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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 1 Kings 17:1-23

13. THE BOOK OF 2 KINGS

Our journey through the Bible and especially the Old Testament has shown us that we can divide the Old Testament into 4 equal parts of roughly 500 years each.

1. From 2000 to 1500 B.C. Israel was led by **Patriarchs:** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, though they were not a nation at time.

2. From 1500 to 1000 B.C. they were led by **Prophets:** from Moses to Samuel.

3. From 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. they were led by **Princes:** or kings from Saul and onwards.

4. From 500 B.C. and leading up to the time of Christ they were led by **Priests:** from Joshua a priest who returned to Judah from exile under Zerubbabel's rule to Caiaphas in the time of Christ.

Now we are looking at the third period when Israel were led by Princes or Kings. The reign of Solomon had a profound effect upon the nation of Israel. His rise to power meant prosperity, his fall opened the way for a

major deterioration in the spiritual and moral life of the people. How far the nation had fallen under the reign of Solomon can be seen from the fact that only a short time after his death Jeroboam could introduce the worship of golden calves without creating a public outcry. You see, the nation had divided. There was the Northern Kingdom with 10 tribes and the Southern Kingdom with 2 tribes.

The Northern Kingdom existed for just a little over 200 years from 930 B.C. to 722 B.C. and all of its kings were evil.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah existed much longer almost 350 years and most of its kings were bad but some were good.

At the close of the Second Book of Kings the ten tribes of Israel are in exile in Assyria and the two tribes of Judah are in exile in Babylon. Someone has said, “*It lay in the plan of divine providence to abandon them to oppression, to lead them to repentance through the school of misery.*”

For centuries Israel had been a theocracy, that is government was invested in God. There had been no visible head for the nation, though God had spoken through various men raised up from all walks of life, a Moses, a Joshua, a Gideon, a Samuel, a prophet, a priest and a king. But like anything else in which man has a part, the theocratic form of government failed. So God gave Israel a king. And the two books of Kings record the long dismal failure of the monarchy tried and tested as it were

over more than 500 years. It's interesting to notice the contrast between 1 and 2 Kings.

1 Kings begins with the kingdom established in glory (Solomon) 2 Kings ends with a kingdom divided in shame. 1 Kings begins with bright prospects for obedience (3:3) 2 Kings ends with tragic judgments for disobedience. (17:8) 1 Kings begins with the dazzling splendour of the temple but 2 Kings ends with the smouldering ruins of the temple. 1 Kings opens with the translation of Elijah to heaven and ends with the transportation of the Jews to Babylon. 1 Kings begins with Solomon in all his glory and ends with Zedekiah, broken, blinded and banished, bruised under the heel of a foreign invading power. My we cannot read 2 Kings without thinking of Solomon's proverb "*the way of transgressors is hard.*" (Prov 13:15) Paul's word, "*the wages of sin is death,*" is here demonstrated on a national scale.

Now when we look at the structure of this book we discover that the first ten chapters are wholly occupied with the northern kingdom, Israel, and here the ministry of Elisha to the Northern Kingdom is the predominant subject. Then in the next group of chapters that is from Chapter 11 to Chapter 17, the narrative alternates between both kingdoms, and it ends with the passing of Israel into Assyrian captivity. Finally, in chapters 18 to 25 we have the history of Judah only and this last group of chapters ends with the passing of Judah into Babylonian captivity. So first of all we are going to look at,

(1) The Defection of the Northern Kingdom Ch's 1-10

For at the opening of 2 Kings Ahaziah rules Israel and Jehoshaphat rules Judah. There is a marked contrast between these two. Of King Ahaziah of Israel it says, "*And he did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin: for he served Baal and worshipped him and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.*" (1 Kings 22:52-53) By contrast of King Jehoshaphat of Judah it is written, "*And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father he turned not aside from doing it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.*" (1 Kings 22:43) You see, while Judah is experiencing the benefits of a good and godly king Israel is ruled by a bad king. For when we look at Israel here we are confronted with,

(a) ***THE DEGENERATE TIMES:***

Now always remember that the appearance of a prophet was always a mark of apostasy and rebellion in Israel. The prophets raised their voices in loud protest against the prevailing idolatry, corruption, and blindness of their times calling the nation back to God. The prophet was first of all a man with a message from God for his own generation, a "*forthteller,*" rather than a "*foreteller.*" Now what was the climate like in which Elisha lived ? Well,

(1) POLITICALLY: It was UNSTABLE

As we have seen, the two books of Kings deal with the nation of Israel in three ways. (1) The United Kingdom: (2) The Divided kingdom: (3) The Surviving Kingdom: Now it was to the Northern Kingdom that both Elijah and Elisha ministered. Elijah was raised up during the reign of one of the wicked kings of Israel. Do you recall Ahab ? The biblical record says that, “ *Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.* ” (1 Kings 16:30) Do you recall who Ahab’s wife was ? Jezebel. Ahab was one of the world’s hen-pecked husbands, if you don’t what that is, ask your wife. Here was a man who became the tool of a crafty, unscrupulous woman. Now Elisha who was Elijah’s successor began his ministry during the reign of Ahab’s son and of Jehoram we read “ *And he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord but not like his father, and like his mother.* ” (2 Kings 3:2) So politically Elisha lived in an unstable climate. Locally we have become more politically stable, but what about internationally ? Does political instability not mark many of the nations in our western society ? (a)

(2) MORALLY: It was UNCLEAN:

You see, when Jezebel came to Israel she didn’t come alone. (1 Kings 16:31) She brought her gods with her and it was not long before Baal worship was established in the land. Now this was nothing new to Israel for Baal worship had been the religion of the Canaanites before Joshua conquered the land. Baal was the son of El who was thought to give increase to family, flocks, crops, fertility

rites played a large part in Baal worship, chambers existed for male and female prostitutes. A main Baal altar was accompanied by an Asherah, a pole carried in honour of the goddess of that name the consort of Baal. *Baal worship included prostitution, pornography and all kinds of sexual sin.* And this was the day in which Elisha lived. ***Is it not similar to our own day ?*** Do we not live in a society without fixed standards ? Do we not live in an age when everyone is doing that which is right in their own eyes ? Christians have been seeking to oppose the new sexual orientation laws and we have been blasted as old fashioned, archaic and narrow minded. We live in an hour when homosexuals are being ordained to the ministry, lesbians are demanding their rights to have children, child abuse is on the increase, and our women cannot walk the streets of our cities at night for fear of being raped.

David Silvester who defected from David Cameron’s Conservative party has said recently that the recent storms and floods across Britain are due to the government’s decision to legalise gay marriage. Silvester an elected member of the town council in Henley-on-Thames west of London, says, “ *I wrote to David Cameron in April 2012 to warn him that disasters would accompany the passage of his same-sex marriage bill.* ” Not that long in Edinburgh a Christian publisher spoke about how he was nearly closed down by the gays protesting outside his shop because he was exposing them. (7/9/96) What an age we live in (a) (b)

(3) RELIGIOUSLY: It was UNSOUND:

You see although Jehoram did not go the same extent of evil as his father and mother before him, yet of him we read, “ *he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.* ” (2 Kings 3:3) What were these sins ? Idolatry. For it was Jeroboam who set up a golden calf in Bethel and in Dan. (1 Kings 12:28) The nation of Israel was still overwhelmed with a floodtide of idolatry. What an age this was. Politically it was unstable, Morally it was unclean. Religiously it was unsound. It was openly declared that Baal lived and Jehovah ceased to be. Of course an idol is any substitute for God. It may be anything that comes between my soul and God. Your house, your car, your children, your home, your job, your clothes, anything that comes between you and God. My are you guilty of idolatry ? (1 Jn 5:21) Is it time for you to pray, “ *The dearest idol I have known,* ” Now are we not living in similar times ? Days of uncertainty, days when Biblical standards are thrown away, days when false prophets abound on every hand and various forms of idolatry even pervade our own lives. (a) But look at,

(b) *THE DEFINITE TESTIMONY:*

For God, never leaves Himself without a witness and so Elisha appears as Elijah’s successor. In the summer of 1993 the Atlanta Braves baseball team traded some of their minor league players for the All-Star first baseman of the San Diego Padres, Fred McGriff. He brought the Braves the firepower they needed to make a serious run for the championship. But what about the man McGriff replaced ? Sid Bream, a believer in Christ, was the Braves regular first baseman. He had helped Atlanta get to the

World Series in 1992, but with McGriff coming he was headed for the bench. “ *There’s no doubt something like this hurts your pride and your ego,* ” said Bream. “ *But the one thing I’m counting on is that there’s something better ahead.* ” My when we’ve done a job well for many years, it can be difficult to step aside for someone younger or better qualified. Elijah was in that kind of situation. His ministry was coming to an end. His attitude, however, revealed his trust in God. He said to Elisha, his successor, “ *Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee.* ” (2 Kings 2:9) I wonder has the time come for you to give up a position you’ve held for a long while ? It could be at work or even in a ministry at church. Will you ask God for the grace to accept His plan for you ? And then step aside gracefully.

Now there were scores of men in Israel who would have jumped at a chance to have been Elijah’s successor. Obadiah had a caveat of them. The school of the prophets had some more of them. The Spirit of God, however, passed over all of them. *He already had his man in mind, Elisha a man with no theological training or prophetic experience at all.* Now it’s interesting to notice that,

1. Elisha Ministry was Distinctive:

It was in sharp contrast to that of his predecessor. My God does something new in each generation. That is why it is not healthy for us to live in the past. We may learn from the past, but we must never live in the past. There is no better time for me being alive than now, no better place for me to be living than right here, for being alive in this

time, and in this place is God's will for me. Elisha's ministry was distinctive. Now there is nowhere in Scripture, that this is set forth more powerfully, than in that great scene at Mount Horeb. (1 Kings 19:9-12) *You see the ministry of Elijah was symbolized by the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire.* The wind rent the mountains, the earthquake caused Sinai to tremble, and the fire devoured everything that came within its reach. Now this tremendous upheaval was intended to mirror to Elijah the prophet, his own reforming methods. With the same turbulent energy Elijah had swept through the land as a messenger of judgment from the Lord of hosts, but now Elijah was gone and God chooses a different ministry, the ministry of Elisha, the ministry of the still small voice to fulfil His purposes.

Elijah was the prophet of Judgement, Elisha was the prophet of Grace. Elijah's ministry was mainly of a public character, Elisha's ministry was mainly of a private character. Elijah's ministry was more with the masses, Elisha's ministry was more with the individual. You see instead of Israel being driven by fear, they were now to be drawn by love. Dr. J. Oswald sanders states that

" the whispers from Calvary are infinitely more potent than the thunder of Sinai in bringing men to repentance."

Do you recall what Paul says to the Corinthian church ?

" For the body is not one member, but many."

(1 Cor 12:14) There is diversity in unity. Now unity and diversity must work together or one will destroy the other. Unity without diversity is uniformity, but diversity without unity is anarchy. The church needs both unity and diversity if it is to function in this world. My God

created us to be different from one another. Aren't you glad about that ? That there is not another you. We are different from one another. Paul poses the question, *" for who maketh thee to differ from another ?"* (1 Cor 4:7) The answer is obvious. Now if we let this truth sink down into our hearts we'll be cured of jealousy for the rest of our lives. You see the gifts that God has given to me He has not given to you and the gifts God has given to you He has withheld from me. Do you recognise that ? Stephen Olford said *" that God does not make duplicates, He only makes originals."* And your ministry is distinctive. My could it be that you are jealous of some Christian ? My the gifts that God has given to me He has not given to you and the gifts that He has given to you, He has withheld from me. Do you recognise that ? Do you realise that your ministry is distinctive ?

2. Elisha ministry was Effective:

You see, the Lord was in *" the still small voice."*

(1 Kings 19:12) God was there with Elisha who was justly called, *" the man of God."* (4:9) Indeed while Elijah performed eight miracles, Elisha performed sixteen. It's Elisha who,

1. Takes the mantle and divides the waters of Jordan:

(2:14)

2. Heals the water: (2:22)

3. Multiplies the widow's oil: (4:6)

4. Raises the dead: (4:35)

5. Purifies a pot of stew: (4:41)

6. Feeds 100 men: (4:44)

7. Heals Naaman the leper: (5:14)

8. Floats an axe head: (6:6)

9. His dead bones brings a man back to life: (13:21)

And all this great work for God was done during a time when apostasy gripped the land with a vice like grip. You see, Elisha illustrates for us what it means to live “ *the abundant life*. ” My is this not the greatest need of the hour ? The Lord Jesus said “ *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. ” (Jn 10:10) My is that not genuine revival ? Yet think of the fear and frustration, the defeat and depression, the bitterness and breakdown encountered increasingly in the churches and in the saints. Many are content to live below the standard set forth in the Scriptures (Eph 4:17-32) hence their ministry is formal, futile and fruitless. What about your ministry ? Is it effective ? Is it fruitful ? Is it fraught with blessing ? There was the degenerate times but bless God there was the definite testimony. (1)

(2) The Description of the Two Kingdoms Ch's 11-17

And these chapters tell the story of the two kingdoms down to the fall of Samaria, the Israelite capital. Now it's a sad tale of chaos and disorder culminating in the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom. I want you see here in this section,

(a) THE DIVERSITY OF THE KINGS:

1. Consider their Number:

In the Northern Kingdom there were 19 Kings, in the Southern Kingdom there were 19 Kings and 1 Queen.

2. Consider their Names:

In the Northern Kingdom there was,

1. Jeroboam:
2. Nadab:
3. Baasha:
4. Elah:
5. Zimri:
6. Omri:
7. Ahab:
8. Anaziah:
9. Jehoram:
10. Jehu:
11. Jehoahaz:
12. Jehoash:
13. Jeroboam 11
14. Zechariah:
15. Shallum:
16. Menahem:
17. Pekahiah:
18. Pekah:
19. Hoshea:

In the Southern Kingdom there was,

1. Rehoboam:
2. Abijam:
3. Asa:
4. Jehoshaphat:
5. Jehoram:

6. Ahaziah:
7. Athaliah:
8. Joash:
9. Amaziah:
10. Uzziah: (Azariah)
- 11.. Jotham:
12. Ahaz:
13. Hezekiah:
14. Manasseh:
15. Amon:
16. Josiah:
17. Jehoahaz:
18. Jehoiakim:
19. Jehoiakin:
20. Zedekiah:

Have you got them all ?

3. Consider their Nature:

As I have said the Northern Kingdom of Israel had 19 kings and they were all bad. Of the 19 kings and 1 queen of the Southern Kingdom most were bad and some were good. Now as the kings of Judah are measured against the yardstick of David (1 Kings 11:4, 6, 33, 38, 15:11) so the northern kings are measured by “*Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin.*” (1 Kings 22:15) Time and again Jeroboam is referred to as such. Indeed this wicked King projected his deadly shadow over the throne of Israel for 250 years until at last they were taken into captivity by Assyria. We would do well to reflect on the shadows cast by these two men, David and Jeroboam. You

see, all of us are casting shadows as we go through this present life. The question is what kind of shadow are we casting ? What kind of influence will we leave ? What kind of shadows are we going to cast today and leave tomorrow ? Will it be a shadow like that of Jeroboam or a shadow like that of David ? You see, rulers have a powerful influence for good or bad upon a nation. My should this not give us cause for concern in our own day and in our own land ? You see, its still true that “*righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.*” (Prov 14:34) It is imperative therefore that we pray for those who have the rule over us.
(1 Tim 2:1-4) (a)

(b) THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS:

For the ministry, of many of the prophets, fall within this period. It is vitally important to understand the place the Hebrew prophets occupied in the Old Testament, and where they fitted in to the historical timescale. *You see, the prophets spoke to their own generation and their messages were relevant to the circumstances when they lived.* These men raised up by the Lord also spoke to an age far beyond their own day. Their function was twofold. It was to forthtell and to foretell, to describe and prophecy. Thus Isaiah was the great prophet in Hezekiah’s time, and Jeremiah the great prophet from Josiah’s time. There were the oral prophets and there were the written prophets and we have to see exactly where they fit into the historical picture. (a) (b)

(c) THE CAPTIVITY OF THE KINGDOM:

For here in (Ch 17) is the final indict-ment of the ten tribes and their deportation into Assyria, from which there would be no return. In these verses the Holy Spirit explains to us why Samaria fell.

1. The Nation Secretly Disobeyed: (17:8-9)

God had warned them not to mingle with the heathen nations in Canaan (Deut 7:1) yet Israel secretly disobeyed and gradually yielded to heathen worship.

2. The Nation Openly Rebelled: (17:10-12)

What begins as secret sin ultimately becomes open sin.

3. The Nation Persistently Rejected: (17:13-15)

They heard God's call through the prophets yet refused to bow the knee to the Lord. So in 722 B.C. God judged them and sent them into captivity into Assyria. Do you know something ? These tragic events in the history of Israel ought to cause us to fear for our country and pray for our leaders. Godless leaders produce godless generations of citizens and when the Word of the Lord is rejected there is no hope for a nation's future. (17:34-38) My will you learn the lesson ? There is no cure for apostasy. Once a church, a denomination, a nation has turned away from the Lord, God must judge. Did Judah learn from Israel ? (1) (2)

(3) The Downfall of the Southern Kingdom Ch's 18-25

For Judah's sins, finally catch up with her and 135 years after Israel was carried into Assyria Judah was carried into Babylon. John Phillips divides these years into 5 periods.

(a) THE PERIOD OF REVIVAL: 18:1-20:21

Under Hezekiah. You see, no king of Judah is more unreservedly commended than good king Hezekiah. His work included,

- 1. The Purification of the Temple:*
- 2. The Restoration of Worship:*
- 3. The Observance of the Passover:*
- 4. The Reformation of the People:*

Now both Isaiah and Micah exercised their ministry during the reign of Hezekiah. Do you recall that Hezekiah had to face three enemies ? He had to face the Assyrian Invaders: (Ch's 18-19) he had to face Death: (20:1-11) and he had to face the Babylonian Visitors: (20:12-21) Its interesting that in these different crisis the king resorted to prayer. Look at (19:14-19) Have you ever received a poison pen letter ? What have you done ? Have you spread it before the Lord ? Did you notice the real basis for prayer in (19:19) “ *That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God even thou.* ” You see, the glory of God was his chief concern. Maybe when get the past the “ *self glory,* ” “ *church glory,* ” and “ *denominational glory,* ” and get caught up with “ *God's glory,* ” we will see revival. (a)

(b) THE PERIOD OF REBELLION: 21:1-26

Under Manasseh and Amon. You see, Hezekiah was placed between a bad father and an evil son and by the time he counteracted the evil of his fathers reign, his son came to the throne and reversed all the reforms. Little is said about Manasseh's reign other than it was marked by injustice, idolatry and immorality. Taken to Babylon Manasseh was put in *prison* “ *And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God and he was intreated of him.* ” (2 Chron 33:13) My “ *is anything to hard for the Lord ?* ” (Gen 18:14) (a) (b)

(c) THE PERIOD OF REFORM: 22:1-23:30

Under Josiah. It was during this period that Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk ministered. It was Josiah who embarked on a wide ranging reformation. He cleansed the temple, then the city and then the country putting an end to every form of false and cruel worship. Then the temple was repaired, the law of God was recovered and the Passover was reinstituted. My Josiah's godly life and ministry had stayed the hand of judgment a few more years but captivity was coming and nothing could prevent it.

(d) THE PERIOD OF REPUDIATION: 23:31-24:16

Soon followed. As Jehoahaz, (23:31-35) Jehoikim (23:36-24:7) and Jehoichin (24:8-16) sought to cast off the authority of the Lord. The writing was on the wall, and

(e) THE PERIOD OF REMOVAL: 24:17-25:30

Arrived and Judah was taken into captivity. Now keep in mind that the deportation took place in 3 stages. The first attack took place in **605 B.C.** at which time the first group of captives were taken among whom was Daniel and his three friends. The second invasion took place in **597 B.C.** when a much larger number of people were taken, among whom was Ezekiel. (Ezek 40:1) The third and final invasion took place in **586 B.C.** when the city was destroyed (25:1-12) the temple was disgraced (25:13-17) and the land was left desolate (25:18-30) My the judgement was long in coming but when it came it was thorough, just and on time. Think of this. *Everything God had given the Jews were taken from them. They had no king on David's throne, nor do they have today. They had no temple for it had been burned and its sacred vessels confiscated. Today they have no temple. Their holy city was destroyed and ever since that time has been the focal point for war and unrest. Their land was taken from them and they were scattered among the nations.*

Of course, this awful siege was but a forerunner of the terrible destruction in A.D. 70 when until May 1948 the nation lost its national character. So here we see them as one has put it “ *conquered, captive, and castaway.* ” You see, “ *where there is no vision, the people perish.* ” My where the vision of God is lost there will certainly follow as Dr. Campbell Morgan puts it “ **degraded ideals, deadened consciences, defeated purposes.** ” That's the human side, but on the divine side, the picture is one of ultimate triumph. For the greatest prophet of the era writes of the Lord, “ *He shall not fail nor be discouraged.* ”

(Is 43:4) When the throne on earth falls to pieces the throne in the heavens still stands. The **chosen people** may fail on earth. But the **chosen purpose** cannot fail. The Babylonian exile which came as a judgment on the Jews cured them for ever of their idolatry, and the law of God became wonderfully precious to them. My they are still the chosen people. What a study they are. Scattered over the face of the earth, yet strangely one, ever persecuted yet ever preserved, mixed in with all the races yet the most distinct people in the world. My their history is a mystery apart from God's Word. Other peoples have become extinct yet they are still preserved and will be preserved until all human failure is completely eclipsed and David's greater Son, even the Lord Jesus will, sit on the throne in Jerusalem and will reign "*from shore to shore.*" Will you take it home with you this ? "**He shall not fail nor be discouraged.**"