

SESSION #20

2 KINGS

First of all, a quick review. 1 Samuel, the transition book, gave us Samuel, the minister of education and the father of the constitution, the declining rule of King Saul, and the rising of David. 2 Samuel gave us the triumphs and troubles of King David. Then in 1 Kings we see Solomon and the “-boams”, the disruption of the kingdoms.

So now we come to 2 Kings and this one is a book of dispersion. The kingdom is already divided in two but now it begins to get dispersed off into captivity. And here is the first record of it, 2 Kings, the kingdoms – both of them – taken captive by two different nations.

The structure is fairly easy to understand. The first 10 chapters especially focus on the northern tribes, the 10 tribes of Israel, including in this period of time the successor prophet to Elijah, a man named Elisha.

Then from chapters 11 through 17 we get stories that alternate back and forth, some stories are about Israel, some are about Judah. But at the end of that set of chapters, chapter 17, the northern kingdom of Israel is taken away captive by Assyria. And they're gone. But the book of 2 Kings isn't over yet, so what will the rest of the book talk about? Well, it won't be Israel because they're gone.

There's only one possibility left. And so the remaining 8 chapters, 18 – 25, all focus on Judah because that's the only surviving kingdom. And then of course their story ends in tragedy as well. They are taken captive to Babylon by the newly-prominent nation in the region, the kingdom of Babylonia.

This happens even though they had all the examples, all the history, all the lessons they could have learned from their cousin nation, Israel, in the north. They don't pay any attention to what happened there and the result of the sin of those people. They also had the advantage of reform programs by some of Judah's kings, especially Hezekiah and

Josiah, but they didn't keep those going. And they had the benefit of the ministries of the great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah. But in their stubborn disobedience, they go along the very same track as Israel and end up in the very same tragic situation: they are taken captive.

Throughout the stories of the kings in 2 Kings, you'll notice two things in particular. First of all there is a contrasting set of standards. David is the standard against which the characters of all the later kings of Judah, the southern kingdom, are compared or estimated. And when the record talks about the kings of Judah, two phrases are repeated about them. King so-and-so "*he was like his father David*", or "*he was not like his father David*". David is always put up as the standard against which all the later kings in Judah were measured.

And then a second phrase that is common is, "*king so-and-so did what was right but the high places (where they worshipped false idols and false gods) were not taken away.*" An incomplete obedience to the point that chapter 17 and verse 33 declares, "*They worshiped the Lord but they also served their own gods.*"

So they kept a sort of veneer of being God's people, worshipping Him but only in rituals not in their hearts, because in their hearts they have already gone astray and worshipped other gods as well, led in that direction by ungodly kings.

On the other hand, Jeroboam, the first king of the breakaway nation of Israel, sets the standard for all the Israelite kings who come after him. And the repeated phrase is, "*Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin*". And 15 of the 18 kings who come after him all follow his example, they were like "*Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.*"

So one of the questions that immediately arises out of that kind of comparison is this: what kind of shadow, what kind of influence, are you casting? And what kind am I casting on other people, today and for posterity tomorrow? Are we going to be people like David who will set the kind of standard and example that other people can follow and God is pleased with? Or will we be people like Jeroboam who will also set a standard that other people follow but it will be to their detriment?

It all depends on obedience, whether we live a life of obedience or incomplete obedience.

The prophet who is used so much by God during the record of these kings in 2 Kings is Elisha. A wonderful character but quite a contrast with Elijah. Both were fantastic prophets. Both men of God in a very unique way. But very different characters. You could hardly imagine, I think, two personalities who are more in contrast, more different from one another than Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah is compared in the New Testament to being like John the Baptist, or John like Elijah. A rough, tough guy living out in the desert calling people to repentance. Elijah's like that. He's a high profile, call-down-fire-from-heaven kind of prophet.

But Elisha is not that kind of guy. He's not a high profile personality; he likes to stay in the background. He doesn't call down fire from heaven and that kind of thing. His ministry is a different kind of ministry. It emphasizes resurrection, it emphasizes hope, it emphasizes new life. He healed the deadly waters at Jericho as his first miracle, it sets the tone for the other life-giving miracles which will be common to his ministry.

He raised a widow's son back from the dead. He healed Naaman, the captain of a heathen army, from leprosy. A wonderful picture of salvation. He feeds people twice in a miraculous way, a direct comparison to the NT record when Jesus fed people miraculously two times. The NT has two miraculous feedings; the OT has two. Both of them in the OT are done by Elisha.

And then I think the most astonishing way that God could possibly highlight and underline and emphasize the fact that Elisha's ministry was not a judgmental call to repentance, like Elijah's, but a resurrection, life-giving, hope-filled kind of ministry, is what happens at the very end of Elisha's life. In fact, it's after Elisha has died. And there's a remarkable little story told in 2 Kings chapter 13. When Elisha died, he was buried in a cave-like tomb beside the road. A guy comes along the road carrying the body of a friend. He's going to take him home to bury him. And as he's going along the road he comes by Elisha's tomb, and at that moment some robbers come down on the road and scare him off. In order to get away with his life he drops the dead body of his friend into this tomb where Elisha was buried. And when the dead man's bones touch Elisha's bones, what happened to the dead man?

He rose from the dead! He rose right on the spot! Elisha, even when he was dead, was still raising people back to life! Can you imagine anything more dramatic to show us what kind of ministry this man had? It's a ministry of resurrection, of new life, of hope.

And the two prophets together, Elijah and Elisha, illustrate in a small way the combination ministries that you get in the Gospel records with John the Baptist and Jesus.

Let's look now at the captivities which are described in 2 Kings. The people of Israel are taken captive in two stages to Assyria. They never return again; they are dispersed among the nations. Judah goes to Babylon 130 years later, in three stages, as a definite act of judgment by God. God says that both nations, or sub-nations, are taken into captivity because they have broken the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. They haven't kept God's agreement.

One of the aspects of the covenant at Mt. Sinai was that they must keep the Sabbath day. And not only the Sabbath, one in seven, they must keep a 7th *year* holy; that is, they must not plant crops in the 7th year. And then the 7th seven, the 49th year, is followed by the Jubilee Year which was a special type of Sabbath year.

The problem is, as Leviticus 25 and Jeremiah 34 show us, God's people didn't keep the Sabbath. They didn't keep the Sabbath day, they didn't keep the Sabbath year. They were so greedy for money that they never let the land rest. They always planted the crops every single year. God had said, "*Don't do that. Plant 6 years, then let it rest one year. Plant another 6; let it rest.*" They never let it rest once because they just wanted money.

I think this is not just an ancient problem. Some of us, and I point my finger back at myself too, may need to look at our lifestyles and our schedules to see whether we might be in danger of not taking the rest that God asks us to take. Maybe in some cases, it's because we're trying to make money. In other cases, it might be because we've got so many things going on, we just can't imagine how we can take a day of just resting, for God. How can you get everything done if you do that?

Well, God gives a principle in Lev. 26: *“Since you refused to let the land rest, and that was one of my requirements, I’m going to let the land rest.”* And so he sends the people out of the land for 70 years. 490 years have gone by since they first entered the Promised Land. During that 490 years they should have let the land rest for how many years? 70 years. They never did it once. So God says, *“I’m keeping track. My calculator works. You guys have missed it for 70 times. So you’re going to get booted out of the land, and I’m going to let the land rest for all those 70 years you didn’t let it rest. And when that’s done then I’ll let you come back.”* Wow! That’s how important Sabbath rest is to God as a principle. Well, I lay it on you gently for your own consideration. May God speak to you if needs be.

Here’s a review of where we’ve been recently. The story of First and Second Kings begins with glory but ends up in captivity. We saw the glory of Solomon. Then the kingdom is split. And this division is followed by troubles. That’s 1 Kings.

Then the kingdoms are corrupted. Then Israel goes into captivity in chapter 17 of 2 Kings. Judah follows right along even though they’ve had the sad example of their cousins to keep them on the right path. They also go into corruption and then into captivity themselves. By 2 Kings 25 they are in Babylonia. Verse 21 tells us, *“So Judah went into captivity away from her land.”* A sad, sad picture indeed.

In our next session we’ll look at the two books of Chronicles, which seem to be a repeat of the books of Kings but there are important differences. Find out what they are in Session 21.
