remained in the way of that happening almost immediately, and that was Josiah. He instituted extensive reforms based on the Word of God in 2 Kings 22-23.

C. Fall of Judah and Jerusalem

After Josiah's death in 609 B.C., his successor reverts back to the practices that condemn the nation to death, and death is its fate indeed. By chapter 25, we read of the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, now captured by a successor to the Assyrians, a superpower, the Babylonians. With that fall of Jerusalem comes the great exile. By the thousands, the people are taken and resettled in various parts of the Babylonian Empire. Northern Israel is gone; southern Israel is gone. There is no more nation; there is no more king. The people of God are defeated. They have been conquered, and large numbers of them are deported, and as the prophecy way back in Leviticus 26 has it, the land now lies in Sabbath—it is in rest.

Discussion Questions

How is “idolatry” demonstrated in your culture? What is its attraction?

Why did God deliver the Israelites into the hands of their enemies?

What can we learn from the book of 2 Kings about how God wants His people to live?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*. 2nd ed. Discovery House Publishers: 2012.

Read Chapter 17: "A Wasted Life" (2 Kings)

Philip Yancey Devotional Judah's Boy Wonder - 2 Kings 22:1-23:3

"The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul" (2 Kings 23:3).

The Bible does not record what specific effect Zephaniah's words had within Judah. But it does give a thrilling account of a turnaround that occurred during his days led by King Josiah.

King Josiah took over at the age of eight in the midst of a crisis seemingly beyond all healing. But Josiah was no ordinary 8-year-old. Raised by a wicked king in a wicked time, he somehow emerged with a spiritual vision that had no equal. Against the odds, Josiah steered his nation back toward God.

Josiah devoted much time and energy to a favorite public works project, repairing the temple. And one busy day, as carpenters sawed new joists and beams, masons carved new stones for the temple walls, and workmen hauled off rubble from the idols Josiah had smashed—in the midst of that din and clutter, a priest made an amazing discovery. He found a scroll that looked like—could it be?—the Book of the Covenant, the original record of the agreement between the Israelites and their God. (Most scholars believe the scroll contained part or all of the book of Deuteronomy.)

The neglect of such an important document, long buried and forgotten, shows the extent of Judah's slide away from God. And Josiah's response shows the depth of his commitment. Hearing those sacred words for the first time, he tore his robes in shame and repentance. And after a prophetess had confirmed the scroll's authenticity, Josiah pledged himself and his nation to the terms of the long-lost covenant.

This chapter tells the story of the dramatic discovery, and the next tells of Josiah's fervent campaign to call his nation back to God. His actions would change the landscape of Judah and stave off certain destruction. All this came about because a young king took seriously the words of God.

Life Question: When have you experienced an "awakening" similar to King Josiah's?

Glossary

Assyria — The upper Tigris River region, which took its name from its capital city Asshur. Later, Nineveh and Calah (Nimrud) also became capital cities. The fertile heartland of Assyria lay between the Syrian Desert, Anatolia, and the Kurdish hill, and was separated from Babylonia to the south by the Harmrin hills.

Babylon — Capital city of Babylonia. It lay on the bank of the Euphrates River, the land of Shinar, in the northern area of Babylonia (now southern Iraq) called Accad or Akkad. Its ruins, covering 2,100 acres, lie about 50 miles south of Baghdad and 5 miles north of Hillah.

Babylonia — Southern Mesopotamia (modern southern Iraq) was the site of the first civilization, first called Sumer and Akkad and later Chaldea. It was bounded on the east by the Persian hills, to the west by the Syrian Desert, and to the south by the Persian Gulf (also called Shinar).

Idol — A material object representing a deity to which religious worship is directed.

Idolatry — Worship or honor paid to any created object. The forms of idolatry are (1) Fetishism, or worship of trees, rivers, hills, stones, etc. (2) Nature worship, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, as the supposed powers of nature. (3) Hero worship, the worship of deceased ancestors, or of heroes. Idolatry was essentially materialistic based on the idea that humans would feed the “gods” in exchange for agricultural fertility.

Samaria — In the heart of the mountains of Israel, about six miles northwest of Shechem, stands the hill of Shomeron. Omri, the king of Israel, purchased this hill from Shemer, its owner, and built on its broad summit the city to which he gave the name of “Shomeron,” i.e. Samaria, as the new capital of his kingdom instead of Tirzah (1Ki 16:24).

Syria — The area occupied by a loose federation of Aramean (Syrian) villages and city-states. “Syria” in general refers to the region north and northeast of Palestine to the Euphrates and extending into the land between the Euphrates and the Habor Rivers. Its capital was Damascus.

Quiz

1. Ancient Babylon is part of the present-day nation of:
 - A. Iraq
 - B. Iran
 - C. Jordan
 - D. Turkey
2. Ancient people offered food to their gods:
 - A. To connect with that god
 - B. To get something in return
 - C. Because they believed that gods couldn't feed themselves
 - D. All of the above
3. During the divided monarchy, Israelite religion was generally:
 - A. Pagan
 - B. Monotheistic
 - C. Animistic
 - D. Syncretistic
4. Omri made this city the capital of the northern kingdom:
 - A. Tirzah
 - B. Samaria
 - C. Shechem
 - D. Bethel
5. One of the main factors that drew Israel away from worshiping Yahweh was:
 - A. Their desire for a more ascetic religion
 - B. Their desire to be different from other people
 - C. The fact that there was no idol to look at when worshiping Yahweh
 - D. The lack of festivals and celebrations
6. The Israelites never stopped worshiping and believing in the Lord as their:
 - A. Personal God
 - B. Family God
 - C. National God
 - D. Ancestral God
7. The northern kingdom fell in:
 - A. 931 B.C.
 - B. 722 B.C.
 - C. 586 B.C.
 - D. 538 B.C.

8. The prophet Elisha anointed this king who would bring to an end the powerful dynasty of Omri:
 - A. Jehu
 - B. Ahab
 - C. Pekah
 - D. Hoshea
9. The southern kingdom was conquered by the:
 - A. Philistines
 - B. Assyrians
 - C. Syrians
 - D. Babylonians
10. Who established considerable reforms based on the Word of God shortly before the fall of Judah?
 - A. Elijah
 - B. Elisha
 - C. Josiah
 - D. Hezekiah

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. D 4. B 5. C 6. C 7. B 8. A 9. D 10. C