

The Divided Church: The Northern & Southern Kingdoms

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1 Israel Splits Into 2 Kingdoms	1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10-11	1
2 Jeroboam and 2 Unknown Prophets	1 Kings 12:25-13:34	4
3 More About Rehoboam and Jeroboam	1 Kings 14; 2 Chronicles 12	7
4 Abijam and Asa	1 Kings 15:1-15; 2 Chronicles 13-15	10
5 A Series of Kings	1 Kings 15:16-16:34; 2 Chron. 16	13
6 The Miracles of Elijah	1 Kings 17:1-18:16	16
7 Elijah's Courage and Cowardice	1 Kings 18:17-19:21	19
8 Ahab Wars Against Aram	1 Kings 20:1-43	22
9 Ahab Covets Naboth's Vineyard	1 Kings 21:1-29	25
10 Jehoshaphat and His Alliance With Ahab	1 Kings 22:1-46; 2 Chronicles 17-18	28
11 More About Jehoshaphat	1 Kings 22:47-50; 2 Chron. 19-20	31
12 Ahaziah's Messengers Meet Elijah	1 Kings 22:51-53, 2 Kings 1	34
13 From Elijah to Elisha	2 Kings 2:1-25	37
14 Jehoram Subdues Moab's Rebellion	2 Kings 3:1-27	40
15 The Miracles of Elisha	2 Kings 4:1-44; 6:1-7	43
16 Naaman and Gehazi	2 Kings 5:1-27	46
17 More Trouble With Aram	2 Kings 6:8-7:20	49
18 Jehoram and Jehoram	2 Kings 8:1-24; 2 Chronicles 21	52
19 Ahaziah and Jehu	2 Kings 8:25-9:29; 2 Chron. 22:1-9	55
20 Jehu Cleans House	2 Kings 9:30-10:36	58
21 Queen Athaliah	2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chr. 22:10-23:21	61
22 Joash, the Boy King	2 Kings 12:1-21; 2 Chronicles 24	64
23 Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Amziah	2 Kings 13:1-14:7; 2 Chron. 25:1-16	67
24 Civil War, Jeroboam II, and Uzziah	2 Kings 14:8-15:4; 2 Ch 25:17-26:15	70
25 Another Series of Kings	2 Kings 15:5-22; 2 Chron. 26:16-23	73
26 Pekahiah, Pekah, and Jotham	2 Kings 15:23-38; 2 Chronicles 27	76
27 Ahaz and The Fall of Aram	2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28	79
28 Hoshea and the Fall of Israel	2 Kings 17	82
29 Hezekiah's Good Reign	2 Kings 18:1-12; 2 Chron. 29-31	85
30 Assyria's Invasion of Judah	2 Kings 18:13-19:37; 2 Chr. 32:1-23	88
31 Hezekiah's Latter Years	2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33	91
32 Manasseh and Amon	2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33	94
33 Josiah's Good Reign	2 Kings 22:1-23:30; 2 Chron. 34-35	97
34 Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin	2 Kings 23:31-24:17; 2 Chr. 36:1-10	100
35 Zedekiah and the Fall of Judah	2 Kings 24:18-25:21; 2 Chr. 36:11-21	103
Timeline of the Divided Kingdom Kings, Queens, and Prophets		106

Israel Splits Into 2 Kingdoms

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Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel. - Proverbs 13:10

Today we are beginning a new sermon series titled, “The Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms”. This series will cover a span of about 370 years, from approximately 954-586 BC. Our primary texts will come from 1 and 2 Kings, however we will supplement them with related portions of 2 Chronicles.

I’ve intentionally equated the New Testament church with Old Testament Israel in the title of this sermon series. This is not to suggest or teach that the 2 groups are the same, as I believe they are distinctly different in many ways. My purpose for equating them, as I’ve stated before in other similar series, is to emphasize the continuity of purpose between the people of God in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament. Both were and have been chosen by God to be His witnesses and ambassadors to the lost world. I believe that we as Christians can and should learn from the examples and history of our ancestors in the faith, the Jews.

The Divided Kingdom era of Jewish history fits chronologically between the United Kingdom era (approx. 1050-954 BC) and the Babylonian Exile and Post Exilic period (approx. 586-440 BC). After about 100 years of existence as a single nation, under the leadership of King Saul, followed by King David, and then King Solomon, Israel split into 2 separate kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom retained the name Israel, while the Southern Kingdom became known as Judah. This arrangement continued until the fall of the Northern Kingdom in around 720 BC, and then the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC.

In the coming months, we will explore the stories of both kingdoms. It is my prayer that, along the way, God will teach us many lessons that we can apply in our own lives and in our church. I am excited to see what the Lord has in store for us through these messages!

I. REHOBOAM’S FOOLISH DECISION (1 Kings 12:1-15; 2 Chronicles 10:1-15)

After his father died, Rehoboam went to the ancient city of Shechem. All the people of Israel had gathered there to crown him as their new king. When Jeroboam, a renowned Israelite who had fled from King Solomon several years earlier and had been living in Egypt (1 Kings 11:40), heard the news of Solomon’s death he returned to Shechem also. Speaking on behalf of the Israelites, Jeroboam asked Rehoboam if he intended to treat them more leniently and mercifully than his father Solomon had done. King Solomon had conscripted many of the Israelites into heavy, forced labor, using them to build all sorts of construction projects throughout his kingdom. Rather than giving them an immediate answer, Rehoboam told the Israelites he needed 3 days to think it over.

After Jeroboam and the Israelites departed, Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father. They advised him to lighten the burden on the Israelites, to be merciful toward them, and to answer them kindly. They stated that, if he were to lessen or even eliminate their forced labor, the people of Israel would love and serve him faithfully. Not satisfied with their counsel, Rehoboam turned to the young men who had grown up with him and served as his advisors. They suggested that he increase the workload of the Israelites even more so than his father had done. Perhaps they thought this would give the people a greater fear of Rehoboam than they'd shown to Solomon?

When Jeroboam and the people of Israel returned 3 days later to see what Rehoboam had decided, he followed the advice of his younger counselors and answered them harshly. He did not heed their concerns, but instead expressed his intention to discipline and oppress them even more. This turn of events was all part of God's plan to divide the nation of Israel. The prophet Ahijah had already told Jeroboam that these things would happen back before he'd fled to Egypt some years earlier.

II. THE NATION DIVIDES (1 Kings 12:16-24; 2 Chronicles 10:16-11:4)

When the Israelites saw how Rehoboam had treated them, they became furious and refused to recognize him as their new king. When Rehoboam sent his servant Adoram to conscript them into forced labor, they stoned him to death. Fearing for his own safety, Rehoboam hurriedly fled south to Jerusalem where he was made king and reigned over the house of David, which consisted primarily of the tribe of Judah. Meanwhile, the northern tribes called an assembly and made Jeroboam their king, and he ruled over Israel. Thus, the united nation was no more, as it had now split into 2 separate kingdoms.

When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem after leaving Shechem, he assembled an army of 180,000 valiant soldiers from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. His plan was to crush the rebellion of Israel and reunite the nation as one. However, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the prophet who subsequently warned Rehoboam not to go up and fight against his brethren Israel. Rehoboam obeyed God's word, disbanded his army, and sent them home. He peacefully allowed the northern tribes to break away and form their own kingdom.

III. REHOBOAM'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS (2 Chronicles 11:5-23)

Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and was the first king over Judah, the southern kingdom. During his reign he built and fortified many cities for defense including Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron. He also strengthened existing fortresses, placed officers in them, and stored them with food, oil, and weapons.

The southern kingdom was made up primarily of the tribe of Judah, and it adopted the same name - Judah. However, it also included the smaller tribe of Benjamin and perhaps any remaining remnant of the tribe of Simeon which had assimilated into Judah over the years.

Beyond that, the priests and Levites who lived in Israel stood with Rehoboam and many of them moved to Jerusalem and other cities in the southern kingdom. This migration happened because Jeroboam practiced idolatry, set up high places, and appointed his own false priests in Israel. For the first 3 years of Rehoboam's reign, things went rather well in Judah and the people followed the Lord. Unfortunately, their allegiance to God wouldn't last.

During the years of his kingship, Rehoboam took 18 wives (including Mahalath and Maacha, his favorite) and 60 concubines and fathered 28 sons and 60 daughters. He had a large, extensive family. He wisely dispersed his sons in fortified cities throughout the territories of Judah and Benjamin, gave them food in abundance, and even sought wives for them. Rehoboam appointed his son Abijah to be the leader of his brothers and intended to make him the next king of Judah.

CONCLUSION

In today's message we've discussed the events that led to the division of united Israel into 2 separate kingdoms. We have introduced Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the 2 men who became the first kings of Judah and Israel, respectively. We've also taken a brief look at King Rehoboam's accomplishments in Judah, especially during the early part of his reign, as well as the prolific growth of his family. Next Sunday we will focus on Jeroboam's reign in Israel, which ran concurrently with Rehoboam.

One of the key lessons we can take from this sermon has to do with receiving and following advice. Rehoboam rejected the wise advice of his father's older, more experienced counselors and instead followed the foolish advice of his own, younger, less experienced counselors. While in this particular instance Rehoboam's foolish decision was by God's design, it should be noted that it was still a foolish choice. It's also important to point out that, while age and experience can certainly lead to wisdom, they doesn't necessarily guarantee it. Young people can (and sometimes do) give really good advice while older people can (and sometimes do) give really bad advice. The emphasis here is on the advice itself. Is it or is it not from the Lord? Does it encourage us to listen to the concerns of people and show them God's love and grace, or to dismiss them altogether and act with bitterness and cruelty? We need to be careful that the voices we listen to and follow seek to build people up, rather than tear them down.

Let me close with another observation. I can't help but notice that even after Rehoboam made a foolish decision that resulted in disastrous consequences, God instructed him not to aggravate the situation by trying to "fix" it. Could it be that instead of trying to reverse or erase our mistakes, sometimes the Lord would rather us simply learn from them and make the best of whatever has transpired? Just a thought...

Jeroboam and 2 Unknown Prophets

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Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." - Exodus 32:3-4

Last week we started a new sermon series titled, "The Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms". When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, foolishly declared his intention to treat the people of Israel even more harshly than his father had treated them, the northern tribes rebelled against him and formed their own kingdom. They retained the name Israel and appointed Jeroboam as their first king.

Meanwhile Rehoboam returned to Jerusalem and retained control over the southern kingdom, which became known as Judah (the house and line of David). During his reign, Rehoboam built and strengthened many fortresses and cities throughout his territory. He also had a large family which he spread out across Judah. During the early years of his reign, Rehoboam was faithful to God and many of the Levites who lived in the northern kingdom moved to the south.

In today's message we will shift our focus to Jeroboam and the northern kingdom. We will discuss an interesting event that happened there during this same period of time. Remember, throughout most of this series, we will be telling 2 stories that run concurrently - that of Israel and Judah. We must be careful not to get them confused.

I. JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY (1 Kings 12:25-33)

After being chosen and made king over the northern kingdom, Jeroboam set up his palace in Shechem. He made some renovations and improvements to the city because it was now the capital of Israel (although only briefly). He also rebuilt and fortified Penuel, the ancient and strategic Transjordan city where Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:30-31). Nevertheless, he still feared that if the people of Israel were to make regular pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem, which was now in Judah, their allegiance would eventually return to Rehoboam and the southern kingdom.

Concerned, Jeroboam sought out some advice. Following it, he made 2 golden calves and set them up in the Israelite cities of Dan and Bethel, which were on opposite ends of his kingdom. He proclaimed that these idols were Israel's true gods and instructed his people to go worship at either of these cities (whichever was more convenient) because traveling to Jerusalem was too burdensome. In addition to this despicable sin, he also built shrines and pagan temples on high places and appointed cultic priests who were not descendants of Levi.

Jeroboam even created his own feast day as a substitute for the traditional feast days commanded in the Law of Moses. It was observed in the 8th month, on the 15th day of the

month, perhaps as an alternative to the Feast of Tabernacles which was held in Judah a month earlier. In his arrogance, Jeroboam went to Bethel on his self-proclaimed “feast day” and personally offered sacrifices on the altar to the golden calf that he had placed there. He also burned incense on the altar, assuming for himself the role of a priest.

II. JEROBOAM’S WARNING (1 Kings 13:1-10)

While Jeroboam was offering incense at the altar in Bethel, a man of God who’d come up from neighboring Judah approached him. The man prophesied that many years later a king would rise up from the line of David (in the southern kingdom) named Josiah. King Josiah would burn the bones of the northern kingdom’s false priests on this very altar, thereby defiling both the altar and their remains. The man of God announced a sign as confirmation of his prophecy stating that the altar would split open and ashes would pour out of it.

When Jeroboam heard this prophecy, he reached out his hand toward the prophet and said, “Seize him!” At that very moment, his arm was paralyzed, the altar split open, and ashes poured out just as the man had declared. Realizing his futility, Jeroboam asked the man of God to restore movement to his arm and the prophet graciously did so through prayer. Then, perhaps in an attempt to bribe or win the prophet’s favor, Jeroboam offered him a meal and reward. The man refused the king’s offer, stating that God had forbidden him from accepting any food or drink in Israel, and he departed for Judah taking a different route than he’d come by.

III. A PAIR OF PROPHETS (1 Kings 13:11-34)

Now an old prophet, who was from Israel and lived in Bethel, heard from his sons what had happened that day. With his sons’ help, he saddled his donkey and went out in pursuit of the man of God from Judah. When they met, the older prophet invited the man back to his house to eat and drink. When the man of God refused (for the same reason he’d refused the king), the old, disobedient prophet lied and said that God had told him to extend the invitation. The man from Judah believed the lie, consented, and went with the old prophet back to his home.

As the 2 men were eating together, the word of God came to the old prophet. He rebuked the younger prophet from Judah for breaking the Lord’s command not to eat in Israel and stated that, for his sin, he would not be buried in the grave of his fathers. Sure enough, as the man of God traveled home on a donkey later that day, a lion attacked and killed him. Shockingly, the lion and donkey stood peacefully beside the dead man’s body that laid at the side of the road as several people passed by. This was a sign of divine judgment.

When the old prophet heard that the man of God had been killed, he went and retrieved his lifeless body from alongside the roadway. He brought the man of Judah back to Bethel and mourned over him. The old prophet buried the dead man in his own grave, then instructed his sons to bury him in the same grave when he died, so that the 2 prophets’ bodies and bones would lie together. The old prophet believed the warning that had been spoken to Jeroboam and

hoped that, perhaps, if his bones were buried with the man of God they'd be spared from being burnt on the altar someday along with those of Israel's other false prophets and priests.

Even after all of this, Jeroboam still did not repent of his wickedness. He continued to ordain those who embraced his idolatrous ways to serve as priests in the high places he'd made. Jeroboam was the first of several evil kings in the northern kingdom. His sin became a reproach on his family which would soon lead to their total destruction and abdication of the throne.

CONCLUSION

Almost 300 years later the man of God's prophecy was fulfilled. During the reforms of King Josiah of Judah, Israel's remaining idols were gathered and destroyed and the bones of her false priests were exhumed and burned on the altar at Bethel. However, the remains of the man of God and the old prophet were left undisturbed (2 Kings 23:15-18).

In ancient cultures, the preservation of human bones was considered necessary for the afterlife or any future resurrection. Perhaps this was why the older prophet was so concerned about his bones being burnt. Even today, there are some people who strongly oppose the practice of cremation for the deceased. To be clear, the Bible does not state anywhere or even imply that cremation is sinful. The same God who created man out of dirt can resurrect bodies out of ashes or dust. Whether a person is buried or cremated is a matter of one's own conscience.

This bizarre story foreshadows the future and fate of the northern and southern kingdoms. These 2 anonymous prophets generally represent Judah and Israel. Both are distinct, yet their stories are intertwined. Both wield a degree of influence over each other. Both are vessels through whom God speaks at times, yet both are fatally flawed and disobedient. Both of them die, although not in the same way or at the same time. Ultimately, both are preserved so that someday they might be raised up together.

In closing, Jeroboam's idolatry infected and doomed the kingdom of Israel from its very beginning. As a whole, the northern kingdom abandoned God at the outset and turned their affections to false gods and idols. As we will discover, each of its kings was no better than the last, and their downward spiral continued until they hit rock bottom. That said, the southern kingdom didn't fare much better...

Beloved, may we always remember and abide by the first commandment - "You shall have no other gods before me." It is first for a reason!

More About Rehoboam and Jeroboam

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Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. - James 4:17

Despite having been warned by the man of God from Judah, King Jeroboam of Israel continued his idolatrous ways. He set up false gods and idols, appointed pagan priests, and even created his own feast day. Meanwhile, King Rehoboam of Judah abandoned his initial faithfulness to God and began acting wickedly as well. Both the northern and southern kingdoms got off to a rocky start...

In this morning's sermon we will take a final look at the kingships of Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Neither of these 2 men was a godly king. Sadly, the people of Israel and Judah went along with and suffered the consequences of poor leadership.

I. AHIJAH'S PROPHECY AGAINST JEROBOAM (1 Kings 14:1-20)

King Jeroboam's son Abijah became deathly sick, so he sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah in Shiloh to find out if the child would survive. He told her to wear a disguise and conceal her identity so that Ahijah would not know that she was his wife. Ahijah was the same man who had told Jeroboam earlier that God would make him king of Israel (1 Kings 11:29-39). So she went, taking some cakes, bread, and honey with her as a gift for Ahijah.

Now Ahijah had grown old and his vision was poor. The Lord spoke to Ahijah and told him in advance that Jeroboam's wife was coming to inquire about their son's health, and that she would pretend to be another woman. So when Jeroboam's wife arrived, the prophet immediately recognized her true identity and called her out. He then delivered a harsh warning for Jeroboam.

Ahijah prophesied that King Jeroboam's house would be completely cut off from Israel and his royal line severed, because of the great idolatry that he had committed. God had graciously made him king and promised to bless him if he remained faithful, but Jeroboam sinned and led Israel astray. For his brazen disobedience, every male in Jeroboam's house would die and their remains would be picked over by the dogs and the birds. Furthermore, Ahijah told Jeroboam's wife that their sickly son would die as soon as she returned home, and that he would be the only male of Jeroboam's entire household to be properly buried.

Abijah also prophesied that the kingdom of Israel would be shaken, uprooted, and scattered beyond the Euphrates River because they had embraced the idolatrous ways of King Jeroboam. This prophecy was fulfilled many years later when the northern kingdom fell to Assyria. When the king's wife returned home to Tirzah (which had apparently replaced Shechem as the capital city), Jeroboam's son died and was buried just as Ahijah predicted. In all, Jeroboam reigned in Israel for 22 years. When he died, his son Nadab became king.

II. SHISHAK OVERPOWERS REHOBOAM (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chronicles 12:1-12)

In the 5th year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, the king of Egypt, along with his vast army and several African allies, invaded the southern kingdom. He captured the fortified cities of Judah as far north as Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah, who had spoken to Rehoboam earlier (1 Kings 12:22-24), came to the king and his princes to explain that God had allowed this Egyptian conquest to occur because Rehoboam had forsaken the Lord. In response, Rehoboam repented, and the Lord determined not to destroy Jerusalem. Instead, Shemaiah pronounced that Rehoboam and the people of Judah would become slaves and servants of Shishak.

So when Shishak and the Egyptians came up against Jerusalem, they did not destroy the city. However, they did plunder the temple and the king's palace and took all the precious items and articles from there, including the golden shields which Solomon had made. Later, Rehoboam had bronze shields made to replace those that had been looted and he put them under the care of his guard. They would be taken to the temple whenever the king went to worship there, but then returned to the guards' room afterwards for safe keeping.

III. REHOBOAM'S ABOMINATIONS (1 Kings 14:21-24, 29-31; 2 Chronicles 12:13-16)

During Rehoboam's reign the kingdom of Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord and provoked Him to jealousy. Following his lead, they built high places, pillars, and set up pagan images on the hills and beneath the luxuriant trees. They allowed male cult prostitutes in the land and committed the same evil abominations that the Canaanites had practiced before them.

There was ongoing war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout their respective reigns. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and Naamah the Ammonitess, ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah from his palace in Jerusalem for 17 years. When he died, he was buried in Jerusalem and his son Abijam (or Abijah) took his place.

CONCLUSION

While still a servant of King Solomon, the LORD spoke to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah and promised to make him king. Furthermore, God promised to bless Jeroboam if he remained obedient. However, years later when Jeroboam became king just as had been foretold, he chose to set up idols and worship false gods in order to protect his own political power. But, did you notice, when things got desperate and his son became seriously ill, Jeroboam turned back to God for help? He was too arrogant to admit that his false gods were powerless to save, so he asked his wife to disguise herself hoping that Ahijah wouldn't recognize who she was. Sad. Jeroboam's actions suggest that He knew God's power and legitimacy all along, yet he knowingly chose to disregard Him whenever he felt it was in his best interests.

There is a popular saying that goes something like this, "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." This is exactly what Jeroboam did. God elevated him to a position of royalty and renown. God granted him prosperity and success. Then, once in power, Jeroboam forsook the LORD and

followed his own carnal and selfish ambitions. Is it any wonder that God's judgment fell upon him and his household?

As for Rehoboam, he was the son of Solomon and the grandson of David. He had grown up watching the temple being built in Jerusalem and hearing wonderful things about God. The opening chapters of Proverbs are addressed to Solomon's son, suggesting that perhaps Rehoboam was among the first recipients of these wise sayings. Surely he was raised to fear God and walk in the ways of David. Nevertheless, as king, Rehoboam provoked the LORD by allowing despicable practices and pagan worship. He led Judah to sin.

To use a modern parallel, Rehoboam was somewhat like a child who was raised in a Christian home who later turned from God as an adult. He should have known better than to act and speak the way that he did. Beloved, sin is bad enough as is, but perhaps even worse when we know better and do it anyway.

In closing, though Jeroboam's sin was more egregious and immediately consequential than Rehoboam's, neither of them were good, righteous leaders. Both of them could have been - and should have been - godly kings, yet both were weak and susceptible to sin and idolatry. May we learn from their negative examples to walk in obedience and faithfulness to the Lord.

Abijam and Asa

Originally preached on 5/5/2024

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me. - Psalm 50:15

Last week we concluded our discussion of Rehoboam, the first king of Judah, and Jeroboam, the first king of Israel. This morning we will turn our attention exclusively to Judah and read about her next 2 kings, namely Abijam and Asa. I trust that God has something wonderful in store for us today as we learn about these 2 men.

I. ABIJAM'S BRIEF REIGN (1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13)

In the 18th year of Jeroboam's reign in the northern kingdom of Israel, Abijam became king over the southern kingdom of Judah. Abijam was the son of Rehoboam and Maacah (she was likely the granddaughter of Abishalom, or Absalom). Abijam was not a godly king, but the Lord sustained him for the sake of His covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:16). War continued between Israel and Judah throughout his brief 3 year reign. When Abijam died, he was buried in Jerusalem and his son Asa became king in his place.

Abijam (also called Abijah) is remembered mostly for his military victory over Jeroboam. Though his forces were outnumbered 2-to-1, he boldly stood on Mount Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim and declared that God had made a covenant to David and his descendants (ie, Judah) to rule over all of Israel forever. He rebuked Jeroboam and the northern tribes for rebelling against God's covenant. He chastised them for worshiping golden calves, appointing pagan priests, and driving out the Levites and true priests of God. He defended Judah for remaining faithful to the Lord and following the ceremonial law in the temple. He declared that God was with Judah, and warned the much larger army of Israel not to fight against the Lord.

Nevertheless, Jeroboam's vast army ambushed Judah from the front and the rear. While under attack, Abijam's priests blew their trumpets, his soldiers cried out to God, and then shouted a fearsome war cry. The Lord rose up and routed the men of Israel before Judah, so that they fled and their army was decimated. Some 500,000 soldiers of Israel were slain, and the northern kingdom was subdued. Abijam's forces pursued Jeroboam's and temporarily captured several southern Israelite cities, including Bethel, which would later be returned. Apparently, Jeroboam sustained some type of injury during the battle and suffered from its lingering effects until his death. Meanwhile, in just a few years, Abijam became quite powerful, married several wives, and fathered a large family. Still, his reign as king was fairly short.

II. ASA'S EARLY SUCCESSES (1 Kings 15:9-10; 2 Chronicles 14)

After his father Abijam died, Asa became the king of Judah in the 20th year of Jeroboam's reign over Israel. Asa would serve as king for 41 years, ruling from his palace in Jerusalem. Asa's mother was named Maacah, apparently the same woman as Abijam's mother, which would seemingly make these 2 kings brothers rather than father and son. However, it is quite possible

that for unknown reasons Asa was raised by his grandmother, so that she was in effect his “mother” though she didn’t actually give birth to him. Other plausible explanations exist for this quandary as well, and therefore it should not be regarded as an error in Scripture.

During the first 10 years of Asa’s reign, Judah enjoyed a prolonged period of peace. Asa used this tranquil decade to build and fortify cities throughout the southern kingdom. He surrounded these cities with walls, towers, gates, and bars. He also built up a large and well equipped army with valiant soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

The peace was finally broken when an army from Ethiopia, under the leadership of Zerah, made up of a million men and 300 chariots, came up against Judah. The opposing forces met for battle at Mareshah. Asa cried out to the Lord for help, and God routed the Ethiopians. Asa and his army pursued the fleeing Ethiopians, striking down many of them, and ultimately recovered great amounts of spoil and plunder, including many sheep, camels, and livestock.

III. ASA’S REFORMS (1 Kings 15:11-15; 2 Chronicles 15)

The prophet Azariah went out to meet with King Asa. Azariah told Asa that if he and the people of Judah would earnestly seek the LORD, that He would be with them. He further warned that if they were to abandon the LORD, He would forsake them. Azariah cited Israel’s past and an example of this principle, and encouraged Asa to be strong and to continue doing good work.

Upon hearing this prophecy, King Asa began implementing reforms in hopes of restoring Judah’s allegiance to God. He removed many abominable idols from throughout the land and restored the altar in the temple. He appointed a day for people throughout his kingdom to bring animals and make sacrifices to God. On that day, they all assembled at the temple in Jerusalem and together gave a great offering to the LORD. While there, Asa and the citizens of Judah made a covenant to seek the LORD wholeheartedly. They celebrated their oath with shouting, singing, and music.

Asa also removed Maacah from the royal position of queen mother because she had made an Asherah. He cut down the horrid, idolatrous image she’d built and burned it at the brook Kidron. Asa put away the male cult prostitutes that his father Abijam had allowed. He also returned many dedicated things to the house of the LORD, including gold and silver utensils, which had apparently been removed. Asa was a good and righteous king who, for the most part, walked in the ways of David and was devoted to God. Still, his purification of Judah was incomplete as some of the high places remained.

CONCLUSION

Both King Abijam and King Asa achieved a great victory over a much larger army. Abijam defeated Jeroboam and the Israelites, while Asa defeated Zerah and the Ethiopians. They were victorious because they cried out to God for help. Friend, no matter how great the enemy may appear, God is always bigger and stronger. Let us turn to Him for help in all of life’s battles.

As for Abijam, the Bible describes him as a bad king who provoked the Lord. His reliance on God during his conflict with Jeroboam seems to have been an isolated occurrence. Most of the time, he was promoting and allowing idolatrous behavior to run rampant in Judah. His life was characterized by long seasons of unrighteousness and sin, with an occasional act of humility and obedience. This is the opposite of what Christianity should look like. While none of us are perfect and we all stumble at times, our lives should be characterized by ongoing righteousness, faithfulness, and obedience with occasional missteps along the way. Sinful speech and conduct should be the exception, not the rule.

We will talk more about Asa next week, but for now let's remember that he was a good king who desired to bring his people closer to God. He implemented several reforms in order to purge the wickedness from Judah and restore its devotion to the Lord. May we follow his example as we consider what changes are needed in our lives, in our homes, in our church, in our relationships, and so on, that we might walk in closer fellowship with God. May we have the courage and wisdom to put these changes into action.

A Series of Kings

Originally Preached on 5/12/2024

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. - Ecclesiastes 7:8

Good morning. In today's sermon we are going to discuss several different rulers. Our focus will be primarily on the northern kingdom and the several kings who reigned there during Asa's long, 41 year tenure in the south. Though our emphasis will be on Israel, due to the close and intertwined relationship between both kingdoms, we will also learn a few more details about Asa's reign in Judah.

I. NADAB (1 Kings 15:25-31)

Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, became the king of Israel in the 2nd year of Asa's reign in Judah. He was king for just 2 years and none of his accomplishments are recorded in the Bible. Like his father, Nadab was a wicked leader who led Israel to sin against God. Baasha, the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar, conspired against and assassinated Nadab at Gibbethon, while Israel was laying siege on the Philistines. Baasha then tracked down and executed the rest of Jeroboam's household, leaving none of them alive, and thus fulfilled God's dire prophecy to Jeroboam (and his wife) through the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 14:7-12).

II. BAASHA AND ASA (1 Kings 15:16-22, 32-34; 16:1-7; 2 Chronicles 16:1-10)

In the 3rd year of Asa's reign over Judah, Baasha became king of Israel after assassinating his predecessor. He ruled from Tirzah for 25 years and, like those before him, was an evil and idolatrous king who led the northern kingdom further into sin.

There was ongoing war between Baasha in Israel and Asa in Judah throughout most of their kingships, but it came to a head in the final few years of Baasha's reign. Baasha began fortifying the city of Ramah in order to cut off a primary passage to and from Judah and thus prevent people from entering or leaving the southern kingdom. In response, Asa sent gold and silver treasures taken from the temple and from his palace to Ben-hadad, the king of Aram who lived in Damascus, in order to secure a treaty. Ben-hadad accepted the gifts, agreed to the alliance, and subsequently attacked Israel from the north. This forced Baasha to abandon his activity in Ramah to go fight against the Arameans. Once the Israelites had left, Asa and the people of Judah went up and dismantled the fortifications Baasha had made in Ramah and used them to build Geba and Mizpah instead.

Following these events, Hanani the seer came to King Asa of Judah chastising him for relying on Aram to deliver them rather than trusting in the Lord. Hanani reminded Asa that he had previously trusted in God during his encounter with a much larger Ethiopian army and had been given the victory. This time, however, he'd turned to human strength for deliverance. Because he had acted foolishly, Hanani prophesied that Asa and the kingdom of Judah would have more

war. Enraged by this rebuke, King Asa had Hanani imprisoned and even mistreated some of his own people.

Meanwhile, the word of the Lord came to Jehu against Baasha the King of Israel. Jehu rebuked Baasha for his sin and wickedness, and prophesied that God would consume and destroy his household and cut off his royal line just as he had done with Jeroboam's. When Baasha died, he was buried in Tirzah and his son Elah became king in his place.

III. ELAH AND ZIMRI (1 Kings 16:8-20)

In the 26th year of Asa in Judah, Elah became the king over Israel and reigned in Tirzah for 2 years. None of his accomplishments are recorded in the Bible. His servant Zimri, who was the commander of half of Israel's chariots, conspired against him. While Elah was drunk, Zimri assassinated him and then went about murdering every male member of the king's household. Thus, Zimri fulfilled Jehu's prophecy against Baasha, just as Baasha had fulfilled Ahijah's prophecy against Jeroboam.

So, in Asa's 27th year as king of Judah, after killing Elah and murdering Baasha's entire family, Zimri became the king of Israel. His reign lasted for only 7 days. The Israelite army was camped at Gibbethon and when they received reports of Zimri's coup back in Tirzah they were furious. They appointed Omri, the commander of the army, as rightful king over Israel and went up to besiege the capital city. When Zimri realized that his situation was hopeless and that his conspiracy had failed, he committed suicide by burning the king's citadel down around him while he was inside.

IV. TIBNI AND OMRI (1 Kings 16:21-28)

In the wake of Zimri's death, the people of Israel were divided. Half of them followed Tibni, the son of Ginath, regarding him as king while the other half were allegiant to Omri as king. Thus, the northern kingdom itself was split for a few years. Eventually the followers of Omri prevailed, Tibni died, and Omri became the singular king of Israel. His undisputed reign began in the 31st year of Asa's reign in Judah, and (including the years he'd co-reigned with Tibni) Omri was king for 12 years.

After ruling from Tirzah for 6 years, Omri bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for 2 talents of silver. He built the city of Samaria there and made it the new capital city of Israel. He relocated to Samaria and finished his reign there. Omri was a wicked and sinful king like those before him. When he died, he was buried in Samaria and his son Ahab became king.

V. AHAB AND ASA (1 Kings 15:23-24; 16:29-34; 2 Chronicles 16:11-14)

Ahab became Israel's king during the 38th year of Asa's reign in Judah. His kingship lasted for 22 years. Ahab was a wicked and evil king. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. In order to appease the Sidonians and for his wife's sake, Ahab worshiped their

pagan god Baal and even had a temple and altar built for Baal in Samaria. He also set up an Asherah. Ahab was arguably the most wicked king that the northern kingdom ever had.

On a side note, it was during this time that a man named Hiel of Bethel rebuilt the ancient city of Jericho. It had laid in ruins since the days of Joshua when God caused its walls to crumble before the children of Israel. During the city's reconstruction, Hiel's firstborn and youngest sons both died just as had been forewarned by the word of the Lord (Joshua 6:26).

The same year that Ahab became Israel's king, Asa contracted a disease in his feet that became quite severe. Unfortunately, just as he had done in the case with Baasha and Aram, once again king Asa did not turn to the Lord for healing but instead relied solely on the physicians. When he died a few years later, he was buried in his own tomb in Jerusalem and there was a great memorial service held in Judah. His son Jehoshaphat became the new king of the southern kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Though Asa was regarded as a good king overall and implemented several reforms in hopes of leading Judah back to the Lord, he was clearly an imperfect man. His initial reliance on God seemed to wane over time. Instead, he trusted in the Arameans to save him from king Baasha and then trusted in the physicians to heal him from his debilitating foot disease. Let me be clear - this passage does not suggest that we should shun doctors or resist medical treatment, but rather teaches that even as we receive such care our faith should rest clearly and soundly on the Lord. He is our Healer, whether He chooses to work through doctors, medicine, or through His own supernatural means.

Also, I can't help but comment on the tumultuous turnover of kings in the northern kingdom. All of them were wicked, idolatrous, and provocative toward God. The Lord used several of them to judge their predecessors through violence, assassination, and murder. Some of those who killed the families of others later suffered a similar fate themselves. It reminds of what Jesus said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword." (Matthew 26:52) While there are certainly exceptions to this proverb, it proves true quite often, and is an apt reminder that we are wise to live peaceful, harmonious lives.

Next Sunday we will stay in the northern kingdom, but won't be spotlighting another king. We will introduce someone else, a peculiar character who seems to burst on the scene out of nowhere. You don't want to miss it. Until then, have a blessed week.

The Miracles of Elijah

Originally preached on 5/19/2024

Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." - Mark 8:27-29

I hope you've had a blessed week and am glad to see you here for worship this morning. I trust that God will speak to us again today through the proclamation of His living word and the inner movement of the Holy Spirit. I pray that we will listen to and obey His voice.

When we concluded last week's message, Ahab had become the new king of Israel. He and his wife Jezebel were an evil, corrupt couple. Meanwhile in Judah, Asa died after serving as king for over 40 years and his son Jehoshaphat took the throne in his place. We will be focusing on these 2 kings over the next few weeks. That said, there is another character who we'll be discussing as well. He wasn't a king or even part of the royal family, but rather was a famous and somewhat unconventional prophet.

I. ELIJAH PREDICTS DROUGHT (1 Kings 17:1-7)

Elijah the prophet, who was from Tishbe, a small town in Gilead, boldly came before Ahab the king of Israel. He announced that there would be a severe drought in the land - no rain or dew - for the next 3 years except at his word. Then, in accordance with the word of the Lord which had been spoken to him, Elijah went and hid at the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan River. God sent ravens both morning and evening to provide him bread and meat and he drank water from the brook. After a while, however, the brook dried up due to the drought.

II. INEXHAUSTIBLE FLOUR AND OIL (1 Kings 17:8-16)

God told Elijah to go stay at Zarephath, a city that belonged to Sidon, where He had appointed a widow to take care of him. Sure enough, when Elijah arrived at the city gate he saw a widow there gathering sticks. He asked her to give him a drink of water and bring him a piece of bread. The poor widow answered that she did not have any bread, but only a tiny amount of flour and oil remaining. She explained that she had been gathering sticks in order to prepare a final cake for her and her son, that they might eat it together once more before starving to death.

Elijah told her not to be afraid, but instructed her to make 3 cakes. She was to make his first and bring it to him, then make 2 more with the ingredients that remained for her and her son. Elijah then promised the woman that neither her bowl of flour nor her jar of oil would be empty until the day that God sent rain upon the earth. The widow went and did as Elijah instructed. Because of her faith and obedience, the Lord miraculously multiplied her flour and oil so that it wasn't

exhausted for many months until the drought finally ended. Thus, she was able to provide for all 3 of them.

III. THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH'S SON (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Sometime later, the widow's son became severely sick and died. In her agony and grief, the widow lashed out at Elijah and blamed him and his presence in her house as the reason for her son's death. In response, Elijah asked the woman to bring her lifeless child to him. Elijah took the boy to the upper room where he was staying and laid his body on his bed. Then he prayed to the LORD that the child might be raised to life and stretched himself over the boy 3 times.

The LORD heard Elijah's prayer and supernaturally revived the boy. The prophet took the resurrected child down to his mother and presented him alive and well. She was amazed and joyful, and she acknowledged Elijah as a true man of God who spoke the word of the LORD.

This is the 1st of 10 physical resurrections that are documented in the Bible. In fact, we did a miniseries on these back in 2017 around the Easter holiday. If you would like to read the notes from that series, they are available on our church website under the "Books" tab. Select the sermon series, "Risen From the Dead".

IV. OBADIAH MEETS ELIJAH (1 Kings 18:1-16)

During the third year of the drought, the LORD appeared to Elijah and commanded him to go show himself to Ahab and that He would finally send rain upon the earth. So Elijah departed from Zarephath for Samaria, where the famine was severe, in order to stand before the king. Meanwhile, Ahab sent his servant Obadiah, who was in charge of his household, to survey the land in search of any springs of water or green grass that might be left to feed the king's animals. Ahab also searched, and the 2 men went in different directions.

Though Obadiah served the wicked King Ahab, secretly he was a man of God. Queen Jezebel had sought out and executed many of the Lord's prophets, but Obadiah had quietly hidden 100 of them in 2 caves, 50 in each, and was providing bread and water for them. Ahab and Jezebel were desperately searching for Elijah who had been residing safely in Zarephath, so that they might kill him, too.

As Obadiah was roaming through the countryside, he met Elijah, recognized him, and fell down before him. Elijah told Obadiah to go find Ahab and tell him that he had come to meet him. Obadiah was initially hesitant to do so. He objected because he feared that Ahab might kill him, the messenger, especially if he was unable to find Elijah after being told of his arrival. Obadiah also worried that Ahab would find out about the 100 prophets he'd hidden from Jezebel. To calm his nerves, Elijah ensured Obadiah that everything would be okay. Once settled, Obadiah went and found Ahab and told him that Elijah had come. Then Ahab came to meet Elijah.

Though it is uncertain and disputed, there are many Bible historians who believe that this Obadiah was the same man who wrote the short Bible book by the same name. If so, chronologically Obadiah would be the 1st of the minor prophets. The book of Obadiah is a prophetic warning to the nation of Edom.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap things up this morning, let's consider a few applications from today's sermon. First, God is able to provide for our needs even under dire circumstances. The LORD sent food to Elijah by way of ravens at the brook Cherith. Later, he provided for the prophet, widow, and her son at Zarephath by supernaturally resupplying her bowl of flour and jar of oil. Even in our lack, when our needs are great, we can trust in God to provide for us.

Second, God has the power to raise the dead. He worked through Elijah to bring the widow's son back to life. So also, He raised His only begotten Son Jesus Christ from the dead 3 days after the crucifixion. By this same power, He promises to someday resurrect all of the righteous and redeemed saints so that we might live eternally and physically with Him in the New Heavens and Earth.

Third, even in the face of danger we need to have courageous faith. Though Obadiah was afraid of what Ahab and Jezebel might do to him, still at great personal risk he bravely hid and took care of 100 prophets of God. We shouldn't be too hard on him for keeping quiet about his devotion to God. I mean, you can't help others if you're dead. Obadiah's actions remind me somewhat of those who hid Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

Next week we will learn more about Elijah. We will read about his well-known encounter with the prophets of Baal. I hope you'll be able to join us for that! God bless you.

Elijah's Courage and Cowardice

Originally preached on 5/26/2024

And I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not allow My holy name to be profaned anymore. But the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. - Ezekiel 39:7

When we concluded last Sunday's message, Elijah was going to meet King Ahab. Along the way, he had encountered Ahab's servant Obadiah, who was also a believer in God. The 2 men had spoken with each other and Obadiah had expressed his reservations in announcing Elijah's arrival to the king. Nevertheless, he ultimately did so and Elijah and Ahab met.

This morning we will pick up the story there and read about an epic confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. We will also learn how the 3 year drought ended, how Elijah fled from the evil Queen Jezebel, and identify 3 men who God commanded him to anoint. This message is titled, "Elijah's Courage and Cowardice".

I. CONFRONTATION ON CARMEL (1 Kings 18:17-40)

When Ahab and Elijah met, Ahab accused Elijah of being a "troubler" to Israel. Elijah answered that Ahab and his household were the real troublemakers because they had forsaken the Lord and followed the Baals. Elijah asked Ahab to gather the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table together with him at Mount Carmel.

Ahab summoned all of these false prophets, along with the people of Israel, to Mount Carmel. Elijah asked the people assembled there not to waver between two alternatives but to choose and follow either Baal or the Lord as the true god. He challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest to determine which god was genuine. Both he and they would prepare an ox to be sacrificed, both would lay it on wood, both would call out to their god, and the god who answered by consuming the offering with fire would be declared the true god. The prophets of Baal agreed to the terms and the challenge began.

They went first. After preparing an ox and placing it on wood atop an altar, the false prophets of Baal began crying out for him to pour fire down upon their offering. They did so from morning until noon, but nothing happened. Elijah began mocking them, suggesting that they shout louder because Baal might be away traveling or perhaps be asleep. In their desperation, as the afternoon wore on, they began cutting themselves as they continued crying out until evening. Still, Baal did not answer and nothing happened.

Now it was Elijah's turn. He took 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes of Israel, and built an altar with them. He prepared an ox and placed it on the wood. However, he also dug a trench around the altar. Then he had the people pour water on the ox and wood 3 times so that both were drenched, and the surplus water flowed into and filled the trench. Finally, Elijah cried out to the LORD to reveal Himself to the people as the true God, and the LORD immediately and

spectacularly sent fire down from heaven consuming the offering, wood, altar, and all of the water in the trench.

The people fell on their faces and declared the LORD as the true and living God. Following Elijah's command, they seized all of the prophets of Baal. They brought them down to the brook Kishon and Elijah slew them there.

II. RAINING AND RUNNING (1 Kings 18:41-19:8)

Elijah told Ahab to eat and drink in celebration, for he had heard the sound of a heavy rain that would finally end the crippling drought. As Ahab did so, Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel. God told him to look toward the sea, but when he did, Elijah saw nothing in the sky. This happened 7 times. On the 7th time, when Elijah looked, he saw a small rain cloud in the distance. He told Ahab to hurry in his chariot to Jezreel before the heavy downpour came. The clouds grew dark, the winds blew, and a torrent of rain showered down. God strengthened Elijah so that he actually outran Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel.

Ahab told Jezebel his wife that Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal. She sent a messenger to Elijah swearing that she would find and kill him the very next day. Fearing for his life, Elijah fled to Beersheba in extreme southern Judah, left his servant there, and then continued another day into the wilderness alone. He sat under a juniper tree and waited for God to take his life. An angel attended to him, telling him to arise, eat, and drink the bread and water that God had provided. The angel also said that he'd need this nutrition for the long journey ahead. Elijah obeyed, regained his strength, and then traveled 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb.

III. GOD'S STILL, SMALL VOICE (1 Kings 19:9-21)

When he arrived at Mount Horeb, Elijah hid in a cave. The LORD spoke to him asking why he was hiding there. In self-pity, Elijah defended his righteousness and contended that Israel had forsaken God, murdered His prophets, and that he alone was left running for his life. Of course, this was a bit of an exaggeration, as Obadiah had rescued and provided for 100 of the LORD's prophets. People tend to be overdramatic when they are feeling sorry for themselves.

So the LORD told Elijah to step out of the cave and watch as He passed by. A great and powerful wind blew up, so strong that it broke the rocks, but God was not in the wind. Next came an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire either. Finally came the sound of a gentle breeze. Elijah wrapped his face in his cloak and listened to the still, small voice of the LORD.

For the 2nd time God asked Elijah why he was hiding there and Elijah offered the same answer as before. Seemingly ignoring his self-misery, God told Elijah to get up and go back to Israel. God isn't impressed with our "pity parties". Along the way he was to stop in Damascus and anoint Hazael as king over Aram, then Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet in his

place. God would use these 3 men to bring judgment upon Ahab and the kingdom Israel, yet would preserve 7,000 faithful people who had refused to worship Baal.

Elijah obeyed the command of the LORD. He went and found Elisha while he was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. Elijah threw his cloak (or mantle) upon Elisha, symbolizing his anointing of the new prophet. Before departing, Elisha asked if he might say goodbye to his parents. He sacrificed and prepared a pair of oxen for them all to eat together. After the meal, Elisha got up and left with Elijah and became his servant.

CONCLUSION

I have always been struck by the dramatic change in Elijah's character from chapter 18 to chapter 19. He acted with tremendous courage as he appeared before King Ahab who was intent on killing him. He boldly challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel, mocked their frivolous and futile cries, and then valiantly executed all of them. He was, in these moments, a warrior for the LORD.

Then, when threatened by Jezebel, he was suddenly overcome with fear. He cowardly fled and hid in a cave, crying that all was lost and that he was the last godly prophet alive. He was filled with self-pity and timidity. What happened to him? Jokingly, I have heard some pastors suggest that these passages prove that dealing with just 1 evil woman is more scary than dealing with hundreds of wicked men. But seriously...

While we are fickle - brave at times and terrified at others, confident at times and uncertain at others, strong at times and weak at others - beloved, we can always trust in the constancy of God. He is unchanging, the same all the time. He doesn't have good days and bad days. He is always good, always mighty, always faithful, always wise, always truthful, and always ready to save. If you have placed your faith in Him as Lord and Savior, He is your Constant.

Ahab Wars Against Aram

Originally preached on 6/2/2024

The pronouncement concerning Damascus: "Behold, Damascus is about to be removed from being a city and will become a fallen ruin." - Isaiah 17:1

The Biblical nation of Aram equates to modern-day Syria. Its capital city was and still is Damascus. The people of Aram were descendants of Noah's son Shem. They became known as Aramaens. Aram is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, during the era of the patriarchs, the judges, and the kings. By the time of the New Testament, its name had officially changed to Syria. During Israel's divided kingdom era, which is the topic of our current study, Aram was ruled by a leader named Ben-hadad.

Ben-hadad is actually a title, not a name, similar to "Pharaoh" or "Emperor". It means "son of Hadad." Hadad was the Mesopotamian god of thunder and storms. It was common in ancient times for kings to be named after gods. Bible historians believe there were 3 separate kings in Aram who went by this title - Ben-hadad I, Ben-hadad II (his son or grandson), and Ben-hadad III (an unrelated man who assassinated Ben-hadad II). We will mention all 3 of these men during this series.

In today's sermon, we will turn our attention away from Elijah the prophet (who we've spoken about for the past 2 weeks) and focus instead on King Ahab and Israel's renewed war with Ben-hadad, king of Aram. This may have still been Ben-hadad I, the same man who made a treaty with King Asa of Judah some 25-30 earlier in his skirmish against Baasha (1 Kings 15:16-22), but was more likely Ben-hadad II. Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 20 and let's begin...

I. AHAB'S RESISTANCE (1 Kings 20:1-12)

Ben-hadad king of Aram, along with 32 other kings, gathered a united army with horses and chariots and went up to Samaria and besieged it. He sent a message to King Ahab, who was surrounded in the city, that he wanted all of his gold and silver, as well as his most beautiful wives and children. Seeing no other choice, Ahab agreed to Ben-hadad's request. However, when the king of Aram's messengers returned a second time they told Ahab that they'd be coming the next day to search his house as well as those of his servants to take whatever they found desirable.

While Ahab had previously agreed to a limited seizure of his possessions, this expanded seizure seemed too much. He called all of his elders together and explained to them what had happened. They advised him not to consent to Ben-hadad's new terms. Therefore, Ahab told the messengers that he would abide by the initial request, but would not consent to the second, larger request. When Ahab's message was delivered, Ben-hadad decided to attack the city and take it by force.

He sent a pompous message to Ahab stating that he and the Aramaen army would reduce Samaria to dust. Ahab defiantly replied, "Let not him who girds his armor boast like him who takes it off." In other words, don't count your chickens before they hatch. When the king of Aram received Ahab's snarky response, he readied his forces to attack Samaria.

II. AHAB'S FIRST VICTORY (1 Kings 20:13-25)

In the meantime an unnamed prophet approached King Ahab and told him that God would deliver the city from the Aramaens, again showing Himself to be the true LORD. Skeptical, Ahab asked by what means. The prophet answered, "By the young men of the rulers of the provinces." These were small, regional units of skilled commandos. Ahab asked who would begin the battle and the prophet answered that he would. So Ahab gathered his forces, 232 commandos and 7,000 regular Israeli soldiers, to start the fight.

Israel went out at noon, while Ben-hadad and the 32 kings were drinking themselves drunk in their tents. The young men from the provinces went first and it was reported that they were coming. Ben-hadad commanded that they be taken alive. When the Aramaen soldiers approached them, Israel suddenly attacked. They slaughtered Aram's forces and pursued them as they fled. Ben-hadad escaped on horseback. Nevertheless, King Ahab and Israel achieved a great victory.

The prophet returned to Ahab once again and advised him to strengthen himself because Ben-hadad and the army of Aram would be back at the turn of the year. Meanwhile, as the Aramaen army sought to recover its losses and regroup from its crushing defeat, Ben-hadad's advisors reasoned that Israel's gods were gods of the mountains while Aram's gods were gods of the plains. They instructed him to replace his supporting kings with captains and to fight Israel on the plains rather than in the mountains, so that they would have the advantage and prevail. This would be the strategy for their next battle.

III. AHAB'S SECOND VICTORY (1 Kings 20:26-43)

Just as predicted, at the turn of the year the king of Aram, Ben-hadad, and his replenished army went up to fight against Israel on the plains surrounding Aphek. Israel went out and camped opposite of Aram. An unnamed prophet, perhaps the same person as before, came and told King Ahab that God would deliver Israel again, although they were vastly outnumbered, once more proving himself to be the LORD. Both camps were still for a week, but on the 7th day the battle began. Israel was victorious, killing 100,000 of Aram's soldiers in a single day. The remaining 27,000 fled into the city of Aphek, where the wall subsequently fell on them.

Ben-hadad hid himself in the city. His servants advised him that Israel's kings were known to be merciful, and counseled him to surrender. Heeding their advice, Ben-hadad came out of hiding and surrendered himself to Ahab. Ben-hadad promised to return the Israeli cities that had been previously taken by Aram and to restore friendly relations between the 2 kingdoms. Agreeing to the covenant, Ahab allowed Ben-hadad to live and released him to return to Damascus.

Meanwhile, another unnamed prophet asked a man to strike him. When the man refused, the prophet told him that he would be killed by a lion for his disobedience. When the man left, a lion found and killed him just as had been prophesied. The unnamed prophet asked another man to strike him. This time the man complied and hit the prophet, leaving an obvious injury. The prophet disguised himself with a bandage and went to speak to King Ahab. He presented himself as a soldier who had been charged to guard a prisoner with his life, but told the king that somehow his prisoner had escaped.

King Ahab ordered that he be executed, consistent with the penalty that had been given by his commanding officer. However, the whole story was made up. The prophet revealed his true identity and explained that his story was an object lesson for Ahab. Just as he was furious at the hypothetical soldier for allowing his hypothetical prisoner to escape, so also God was angry at Ahab for allowing Ben-hadad to go free. As a result, God would bring judgment on Ahab for his negligence.

CONCLUSION

I want to make 3 observations from this chapter before we conclude today's message. First, don't presume you know the outcome of something before you've even started. Ben-hadad boasted of victory prior to the fight, and ended up getting whipped - twice. Second, when God shows you who He is, believe Him. God showed Himself to Ahab at Mt. Carmel (which we discussed last week), and again during both his first and second victories over Aram. Sadly, Ahab still didn't repent or change his evil ways. Third, if God affords you an opportunity to rid yourself of danger, consistent with His will of course, take it. I am not suggesting that you should murder your enemies, but I am saying that if you foolishly allow sinful influences to remain in your life rather than disposing of them, it is likely that they will eventually bring you down. Beloved, the broad road leads to destruction, so if you see an exit ramp, get off. And by the way, the exit ramp is named Jesus...

Ahab Covets Naboth's Vineyard

Originally preached on 6/9/2024

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. - Exodus 20:17

Good morning. In today's message we will continue focusing on events in the life of King Ahab, ruler of the northern kingdom, Israel. This sermon is titled, "Ahab Covets Naboth's Vineyard". Perhaps you've heard or read this somewhat familiar passage before. It includes 4 main characters - King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, Naboth, and Elijah the prophet. This story is recorded in 1 Kings chapter 21. Let's get started...

I. AHAB'S PLIGHT (1 Kings 21:1-7)

After 2 resounding military victories over the Aramaeans, the kingdom of Israel enjoyed a brief respite of peace. Though King Ahab reigned from Samaria, he had palaces in other cities as well. There was a man named Naboth living in Jezreel who owned a vineyard next to Ahab's palace there. Ahab approached Naboth and asked him if he might have his vineyard in order to use it as a vegetable garden due to its proximity to the palace. Ahab promised to either give Naboth an even better vineyard in its place or to buy the vineyard from him outright.

However, when presented with Ahab's offer, Naboth declined to give or sell his vineyard to Ahab. Naboth explained that this land belonged to his ancestors and tribe, and rightly stated that the Law did not allow the transfer of land from 1 tribe to another (Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 36:7). Ahab did not have legitimate authority to take the vineyard so he went away disappointed and sorrowful. He returned to his palace where he laid in bed sulking, refusing to eat.

Queen Jezebel asked the king what had happened to cause him such distress. Ahab answered that Naboth was unwilling to sell or exchange his vineyard. Jezebel was shocked by Ahab's weakness and said, "Aren't you the king?", implying that he should just confiscate it. She told him to quit crying, get out of bed, cheer up, and eat. She said that she would handle the situation and would get the vineyard for her husband.

II. JEZEBEL'S PLOT (1 Kings 21:8-16)

Jezebel wrote letters in the king's name, sealed them with his royal seal, and sent them to the elders and nobles of Jezreel. She instructed them to proclaim a fast, a religious holiday, and to hold a ceremony with all of the prominent men in the city. Naboth was to be seated at the head of the table. However, they were to sit 2 false witnesses before him who would publicly accuse him of cursing God and the king. Based on their "testimony", the nobles and elders were directed to take Naboth outside of the city and stone him to death (Leviticus 24:16).

When the leaders of the city received Jezebel letters, which had been written in the king's name, they promptly obeyed. They proclaimed a fast, planted false witnesses at the grand ceremony, publicly made false allegations against Naboth, and then stoned him to death. Though not stated here, in 2 Kings 9:26 (which we will study later in this series) we learn that Naboth's sons were stoned with him so as to wipe out his heirs. It was all an elaborate set up, orchestrated by the evil queen. After it had been done, the nobles and elders sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead.

Upon hearing the news, Jezebel went to her husband, King Ahab, and reported that Naboth (and his heirs) had been killed. She told him to go and take possession of the vineyard that Naboth had previously refused to give him. So Ahab arose and went down to the vineyard to take it for himself.

III. ELIJAH'S PROPHECY (1 Kings 21:17-29)

Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Elijah and told him to go meet Ahab at the vineyard. Elijah was to confront Ahab with his sin, charging him with murdering an innocent man in order to steal his possessions. For his wickedness, the LORD would bring judgment upon Ahab. In the same place where the dogs had licked up Naboth's blood after he'd been stoned outside the city, they would also somebody lick up Ahab's blood.

Ahab asked Elijah why he had come to trouble him. Elijah replied that Ahab had acted wickedly and that God would soon cut off his royal line just as He had done with Jeroboam and Baasha. Because Ahab had provoked the LORD and led Israel astray, God would see to it that his male descendants were destroyed and that the throne was forever taken away from his family. Furthermore, Jezebel would die and her body would be picked over by dogs in the streets of Jezreel. Likewise, the bodies of Ahab's household would be ravished by the dogs and birds.

Ahab was an evil, idolatrous king. To make matters worse, he was enticed to commit greater sin by his wicked and cruel wife Jezebel. Nevertheless, when Elijah pronounced this damning prophecy against him, Ahab expressed grave sorrow and remorse. The word of the LORD came to Elijah again declaring that, because Ahab had humbled himself, God's judgment against his household would not come during Ahab's days but rather during the days of his son. Thus, God's judgment was postponed, but not rescinded.

CONCLUSION

This story deals with the sin of coveting. The 10th commandment states, "Thou shall not covet." The word covet can also be translated as lust. It is an evil, carnal desire for something or someone that does not belong to you or that you have no right to long after. Coveting is an inner sin of the heart and mind that often gives birth to other outer sins such as stealing, adultery, and/or murder. It is a form of envy.

Perhaps the most well known Bible story about coveting features King David. He lustfully desired Uriah's wife Bathsheba, which ultimately led to both adultery and murder. In the passage we read today, King Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, which resulted in a conspiracy, lies, theft, and murder. Both of these passages, and many others, illustrate how coveting oftentimes is a catalyst for other sins.

Today's message also touches on the issue of private property and eminent domain. When does the government have a legitimate right to take someone's private property? I will concede that this is not always a cut-and-dry answer and there are often considerations that need to be made for the public good. However, in this instance, there was no compelling reason for Ahab to seize Naboth's vineyard. He was wrong to do so. In general, the government has no right to confiscate someone's private property unless the owner voluntarily permits them to do so, and even then they should be properly compensated for the property.

In the Garden of Eden, God held Adam accountable for his sin even though Eve enticed him. We see the same thing in this passage. God held Ahab accountable for his sin even though Jezebel was the mastermind behind it. The lesson is clear. When we are complicit with sin and freely go along with it, we bear the same level of guilt as those who originated it. For this reason, we cannot blame others (even the Devil) for our sin.

Lastly, this story is an example of how powerful people can seemingly get away with anything. They can exploit the powerless, set them up to take the fall, and abuse the justice system for their own purposes. We see this type of corruption all the time among our politicians and the wealthy elite class. It is simply naive to believe that man's law applies equally to everyone. That said, God will hold everyone accountable. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but we can rest assured that, in His time, those who commit sin - even the rich and powerful - will face justice.

Jehoshaphat and His Alliance With Ahab

Originally preached on 6/16/2024

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. - 2 Timothy 4:3-4

For the past few weeks we have concentrated on the northern kingdom. We have talked about the reign of King Ahab and his malicious wife Jezebel. We have discussed their encounters with the prophet Elijah, Israel's ongoing war with Aram, and their conspiracy to confiscate Naboth's vineyard. Meanwhile in Judah, Asa's son Jehoshaphat had taken the throne. Let's backtrack a bit this morning to discuss the first several years of his rule in the southern kingdom.

I. JEHOSHAPHAT'S EARLY REIGN (1 Kings 22:41-46; 2 Chronicles 17)

After the death of his father Asa (presumably to complications from foot disease), Jehoshaphat became king of Judah during the 4th year of Ahab in Israel. Jehoshaphat's mother was named Azubah. He was 35 years old when he became king and he ruled for 25 years in Jerusalem. Like his father, Jehoshaphat was regarded as a good king who generally did right in the sight of the LORD. He did not remove all of the high places, but he did expel the remnant of sodomites that remained in the land following his father's reign.

Jehoshaphat placed troops in Judah's fortified cities and garrisons throughout the kingdom including in the cities of Ephraim that Asa had captured. He firmly cemented his position as king and all of Judah brought tribute to him. He walked in the ways of David, did not seek after idols, and took pride in God's commandments. Thus, the LORD established his kingdom and made him strong.

In the 3rd year of his reign, Jehoshaphat sent select officials, Levites, and priests to teach the law of the LORD throughout the cities of Judah. The surrounding nations dreaded him and kept the peace. In fact, some of the Philistines and Arabians brought him gifts as tribute, such as silver and flocks of animals. Jehoshaphat built fortresses and store cities to contain the vast quantity of supplies he accumulated. He also mustered a sizable army that was placed under the command of several skilled leaders.

II. AHAB & JEHOSHAPHAT JOIN FORCES (1 Kings 22:1-12; 2 Chronicles 18:1-11)

Earlier in his reign, Jehoshaphat had allied himself with Ahab by marriage (allowing his son Jehoram to marry Ahab and Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah). So 3 years after Israel's 2nd victory over Aram, Ahab decided to retake the city of Ramoth-gilead. It was an Israeli city that was still being held by the Aramaens. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to assist him in this effort (it would be Israel's 3rd campaign against Aram), and Jehoshaphat readily agreed to the alliance.

As a precursor, Jehoshaphat requested that Ahab inquire a word from the LORD as to whether this was a good idea or not. So Ahab gathered up the “prophets” of Israel, about 400 men, and asked them. They all agreed that Ahab and Jehoshaphat should move forward with their plans to retake Ramoth-gilead. However, when Jehoshaphat saw that none of these men were actually prophets of the LORD, he asked Ahab if there were any of God’s prophets available that they might ask. Ahab named 1 man, Micaiah, but said that he hated him because he never prophesied good or favorable things for him.

To appease Jehoshaphat, Ahab went ahead and summoned Micaiah. In the meantime, while they waited for him to arrive, Ahab and Jehoshaphat sat on their thrones in the palace in Samaria as numerous false prophets appeared before them ensuring victory. Zedekiah, a prominent prophet in the northern kingdom, confidently predicted that Israel would gore the Aramaens with horns of iron.

III. MICAIAH PREDICTS DEFEAT (1 Kings 22:13-28; 2 Chronicles 18:12-27)

The messenger who went to retrieve Micaiah told him that all of King Ahab’s prophets had uniformly assured him success over Aram. He asked Micaiah to deliver the same positive message. However, Micaiah rebuked the messenger saying that he would prophesy whatever God revealed to him, whether encouraging or not.

When Micaiah appeared before the 2 kings, he initially consented to the messenger’s request and simply told Ahab what he wanted to hear - that Israel would surely defeat Aram. But something in his tone or on his face must have given him away, and Ahab insisted that he tell the truth. So Micaiah prophesied the word of the LORD, that Israel would be defeated if they attempted to retake Ramoth-gilead. Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, “See? I told you he would not prophesy anything good for me.”

Micaiah proceeded to describe his heavenly vision of how God had sent a deceiving word to the prophets of Israel. Their false promises of victory would entice Ahab into a losing battle. Furious, Zedekiah slapped Micaiah across the face and questioned his message. Ahab commanded that Micaiah be thrown in prison and fed sparingly until he returned triumphantly from battle. The prophet defiantly responded that if Ahab returned safely from battle, then the LORD had not spoken by him. For God had decreed that Ahab would die in the fight.

IV. DEFEAT & DEATH OF AHAB (1 Kings 22:29-40; 2 Chronicles 18:28-34)

The allied forces of Israel and Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. Before the conflict began, Ahab disguised himself in order to conceal his identity from the Aramaens. When the fighting broke out, Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, ordered some of his charioteers to the singular mission of finding and fighting against Ahab. In the heat of battle, they mistook Jehoshaphat for Ahab and sought to overtake him, but when they realized their error, they broke off their pursuit.

As the confrontation raged on, Ahab was randomly struck by an arrow in the joint of his armor. Severely injured, the driver of his chariot withdrew him from the battle. At a safe distance, they propped Ahab up in his chariot so that he could watch the fighting. As the disguised king slowly bled out, his blood stained and pooled in the bottom of his chariot. Ahab died that evening, and Israel's and Judah's troops withdrew in defeat from Ramoth-gilead.

King Ahab's body was returned to Samaria and buried. His chariot was taken outside of the city to be washed, just as Naboth had been taken out of the city to be stoned. As it was being cleaned, Ahab's blood dripped onto the ground where it was licked up by the dogs, just as Ezekiel had prophesied (1 Kings 21:17-19). Thus, Ahab died and his son Ahaziah became king of Israel in his place.

CONCLUSION

King Ahab had surrounded himself with "yes men". His many prophets told him exactly what he wanted to hear. They even tried to suppress and silence any messages to the contrary so that there would be no dissenting opinions. Ahab didn't want the truth, and he despised and imprisoned the man who was bold enough to speak it. Emboldened by his previous success, Ahab foolishly ignored the word of the LORD. But Ahab's arrogance and corruption ultimately was his downfall, and his disregard for God's prophetic word cost him his life.

Beloved, people need to hear the truth. It may not be popular or easy to listen to, but it alone has the power to save. This world hates the truth of God. It revels in the darkness and despises the light. It delights in the filth and stink of sin, while stubbornly resisting purity and righteousness. This fallen world deceives itself with comforting lies and empty deception. Nevertheless, this world desperately needs the truth more than anything. Jesus is the truth! May we have the courage to say it.

More About Jehoshaphat

Originally preached on 6/23/2024

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? - 2 Corinthians 6:14

Last week we began our discussion on King Jehoshaphat of Judah. He was a good ruler who led the southern kingdom to revere and follow the LORD. His dominion was strong and well respected by the surrounding nations. Unfortunately, he allied himself and his forces with Israel in their campaign to reclaim Ramoth-gilead from the Aramaens. Their alliance was soundly defeated, King Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped with his life.

This week we will learn more details about Jehoshaphat's reign. We will pick up right where we left off last Sunday. Most of the Biblical information about Jehoshaphat is recorded in the book of Chronicles, so for the sake of today's message we will spend more time there than in the book of Kings (where we normally are).

I. REBUKE & REFORM (2 Chronicles 19)

Following the death of Ahab and their combined army's failure to retake Ramoth-gilead, Jehoshaphat returned to his palace in Jerusalem. Jehu the prophet went out to meet him. This was the same Jehu who had prophesied against King Baasha of Israel around 30 years earlier (1 Kings 16:7). Jehu rebuked Jehoshaphat for assisting the wicked and idolatrous King Ahab. Still, he did recognize and acknowledge the good things that Jehoshaphat had done.

Perhaps somewhat convicted by his foolish choice to fight alongside Ahab, Jehoshaphat renewed his efforts to reform Judah in its obedience to God. He appointed judges to serve in cities throughout his kingdom who were fair, impartial, upright, and righteous. He also appointed some Levites, priests, and respected household leaders to resolve disputes among the people in Jerusalem. He instructed them to render judgments in the fear of the LORD. In short, he reformed the court system of Judah, placing it under the headship of Amariah, the chief priest, and Zebadiah, the king's official.

II. INVASION & PRAYER (2 Chronicles 20:1-13)

Up to this point, Judah had been at peace throughout the entirety of Jehoshaphat's reign. However, in the wake of his defeat against the Aramaens, the traditional enemies of Judah again became emboldened. A large army, made up mostly of soldiers from Moab and Ammon, along with a few others, came up against Judah. Their invading forces camped at En-gedi, an oasis located on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

Jehoshaphat was frightened so he declared a fast throughout Judah and summoned his people to come seek the LORD. He stood before a large assembly who had gathered at the temple in Jerusalem and began to pray. As he did so, Jehoshaphat remembered how God had brought

His people out of Egyptian captivity and settled them in the Promised Land. He spoke of how their ancestors had left the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites alone for the most part during those former days and lamented that these nations had now risen up against them. As all of Judah's families listened intently to his prayer, Jehoshaphat pleaded with God to deliver his powerless kingdom from their enemies' mighty hands.

III. ASSURANCE & SUCCESS (2 Chronicles 20:14-30)

Then, in the midst of the assembly, the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the prophet. He assured Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah that God would deliver them from the invading multitude. He foretold the path by which the enemy would approach and instructed the army of Judah to meet them for battle. However, Jahaziel prophesied that Judah would not need to fight, but rather simply watch and behold God overthrow the opposition. Upon hearing the message, Jehoshaphat, the Levites, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem joyfully praised and worshiped the LORD.

Early the next morning, the army of Judah went out to meet the approaching adversary. Jehoshaphat encouraged them to trust in the LORD and the word of His prophets. He appointed singers to go before the soldiers singing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. As soon as they began singing, the multitude of Moabites, Ammonites, and others were overcome with supernatural confusion and began fighting each other

When the men of Judah came near they looked from a distance. They saw that the enemy had completely destroyed itself and slain bodies were scattered across the landscape. It took 3 days for Jehoshaphat and his troops to gather the abundant spoils that were left on the battlefield, including various goods, garments, and valuables.

On the 4th day, Judah's army assembled in the valley of Beracah and blessed the LORD. Then they returned triumphantly to Jerusalem, singing and playing musical instruments as they came. When word spread of how God had fought for Judah, the surrounding nations were again filled with dread and resumed their previous policy of keeping the peace with Jehoshaphat.

IV. DISPLEASED & DESTROYED (1 Kings 22:47-50; 2 Chronicles 20:31-37)

Sometime later Jehoshaphat engaged in a joint initiative with Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, king of Israel. Together they built a fleet of merchant ships to travel to Tarshish and import gold from Ophir. However, Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahaziah was displeasing to God, just as his alliance with Ahab had been. Eliezer the prophet told him that the LORD would destroy his fleet. Sure enough, for reasons not stated in Scripture, the ships were broken at Ezion-geber.

CONCLUSION

Jehoshaphat was a good, righteous king who initiated and oversaw many reforms in Judah to bring his people closer to God. That said, he seemed to have a tendency to entangle himself in

bad alliances. As we read last week, he foolishly joined forces with wicked King Ahab to fight against Aram. After being decimated and barely escaping with his life, Jehoshaphat was rebuked for his poor decision. His reputation of strength was damaged, which may have been a motivation for the invasion of the Moabites and Ammonites which we studied this morning. Though God delivered him, apart from his alliance with Ahab the LORD's intervention may not have been necessary.

A few years later, seemingly having learned nothing from his previous misstep, Jehoshaphat teamed up with Ahab's contemptible son Ahaziah to build a merchant fleet of ships, apparently to serve both Judah and Israel. Once again, he was rebuked for his foolishness. God destroyed the ships so that they were rendered unusable and the project was a failure.

These aren't the only outcomes of Jehoshaphat's unwise alliances with Ahab and his corrupt family. He allowed his son Jehoram to marry Athaliah, Ahab and Jezebel's awful daughter. This decision would result in disastrous consequences also, as we will discover in a few weeks.

The Bible teaches us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This command is often applied to marriage, but it is also appropriate in many other circumstances. We should avoid becoming allied, partnered, or contractually bound with evil, ungodly people or groups. Such associations and relationships are a recipe for trouble.

Ahaziah's Messengers Meet Elijah

Originally preached on 6/30/2024

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. - James 4:10

Good morning. Today's message is the 12th in our current sermon series titled, "The Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms". We will read the last few verses of 1st Kings and then move into 2 Kings. Did you know that when the book of Kings was originally written, it was not divided into 2 parts? It was separated later when the Bible was being canonized.

Last Sunday we discussed the reign of King Jehoshaphat in Judah. We mentioned his partnership with Ahaziah to construct a fleet of merchant ships. As you may recall, God was displeased by this alliance and He destroyed these ships. This morning, we will read a bit more about Ahaziah and his short kingship over Israel.

I. AHAZIAH BECOMES KING (1 Kings 22:51-53)

In approximately 877 BC, after his father Ahab was killed during a battle against Aram, Ahaziah became king of Israel. His reign began during the 17th year of King Jehoshaphat in Judah, and lasted for just 2 years. Ahaziah lived in and ruled from the capital city of Samaria. Like his father and mother, Ahab and Jezebel, he was an evil king who walked in the ways of Jeroboam and led the northern kingdom into sin. Ahaziah served and worshiped Baal which, as we will discover in this message, provoked the LORD to anger.

II. ELIJAH'S DIRE PROPHECY (2 Kings 1:1-8)

After Ahab's death, the neighboring kingdom of Moab rebelled against Israel. We read last week of their uprising against Judah as well. At some point, Ahaziah fell through a lattice in the upper chamber of his palace. As a result of the injuries he sustained, Ahaziah became seriously ill. So he sent messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron to inquire of their god Baal-zebub whether he would recover from his sickness or not.

Meanwhile, the LORD spoke to Elijah the prophet and instructed him to go and intercept the king's messengers. He was to sarcastically ask them if they were seeking answers from Baal-zebub because there was no God in Israel to inquire of. Elijah told the messengers to tell Ahaziah that he would surely die. So the messengers returned to Samaria, having never gone to Ekron, and surprised the king by their early arrival. When they told him the foreboding message they'd received, Ahaziah asked them to describe the prophet they encountered. As they did so, King Ahaziah realized that they had spoken with Elijah.

Of course there was a god in Israel that Ahaziah could have sought out - Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the 1 and only true and living God. Baal-zebub, which means "the lord of the flies", was another of many false deities. Over the centuries, Beelzebul came to be synonymous with Satan. In the gospels, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons

by the power of Beelzebul (their manifestation of Baal-zebul) rather than that of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:22-28, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:14-20).

III. FIRE FROM HEAVEN (2 Kings 1:9-16)

Enraged, Ahaziah sent a captain and his 50 soldiers to find, arrest, or possibly even kill Elijah. When they arrived, he was perched up on top of a hill. The captain demanded that he come down. Elijah answered, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your men." At that moment, fire fell and burnt up the captain and his soldiers.

When the king heard what had happened, he sent another captain with 50 more men. Once again, they found Elijah on top of the hill and ordered him to come down. Elijah called fire down from heaven and it consumed them, too.

Furious, Ahaziah sent a 3rd captain with 50 men. This time, however, when they found Elijah, the captain humbly pleaded for Elijah to spare their lives. An angel of the LORD told Elijah to go down to them, which he did, and was subsequently taken to the king. Upon his arrival, Elijah boldly rebuked Ahaziah for inquiring the word of Baal-zebul rather than God, and again stated that he would surely die.

Beloved, the LORD is a jealous God. He is provoked and offended when we seek out other gods rather than Him. He is rightly angered when we turn to others for answers instead of our all-knowing Creator. This is especially egregious when we should know better and do it anyway.

IV. AHAZIAH DIES AS PREDICTED (2 Kings 1:17-18)

And so, in the days that followed, Ahaziah died just as Elijah had spoken. He had no son and so his brother, Jehoram, another of Ahab's children, became king over Israel in his place. Ahaziah's death and the coronation of his brother Jehoram in Samaria took place during the 18th year of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:1) which was also the 2nd year of Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram in Judah. This means that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram served as co-regents for a few years in the southern kingdom.

This period of the divided kingdom era can get a bit confusing because the kings in Israel and Judah had the same name - both were named Jehoram (also called Joram). Also, due to the marriage with Athaliah, they were relatives - brother in laws to be specific. What's more, Ahaziah of Israel, who we spoke about this morning, was the deceased uncle of Ahaziah of Judah, who we'll discuss in a few weeks. I've included a diagram (see below) to help us keep this straight.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Ahaziah wanted to hear a message of life. He longed to hear good news of restoration, hope, and deliverance. Don't we all? But rather than turning to God, the Giver of Life, he sought salvation from Baal-zebul. Because of his idolatry and sin, the LORD decreed

through Elijah that he would certainly die. Instead of being convicted and repenting of his evil ways and misplaced faith, Ahaziah decided to harm God's prophet for speaking the truth.

Ultimately, King Ahaziah died. So did the 1st and 2nd commanders and each of their 50 men because they did not recognize or respect the authority and power of God and His prophet. But the 3rd commander acknowledged the LORD, humbly bowed before Elijah, and pleaded for his life and that of his soldiers. He did not turn elsewhere for salvation (like Ahaziah did), he did not discount or demean God's prophets (like the 1st commander did), nor did he foolishly overlook the clearly demonstrated power of God (like the 2nd commander did).

Beloved, we are all dying as the just consequence of our sin and there is only 1 source of forgiveness and eternal life. Rather than seeking other futile alternatives, rather than railing against the truth and seeking to harm those who speak it, and rather than ignoring the abundant evidence of His almighty power, why don't we instead bow before the LORD and receive the life He offers? Friends, God will extend favor to and spare those who humbly submit and surrender their lives to His Son, Jesus Christ. Will you trust Him for salvation today?

From Elijah to Elisha

Originally preached on 7/7/2024

You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He [Jesus] must increase, but I [John the Baptist] must decrease. - John 3:28-30

This morning we are going to turn our attention away from the kings of Judah and Israel. Instead, we are going to discuss the prophet Elijah and his successor Elisha. Following the chronology of 2 Kings, the events we'll cover this morning occurred soon after the death of Ahaziah and the crowning of Jehoram (his brother) as ruler over the northern kingdom.

It is important to remember that Elijah had already selected Elisha to become his replacement a few years earlier during the reign of King Ahab. In fact, Elisha had left his family and home behind in order to follow Elijah as his disciple (1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21). Therefore, these 2 prophets had known each other and even ministered together for a while. In today's message, we will read about the official "passing of the torch" from Elijah to Elisha.

I. JOURNEY TO THE JORDAN (2 Kings 2:1-8)

The Lord instructed Elijah to go to Bethel. Elijah told his disciple Elisha to stay behind, but he insisted on going with him. So the 2 men departed from Gilgal and came to Bethel. When they arrived, the sons of the prophets there asked Elisha if he knew that the LORD intended to take his master away from him that day. Elisha indicated that he was aware of God's plan and encouraged them to remain calm.

Then the Lord instructed Elijah to continue on to Jericho. Again he asked Elisha to stay behind, but Elisha insisted on going with him. When they reached Jericho, the sons of the prophets there also asked Elisha if he knew that God planned to take Elijah his master away, and Elisha said, "Yes, I know, but don't be troubled by it."

Then the Lord instructed Elijah to keep going to the Jordan River. Elijah asked Elisha to stay in Jericho, but insisted on going so the 2 men went together, accompanied by 50 sons of the prophets. When they arrived at the Jordan, Elijah took off his mantle and struck the waters. The river parted and he and Elisha crossed over on dry ground to the opposite side while the 50 sons of the prophets stayed put and watched from a distance.

Apparently God had already revealed His intentions to Elijah, Elisha, and the sons of the prophets in both Bethel and Jericho. They already knew that the LORD was about to formally replace Elijah with Elisha as the prominent prophet in Israel. In fact, they were somewhat unsettled by it so Elisha tried to reassure them and relieve their anxiety.

II. TRANSLATION AND SEARCH (2 Kings 2:9-18)

Having crossed to the opposite side of the Jordan, Elijah asked Elisha if there was any departing thing he might do from him. Elisha asked for a double-portion of Elijah's spirit to be upon him. Elijah answered that if Elisha was able to see him being taken away, it would be a sign that God had granted his request. As they were walking, suddenly the 2 men were separated by a fiery chariot and flaming horses and Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind to heaven as Elisha watched. As he was whisked away, Elijah dropped his mantle to the ground. Elisha mourned his master's departure, took up the mantle (signifying the transition of office), and used it to divide and cross back over the river.

The 50 sons of the prophets, who had observed everything from a distance, declared that Elijah's spirit now rested on Elisha. They asked Elisha if they might go search for Elijah in the surrounding area and perhaps find where God had taken him. Elisha discouraged them from doing so, but they insisted until he consented. They searched for Elijah for 3 days and were unable to find him. When they called off the search, Elisha said, "I told you not to go."

The traditional view is that Elijah was taken up into Heaven, where God the Father abides. However, many contemporary Bible students (myself included) disagree with this assessment. I tend to think that Elijah was translated to another somewhat distant and discrete location on the earth where he later died in obscurity. Here are a few (but not all) of the reasons why I hold this opinion. First, the Hebrew word for heavens in this passage is most often translated "sky" elsewhere in the Bible. Second, the fact that the witnesses wanted to look for him suggests that he was taken away across the sky, not up into Heaven. Third, as we'll read in a few weeks, some years later King Jehoram of Judah received a letter sent from an unknown location that was written by Elijah (2 Chronicles 21:12-15). Fourth, there are examples of instantaneous relocation to another place on the earth in both John (6:21) and Acts (8:39-40). Fifth, and most significant to me, Jesus explicitly said that He was the first person to ascend into Heaven (John 3:13) - not Elijah (or Enoch for that matter).

III. RETURN TO SAMARIA (2 Kings 2:19-25)

After the failed search for Elijah, the people of Jericho informed Elisha that the city's water was bad and, accordingly, the land was unfruitful. He requested that they bring him a new jar that had been filled with salt. He went out to the principal spring that supplied Jericho's water. He sprinkled some salt into it and declared that the Lord had miraculously purified the water. Sure enough, the waters were cleaned and have remained clear and good ever since.

Elisha went up from there to Bethel. He was met by a large hoard of "young lads" from the city. They ruthlessly mocked him, shouting, "Go up, baldhead!" He looked at them and cursed them in the name of the LORD. 2 female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the lads. Elisha continued on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.

This episode is often perceived to be quite disturbing and incomprehensible. It has been depicted as a rash and impulsive decision by an insecure prophet to curse children leading to

their violent deaths, simply because they were name-calling him. But, upon further study, the same Hebrew word translated “children” in the King James Version of this passage is also used regularly in Scripture to refer to young men or servants. Furthermore, they were taunting Elisha to “go up” like Elijah had done, apparently well aware of Elijah’s miraculous translation. This makes me wonder if these young men were the aforementioned “sons of the prophets” in Bethel, or were affiliated with them in some way. Regardless, a more apt understanding of this story is that a large group of informed young men confronted Elisha, bitterly questioning and scornfully doubting his credentials as Elijah’s rightful successor, and were judged by God for their dismissive behavior. This is comparable to those who accepted John the Baptist as legitimate, but then despised and rejected Jesus who followed thereafter.

CONCLUSION

A major theme of today’s message is the transition of status from Elijah to Elisha. For the past several years, Elijah had been the premiere prophet in Israel. Among other things, he had announced the beginning and ending of the drought, he’d blessed the widow’s flour and oil so that it would not run out, he’d raised her young son from the dead, he’d challenged the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, he’d called fire down from heaven 3 times (once to consume a sacrifice and twice to consume a captain and his soldiers), and he had given specific prophecies of doom to Ahab, Jezebel, and Ahaziah. When you have been successful in ministry like Elijah was, sometimes it can be hard to step aside and let others lead, but he did so gracefully and in spectacular fashion. Passing the baton takes a measure of humility.

Likewise, it can be difficult to follow in and step out of the shadow of a great leader. Elisha had some big shoes to fill and, naturally, he felt some degree of pressure. This is why he asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit to be upon him, and it explains why all of the sons of the prophets were somewhat nervous about the change. Would Elisha be up to the challenge? Could he rise to the level of his mentor? Could he become the great man of God that Elijah was? Obviously there were some “haters” in Bethel who didn’t think so. Only time would tell...

Beloved, I close with this simple thought... We have led our own lives long enough. It is time to hand the reins over to Jesus and give him control. We must decrease, and He must increase.

Jehoram Subdues Moab's Rebellion

Originally preached on 7/14/2024

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. - Hebrews 11:1

Good morning. In last Sunday's message, we discussed the memorable transition from Elijah to Elisha as the leading prophet in Israel. We will talk a lot more about Elisha and his remarkable ministry in the coming weeks, including some today. That said, our primary emphasis this morning will be on the kings of the northern and southern kingdoms and yet another alliance between them.

I. JEHORAM BECOMES KING (2 Kings 3:1-3)

After his brother Ahaziah's death, Jehoram became the king of Israel during the 18th year of Jehoshaphat in Judah. Jehoram, the son of Ahab, reigned for 12 years and did evil in the sight of the LORD although not to the extent of his parents. To his credit, he did put away the sacred pillar of Baal that Ahab had made. Nevertheless, he clung to the sins of Jeroboam and led the northern kingdom further into idolatry and wickedness.

II. MOAB'S REBELLION & ISRAEL'S ALLIANCE (2 Kings 3:4-12)

During the reign of King Ahab, the Moabites paid an annual tribute to Israel consisting of lambs and ram's wool. But after Ahab's death (and Ahaziah's), Mesha, the king of Moab, rebelled against the northern kingdom. In response, Jehoram called his army together and sought the assistance of neighboring Judah. Jehoshaphat, who had always stood with Israel in the past, readily agreed to fight alongside Jehoram to quell Moab's rebellion. Jehoshaphat suggested that their alliance should attack Moab from the south, via the desert wilderness of Edom.

So the combined forces of Israel, Judah, and Edom journeyed through the arid wilderness for 7 days slowly making their way toward Moab. Unfortunately, they were unable to find any water for themselves or their animals. They became increasingly weak and dehydrated. King Jehoram moaned that God was against them. Jehoshaphat asked if there was a prophet of the LORD available for them to inquire of, and Jehoram's servant suggested Elisha. Therefore, the 3 kings went to speak to him.

This scenario is reminiscent of an earlier alliance between Israel and Judah in their battle against Aram (1 Kings 22). On that occasion, Jehoshaphat agreed to fight alongside Ahab and insisted that they consult with a prophet of the LORD before going to war. They spoke with Micaiah, who prophesied against the battle, but they stubbornly moved forward with it anyway. As you may recall, things didn't end well for either Israel or Judah. Would this time be different?

III. ELISHA'S MESSAGE (2 Kings 3:13-20)

Elisha was well aware of Israel's long history of wickedness and idolatry. When the 3 rulers arrived and King Jehoram asked Elisha for his counsel, the prophet's initial and rather flippant response was "go ask your parents' prophets and gods". Jehoram expressed his grave fear that God intended to give the over to the Moabites, but Elisha wasn't moved by his despair. He bluntly responded that the only reason he was even meeting with this trio was for the sake of Jehoshaphat, the righteous God-fearing king of Judah.

Elisha asked that a minstrel, that is, a musician, be brought to him. When the minstrel began to play, the hand of the LORD came upon him and he told the kings to fill the valley with trenches. Elisha explained that, though they would not actually see any wind or rain occur, God would suddenly fill the valley with water to supply their needs. Besides this, the LORD would also give them the victory over Moab. They were instructed to strike Moab's prominent cities, fell its trees, stop its springs, and mar its land with stones. The next morning, God sent a sudden flash flood through the valley and water filled the trenches that had been dug.

This story serves as an example of how music can enhance our communication with the LORD. The word of God came to Elisha when the music played. There is no question that music is an important aspect of worship and sincere communion with the Holy Spirit. That said, music isn't always necessary for the Holy Spirit to move or for the LORD to reveal His word. Sadly, many churches in recent years, particularly some megachurches, have abused music to create an emotionally-charged "atmosphere" that replicates a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit with intense human feelings divorced from truth.

IV. ISRAEL'S VICTORY (2 Kings 3:21-27)

When the Moabites heard that Jehoram's united army was approaching, all of their fighting men girded themselves in armor and gathered at the border to intercept the invaders. Looking out over the valley before them, they saw the morning sunlight reflecting off the water-filled trenches and it appeared to them as blood. They thought that the allied forces had slain each other, so they broke ranks and descended into the valley to gather spoils.

When the Moabites entered the camp disorganized and unaware, Israel and her allies ambushed and slaughtered them. The alliance then set about destroying all the cities and lands of Moab just as the LORD had directed. Realizing the battle was lost, the king of Moab took 700 sword-wielding soldiers and made a final, desperate attempt to escape. When he was unable, he sacrificed his eldest son (who was to be his successor) as a burnt offering, presumably to appease their pagan god(s). Shocked and appalled by his crazed despair, Israel called off their advance and returned to their own land. Nevertheless, the Moabite rebellion had been crushed.

CONCLUSION

This passage provides a clear illustration of true, saving faith. The combined armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom were exhausted from a week-long trek through the desert. They needed water to sustain and revive them. Their situation had grown desperate. That said, God promised

to provide them the water they needed, but in order to receive it they had to do something - dig ditches. Now If you've ever done any digging, you know that it's not easy work... especially when you are already worn-out. But, by faith, they obeyed with the confident expectation that God's promises were true. Had they not done so, God's blessing would have been lost. Sure enough, when the waters came, they were prepared. The waters they captured not only provided for their thirst, but were also (in a rather peculiar way) the means by which they defeated the Moabites.

Beloved, genuine faith acts in a manner that anticipates the promises and truths of God. It is not merely belief, but rather a lifestyle of obedience, behavior, and speech that is firmly based on and securely rooted in that belief. It is not just a confession, but rather a daily commitment to "take up your cross and follow" Jesus (Luke 9:23). It is living today in accordance with an expected outcome tomorrow. Anyone can say they believe and perhaps, on some level, they do, but saving faith provides tangible evidence. It is supported by hard, tedious, and often thankless, work. My friends, true, saving faith digs ditches.

The Miracles of Elisha

Originally preached on 7/21/2024

You are the God who works wonders [miracles]; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. - Psalm 77:14

Earlier in this series, as you may remember, there was a sermon titled, “The Miracles of Elijah”. It was based on 1 Kings 17 and 18. In that message, we read that Elijah blessed the widow’s flour and oil so that neither would run out during the years of drought. We also learned that when her young son died, by God’s divine might Elijah raised him from the dead. In this morning’s message, “The Miracles of Elisha”, we will see some striking parallels between the ministry of these 2 great Old Testament prophets.

I. THE WIDOW’S OIL (2 Kings 4:1-7)

Elisha was a leader of the sons of the prophets, a group of students and disciples with whom he met and taught on a regular basis. The widow of 1 of these young disciples approached Elisha and told him that her husband, his servant, had died and left her in debt. Their creditor was planning to take her 2 sons as slaves. Elisha asked the widow if she had any assets with which to pay him, and she answered that all she had was a large jar of oil.

Elisha instructed the widow to gather as many jars, bottles, and empty vessels as she could find. She collected them from neighbors, friends, and any one who’d donate. Then, following Elisha’s command, she went into a private room and began to pour the oil from her single jar into these many empty vessels. Miraculously, it filled vessel after vessel until all she had collected were full. When she finished, Elisha told her to go sell the oil necessary to pay her debt and that she and her sons could live on the rest.

This miracle is striking to me in that God’s provision was only limited by the widow’s capacity to receive it. Had she gathered even more jars and bottles to fill, the LORD would have presumably provided even more oil for her and her sons. While she certainly received plenty to meet her immediate needs, I can’t help but wonder if she missed out. Could it be that sometimes we miss the fullness of God’s blessing because we limit it in some way ourselves?

II. THE SHUNAMMITE’S SON (2 Kings 4:8-37)

During his travels, Elisha often passed through the village of Shunem, located near the Jezreel Valley. There was a prominent woman in the village, along with her husband, who often provided meals to Elisha whenever he was in town. In fact, she even prepared a small room for him in their upper chamber with a bed, table, chair, and lamp where he could stay overnight.

In return for her kindness, Elisha asked the Shunammite woman if there was anything he might do for her - perhaps put in a good word with the king or captain of the military. She answered that neither of these suggestions was necessary and that she was content as she was. Gehazi,

Elisha's servant, pointed out that she didn't have a son and that her husband had passed his child producing years. So Elisha told the woman that she would have a son. At first she didn't believe him, but sure enough she conceived and gave birth to a baby boy the next year.

The infant grew into a young boy, and 1 fateful morning he complained of severe head pain. Sadly, the child died at noon and his mother took him to the upper chamber and laid his body on Elisha's bed. Leaving him there, she hastily departed for Mt. Carmel to find Elisha. He saw her approaching and sent Gehazi to go greet her. She did not tell Gehazi what had happened, but instead waited until she reached Elisha.

Upon hearing the tragic news, Elisha gave his staff to his younger and faster servant Gehazi and instructed him to rush, non-stop, to Shunem and lay it on the deceased boy's face. Gehazi did so, but there was no response. He returned to tell Elisha, who had himself departed for Shunem at this point, albeit at a slower pace, along with the child's mother.

When Elisha arrived, he went alone into the upper room, prayed, and stretched himself out on the boy's body. It suddenly became warm. Elisha walked down into the house, then back up to the room, and laid on the child again. This time the lad sneezed 7 times and opened his eyes. Elisha then called for the Shunammite woman to come, so she entered the room, saw her resurrected son, bowed in thanksgiving and awe before the prophet, and finally gathered her son in her arms and left. Elisha had raised him from the dead!

III. THE POISONOUS STEW (2 Kings 4:38-41)

When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. He asked a servant to prepare a large pot of stew for him and the sons of the prophets there. Someone went out to the field to gather herbs and found several gourds growing on a wild vine. Not knowing what they were, they took the gourds, sliced them, and cooked them in the stew. When the sons of the prophets began to eat, they immediately felt uneasy, realized that the stew was poisonous, and cried out in desperation. Elisha took some meal (ground seed), threw it into the pot, and the stew was miraculously remedied and made safe to consume. Everyone then ate safely. God had taken that which was tainted and bad and made it pure and good.

IV. THE LOAVES AND GRAIN (2 Kings 4:42-44)

A man came up from Baal-shalishah and brought Elisha 20 barley loaves and ears of grain that he'd taken from the first fruits of his harvest. He told Elisha to give them to the people so that they might eat, perhaps referring to the sons of the prophets. Nevertheless, his attendant openly doubted that this would be enough food to feed them all... some 100 people in total. Elisha answered with the word of the LORD, stating that it would be more than enough. So they set the food before the people, they all ate their fill, and there were leftovers just as the LORD had spoken.

This miracle is similar to the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 which are recorded in the gospels. On both of these occasions, Jesus fed the multitudes with just a few fish and loaves of bread. In both instances, there was food leftover afterward. These types of miracles demonstrate the marvelous and supernatural power of God to take little and multiply it above and beyond our needs. We can trust in the LORD's provision.

V. THE FLOATING AXEHEAD (2 Kings 6:1-7)

The sons of the prophets decided that their living quarters were too cramped and they wanted to expand. With Elisha's blessing, they went down to the Jordan River to gather beams of timber in order to build additional, meager living spaces for themselves. They asked Elisha to join them, which he did, and when they arrived they began cutting down trees. As they were doing so, 1 of the men cried out that the axehead had slipped off the handle of his borrowed ax and had flown into and sunk to the bottom of the river. Elisha came over and asked him to indicate the general area where it had fallen. When the man showed him, Elisha cut off a stick and threw it there, miraculously causing the heavy iron axehead to float to the top. Seeing it resting on the waters, Elisha told the man to take it, which he did and presumably repaired the ax.

This peculiar little miracle demonstrates God's ability to find lost things. It reminds me of the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. On a personal note, over the years I've dropped wedding rings (yes, plural), multiple cell phones, my favorite childhood teddy bear, rods, reels, tackle, and all sorts of other stuff in the lake. Maybe I should take Elisha with me the next time I go fishing, you know, just in case...

CONCLUSION

The miracles we've discussed this morning took place at various times during the reign of King Jehoram in Israel. Elisha had a remarkable ministry which lasted well over 50 years, more than twice as long as Elijah's. Depending on who's count you use, there are 14 miracles attributed to Elisha in the book of Kings, exactly twice as many as the 7 that are credited to his predecessor Elijah. These numbers make sense of course, seeing that Elisha received a "double-portion" of Elijah's spirit. We will talk more about Elisha's amazing accomplishments next Sunday.

Naaman and Gehazi

Originally preached on 7/28/2024

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. - Luke 4:27

According to the Biblical record, Elisha performed more miracles than any other Old Testament prophet. In just the past 2 weeks, we've discussed several of these miracles including the parting of the Jordan River, the purification of Jericho's tainted water supply, the provision of oil to pay a widow's debt, the physical resurrection of the Shunammite woman's deceased son, the purification of poisonous stew, the multiplication of bread and grain, and the floating axhead. This morning we will highlight yet another of Elisha's many miracles and talk about the unfortunate events that followed.

I. NAAMAN SEEKS A CURE (2 Kings 5:1-7)

Naaman was the captain of the army of Aram (Syria in the New Testament). Perhaps you may recall that the Arameans were bitter enemies of the northern kingdom. They had fought repeatedly against Israel during the reign of King Ahab, and had even fatally wounded him during 1 of their battles about a decade earlier. Naaman was a highly respected and revered man in Aram because of his great military success. Though he was a valiant and fearsome warrior, Naaman had contracted a dreaded case of leprosy.

Naaman's wife had a young Israelite girl who was her servant. The child had been captured and taken from her homeland by a marauding band of Arameans. Though she was young, the girl was aware of Elisha's miraculous power and wonderful deeds in Samaria. She wished Naaman could meet him and, perhaps, be healed of his leprosy. Based on her statement, Naaman had the king of Aram write a letter to the king of Israel requesting that he be cured. With the letter in hand, along with a sizable gift of gold, silver, and clothes, Naaman departed for Israel hoping to be cleansed of his leprosy.

When Naaman arrived, the king of Israel (Jehoram) read the letter that he'd carried with him. The king tore his clothes in dismay, fretting that he was not God and did not have the power to cure any one of leprosy! In fact, the king suspected that perhaps this whole episode was some type of a set-up or a pretext for Aram to make a quarrel with Israel.

II. NAAMAN IS HEALED (2 Kings 5:8-14)

Somehow Elisha learned that Naaman had come to Samaria and that the king of Israel was confounded by his seemingly impossible request for a cure. Elisha asked the king to send Naaman to him. So Naaman came, with his grand procession of horses and chariots, and arrived at the doorway of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger out to tell him to go wash himself in the Jordan River 7 times in order to be cleansed of his disease.

Naaman, a man of great renown and authority, went away furious and felt insulted that Elisha had not personally come out to meet him or to perform any type of miraculous healing. He huffed that the rivers of his homeland Damascus, the Abanah and the Pharpar, were much cleaner than the Jordan River and wondered why he couldn't wash himself there. But Naaman's servants reasoned with him, stating that if Elisha had told him to do some great thing he would have done it, so why not try this? Regaining his composure, Naaman went down to the Jordan and dipped himself in its waters 7 times. Amazingly, the leprosy disappeared and his skin was made clean like that of a little child.

This passage foreshadows and beautifully exemplifies that teaching of Christ that we are to "love our enemies". Jesus gave us this paradoxical command during the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5:43-45). Though she had been taken by him and his countrymen as a slave, the little servant girl still wished for the well-being of her master. Though the nation of Aram was a bitter enemy of Israel, still Elisha told Naaman how he could receive the LORD's healing. I am struck by their kindness and affection for Naaman.

III. GEHAZI'S GREED (2 Kings 5:15-27)

Naaman returned to Elisha's house to give him the generous gift he'd brought from Aram in appreciation for being healed. However, Elisha refused to accept the gift, despite Naaman's insistence. Before leaving, Naaman asked Elisha if he might take 2 mules' load of dirt with him. In ancient times, gods were believed to be isolated to individual nations or kingdoms based upon the boundaries of the land. By taking some dirt back to his home in Aram, Naaman hoped the God of Israel could become active in his house. Naaman also promised that, going forward, he would not worship any other god(s) but the LORD. He realized that, as a servant of the king, he'd still be required to make regular trips to the pagan temple of Rimmon and bow before him, so he asked Elisha to excuse him in this matter, as it would just be an act to appease his king. Elisha wished him well and Naaman departed.

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, thought to himself, "Why didn't Elisha take the generous gift that Naaman offered to give him? Surely I will take some of it." So Gehazi pursued and overtook Naaman's troop. He told Naaman that some guests had just arrived unexpectedly at Elisha's house and that he'd been sent to ask for a talent and silver and 2 changes of clothes for them. Naaman happily gave these things to Gehazi, who subsequently hid them in his house for himself. Then he hastily returned to his master Elisha who asked him where he'd been, and Gehazi lied about his whereabouts.

By divine revelation, God had already shown Elisha the truth of what Gehazi had done. Imagine Gehazi's surprise when Elisha described in detail what he thought he'd done in secret. Elisha bitterly rebuked Gehazi's deception and greed. As punishment, Elisha cursed Gehazi and his descendants forever with the leprosy of Naaman. Gehazi departed from the house a leper, covered in sores.

This story is similar to that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. They lied about the fullness of their giving and withheld a portion of it for themselves, believing that no one else would ever know. But Peter knew, and as a result both of them died. Or the story of Achin, who hid some of the forbidden spoils he'd taken from Jericho in his tent. When he was found out by Joshua, the Hebrew Children stoned him to death. Or David who concealed his sinful relationship with Bathsheba, only to be exposed by Nathan and then lose the child that was born as a result of their adultery. Beloved, the truth will come out sooner or later and unrepentant liars will be held accountable. Even if no one else knows your secret, God does (Hebrews 4:13).

CONCLUSION

A final thought... Naaman was a proud, accomplished man. He initially scoffed at Elisha's unusual prescription for healing his leprosy, supposing it to be a ridiculous and woefully inadequate proposal. In fact, he thought his solution was better. Fortunately, Naaman eventually humbled himself and complied with Elisha's instructions. As a result, he was healed.

In the same way, the Bible teaches us that the way of the cross seems foolish to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18). What a ludicrous and naive notion to believe that salvation would come freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. What type of idiot would believe that? Nothing in life is free - surely it must be purchased or earned. Yet, this "foolishness" is the gospel and repentance and surrender are the only means of salvation. It is sad to think about how many people are never cleansed of their sin because they stubbornly and arrogantly refuse to be washed in the blood of Christ.

More Trouble With Aram

Originally preached on 8/4/2024

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. - Psalm 34:7

In last week's sermon, we read how God extended his kindness to Naaman, the captain of the Aramean army, by healing his leprosy through the prophetic word of Elisha, the premiere prophet in Israel. You might think that such a magnificent act of grace shown to an enemy might change the hearts and attitudes of Aram toward Israel, and perhaps foster an end to their long-standing rivalry. Well, you'd be wrong...

In this morning's message, we'll see renewed hostilities between these 2 adjacent kingdoms. Due to the length of the passage today, I will not read every verse aloud so I encourage you to read those I skip over silently as I am preaching. That said, we will summarize and discuss the entire passage and, as always, look for applications.

I. ARAM'S PLOT TO CAPTURE ELISHA (2 Kings 6:8-23)

The king of Aram, most likely Ben-Hadad II, continued to engage in border skirmishes with the Israelites. In advance of these raids, he'd communicate his intentions to his officials. However, the LORD continually revealed his attack plans to Elisha who then relayed them to Jehoram, the king of Israel, so that the Israelites were always a step ahead of Ben-Hadad and able to thwart his efforts. After this happened several times, the king of Aram became upset and believed there to be a spy among his servants. When they explained to him that it was Elisha who foreknew his tactics, Ben-hadad dispatched soldiers to Dothan in hopes of capturing the prophet. They came by night and surrounded the city.

The next morning, Elisha and his servant went out and saw the forces of Aram circling the city. His servant was terrified, but Elisha told him not to be afraid, saying, "Those who are with us are more than those who are against us." Elisha prayed and the servant's eyes were opened to see a multitude of angelic horses and fiery chariots on the mountains all around them. As the enemy approached, Elisha prayed again, and the Lord struck them with blindness. Unable to see that it was him, they asked where Elisha was residing and he led them to Samaria.

When they arrived at the capital and were safely enclosed in the midst of the city, Elisha prayed for a third time and their eyes were opened. Immediately the soldiers of Aram were able to see and realized they had been led into a trap. The king of Israel asked if he should kill them all, but Elisha intervened. Instead, they prepared a feast for the captive Arameans, and afterwards released them. They returned to Aram and, as a result of this incident, their marauding bands stopped coming into Israel.

II. ARAM'S SIEGE ON SAMARIA (2 Kings 6:24-33; 7:1-2)

Despite his soldiers' release and safe return, King Ben-Hadad of Aram still felt strong animosity and bitterness towards Israel. Therefore, he sent his army to lay siege on Samaria. On top of the siege, there was also a great famine in Samaria. Due to their scarcity, the prices of food and other needed items skyrocketed. The situation became so desperate that the besieged people turned to cannibalism, with women sacrificing their own sons to eat. The king of Israel felt completely helpless and exasperated, and blamed God and Elisha for Israel's dire predicament. He angrily planned to execute the prophet.

Jehoram sent an executioner to go find and eliminate Elisha, who at the time was sitting in his house with a group of elders. Once again, however, the LORD revealed what was happening so that Elisha knew in advance the king's evil intentions. When the executioner arrived, Elisha wisely refused to let him in. The king, who had followed closely behind his executioner arrived also, and speaking through the door exclaimed, "The LORD has sent this calamity upon us. Why should we wait for His deliverance any longer?"

Safely secured inside, Elisha answered, "Tomorrow food and supplies will be so abundant for us that the inflated prices will drop precipitously." A royal officer of the king (perhaps the executioner) who was locked outside the house openly doubted Elisha's bold prediction and questioned how this could possibly be. Elisha assured him that it would happen, but added that, because of his doubt, he'd not eat any of it.

III. ARAM'S SUDDEN FLIGHT (2 Kings 7:3-20)

Now there were 4 leprous men seated at Samaria's entry gate who reasoned to each other that if they stayed there or went into the city they'd surely die. So they decided to surrender themselves to the Arameans, in hopes that they might be shown mercy and allowed to live. At twilight, they arose and went out to the enemy's camp only to discover that it had been abandoned and no one was there. For the LORD had caused the army of Aram to hear the sound of another great army approaching, and believing that they were about to be ambushed by hordes of Hittites and Egyptians, the Arameans had hastily fled in the night leaving all of their bountiful provisions behind.

When the lepers found the vacant camp, they joyfully ate, drank, and plundered treasures for themselves from tent to tent. However, remembering the plight of their countrymen back in Samaria, they felt a bit guilty of their celebratory behavior and decided that they must share this wonderful news with the people in the city. Therefore, they hurriedly returned to Samaria in the dark and told the king what they'd found. The king thought it was a trap, to lure Israel out of the city and ambush them, so he dispatched a small team to go check things out.

These scouts went out to Aram's camp and then continued tracking all the way to the Jordan River, finding all sorts of supplies and equipment that had been left along the way by the Arameans during their hasty retreat. They then returned to the capital and reported that it was just as the lepers had said. Upon hearing the news, the people of the city rushed out to the abandoned camp for food and supplies. The bounty was so great that the inflated food prices

fell dramatically, just as Elisha had prophesied. Furthermore, as they stampeded through the city gate, the people trampled the officer of the king who had doubted Elisha's words so that he died, just as the prophet had foretold. Miraculously, God had delivered Israel again!

CONCLUSION

Let me close today with 2 brief applications from this passage, though I am sure there are many more we could highlight and discuss. First, if you fear the LORD and are his redeemed child, you can trust that He will protect you from harm (outside of His will, that is). We are to pray accordingly. The LORD surrounds His own with angelic armies, so that those who are with us are more than those who are against us. Do not fear the enemy, because our God is bigger than he is, and His unseen forces are all around us.

Second, God has already defeated the enemy, Satan, and given us a great provision through His Son, Jesus Christ. He has won the victory and provided a means of salvation for everyone who will come and receive it. But friends, there are still many people "back in the city" who don't know what we know and have not yet heard the good news. So... will we keep the glorious message of salvation to ourselves and selfishly hoard the blessings of God, or will we, like these 4 lepers, go and share it with those who are desperate, sick, and dying that they might be delivered from their sin as we have been?

Jehoram and Jehoram

Originally preached on 8/11/2024

“Your [David’s] house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” - 2 Samuel 7:16

Following the Biblical sequence, Jehoram, the younger son of Ahab, became king over Israel in 2 Kings 1:17 after his childless, older brother Ahaziah died. Around this time, Elijah was translated into heaven and Elisha took his place as the prominent prophet in the northern kingdom. For the past several chapters (2-7) we have focused primarily on the ministry of Elisha during Jehoram’s 12 year reign. This morning, as we examine 2 Kings 8, it is safe to say that we have progressed in time just over a decade to near the end of Jehoram’s tenure.

In today’s sermon, we will discuss a final story from Jehoram’s rule in Israel, see a transition of power in the neighboring kingdom of Aram, and find out what’s been going on in the southern kingdom of Judah all this time. This message is titled “Jehoram and Jehoram”. It is the 18th installment of our current sermon series on the “Divided Kingdom Era”.

I. JEHORAM RESTORES PROPERTY (2 Kings 8:1-6)

Throughout most of Jehoram’s reign, there was a severe and long-lasting famine in Israel (2 Kings 4:38, 6:25, 7:4). Earlier during his kingship, Elisha had raised the Shunammite woman’s child from the dead (2 Kings 4:8-37). With these 2 facts in place, let us consider the passage described in the opening verses of 2 Kings 8, and discover (as Paul Harvey used to say) “the rest of the story...”

Going back a few years, after he had brought the Shunammite woman’s son back to life, Elisha had instructed her and her family to sojourn to another land because God had called for a 7 year famine to take place in Israel. She and her household went to Philistia, where they lived throughout the entire famine. When it ended, they returned to Israel and she met with King Jehoram to ask that her home and property might be returned to her. Apparently, it had been confiscated due to her family’s desertion.

The king spoke with Gehazi, who apparently was still Elisha’s servant at this point and had not yet contracted leprosy. He recalled how, some 7 years before, his master had raised the Shunammite’s son to life. Then the woman’s resurrected son appealed to the king and Gehazi confirmed their identity as the recipients of this great miracle. Upon hearing her second appeal, Jehoram restored the Shunammite woman’s property and produce to her. Thus, the family returned to and resettled in their abandoned home.

II. HAZAEL BECOMES KING OF ARAM (2 Kings 8:7-15)

Elisha went to Damascus, the capital of Aram (Syria), presumably to see Ben-hadad who was deathly sick. The king sent Hazael, his servant, to greet Elisha with a gift and ask if he would

recover from his illness. So Hazael brought the generous gift to Elisha and asked him about the king's fate. Elisha instructed Hazael to tell Ben-hadad that he would (given sufficient time) recover, but predicted that he would die (of other causes) before the recovery took place.

Then Elisha gazed deeply at Hazael and began to weep. When Hazael asked him why he was crying, Elisha answered that as the new king of Aram, Hazael would bring great calamity and destruction upon Israel. Hazael seemed surprised by the prophecy, but Elisha assured him that he would indeed become king and these terrible things would occur. So Hazael returned to Ben-hadad and told him that, according to the word of Elisha, he would surely recover from his sickness. But then, the very next day, the murderous and treacherous Hazael suffocated the ailing king with a wet cloth and usurped his place on the throne. Hazael's rise to become Aram's king had been foretold to Elijah years earlier during the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 19:15).

III. ANOTHER JEHORAM IN JUDAH (2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21:1-20)

In the 5th year of Jehoram's (aka, Joram's) reign in Israel, another man also named Jehoram replaced his father Jehoshaphat as the new king in Judah. So, for a few years, the kings of both the northern and southern kingdoms had the same name. Jehoram was 32 years old when he became the sole king of Judah after Jehoshaphat's death and he reigned for 8 years in Jerusalem. He had co-reigned with his father for around 6 years prior to this. Jehoram was married to Athaliah, the corrupt daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and was heavily influenced by her wicked ways. In order to secure his grip on the throne, he killed all of his brothers and several other rulers in the land. Jehoram did evil in the sight of the LORD, but God tolerated him for the sake of His covenant with David.

During his kingship, Edom revolted against Judah and set up a king for themselves. Jehoram and his army marched against and struck the Edomites, nevertheless its rebellion continued. So also, the city of Libnah (in Judah) revolted against Jehoram as well in outright objection to his evil rule and practice. Jehoram set up high places in the mountains of Judah to worship false gods and led the southern kingdom astray.

As his immoral reign wore on, Jehoram received a letter written by the prophet Elijah. It strongly condemned him for his evil ways and for forsaking the righteousness of his father Jehoshaphat and grandfather Asa. It went on to prophesy that the LORD was about to strike Jehoram's kingdom, his family, and his possessions. Furthermore, God would cause Jehoram himself to contract a terrible bowel disease. The receipt of this letter, as we discussed earlier in this series, suggests that Elijah was not taken up into Heaven but rather was translated to a remote location on the earth where he quietly kept abreast of the ongoing events in Israel and Judah which precipitated the writing of this letter.

Sure enough, not long after a combined force of Philistines and African Arabs came up against Judah, invaded it, and carried away the king's possessions, including all of his wives and sons except for Jehoahaz, his youngest, who was also called Ahaziah. Furthermore, Jehoram came down with a severe bowel disease. He suffered in extreme pain for 2 years before he finally

died. Jehoram (Joram) had been such a bad ruler that the people of Judah did not mourn or honor his death with fire (2 Chronicles 16:14). Though they did bury him in Jerusalem, they did not lay his body in the tomb of the kings.

CONCLUSION

As we come to the end of another message, let me make 3 observations from today's text. First, as it pertains to the Shunammite woman's property, we see that God is able to restore a land that has been abandoned and deserted years later to its rightful owner. In like fashion, the LORD providentially restored the Promised Land to Israel in 1948, almost 2,000 years after its independence had been lost. This land of milk and honey had been given to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by God as an eternal inheritance. The revival and restoration of Israel in its Biblical homeland is unprecedented in human history.

Second, the ascension of Hazael to the kingship of Aram is yet another example of the reliability of God's prophetic word. He had revealed this future occurrence to Elijah and had spoken it through Elisha. Once again, the truthfulness of God's word was confirmed. Over the next few weeks, we will read more about Hazael's evil leadership.

Third, Jehoram of Judah was 1 of the worst kings to ever rule over the southern kingdom. His father Jehoshaphat, who was a good and godly king for the most part, repeatedly allied himself with the northern kingdom and had allowed his son, Jehoram, to marry Ahab and Jezebel's daughter Athalia. Swayed by her wicked influence, Jehoram provoked God and led the people of Judah astray. His idolatrous actions almost led to the severing of David's royal dynasty. His story, and those which will follow in the coming chapters, vividly illustrate the danger of compromising with evil.

Ahaziah and Jehu

Originally preached on 8/18/2024

“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.” - Deuteronomy 32:4

Good morning. I hope that you have been enjoying our current sermon series, “The Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms”. More importantly, I pray that God has been speaking to you through these sermons. At this point, we are roughly halfway through this particular series. In today’s message we will talk about Ahaziah and Jehu. Ahaziah ruled briefly in Judah and Jehu was God’s chosen instrument to bring judgment upon the house of Ahab. Buckle up... today’s sermon is filled with treachery and violence. Ready? Here we go!

I. AHAZIAH BECOMES KING OF JUDAH (2 Kings 8:25-27; 2 Chronicles 22:1-4)

After co-reigning with his wicked father for about a year, Ahaziah became the lone king of Judah when Jehoram (Jehoshaphat’s son) died from his debilitating bowel disease. Though he was the youngest son, all of Ahaziah’s brothers had been carried away and slain by the Philistines and Arabs leaving him alone to succeed his father. His brief 1-year reign in Jerusalem began in the 12th year of Jehoram’s (Ahab’s son) kingship in Israel. Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became king and his mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Following her counsel, he was an evil and corrupt king just as his father Jehoram had been.

II. ELISHA’S SERVANT ANOINTS JEHU (2 Kings 9:1-13)

Once again, hostilities broke out between the northern kingdom and Aram. Jehoram and the Israelite army went up to battle against the forces of Hazael, the new king of Aram, at Ramoth-gilead, where they had dueled multiple times before. Ahaziah and the men of Judah fought as allies alongside Israel, just as they’d done in the days of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram.

Prior to the battle, while the Israelites were camped at Ramoth-gilead preparing to engage, Elisha sent 1 of his servants to find Jehu, take him aside privately, and anoint him to be the new king of Israel (refer back to 1 Kings 19:16). Jehu was a captain in the Israelite army. After finding him, Elisha’s servant took Jehu alone into a house, poured oil upon his head anointing him as king, and instructed him to obey the word of the Lord. God commanded Jehu to strike the house of Ahab and completely wipe out all of his male descendants, so as to cut-off Omri’s royal dynasty, just as had been done to Jeroboam’s and Baasha’s previously. Elisha’s servant also stated that Jezebel would be killed and that her unburied body would be eaten by dogs in the territory of Jezreel. After anointing Jehu and delivering this message, the servant fled.

When Jehu came out of the house, his colleagues asked him what had happened and why this crazed messenger had come to see him. Jehu said, “You know why,” to which they answered, “No we don’t.” So Jehu told them what had happened and how God had chosen him to become

the new king of Israel. His friends were delighted and they laid their garments on the steps before him, blew the trumpet, and cheerfully announced, "Jehu is king!"

III. JEHU ASSASSINATES BOTH KINGS (2 Kings 8:28-29; 9:14-29; 2 Chronicles 22:5-9)

Soon thereafter, the conflict between Israel and Aram began. During the fighting, King Jehoram was badly wounded and was taken away to Jezreel to rest and recover. While recuperating from his injuries, he became very sick. King Ahaziah, who was Jehoram's nephew, went down to visit him.

Meanwhile, Jehu, who was still defending Ramoth-gilead from the Aramaeans, asked his fellow soldiers if he might depart from the battlefield to go give a report to the ailing king at Jezreel. They agreed and Jehu departed with conspiracy on his mind. As he and his company approached Jezreel, Jehoram sent out a greeting party to meet them and ask if they had come in peace. However, the greeting party turned and joined forces with Jehu. So Jehoram sent another greeting party to inquire of Jehu's intentions and it happened again.

Finally Jehoram and Ahaziah, who had come to see him, went out (each in their own chariots) to greet Jehu in person. They met each other in the property of Naboth, whose vineyard had been stolen by Ahab a generation earlier (1 Kings 21). When Jehoram realized that it was a coup he turned to flee, but Jehu shot him in the heart with an arrow and he died. Jehu then instructed his officer to cast Jehoram's lifeless body onto the field of Naboth. He recalled an oracle of the Lord which he'd heard many years before stating that God would someday repay Ahab's household for the murder of Naboth and his sons on this very property.

When Ahaziah saw what had happened, he frantically fled by way of the garden house. Jehu instructed his companions to shoot him, too. So they pursued and found Ahaziah, who had attempted to hide, and they shot him also. Nevertheless, Ahaziah's chariot driver was able to escape to Meggido where King Ahaziah later died. His body was eventually returned to Jerusalem and buried. Meanwhile, word came to Jehu that Ahaziah had been killed and buried.

Remember, though he was the king of Judah, Ahaziah and his slain brothers were still Ahab's grandsons through their mother Athaliah and were therefore part of the extended household that God had charged Jehu to eliminate. Thus, Jehu also killed Ahaziah's nephews, the sons of his fallen older brothers. It seems that, after killing all of these princes, Jehu believed that he'd completely wiped out Ahab's male descendants in Judah. However, though Ahaziah was just 22 or 23 at the time of his death, he did have a few infant sons of his own that Jehu overlooked.

CONCLUSION

God commanded Jehu to eradicate Ahab's royal line by killing all of his male descendants, both in Israel and Judah. We will discuss Jehu's lethal assignment even further next week as we consider even more of his murderous actions. So far, we have read that he assassinated both

Jehoram the king of Israel (Ahab's son) and Ahaziah the king of Judah (Ahab's grandson), along with all of Ahaziah's nephews (Ahab's great grandsons). And Jehu was just getting started...

Stories like this often cause critics and nonbelievers to question or even slander God's character. How could a loving, compassionate God purposely execute such vengeance and wrath upon people, even bad people? Is this the type of God we should revere, love, and serve? (Absolutely yes!)

To address this issue, let us clarify that while God is loving, He is also equally just. While God loves His enemies and affords them an opportunity to repent, if they choose not to they will face His righteous judgment. Ahab and his descendants were bitter enemies of God and had been for decades. They worshiped Baal and led their kingdoms astray. The murder of Naboth was just 1 of countless evil things that they did. Sadly, through the marriage of his daughter, Ahab's wicked influence spread from Israel into Judah as well. God used Jehu to bring justice upon those who had brazenly practiced evil.

Imagine that someone in your own family was being persecuted and abused. Would it be loving to allow such atrocities to continue without any type of intervention? Friend, you can't "love" the oppressor at the expense of the oppressed. If you love someone you will hold them accountable for their actions. God loves His own, and His love from them is demonstrated in part by His judgment upon their tormentors. True love demands justice.

To be clear, God doesn't give Christians blanket permission to act as vigilantes exacting His righteous vengeance upon unrepentant sinners. On the contrary, He teaches us to turn the other cheek and to practice forgiveness, knowing that the LORD Himself will make all things right in due time. We are to endure suffering patiently, as we peacefully contend and pray for His perfect justice. At the same time however, there are several examples in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, of God using a specific person or nation to bring about judgment upon His adversaries. Jehu is such a figure. This is God's prerogative, not ours.

Here's the bottom line... whether now or later, we can be certain that ultimately God's justice will prevail.

Jehu Cleans House

Originally preached on 8/25/2024

And the Lord said to him [Hosea], "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel." - Hosea 1:4

Last week we read that the LORD selected Jehu to bring judgment upon the descendants of Ahab. Elisha's servant anointed him to become the new king of Israel and instructed him, by God's command, to completely cut off Ahab's royal line and to kill his household. Jehu began by assassinating Jehoram, the sitting king of Israel who was Ahab's son, and Ahaziah, the king of Judah, who was Ahab's grandson through his mother Athaliah. Thus, both the northern and southern kingdoms were directly impacted.

In this morning's message, we will continue discussing Jehu's murderous spree. His zealous efforts to eliminate Ahab's family and the lingering effects of their idolatry and pagan worship were quite extensive. I've titled today's sermon "Jehu Cleans House".

I. JEZEBEL IS SLAIN (2 Kings 9:30-37)

After assassinating both King Jehoram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah outside of the city, Jehu and his company rode on into Jezreel. Jezebel made herself up and looked out the window of the palace there. As Jehu entered the gate, she cried out to him, "Is it well Zimri?" She referred to Jehu as Zimri because the LORD had used Zimri to wipe out the house of Baasha a few generations earlier (1 Kings 16:8-14). Jehu looked up at the window and asked if any of the officials who were with Jezebel actually sided with him. When a few indicated that they were, Jehu ordered these traitorous officers to seize her and throw her down. They did so, and when Jezebel's body hit the ground her blood splashed on the wall and horses. Then Jehu trampled her body with his horse and chariot underfoot.

Unphased by Jezebel's death, Jehu went in to eat and drink and instructed his servants to go out and bury her. However, when his servants returned to retrieve her body, there was nothing left to bury but her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands. They informed Jehu and he responded that this was the fulfillment of prophecy. God had told Elijah that Jezebel's corpse would be eaten by the dogs in Jezreel and would become as dung in the field (1 Kings 21:23).

II. AHAB'S HOUSE IS DECIMATED (2 Kings 10:1-17)

Ahab had 70 "sons" (likely both sons and grandsons) living in the capital city of Samaria who were under the protection of a special guard. Jehu wrote letters to the leaders and elders of Samaria, including these guardians, challenging them to select a new king from among these sons and then prepare for battle. However, the leaders greatly feared Jehu's strength and didn't want to fight him. They wrote back expressing their allegiance to him and stated that they would not name any of Ahab's sons as the new king, but instead would do whatever he asked of them.

So Jehu wrote to them a second time and told them to execute all of Ahab's sons and bring their heads to him at Jezreel. Thus the great men of the city slaughtered Ahab's sons and brought their severed heads to Jehu in baskets. When they arrived, he had them placed in 2 heaps at the city gate. The next morning he declared to the people, "I killed Jehoram, but who killed all of Ahab's sons?" Jehu was declaring that, while he had been chosen as the leader of the conspiracy, clearly God was using other persons in conjunction with him to bring about judgment on Ahab's house. In addition to his 70 sons, Jehu also killed Ahab's officials, servants, priests, and other acquaintances in Jezreel.

Next, Jehu arose and departed for Samaria. Along the way, he met several of Ahaziah's relatives at Beth-eked. When he found out that they were kin to Ahaziah, the king of Judah whom he had recently assassinated, he seized them and murdered them also - 42 men in all. He also met Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, who expressed his support for the coup. Jehu invited Jehonadab to ride with him in his chariot and to witness his zeal for the LORD. When he finally arrived at Samaria, Jehu killed everyone left who remained loyal to Ahab.

III. BAAL WORSHIPERS ARE KILLED (2 Kings 10:18-36)

Once Ahab's house was wiped out, Jehu proclaimed a solemn assembly for Baal. He summoned all of the priests, prophets, and worshipers of Baal to gather at the temple of Baal in Samaria. He declared that all were required to attend, and any who were absent would be killed. So everyone who worshiped and/or served Baal came, and Jehu pretended as though he would follow Baal also as king, but it was a ruse.

When everyone had gathered in and filled the house of Baal, Jehu and Jehonadab ordered that garments be distributed to all of the Baal worshipers. They carefully determined that everyone present was allegiant to Baal and there were no followers of God in the crowd. Then they went in to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices. However, Jehu had secretly stationed 80 soldiers outside of the temple who awaited his order. After the burnt offering was complete, he commanded them to go in and kill all of the followers of Baal. In addition, he had them tear down and utterly destroy the house of Baal, and made it into a latrine.

Thus, Jehu completely eradicated the worship of Baal in Israel that had been implemented by Ahab and Jezebel. However, he still promoted the idolatrous worship of the golden calves that Jeroboam had set up in Bethel and Dan. God commended Jehu for destroying the house of Ahab and cutting off his royal line, however Jehu was still an unrighteous and ungodly king who led Israel into sin.

Jehu ruled from Samaria over the northern kingdom for 28 years. During his reign, Hazael and the Aramaens defeated Israel and cut off portions of their territory east of the Jordan River. The tribal lands of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were lost. When he died, Jehu was buried in the capital city and his son Jehoahaz became king in his place.

CONCLUSION

Jehu is an interesting figure in the Bible. On the 1 hand, he thoroughly obeyed God's command to eliminate the house of Ahab. He assassinated both Jehoram in Israel and Ahaziah in Judah. He ordered the deaths of Jehoram's 70 sons and their evil mother Jezebel. Perhaps he went a bit overboard in his murderous spree, killing many of Ahaziah's nephews and relatives, Jehoram's priests, servants, and acquaintances, and ultimately anyone in Samaria who remained loyal to Ahab - though none of these had any claim to Ahab's throne.

Whatsmore, Jehu took it upon himself to wipe out Baal worship in Israel. He ruthlessly slaughtered all of those who followed Baal. Though his actions were extreme, nevertheless the destruction of Baal's altar and temple were a good thing. The LORD commended Jehu for his obedience and promised that his sons would sit on the throne of Israel for 4 more generations.

On the other hand, God also condemned Jehu for the excessive bloodshed and violence he'd committed in Jezreel (and elsewhere). For his sin, Jehu's royal dynasty would eventually be cut off as well. While God was pleased by what Jehu had done, He was displeased with the manner by which he had done it. Jehu provides a clear illustration that the ends do not justify the means. It is not acceptable for someone to use sinful methods to accomplish righteous outcomes. It's not just where we go that matters, but how we get there...

Queen Athaliah

Originally preached on 9/1/2024

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born [of the Hebrews] you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive." Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. - Exodus 1:22-2:2

Over the past 2 weeks, we have learned how God used Jehu to cut off Ahab's royal dynasty. He assassinated Jehoram, Ahab's son, and took his place as the king of Israel. However, we also read that Jehu killed Ahaziah, Ahab's grandson, the king of Judah. So, while Jehu reigned over the northern kingdom, what happened in the south? Who took Ahaziah's place as the new leader of Judah? Would the line of David survive? This morning we will answer these questions with a message titled "Queen Athaliah".

I. JOASH IS HIDDEN (2 Kings 11:1-3; 2 Chronicles 22:10-12)

When Athaliah learned that her only remaining son, King Ahaziah, had been assassinated she sprung into action. She quickly rose up and destroyed all of the remaining royal offspring (or so she thought). During his violent rampage, Jehu had already killed Ahaziah's nephews and many of his other relatives. Now Athaliah set out to murder his young sons as well, her own grandsons mind you, so that she could rule over the southern kingdom.

By God's providence, Jehosheba, who was Ahaziah's sister, hid the slain king's infant son Joash in a bedroom in the palace with a nurse. Sadly, Athaliah killed all of his other baby boys. Thus, Joash was the only remaining royal descendant in the line of David. Eventually Jehosheba and her husband, Jehoiada the priest, smuggled Joash out of the palace and hid him in the temple. Apparently Athaliah was unaware of his existence and made no efforts to find him. She took the throne herself, and reigned as queen over Judah for 6 years.

As a new grandparent (my twin grandsons are 3 ½ months old right now), it is inconceivable to me how anyone could harm, much less kill, their own grandchildren. Those boys already have me and my wife wrapped around their fingers and they can't even roll over yet. I can't even begin to describe the disdain I have for Athaliah and those who murder babies and young children - including their own! It turns my stomach to even think about it.

II. JOASH IS CROWNED (2 Kings 11:4-12; 2 Chronicles 23:1-11)

In the 7th year, Jehoiada the priest sent for and gathered several captains of professional soldiers called Carites and other guards together in the temple. He made them promise not to reveal his secret, then he showed them Joash. He broke them and their respective companies up into 3 groups and gave each group specific commands for protecting the young boy. They were to guard the house of the LORD and watch its gates so that no unauthorized person could

enter. Furthermore, they were to surround Joash wherever he went and kill anyone who got too close to him.

These captains and their men dutifully obeyed Jehoiada's command. The priest even gave them spears and shields that had belonged to King David and had been stored in the temple for years. With their weapons in hand, these men guarded the house of the LORD from right to left, carefully protecting Joash.

When everything was secure, Jehoiada brought the king's son out of hiding for a grand coronation ceremony in the temple. He placed a crown on his head and charged him with upholding the Law. Then he anointed young Joash and declared him as the rightful king of Judah. All the people clapped their hands and rejoiced shouting, "Long live the king!"

Throughout my life I've heard various people say, "I grew up in church!". Well, in Joash's case, this was literally true. He was raised from his infancy in the temple. His upbringing was similar to Samuel, who was dedicated to God by his mother Hannah and left with Eli in the tabernacle while he was still just a baby. Joash was not influenced by his evil grandmother Athaliah, but rather was taught to fear and faithfully follow the LORD.

III. ATHALIAH IS KILLED (2 Kings 11:13-21; 2 Chronicles 23:12-21)

When Queen Athaliah heard all of the commotion, she hurried to the temple to see what was going on. Upon her arrival, she saw the king standing by the pillar in customary fashion with the captains and the trumpeters beside. She beheld all of the people celebrating and blowing trumpets. Athaliah tore her clothes and cried out, "Treason! Treason!"

Jehoiada commanded the captains of the army to seize her and bring her out of the temple. He instructed them to kill anyone who followed her. Jehoiada did not want her to be executed in the house of the LORD. So they brought Athaliah to the horses' entrance of the king's house and put her to death there.

Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, the king, and all the people that they would serve the LORD. The people of Judah went down to the house of Baal and tore it down. They destroyed its altars and images and even killed Mattan, the priest of Baal who resided there. Then Jehoiada appointed officials over the house of the LORD. He had young Joash brought up from the temple to the king's palace and seated him on the throne. Then all of the people rejoiced. For the first time in years, the city of Jerusalem was quiet. Athaliah, the wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who had infected the southern kingdom with her evil ways, was finally dead. Joash, who was just 7 years old, was the new king.

CONCLUSION

During the divided kingdom era there were a total of 40 ruling monarchs - 20 in Israel and 20 in Judah. Of them, 39 were kings and only 1 was a queen - wicked Athaliah. This makes her

unique among all of the leaders of the northern and southern kingdoms. Truth be told, her queenship was illegitimate because the rightful king was alive the whole time... he was simply concealed for his own protection. Nevertheless, Queen Athaliah reigned as the recognized ruler of Judah for half a dozen years.

It would be wonderful if Athaliah stood as a paragon of virtue and charity. There are other great women in the Bible, such as Deborah and Esther, who led God's people with courage and righteousness. Unfortunately, Athaliah led Judah into sin, provoking God by practicing and promoting Baal worship. She was a ruthless, vile person who murdered anyone who stood in her way. Athaliah and her mother Jezebel are arguably the 2 most wicked women in the entire Word of God.

As we close this morning, I want to urge all of the women listening to think about the disastrous influence that Athaliah had on her kingdom, her husband, and her children. Wives, don't be a detriment to your husbands. Mothers, don't teach and counsel your children to sin. On the contrary, model Christ's love to your families and aspire to be the virtuous women that God calls you to be - at home, at church, at work, and in your community. This is His will for your life.

Joash, The Boy King

Originally preached on 9/8/2024

[Paul and his team are] taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. - 2 Corinthians 8:20-21

Good morning. I hope you've all had a wonderful week and have come to God's house this morning expecting to hear from Him. After all, that's why we read and study God's Word. It is living and active, and the LORD speaks to us through it. He tells us things we need to know in order to live as He desires us to.

Today's message will concentrate on the southern kingdom of Judah. Queen Athaliah is dead and her young grandson Joash has been crowned as the new king. The evil influence of Ahab and Jezebel has finally passed. A new day has dawned in Judah, of hope, joy, and restoration.

I. JOASH REIGNS (2 Kings 12:1-3; 2 Chronicles 24:1-3)

During the 7th year of Jehu's reign in Israel, Joash became the king of Judah. He was just 7 years old when he took the crown, and he reigned for 40 years in Jerusalem. Joash's mother was named Zibiah and she was from Beersheba. Joash was a good king who did right in the sight of the LORD all the days that Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Still, the high places were not removed and there were those few who continued making sacrifices and burning incense to and for false gods. When he grew older, Jehoiada took 2 wives for him, and Joash became the father of several children.

II. THE TEMPLE IS REPAIRED (2 Kings 12:4-16; 2 Chronicles 24:4-14)

Joash decided to restore the temple which had fallen into disrepair over the years, due to age, neglect, and mistreatment. He reinstated the annual temple tax that was to be paid by all of the citizens throughout the kingdom of Judah, as prescribed in the law of Moses (Exodus 30:13-16). He charged the Levites with collecting it, intending to use the funds to finance the repairs.

In the 23rd year of his reign, apparently several years after beginning this project, no repairs on the temple had been made. Joash summoned Jehoiada and the priests and asked them why the damages to the temple were not being taken care of. They blamed the wicked sons of Athaliah for abusing God's house for the sake of Baal, but this still did not excuse their disobedience and lack of accountability. Joash decided to follow a different approach, with greater oversight, for gathering the necessary monies.

And so, at the king's command, Jehoiada the priest bore a hole in the lid of a large chest and placed it at the entrance of the temple. The people of Judah were decreed to bring their tax to Jerusalem personally and place it in the chest when making their required pilgrimage to the temple. They could also give voluntary donations if so led. Joash charged his scribe and the

high priest with counting the money in the chest and bringing it to the palace on a daily basis. These monies were collected and used to purchase lumber and supplies, as well as to pay the workers who'd begun work on the temple. The process was transparent, simple, efficient, and conducted in good faith, unlike it had been previously. And thus, after several years, the temple was finally renovated and the temple was again used as God intended.

III. JEHOIADA'S SON IS MURDERED (2 Chronicles 24:15-22)

Eventually, Jehoiada the priest died at the age of 130. He was so respected for all the good he'd done during his life that the people of Judah buried him with the kings in Jerusalem. Sadly, in the years following Jehoiada's death, Joash began listening to and following the voices of others who led him away from God. He began practicing and promoting idol worship and would not listen to the prophets who sought to bring him back to the LORD.

Emboldened by the Spirit of God, Zechariah, the son (most likely, the grandson) of Jehoiada, stood up and confronted Joash and the people for turning from the LORD. Furious and humiliated, Joash had Zechariah stoned to death in the temple court. Jehoiada the priest had been like a father to Joash, raising and counseling him throughout his lifetime, but Joash forsook this kindness and murdered Jehoiada's son (grandson). As Zechariah died, he cried, "May the LORD see and avenge!" (...which He did.) Centuries later, Jesus cited this incident when chastising the Pharisees (Matthew 23:35).

IV. HAZEAL INVADES JUDAH (2 Kings 12:17-18; 2 Chronicles 24:23-24)

During these years, Hazael, the king of Aram, had been quite active and successful in his military exploits. The Aramaens had already conquered and taken the territories east of the Jordan River from Jehu, the king of Israel (2 Kings 10:32-33). They had also invaded Philistia and captured the city of Gath. Then Hazael decided to attack Jerusalem itself. Though the army of Aram was relatively small, God gave it tremendous success. Joash took the sacred valuables and gold that was stored in the treasuries of the temple and the palace and gave them to Hazael in order to secure peace. Satisfied with this bountiful payoff, Hazael departed from Jerusalem.

IV. JOASH IS KILLED (2 Kings 12:19-21; 2 Chronicles 24:25-27)

In the end, Joash's own servants conspired against him. They assassinated him at the house of Millo, as he was going down to Silla. He was sick and in bed at the time of his murder. The conspirators who struck him down were Jozacar (aka, Zabad) and Jehozabad. The people of Judah buried Joash in Jerusalem, but not in the tomb of the kings. Then his son Amaziah became king in his place.

CONCLUSION

Though his name is not mentioned in either Kings or Chronicles, many scholars believe that the minor prophet Joel lived and wrote during the reign of King Joash. There is no explicit reference in the book of Joel to date it with certainty, and thus it must be done based on context clues. As such, different proposals have been made for the time of its writing. That said, for the purposes of this series, we will follow the traditional view and place it here. If correct, this would make Joel the 2nd oldest of the minor prophets, after Obadiah.

Getting back to the sermon, I want to consider how we can apply today's message. The most commonly preached lesson that I've heard from today's passage deals with the handling of finances, both within and outside the context of the church. Any time money is involved, especially large sums of money, it is imperative that those responsible for handling it are held accountable. Corruption and abuse are inevitable apart from the use of sound financial practices and clear visibility. The mismanagement of money has been the downfall of many people and organizations, including churches and ministers. We are wise to be careful and prudent when dealing with the collection and use of money.

Lastly, let me make 1 additional observation. The kingship of Joash demonstrates the importance of having godly mentors and role models in your life. As long as Jehoiada the priest was there to give him counsel and direction, Joash did well. But once Jehoiada was gone, Joash quickly turned away from God and went astray. This in turn led to disastrous consequences. Beloved, it is imperative that we surround ourselves with and heed the advice of righteous, God-fearing men and women.

Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Amaziah

Originally preached on 9/22/2024

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands. - Psalm 90:17

Hello again. In today's message we will consider 3 kings - 2 in the northern kingdom of Israel and 1 in the southern kingdom of Judah. Their names are Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Amaziah. As always, we will read from the book of 2 Kings and incorporate additional details from 2 Chronicles where appropriate. Are you ready? Here we go!

I. JEHOAHAZ STRUGGLES (2 Kings 13:1-9, 22-23)

During the 23rd year of Joash's reign in Judah, Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, became the new king of Israel. He reigned from Samaria for 17 years and did evil in the sight of the LORD just as Jeroboam had done. As a result, God's anger burned against Israel and He allowed Hazael and the Aramaeans to oppress them continuously. Over time, Jehoahaz's army was decimated and reduced to just 50 horsemen, 10 chariots, and 10,000 footmen. However, when Jehoahaz finally prayed for the LORD's favor, God listened and determined to deliver Israel from the heavy hand of Aram. Even still, the northern kingdom continued in its idolatrous ways. When Jehoahaz died, his son Jehoash (also called Joash) succeeded him as king.

II. ELISHA DIES (2 Kings 13:14-21)

During the early years of Jehoash's rule, the renowned prophet Elisha became gravely ill. By this point, Elisha was an old man who had served God faithfully for over 60 years. Jehoash went to visit the dying prophet and wept over him and the weakened military condition of Israel at that time. On his deathbed, Elisha instructed Jehoash to take a bow and arrow and shoot arrows out through the east window of the room. He prophesied that these arrows symbolized Israel's upcoming victory over Aram at Aphek. Then Elisha told Jehoash to strike the ground with the remaining arrows. The king did so 3 times, but Elisha became upset and explained that he should have done so 5 or 6 times. Because he only did so 3 times, Elisha prophesied that Israel's coming destruction of the Aramaeans would be incomplete.

After making this final prophecy, Elisha died and was buried. Sometime later, during the spring, a group of men were in the process of burying an anonymous man somewhere near Elisha's grave. When they saw a marauding band of Moabites approaching, they abandoned their own grave digging, hastily threw the man's body into Elisha's existing grave, and fled. When the body touched the remains of Elisha, the man was miraculously resurrected to life. This somewhat peculiar episode is the 3rd instance of physical resurrection recorded in the Bible, and likely occurred many years after Elisha's death.

III. JEHOASH SUCCEEDS (2 Kings 13:10-13, 24-25)

Jehoash became the king of Israel during the 37th year of Joash, king of Judah. He reigned from Samaria for 16 years. Like his father and all of the rulers in the northern kingdom, he walked in the sinful ways of Jeroboam and led Israel away from the LORD. Jehoash waged war against Amaziah for much of his reign. We will discuss this conflict more extensively next week. When Jehoash died, he was buried with the kings in Samaria and his son Jeroboam (that is, Jeroboam II) took the throne.

As mentioned in the previous point, Elisha prophesied to Jehoash early in his reign that he would defeat the Aramaeans, though not completely, and finally end their lengthy oppression of Israel. It was around this time that Hazael, the mighty king of Aram died, and was replaced by his son Ben-hadad (ie, Ben-hadad III). Ben-hadad was not the skilled military leader that his father was, and Jehoash was able to defeat him 3 times and recover Israelite cities that had been taken by the Aramaeans. These victories fulfilled Elisha's prophecy.

IV. AMAZIAH SINS (2 Kings 14:1-7; 2 Chronicles 25:1-16)

In the 2nd year of Jehoash, king of Israel, Amaziah became the new king of Judah replacing his father Joash who was assassinated by his own servants. Amaziah was 25 years old when he became king and he ruled in Jerusalem for 29 years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin. He did right in the sight of the LORD for the most part, but the high places where people offered profane sacrifices and burned incense were still not removed. As soon as he was able, Amaziah had those conspirators who murdered his father put to death. However, he spared their sons in keeping with the Law of Moses.

Amaziah organized and conducted a census in Judah, and in the process enlisted 300,000 choice and skilled men for his army. In addition, he hired 100,000 warriors from Israel for 100 talents of silver. An anonymous man of God warned him to release the Israelite soldiers or else God would stand against his army and bring it down. Having already paid the money to them, Amaziah asked what he should do to redeem it. The prophet stated that having God's blessing was much more valuable than the money he'd paid, so Amaziah dismissed the Israelite soldiers. They felt humiliated and returned home bitter and angry towards Judah.

Later, the army of Judah marched against Edom (aka, the sons of Seir, Genesis 36:20-30) and struck down 10,000 men in the Valley of Salt. They also captured and killed another 10,000 Edomites by throwing them off a cliff. They took the city of Sela and renamed it Joktheel. However, while the army of Judah was engaged in battle against Edom, the Israelite soldiers whom Amaziah had previously dismissed raided many of the cities in northern Judah, killing some 3,000 people and plundering much spoil. This act of aggression would be a factor leading to the upcoming civil war between Judah and Israel, under Amaziah and Jehoash respectively.

After returning from his resounding victory, Amaziah set up some of Edom's pagan gods that he'd taken and began to worship them. An unnamed prophet, most likely the same man mentioned a few verses earlier, challenged Amaziah by asking him why he'd seek after the god of a nation that he'd thoroughly defeated. The king threatened the prophet to keep his mouth

shut or else, but the prophet bravely predicted that Amaziah would soon be defeated for his idolatry and rejection of the LORD's counsel.

CONCLUSION

Although the northern and southern kingdoms had split apart many years before, up until now they had never fought against each other. They were all brothers, descendants of Jacob, and despite their many differences they were still family. Judah followed God and used the temple in Jerusalem, while Israel had turned to idolatry and the worship of false gods, but both had been able to maintain the peace with each other.

However, Jehoash's victory over the Aramaeans after years of Hazael's oppression gave him confidence in Israel's military abilities. Meanwhile, Amaziah's success over the Edomites inflated his bravado concerning Judah's strength. Both kings were brash and impudent, seemingly more inclined to war than diplomacy, which set the stage for a looming conflict between the north and the south.

I close today's message with a lesson from the text... bigger is not always better. If having more people actually costs us the blessing of God, it's not worth it. Even if we've invested great amounts of money and resources towards increasing our numbers, it is not comparable to the presence of God. This was the prophet's message to Amaziah. Of course, we want to have both if possible, but if not, it is always better to have the Lord's favor than to have a larger group.

Civil War, Jeroboam II, and Uzziah

Originally preached on 9/29/2024

In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider — God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him. - Ecclesiastes 7:14

At the close of last week's message Jehoash was the king of Israel and Amaziah was the king of Judah. Jehoash had just led the Israelites in 3 separate victories over Aram, as had been prophesied by Elisha, and had reclaimed some of the cities that were under their control. Meanwhile, Amaziah was coming off of a resounding victory over Edom. Both kings were feeling confident and powerful.

While the army of Judah was away fighting the Edomites, some soldiers from Israel raided the defenseless cities of the southern kingdom and killed around 3,000 people. This provocation, coupled with the brash and arrogant attitude of both Jehoash and Amaziah, sparked a conflict between the north and the south. Although they were 2 distinct kingdoms, they were related to each other and had been a united kingdom in the past. As such, I tend to think of this contest as a civil war, though I suppose it technically wasn't...

I. WAR BETWEEN BROTHERS (2 Kings 14:8-14; 2 Chronicles 25:17-24)

In response to Israel's raid, and perhaps for other reasons not given in Scripture, Amaziah challenged Jehoash to fight. Jehoash responded with a story about a thorn bush requesting the daughter of a cedar to be given to his son in marriage, but then a wild beast trampled the thorn bush. In the story, Jehoash characterized himself and Israel as the mighty beast and stately cedar, while describing Amaziah and Judah as the measly thorn bush. He then went on to say that Amaziah had grown proud and cocky, and warned him to back off.

Insulted, Amaziah refused to heed Jehoash's warning. Thus, the 2 kingdoms went to war with each other. They met for battle at Beth-shemesh, in the territory of Judah. Jehoash triumphed over Amaziah, and the army of Judah fled from the battlefield. Jehoash captured Amaziah and brought him to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival, the Israelite army tore down a long section of Jerusalem's outer wall and took all of the gold, silver, and fine utensils from both the temple and the palace. They also took additional hostages, and then returned with all of these things to Samaria. Amaziah had been defeated due to his idolatry and his refusal to heed God's counsel, just as the man of God had predicted (2 Chronicles 25:14-16).

II. THE DEATHS OF AMAZIAH AND JEHOASH (2 Kings 14:15-21; 2 Chronicles 25:25-28)

In the years that followed, and perhaps after ongoing hostilities between Israel and Judah, King Jehoash died. He was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. His son, Jeroboam, who theologians and Bible historians typically refer to as Jeroboam II, became king in his place.

Amaziah, the king of Judah, lived for another 15 years after the death of Jehoash. He turned away from the LORD and eventually his own people conspired against him. Hoping to escape, Amaziah fled to Lachish, but his conspirators pursued him and killed him there. They brought his body back to Jerusalem and buried it, then made his 16-year old son Uzziah (also called Azariah) the new king.

III. ANOTHER KING NAMED JEROBOAM (2 Kings 14:23-29)

Backtracking just a bit, during the 15th year of King Amaziah's tenure in Judah, Jeroboam II became king in Israel. He reigned for 41 years and did evil in the sight of the LORD. During his long reign, Jeroboam was able to reclaim the remaining cities that had been taken by the Aramaeans and reestablish the expanded borders of Israel. This success had been prophesied by Jonah, the leading prophet in Israel during this time. Most Christians are familiar with Jonah's encounter with the big fish and his reluctant ministry to Nineveh.

During the decades leading up to this, the neighboring nation of Aram had greatly oppressed Israel dating back to the time of Ahab. But God had been watching all the while, and had not forgotten his chosen people despite their unfaithfulness. As promised, the LORD sent a deliverer (2 Kings 13:5) in Jeroboam to save His people. By this point, the kingdom of Aram was weakening and in decline.

Jeroboam II recovered great amounts of territory for Israel including Damascus and Hamath in the north. His successes harkened back to the days of David and Solomon during the United Kingdom era. Eventually, however, Jeroboam II died and his son, Zechariah took his place.

IV. UZZIAH INCREASES IN STRENGTH (2 Kings 14:22, 15:1-4; 2 Chronicles 26:1-15)

In the 27th year of Jeroboam II in Israel, Uzziah (aka, Azariah) became king in Judah. As stated earlier, he was just 16 years old when he took the throne. Uzziah reigned for 52 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah. Generally, he was a good king who did right in the sight of the LORD. During the first portion of his reign, Uzziah followed the counsel of the prophet Zechariah and God prospered. Still, he did not remove all of the high places that remained in Judah.

During his reign, Uzziah defeated the Philistines, the neighboring Arabians, and the Ammonites. His fame extended to the border of Egypt and he became very strong and respected by the surrounding nations. He fortified the outer wall of Jerusalem and built towers on 2 of its main gates. He kept great numbers of livestock in the lowlands and plains, and maintained fertile fields and vineyards in the hill country. Uzziah amassed an elite army of over 300,000 troops and supplied them with high quality weapons and armor. He even installed newly invented engines of war on the city's wall and corners that could shoot arrows and cast large stones.

One of his greatest achievements was the restoration of Elath. Elath was a prominent port city at the head of the Gulf of Aqabah that had once belonged to Judah. However, it had been

conquered and destroyed by the Edomites many years earlier. King Uzziah was able to reclaim and rebuild the city. By doing this, Judah was able to renew its trade through this strategic port.

CONCLUSION

Moving beyond the conflict that had occurred between them, both Israel and Judah enjoyed a period of success and expansion. Jeroboam II and Uzziah began to reclaim and restore lost cities and territories that had been cut-off from their respective kingdoms for many years. It was a joyful time in which God's favor was clearly evident in both the north and the south. However, this season of prosperity would be short-lived...

The Bible encourages us to enjoy the good times when we can, because they will not last forever. Difficult times will surely follow. We must understand that both good and bad times come from the LORD. Regardless of our circumstances, we should trust in God and praise Him whatever comes our way.

Finally, this passage reminds us that God is faithful to His people even when they aren't faithful to Him. This is especially true of the northern kingdom, but also applies to the southern kingdom as well. His faithfulness is not dependent upon our actions, thank goodness, but rather upon His covenant promises and divine character.

Another Series of Kings

Originally preached on 10/6/2024

He [a person with leprosy] shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. - Leviticus 13:46

At the conclusion of last Sunday's message, both King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam II of Israel were enjoying seasons of great success in their respective kingdoms. They were reclaiming lost cities and territories and reasserting their nation's past dominance. On a side note, it was during this time that the minor prophet Amos lived and prophesied (Amos 1:1). However, things were about to take a turn for the worse. Such is the cycle of life. We move from highs to lows and then back again... both collectively and individually.

As stated last week, Uzziah held the throne in Judah for 52 years. During his lengthy reign, there were 6 kings who ruled in Israel as his contemporaries. We've already discussed the first of these, Jeroboam II, and today we will introduce 3 more men who led the northern kingdom during Uzziah's tenure. If you listen carefully, you'll hear another prophecy fulfilled...

I. UZZIAH'S DOWNFALL (2 Kings 15:5-7; 2 Chronicles 26:16-23)

As Uzziah's strength increased and fame spread, he became filled with pride and began acting unfaithfully to the LORD. In his arrogance, Uzziah entered the temple and burned incense on the altar of incense - a sacred act reserved exclusively for the priests. Azariah, the high priest, along with 80 other priests, confronted him and rebuked him for his sin. They told him that he would no longer be honored by God. In response, Uzziah became enraged.

As he fumed, the LORD struck Uzziah with leprosy while he stood beside the altar of incense. When Azariah and the other priests saw the leprous sores breaking out on Uzziah's forehead, they hurriedly escorted him out of the temple. Uzziah was a leper for the rest of his life. He was required to live in a separate house and banned from going to the temple. As such, his son Jotham ruled over the royal household and effectively acted as king, serving as coregent alongside his leprous father.

When Uzziah died, he was buried in a field that belonged to and was near the graves of the other kings. However, his resting place was separate and isolated because he was a leper. Upon his death, Jotham "officially" became the king of Judah

Uzziah's downfall presents yet another example of the danger of pride. The LORD opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). May we never become so conceited and full of ourselves that we turn from God and/or act sinfully. It also illustrates that no one is exempt from God's judgment - not even the king himself.

II. ZECHARIAH (2 Kings 15:8-12)

In the 38th year of King Uzziah's reign in Judah (aka, Azariah), Zechariah became the king of Israel after the death of his father, Jeroboam II. He ruled from Samaria for just 6 months. He was an evil king who walked in the sinful ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Zechariah's kingship and life were cut short because Shallum, the son of Jabesh, conspired against him and killed him before all the people.

After assassinating Zechariah, Shallum seized the throne for himself, thereby ending the royal line of Jehu and fulfilling another Biblical prophecy. God had promised that 4 generations of Jehu's descendants would reign over Israel (2 Kings 10:30). This is exactly what happened - they were Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah. Beloved, God's prophecies are certain - they always come true.

III. SHALLUM (2 Kings 15:13-15)

Shallum became king of Israel during the 39th year of Uzziah, and he reigned for only 1 month. Then Menahem, the son of Gadi, went up from Tizrah to Samaria and murdered Shallum. Menahem then usurped the throne for himself.

Shallum was a lot like Zimri, who God had ordained to wipe out the line of Baasha many years earlier. After assassinating Baasha's son Elah, Zimri himself was killed a week later (1 Kings 16:12-20). In much the same way, Shallum put an end to Jehu's dynasty yet was murdered shortly thereafter. Same song, second verse...

Though we've already made this point, it bears repeating. Jesus said, "Those who live by the sword die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Stated another way... you reap what you sow or what goes around comes around. Generally speaking, those who inflict violence on others will be more likely to face violence themselves.

IV. MENAHEM (2 Kings 15:16-22)

In the 39th year of Uzziah (Azariah), Menahem became Israel's king. He reigned for 10 years in Samaria. He did evil in the sight of the LORD and led Israel into the sins of Jeroboam. For example, after assassinating Shallum he returned to the city of Tiphshah, which bordered Tizrah, and violently struck its citizens, including its pregnant women, for closing their gates to him and not submitting to him as the new, conquering king. After Menahem's death, his son Pekahiah became king.

During Menahem's reign, Pul, the king of Assyria, came up against Israel. Many historians equate Pul with Tiglath-Pileser III, asserting that Pul was his Babylonian throne-name. Assyria was a rising power in the region, and Menahem feared its great strength. Therefore, Menahem paid Pul a thousand talents of silver, which he levied from the prominent, wealthy men of Israel, in order to secure Assyrian support. Appeased by the pay-off, Pul abandoned his confrontation with Israel and returned to Assyria. However, in the not-so-distant future, they'd be back.

CONCLUSION

Before wrapping up this message, let me add that the minor prophet Hosea began his ministry toward the end of King Uzziah's reign and it continued during the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah (Hosea 1:1). He is never mentioned in the books of Kings or Chronicles. Following the order presented in this series, Hosea is the 5th minor prophet chronologically - Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea.

There are several lessons we can learn from today's sermon, which I've tried to highlight along the way. Most of these we've discussed before in this and in other studies, but it never hurts for us to hear these teachings again. First, pride invariably leads to God's judgment and no one is exempt. Second, the prophetic utterances of God always come true. Third, you will reap what you so - if you treat others violently, there is a good chance you'll face violence yourself. And finally, God's judgment might be delayed for a while, but it will still eventually come. Only reconciliation can actually remove the punishment that awaits us. This salvation and escape from the just consequence of our sin is achieved exclusively by faith in Jesus Christ.

Pekahiah, Pekah, and Jotham

Originally preached on 10/13/2024

And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. - Ecclesiastes 4:12

Good morning. As we pick up where we ended last Sunday, Uzziah is still the king in Judah. Thus far, Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, and Menahem have all reigned for some or all of their tenures in Israel during Uzziah's long administration.

In this message we will meet Pekahiah and Pekah, who also ruled in Israel during the days of Uzziah. We will also introduce Jotham, Uzziah's son, who became king of Judah after his father died. This is the 26th sermon in our current historical Bible study over the divided kingdom era. Let's get started!

I. PEKAHIAH (2 Kings 15:23-26)

During the 50th year of King Uzziah's reign in Judah, Pekahiah became the new king of Israel. He was the son of Menahem and he ruled from Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom, for 2 years. Like all of the other kings of Israel, Pekahiah was an evil leader who walked in the sins and idolatry of Jeroboam. He led his kingdom away from the LORD.

Pekah, the son of Remaliah, conspired against Pekahiah. He was joined in his murderous plot by Argob, Arieah, and 50 men of Gilead. Together, they went up against the king and Pekah assassinated him in the palace. Then Pekah took the throne for himself.

II. PEKAH (2 Kings 15:27-31)

Pekah became the king of Israel during Uzziah's 52nd and final year over Judah. As previously stated, he was the son of Remaliah. He reigned from Samaria for 20 years. He too followed in the sinful ways of Jeroboam and provoked God with his sinful leadership.

During his kingship, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria returned to the region, no longer content with the bribe of silver that Menahem had paid him a few years earlier. He captured the cities of Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He invaded Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali. The Assyrians essentially seized the northern and Transjordan regions of Israel, and carried away many captives. However, the southern portion of Israel, where Samaria was located, still remained.

Pekah's reign ended when Hoshea, the son of Elah, assassinated him during the 20th year of Jotham in Judah. Hoshea became the new king of Israel. He would also be its last...

Over the past few chapters, we have discovered a turbulent period of Israel's history marked with frequent assassinations and royal turnover. Before moving on, let's take a moment to look back and review the numerous dynasties that ruled over the northern kingdom.

The first was: Jeroboam and Nadab. Second was: Baasha and Elah. Third was: Zimri. Fourth was: Tibni. Fifth was: Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram. Sixth was: Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah. Seventh was: Shallum. Eighth was: Mehaahem and Pekahiah. Ninth was: Pekah. Tenth, and last, was: Hoshea.

So, during the divided kingdom era, there were 10 different royal dynasties over Israel. By my count, there were 8 assassinations of a sitting king during these years. Meanwhile, in Judah, there was 1 continuous royal dynasty that spanned the entire period. Although it came very close to being severed during the days of Athaliah and Joash, by God's hand and in accordance with His promise, the line of David remained intact. Quite a contrast between the 2 kingdoms...

III. JOTHAM (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27:1-9)

In Pekah's 2nd year ruling over Israel, Uzziah finally died and his son Jotham became the king in his place. As you might recall from last week's sermon, Uzziah was a leper during the later years of reign and Jotham served as his coregent. This coregency likely lasted less than 10 years, as Jotham was just 25 years old when he became the singular king of Judah. He ruled for 16 years and his mother's name was Jerusha. Jotham was a good king who walked in the ways of the LORD, and he didn't inappropriately enter the temple as his father had done. Still, he didn't remove the high places where false worship continued to be made.

Jotham built the Upper Gate on the south wall of the temple, which allowed another means of entry into the temple court. He also rebuilt the wall of Ophel, which fortified the area of Jerusalem where the temple and the king's palace were located. He also built cities in the hill country of Judah, placing fortresses and towers on the wooded hills.

During his reign, Jotham fought against and defeated the Ammonites. They paid him an annual tribute for 3 years in a row which included 100 talents of silver, 10,000 kors of wheat, and 10,000 kors of barley. In today's measurements, a talent is approximately 75-100 lbs and a kor is just over 5 bushels. Jotham became mighty and renowned because he feared the LORD.

In those days, Rezin, the king of Aram, and Pekah, the king of Israel, formed an alliance. Doesn't that seem peculiar? These 2 kingdoms had been enemies for many years, as we have seen throughout this series. Why would they join together? Perhaps, it was an effort to deter the Assyrians whose strength was increasing by the day. Rezin and Pekah hoped to add Judah to their alliance, thereby making themselves even more formidable.

For reasons not given in Scripture, Jotham died at the relatively young age of 41. He was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers, the kings who preceded him. Ahaz, his son, took his place.

CONCLUSION

There is an ancient proverb which states, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend". This saying suggests that 2 opposing parties can and/or should work together against a common enemy. During World War II in the 1940's, the United States and other western nations allied themselves with the Soviet Union (now Russia) in order to oppose Nazi Germany. Though they were not usually friendly with each other, they agreed that Hitler must be stopped above all else. So they put their differences aside temporarily and joined forces. In today's message, we read of a similar occurrence between Aram and Israel hoping to deter mighty Assyria.

Another example of this is found in the gospels. Typically the Pharisees and the Sadducees hated one another, but they were united in their contempt for Jesus. The same can be said for the Romans and the Jews, who worked together in concert to crucify Him. Beloved, Jesus taught that Christians would be persecuted for their faith just as He was (John 15:20). Though this world is divided into many competing factions who often rage against one another, there is nothing that unites them more than their mutual hatred of Christ, His people, and His truth.

So as we close today, I encourage Christians everywhere to stand strong in the face of persecution. Though this world may beat us down and try to silence us, we must not relent. The multifaceted forces of darkness will not prevail. Remember, this world is not our home and "He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world." May God bless you.

Ahaz and the Fall of Aram

Originally preached on 10/20/2024

It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness. - Proverbs 16:12

Good morning. I trust that you are enjoying our current study called “The Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms”. Beyond just the fascinating stories of the kings, prophets, and other characters we’ve read about, we’ve discovered many lessons, truths, principles, examples, and other teachings that apply to our lives today. For your information, if all goes according to schedule we have 9 sermons left in this series, including today’s message.

Before we dive into today’s text, let’s mention a few Bible prophets who were living at this time. According to the first verse of his book, Isaiah ministered in Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This means that Isaiah was the first of the 4 major prophets chronologically. He is mentioned mostly during the days of King Hezekiah, as we will discover in a few weeks. Also, the opening verse of Micah states that he prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This places Micah as the 6th minor prophet chronologically, assuming the others are dated correctly.

I. AHAZ IS A BAD KING (2 Kings 16:1-4; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4)

When Jotham died, his son Ahaz succeeded him as the new king of Judah. This occurred during the 17th year of Pekah’s reign in Israel. Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and he ruled from Jerusalem for 16 years. Ahaz was an unrighteous, ungodly man who walked in the ways of the idolatrous kings of Israel. Among other things, he burnt his own children in the fire, made molten images for the Baals, burned incense in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, and practiced false worship in the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

II. JUDAH IS INVADED (2 Kings 16:5-6; 2 Chronicles 28:5-15)

Rezin, the king of Aram, and Pekah, the king of Israel, had formed an alliance earlier (2 Kings 15:37). Their intention was to add Judah to their ranks, in order to create a more formidable resistance against the threatening Assyrians. Apparently, when King Ahaz refused to join their coalition voluntarily, Rezin and Pekah invaded Judah. They laid siege on Jerusalem, but were ultimately unable to capture it or depose Ahaz.

Though they failed in their efforts to totally subdue Judah, both Rezin and Pekah did achieve a measure of success. The Aramaeans captured and settled in the port city of Elath, and they took many captives from Judah away to Damascus. The Israelites inflicted heavy casualties on Judah, killing 120,000 men in a single day. A valiant Israelite warrior named Zichri slew 3 of Judah’s prominent citizens - the king’s son, another man who was second in line to the throne, and the official who ruled over the king’s house.

The Israelites also carried away 200,000 women and children from Judah and brought them to Samaria, intending to use them as slaves. They also took great amounts of spoil. A prophet named Oded met and confronted the army of Israel as it arrived. He urged them to return the captives to Judah, because their actions had provoked and angered the LORD. And so, after some consideration, the captured women and children were returned to Jericho and released.

III. AHAZ SEEKS HELP FROM ASSYRIA (2 Kings 16:7-9; 2 Chronicles 28:16-21)

Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser III, the king of Assyria, seeking assistance in his bitter conflict against Aram and Israel. He even sent a generous gift of silver and gold to help secure the Assyrian's support. Tiglath-pileser accepted the gift and went up against Damascus. The Aramaeans were soundly defeated, King Rezin was put to death, and many of the people of Aram were taken away into exile. Thus, the capital city of Damascus fell and the kingdom of Aram was destroyed.

However, Judah still suffered with additional incursions by the Philistines and Edomites. These constant assaults upon the southern kingdom were the LORD's judgment on them for following Ahaz's wicked and sinful leadership. Ahaz sought more aid from Assyria to help the southern kingdom combat these other adversaries, but Tiglath-pileser III gave no additional assistance.

IV. AHAZ'S IDOLATRY WORSENS (2 Kings 16:10-20; 2 Chronicles 28:22-27)

Ahaz went to Damascus, which was now controlled by Assyria, to meet with Tiglath-pileser III. While there, he saw an altar that he really liked, so he sent an order to Urijah the priest back in Jerusalem to build one like it. Urijah obeyed the king's command, and when Ahaz returned from Damascus he used the newly constructed, bronze altar to present his offerings. He made sacrifices on it to the false gods of Aram. Ahaz even placed his altar in the temple and reserved it exclusively for himself, while the rest of the people continued to use the traditional altar that was already there. Urijah the priest went along with King Ahaz's folly.

Ahaz also stripped many of the precious stones and metals from the temple furniture and replaced them with more ordinary, less expensive materials. He likely gave these to Tiglath-pileser III. He dismantled the king's covered entryway into the temple, again to appease Assyrian king. What's more, he cut up the utensils that were in the temple and made altars for himself throughout Jerusalem. Ahaz had altars built in every city in Judah on the high places for people to burn incense to other gods.

When Ahaz died, the people buried him in Jerusalem. However, they did not lay his body in the tomb of the kings, for he was a wicked leader. Hezekiah, his son, became king in his place.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in this morning's message, Ahaz was a bad king - really bad. He is arguably the 2nd worst king in the history of Judah, just behind Manasseh who we've not yet read about.

He started out bad and got progressively worse as time went by! Sadly, his sinful leadership hurt the entire southern kingdom and incited God's judgment against them all. This leads me to a closing question... What is our obligation to governing authorities who practice and promote evil and wrongdoing?

Peter wrote that Christians are to "Fear God" and "honor the king." (1 Peter 2:17). This verse teaches us that while kings, rulers, and/or governing officials are entitled to a proper level of respect (ie, "honor"), God alone is to receive our ultimate reverence (ie, "fear"). All legitimate authority comes from God, who places kings upon the throne in accordance with His will. The LORD is sovereign - not the king! So, if a king, president, prime minister, etc. leads his/her people in a manner contrary to the LORD's commands, Christians must obey God. That said, they are to behave in a Christ-like manner even in their civil disobedience. We see this modeled in Scripture by Daniel, Paul, Jesus, and others.

So, if we had been living in Judah during the days of King Ahaz, I hope that we would have had the courage to stand against his sinful ways rather than go sheepishly along with them, like Urijah the priest did. It's bad enough when anyone stumbles into sin, but especially the priest! The same can be said of Christians today who wholeheartedly support and blindly adhere to the sinful decrees of our modern kings.

Hoshea and the Fall of Israel

Originally preached on 10/27/2024

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." - Matthew 10:5-6

Good morning. A week ago we discussed Ahaz in Judah, but today we are shifting our focus to Israel and talking about Hoshea. I hope that you enjoy this sermon on the northern kingdom, because it will be the last...

I. HOSHEA'S CONSPIRACY AND ISRAEL'S COLLAPSE (2 KINGS 17:1-6)

In the 12th year of Ahaz's reign in Judah, Hoshea, the son of Elah, became the final king of Israel. As you may recall, he had conspired against and assassinated his predecessor Pekah (2 Kings 15:30). Hoshea ruled for 9 years from Samaria. He was an evil, godless king, though not as bad as the Israelite kings that came before him.

During his reign, Shalmaneser, the new king of Assyria who had taken Tiglath-pileser's place, came up against Israel and subjected it to tribute. After a few years, however, Hoshea stopped paying the tribute and sent messengers to So, the king of Egypt, in hopes of securing military assistance against Assyria. When Shalmaneser learned of Hoshea's conspiracy, he captured him and threw him into prison.

The Assyrians invaded Israel and laid siege upon Samaria for 3 years. When Samaria finally fell, the Assyrians carried its people and those scattered throughout Israel away into exile. The captives were resettled in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. The northern kingdom of Israel had been defeated and ceased to exist.

II. THE REASONS ISRAEL FELL (2 KINGS 17:7-23)

Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in approximately 720 BC (with the Assyrian siege of Samaria beginning in 722 BC). From its beginning under Jeroboam until its demise under Hoshea, the northern kingdom of Israel had existed for approximately 234 years. Finally, after all this time, God's judgment fell upon the northern kingdom. There were several reasons for it.

From its outset, the leaders and people of Israel sinned against the LORD. They feared other gods, walked in the customs of pagan nations dating back to the days of the Canaanites, and followed the wicked statutes of their kings. They practiced some of their sin secretly, but much of it was very visible such as the building of shrines and high places in the towns, watchtowers, and cities. They set up sacred pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree where they would burn incense and offer false worship. They made idols for themselves and served them, ignoring the LORD's command not to do so.

Although God had sent several prophets to rebuke them for their egregious sin, the Israelites stubbornly continued to walk in it just as their fathers had done. They rejected God's covenant and adopted the customs of the heathen nations that surrounded them. They set up molten images, including the 2 golden calves in Bethel and Dan. They worshiped Baal, Asherah, and even the sun, moon, and stars. They made their children pass through the fire and practiced witchcraft and sorcery. Israel's actions provoked the LORD to anger, and He sent judgment upon them through the hands of the Assyrians.

It should be noted that, although it still remained intact, the southern kingdom of Judah was also guilty of violating God's commands. It was not innocent either, by any means, but its wickedness was not as blatant as Israel's had been. Therefore, Judah would continue to survive for several more years.

III. ISRAEL IS REPOPULATED WITH STRANGERS (2 KINGS 17:24-41)

The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and resettled them in Samaria and throughout the cities of Israel. These various foreigners did not know or fear the LORD, so He sent lions among them and several were killed. Upon hearing this troubling news, the Assyrian king sent 1 of Israel's priests who had been taken into exile back to Bethel in order to teach the new citizens how to properly worship "the god of the land". Thus, the LORD relented and the lions withdrew.

However, these new occupants of the land simply incorporated the worship of God into their existing religions. They continued to worship their own gods, making idols and setting them up throughout Israel according to the customs of their home countries. The Babylonians made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech. Thus, these people practiced a convoluted mixture of religious practices.

The people of Samaria were not wholly allegiant to the LORD, nor did they adhere to His commandments and law. They did not know or recognize God's deliverance of the Hebrew children during the days of the exodus from Egypt. They were not God's covenant people and didn't remember it or abide in it. They were a mixed breed of blended cultures and faiths which continued melding for generations, even to the days of Christ over 700 years later. Over time, they came to be hated by the orthodox Jews.

CONCLUSION

The remaining sermons in this series will focus exclusively on the southern kingdom, as the northern kingdom has collapsed. Due to its sinful ways, God finally sent judgment upon Israel. He had patiently waited on them, sending messengers to warn them of His impending justice and call them to repentance, but they refused to listen. Perhaps we in the United States today should pay attention, lest we suffer the same fate.

Sadly, many professing Christians today are a lot like the Samaritans of the Bible. They worship God on Sunday mornings, and maybe even Wednesday nights, but throughout the rest of the week they worship the various idols of our culture. These "idols" are not necessarily made of gold, wood, or other materials. Rather, they are the gods of self, money, power, fame, sex, entertainment, phones, comfort, and so on. I have heard it said that an idol can be anything that we love and revere as much or more than God.

Jesus taught that a religion of divided allegiance is no religion at all. He said that you cannot love both God and money. You must choose 1 or the other, lest you become lukewarm and unpalatable to the Lord. So as we close this morning, may we commit ourselves to devoted and exclusive reverence to God alone, and turn away from the many false gods of this world that dilute and poison our faith.

Hezekiah's Good Reign

Originally preached on 11/3/2024

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. - Matthew 6:33

I find it somewhat interesting that, during the long succession of the kings in Judah, a good king would sometimes be immediately followed by a bad king or a bad king followed by a good king. Seeing that these kings were part of a continual family line extending back to David, they were always father and son. Here's the point... just because someone was a good king (and presumably a good father), it didn't always mean that their son would turn out that way. Conversely, it was also possible that a bad king's son might turn out to be a good, honorable, and upright leader. Such stark contrast is evident in today's sermon on Hezekiah.

There are 3 chapters devoted to Hezekiah in 2 Kings and 4 more in 2 Chronicles. That said, the content of these chapters is somewhat different between the 2 books. In most cases, the information in Kings and Chronicles is, for the most part, similar, but not in the case of Hezekiah. Seeing that I've chosen Kings as our primary text for this series, I will summarize much of the information in Chronicles for the sake of time.

I. THE TEMPLE IS CLEANSED (2 KINGS 18:1-3, 5-6; 2 CHRONICLES 29)

During the 3rd year of Hoshea's reign in Israel, just a few years before the fall of the northern kingdom (which we discussed last Sunday), Hezekiah replaced his wicked father Ahaz as the new king of Judah. He was 25 years old when he became king and he ruled from Jerusalem for 29 years. His mother's name was Abi, the daughter of Zechariah, the high priest. Although his father was an unrighteous ruler, Hezekiah was a godly king who faithfully revered and served the LORD, probably due in large degree to his mother's influence. He trusted deeply in God and is widely upheld as the best king of Judah during the divided kingdom era. He clung to the LORD, kept His commandments as written in the Law of Moses, and did not depart from them.

According to the book of Chronicles, in the 1st year of his reign and in the first month, Hezekiah repaired and reopened the doors of the temple which had been closed previously by Ahaz. He had the priests and Levites consecrate themselves and resume the temple work that had been halted for some time. He instructed them to thoroughly cleanse and purify the temple, explaining that the vile, profane actions of the previous administration had provoked the LORD's anger and incurred His judgment. He commanded them to be diligent, not negligent, in their duties and religious service.

After the temple had been cleansed and consecrated, Hezekiah held a great assembly there. The people brought bulls, rams, lambs, and goats for the priests to sacrifice. The Levites played instruments and singers sang to the LORD while the burnt offering was being made, like in the days of King David. They joyfully sang the psalms, praising, worshiping, and bowing before God. Then they began sacrificing thank offerings, and there were more given than the priests

could handle alone, so the Levites helped. Thus, Hezekiah restored the temple service and everyone rejoiced at Judah's abrupt and sudden turn back to God.

II. THE PASSOVER IS RENEWED (2 CHRONICLES 30)

Hezekiah decided to celebrate the Passover, an annual Jewish holy day that had been neglected for some time. He scheduled the celebration a month later than it would normally be held (Exodus 12:2, 6), because the priests, Levites, and temple itself had not been consecrated in time. He sent out a decree inviting all of Judah and Israel to the Passover celebration, an indication of his concern for all of God's chosen people, not just the southern kingdom. Couriers traveled throughout the various cities of Israel urging their brothers to repent and turn back to God, but their message was largely rejected. Only a few men from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun came to join the people of Judah for the celebration.

When the time came, the people gathered to observe the Passover and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. There were many present, including some priests and visitors from the northern kingdom, who had not properly consecrated themselves in order to participate. Hezekiah prayed that God would forgive them in this instance, as their hearts were in the right place. The LORD granted the king's request allowing everyone to join in the celebration. The festivities were so successful that Hezekiah extended them for an additional week. There hadn't been an event like this in Jerusalem since the time of David and Solomon.

III. THE IDOLS ARE REMOVED (2 KINGS 18:4; 2 CHRONICLES 31)

After the Passover celebration ended, the people returned to their home cities and pulled down all of the pillars, Asherim, high places and altars throughout Judah and even some in Israel. Hezekiah appointed divisions of priests and Levites. He set up an ongoing provision of the king's portion for routine burnt offerings that were being made in the temple, and ordered the people to provide their due share to the priests also. As the king's order spread, the people responded with such generosity that great heaps of surplus offerings began piling up in the temple. Rooms were prepared for the priests in the temple and the abundant contribution was distributed appropriately among them.

Hezekiah also destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness during the days of the Exodus. Over the years, the people of Israel had esteemed it and burned incense to it, giving it the name Nehushtan (Numbers 21:6-9). Because of his faithfulness and his implementation of these many godly reforms, the LORD prospered Hezekiah and gave him great success.

VI. THE MILITARY IS STRONG (2 KINGS 18:7-12)

Hezekiah rebelled against the mighty Assyrians and did not serve them. He even defeated and drove out the Philistines who had encroached into Judah during the reign of Ahaz. His military was strong enough (with God's help) to deter the ever expanding Assyrian Empire.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for the northern kingdom. As we learned last week, Shalmaneser laid siege on Samaria in 722 BC, during the 4th year of Hezekiah's reign in Judah. After 3 years, Israel fell to Assyria, in 720 BC, the 6th year of Hezekiah's reign. So, while the southern kingdom was experiencing a season of great renewal and revival, the northern kingdom collapsed and was carried off into exile.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap things up this morning, I want to highlight something that stands out to me about Hezekiah. Did you notice that the first thing he did as king was to cleanse the temple and reestablish proper worship there? Scripture tells us that he did this in his first year and in the first month. It was his main priority. He was not focused on himself, his own ambitions, possessions, power, or so forth. Rather, he was determined to return his kingdom and people to the LORD. As the result of his efforts, the LORD prospered him bountifully.

Beloved, the Bible is very clear. If we will put God first and seek Him with all our hearts, He will bless us in ways that we can't even imagine. He will take care of our needs and even cause us to thrive. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying... I am not suggesting that we will become kings, CEO's, or wealthy superstars. I am simply stating that those who make God supreme in their hearts and lives will receive and enjoy His abundant and oftentimes immaterial blessings. Trust in the LORD and He will take care of you.

Assyria's Invasion of Judah

Originally preached on 11/10/2024

This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the Lord of hosts. - Zephaniah 2:10

Over the past several weeks of this study, we have witnessed the rapid rise of the Assyrian Empire. We've read how they defeated the Aramaeans and toppled Damascus under Tiglath-Pileser III. We've seen them besiege Samaria and conquer Israel under Shalmaneser. So who would be next? Was there any kingdom that could resist the mighty Assyrians?

Last Sunday we introduced Hezekiah and talked about his godly character and leadership. We detailed many of the reforms he implemented in Judah, including his cleansing and restoration of the temple, his observance of the Passover celebration, and his removal of idols and false worship throughout the southern kingdom. Hezekiah was a righteous, God-fearing king whose faith in the LORD was about to be seriously tested...

I. SENNACHERIB TAUNTS HEZEKIAH (2 Kings 18:13-37; 2 Chronicles 32:1-19)

In the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, which would have been 8 years after the fall of Israel (or around 712 BC), the Assyrians, under their new king Sennacherib, invaded Judah and laid siege on many of its fortified cities - including Lachish. Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib at Lachish stating that he would pay the Assyrians any tribute they imposed if their army would withdraw. He even gave Sennacherib silver from the temple and from his own palace. What's more, Hezekiah gave him the golden doors and doorposts he had recently crafted when the temple was reopened a few years earlier. However, King Hezekiah also began making preparations to resist a siege against Jerusalem if peace could not be achieved.

Upon receiving the message and gifts, Sennacherib responded by sending his own messengers back to Jerusalem. Hezekiah sent his servants out to meet them. The Assyrians told Hezekiah's servants that Judah's belief that they could withstand Assyria's dominance was foolish. The Egyptians were powerless to help them. Even God could not deliver them, just as the gods of the surrounding nations had not been able to save them.

Hezekiah's servants asked the Assyrian messengers to speak in Aramaic, which they understood, but the people of Jerusalem who were listening from the wall did not. They didn't want their people to become deflated and discouraged. However, this request only emboldened the messengers to speak even louder in Hebrew so that all of their listeners heard and understood their taunts and threats. They even addressed the citizens of Jerusalem directly and told them not to listen to King Hezekiah, but rather to surrender to the Assyrians lest they be destroyed. The people listened silently and did not answer. After the messengers departed, Hezekiah's servants returned to the king and told him what had happened. Hezekiah was overcome with despair.

II. ISAIAH ENCOURAGES HEZEKIAH (2 Kings 19:1-34; 2 Chronicles 32:20)

Completely dismayed, Hezekiah sent his servants to find Isaiah the prophet and ask him to pray for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah wrote a letter for the king to read and sent it back with these servants. Meanwhile, Sennacherib, who was now besieging the city of Libnah, sent even more messengers to Jerusalem to openly mock and insult God, question His power to save, and further undermine the wavering confidence of Hezekiah.

When Isaiah's letter arrived, Hezekiah read it, took it to the temple, and spread it out before the LORD. He prayed that God would demonstrate His almighty power to the surrounding nations by delivering Judah from the hands of the Assyrians. After this, Isaiah sent another message to Hezekiah stating that God had heard his prayer and would rescue His people from the Assyrian onslaught. Isaiah prophesied that Sennacherib and his forces would suddenly depart from Judah without ever even laying siege on Jerusalem. In addition, he predicted that Sennacherib would be killed in his own homeland.

III. GOD DELIVERS HEZEKIAH (2 Kings 19:35-37; 2 Chronicles 32:21-23)

That night, presumably while they were still besieging Libnah, an angel of the LORD went out and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When those who remained awoke the next morning, they were aghast. The Assyrian army had been decimated by God in a single, resounding stroke. Immediately, Sennacherib and his surviving troops withdrew from Judah in shame and returned to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Meanwhile, the people of Judah and Jerusalem rejoiced and exalted God.

Sometime later, while he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Sennacherib was assassinated with the sword by 2 of his own children. His killers escaped to the land of Ararat, and his son Esarhaddon replaced him as king of Assyria. Thus, the prophetic words of the LORD spoken through Isaiah were fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Today's sermon has a profound application to the people of every generation. Beloved, the enemies of God are on the march. They have been since the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. Untold numbers of people have been overcome by their power and might. Millions have fallen into sin and despair, having been brutally crushed by the Adversary. Satan openly taunts God and questions His power to save, hoping to sow seeds of doubt and discouragement into the hearts and minds of people everywhere. He boastfully and continuously mocks, shouting "God can't save you from your sin. He doesn't care about you. It's hopeless. You will never be delivered. You may as well surrender to me and become servants of darkness."

But friends, the Devil's words are simply not true. He is a liar, and the father of lies. We serve a God who is more mighty than he could ever hope to be. His empty threats only have power over us if we let them. When we believe his lies, we play right into Satan's hands. It's only natural to

have doubts - just like Hezekiah did - but we must have faith over fear. Dear one, if you will turn to the LORD and trust in Him to deliver you from the hands of the enemy, not only can He do it, but He will do it!

Although I am not even in the same ballpark as Isaiah, nevertheless, I stand before you today as God's representative to confidently proclaim, just as he did to Hezekiah, that God hears the prayers of desperate people and will save those who repent of their sin and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Sin, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Sinner, Jesus will transform your life. Sinner, He will make you a new creation. Sinner, He will crush the enemy's power over your circumstances and give you victory as you walk in obedience to Him. So quit quivering, cowering, and believing the Devil's taunting lies. Turn to Jesus Christ today and receive the salvation and deliverance that He, and He alone, affords!

Hezekiah's Latter Years

Originally preached on 11/17/2024

It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. - Hebrews 9:27

For the past 2 weeks we've been discussing the life and work of King Hezekiah. We've talked about his godly character, his religious reforms, and his reliance on God to deliver Judah from the hands of the Assyrians. In this morning's message, we are going to wrap up our comments about Hezekiah with a look at the final years of his reign.

I. ILLNESS AND RECOVERY (2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24-26)

Sometime after Sennacherib and the Assyrians departed from Judah, King Hezekiah became mortally ill. Isaiah the prophet came to visit him with the word of the LORD saying, "Get your house in order because you are going to die." Hezekiah was devastated. He began weeping and prayed to God that he might somehow survive. The LORD told Isaiah, who had already left, to go back and tell Hezekiah that He had seen his tears and heard his prayer. God said that he would heal the king's illness after all, add another 15 years to his life, and protect Jerusalem and Judah from the Assyrians.

Following the LORD's command to Isaiah, Hezekiah's servants took a cake of figs and laid it on the king's sore. The treatment worked and he recovered. Hezekiah went up to the temple 3 days later, just as Isaiah had instructed him to, in order to thank God for cleansing his sickness and making him well.

Before he was healed, however, Hezekiah asked Isaiah for the LORD to show him a sign that he would live. Isaiah gave Hezekiah a choice. "Would you rather the sun jump forward or backward?" Hezekiah chose for it to move backward, so God supernaturally caused the sun to move back slightly in the sky as evidenced by its shadow going back 10 steps on the staircase of Ahaz which descended from the palace and the temple. Amazing!

According to 2 Chronicles, Hezekiah didn't express much gratitude in the immediate aftermath of his remarkable healing. Instead, his heart became proud. When God's wrath came upon him, he and his people humbled themselves. The LORD's anger subsided and remained calm for the remainder of Hezekiah's life.

This incident is 1 of 2 places in the Bible where God temporarily altered time. In this case, He actually caused the earth to rotate backwards just a bit so that the sun appeared to move backward in the sky! The other occasion was when God caused the earth to stop spinning for about a whole day, so that the sun stood still giving Joshua enough daylight to defeat the Amorites (Joshua 10:12-14).

II. SHOWS HIS TREASURES TO BABYLON (2 Kings 20:12-19; 2 Chronicles 32:27-31)

At that time, the king of Babylon sent messengers to Hezekiah with a “get well” letter and gift - he had heard that he was sick. When they arrived, Hezekiah took the Babylonians on a tour and showed them all of the spectacular treasures in his house and throughout his dominion. They were shown great amounts of gold, silver, spices, precious oils, and armor.

Later Isaiah prophesied that the Babylonians would someday come and take all of these valuables for themselves. This was the first prophetic warning of the fall of Judah, which would occur over 100 years later. When Isaiah revealed that this coming catastrophe wouldn't take place during the reign of Hezekiah, the king dismissed it as something beyond his control.

Over the years, Hezekiah amassed great wealth and honor. Not only were his treasuries filled with all sorts of riches, but he also had vast storehouses of grain and abundant flocks of animals. Hezekiah even oversaw a major infrastructure project that routed waters into the city of Jerusalem, on its west side.

III. DEATH AND BURIAL (2 Kings 20:20-21; 2 Chronicles 32:32-33)

As mentioned earlier, after Hezekiah recovered from his severe illness he lived another 15 years. When he finally died, he was buried in Jerusalem. His body was laid to rest in the upper section of the king's tombs, an indication of his noble and righteous character. All of the southern kingdom mourned his passing. His son Manasseh became king in his place.

CONCLUSION

Before we finish this morning, I want to take a quick peek ahead. The first verse of 2 Kings 21, which we will explore in depth next week, states that Manasseh was just 12 years old when he became king. This means that he was conceived and born after Hezekiah recovered from his mortal illness. This is interesting because, as we will discover, Manasseh was an evil and godless king who brought incredible misery to the people of Judah for most of his 55 year reign. It leads me to wonder if, perhaps, the southern kingdom would have been better off in the long run if Hezekiah would have died when God originally stated so that Manasseh would have never been born.

On the other hand, seeing that the throne almost almost always passed to the eldest son, presumably Manasseh, this would strongly suggest that Hezekiah didn't have any sons before becoming mortally ill. If so and he would have died, the royal line of David would have ended and the Davidic Covenant would have been broken. Thus, the extension of Hezekiah's life may have been necessary in order to maintain God's promise. Of course, God in His foreknowledge already knew all of this and acted in accordance with His sovereign will (Job 14:5).

Regardless, this story always causes me to think about the timing of our deaths. Is it always better to live longer? Whenever someone is mortally ill, it can be difficult to know how to pray. There is a big difference between preserving life and prolonging death. These decisions are not always black and white, and in many cases, are a matter of individual conscience. I am going to

speak freely for a moment, so forgive me if I offend anyone. I am speaking only for myself, so feel free to disagree with me...

As a Christian, I know where I will spend eternity - and it's a far more wonderful place than here on this fallen earth. So if I become "mortally" ill, I doubt I'll be praying for a miraculous recovery. In fact, I am a bit surprised that Hezekiah did. Instead, I'll be praying that God will go ahead and take me home, and I hope that my loved ones will be praying likewise.

In my opinion, it's selfish and cruel to keep someone alive artificially when they would otherwise die naturally, especially in cases where they have little to no quality of life - unless they are lost and there is a chance they might be saved. But for Christians, who are literally a breath away from being united with family and friends who are eagerly awaiting them in Heaven, let them die.

So when my time comes, let it come. I'm ready. Don't resuscitate me. Let me go. I don't need another 15 years of this life, or even another 15 minutes. I'd much rather spend them, and the rest of eternity for that matter, with my glorious King Jesus...

Manasseh and Amon

Originally preached on 11/24/2024

Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" - Judges 16:28

The Assyrian Empire had risen from relative obscurity into a world power within a short period of time. It would fall almost as quickly. Following the reign of Hezekiah in Judah and throughout most of the 7th century BC, the dominance of Assyria began its decline. During these years, the prophet Nahum wrote his oracle concerning the upcoming fall of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Nahum is never mentioned in either Kings or Chronicles. Nevertheless, he is the 7th of the minor prophets chronologically.

In this morning's message, we will focus on the kingships of Manasseh and Amon in the southern kingdom. As we will discover, neither one of them was a godly king like Hezekiah. After today's sermon, there will only be 3 left in this series. We are almost there!

I. MANASSEH'S EVIL DEEDS (2 Kings 21:1-9; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9)

Manasseh was a 12 year old boy when he became the king of Judah. He reigned for 55 years, longer than any of Judah's other kings. He was the son of Hezekiah and Hephzibah. He was an evil king who practiced all sorts of abominations. He rebuilt the high places and pagan altars that his father had destroyed. He worshiped Baal, Asherah, and the sun, moon, and stars. Manasseh was a terribly idolatrous leader, reminiscent of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel years earlier, and is widely regarded as the most destructive king in Judah's history - in part because of his long tenure.

He built altars for false gods in the temple and in its courtyard. He made his sons pass through the fire, interpreted signs, practiced divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. Manasseh did great evil in the sight of the LORD and continuously provoked Him to anger. He even erected an Asherah in the temple, profaning and defiling the house of the LORD. Manasseh encouraged the people of Judah to act very wickedly, even more than the Canaanites who had been driven out centuries earlier.

II. THE LORD REBUKES MANASSEH (2 Kings 21:10-15)

Throughout his long reign, the LORD rebuked Manasseh through the words of His prophets. God declared that, because of Manasseh's great sin which eclipsed even that of the Amorites, He intended to bring judgment upon the people of Jerusalem and Judah. He would extend the destruction of Samaria to the southern kingdom and wipe it clean like a bowl. The LORD said that He would abandon the remnant of His people, referring to Judah, and allow their enemies to plunder them due to their many years of disobedience and sin.

III. MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE AND DEATH (2 Kings 21:16-18; 2 Chronicles 33:10-20)

Despite numerous prophetic warnings and calls to repentance, Manasseh and the people of Judah chose to disregard the voice of God. Near the end of his reign, the LORD allowed the Assyrian commanders to come up, capture Manasseh, and lead him away in chains to Babylon. While confined there, Manasseh was in great distress, and finally humbled himself before the LORD. God heard his prayer, and brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem. Manasseh had been transformed by the power of almighty God and became a true believer.

In his final years, Manasseh had work done on Jerusalem's outer wall. He stationed military commanders in the fortified cities throughout Judah. He tore down and discarded all of the foreign gods, idols, and altars he had built in and around the temple. Instead, he sacrificed peace and thanksgiving offerings on the altar of the LORD and ordered all of Judah to worship the true, living God of Israel. Some citizens still worshiped at the high places, but at least they were worshiping the LORD.

Sadly, during the overwhelming majority of his reign, Manasseh led the people of Judah away from God and was ultimately responsible for shedding much innocent blood. When he died, Manasseh was buried in the garden of his own house, which was called the garden of Uzza. It is noteworthy that he was not buried with the other kings. Following his death and burial, his son Amon became the new king.

IV. AMON REIGNS IN JUDAH (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

Amon was 22 years old when he became king and he reigned for only 2 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth. He was an evil, unrighteous king just as father Manasseh had been for almost all of his reign. He served and worshiped idols and completely abandoned faithful allegiance to the LORD. He was so bad that a few of his own servants conspired against him and killed him. The people of Judah had Amon's assassins executed for their crime. They buried Amon in the garden of Uzza, where Manasseh's body had been laid to rest - again, not in the tomb of the kings. Amon's young son Josiah took his place.

CONCLUSION

For about 50 years Manasseh led Judah deep into idolatry and wickedness, ignoring the urges of the prophets to repent and turn to the LORD. As such, he caused immeasurable damage and provoked the judgment of God upon the southern kingdom. He wasted most of his life mired in sin and transgression. But, by God's grace, near the end of his life, while being held in Babylon, Manasseh finally bowed his heart to the LORD and acknowledged Him as the true, living God. He spent the final few years of his reign trying to undo some of the catastrophic things that he'd done previously.

Manasseh is a prime example of someone who spent most of his life far from God. He was a vile sinner who committed all sorts of rebellious acts against the LORD. However, in the end, he

sought forgiveness and found salvation. There are many others like him in the Bible. Samson was an arrogant, self-dependent, ladies' man with an inflated ego. But in the end, he humbly prayed for strength to wipe out God's enemies. The thief on the cross spent his life as a hoodlum and criminal, but acknowledged Christ as Lord in his final hours. Even the Apostle Paul was a heinous and feared persecutor of Christians before encountering Jesus on the Damascus Road.

What about you? Have you spent years wandering in the darkness, rebelling against God, and practicing all types of sin? Have you caused all sorts of damage in the lives of others, and even in your own life? If so, friend, let me tell you that you're not alone. Countless people have done and are doing the same thing. But, I've got good news for you...

Jesus can and will forgive and redeem any and everyone who turns to Him in genuine, wholehearted repentance. It doesn't matter what you've done in the past, no matter how egregious you think it is... the almighty blood of Christ can cover it all. So quit squandering your life in rebellion and submit yourself to the LORD. Then someday you'll be able to speak with Manasseh in Heaven about how Jesus radically changed your life. Remember beloved, it's not how you start that matters, but how you finish.

Josiah's Good Reign

Originally preached on 12/1/2024

It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, - Deuteronomy 31:24

Good morning everyone!. Today's sermon focuses on Josiah, the last "good" king of Judah. There are 1½ chapters about Josiah in 2 Kings and 2 chapters about him in 2 Chronicles. That said, we could easily spend a couple of weeks discussing him, but, seeing that we are trying to complete this series by Christmas, I am just going to give you an overview today. I hope you will take some time to read and study these chapters more carefully on your own at home.

I. THE LOST BOOK (2 Kings 22:1-13; 2 Chronicles 34:1-21)

Josiah became king when he was 8 years old after his father Amon was assassinated. He reigned in Jerusalem for 31 years and his mother's name was Jedidah. He was a good, righteous king who walked in the ways of the LORD and did not veer astray.

During the 18th year of his reign (around the age of 26), King Josiah sent his servant Shaphan to the temple in order to count the money that had been collected for its maintenance and then distribute it among the workers who had made the repairs. When he arrived, Hilkiyah the high priest reported that, during the renovations, he had found a lost book of the law (dating back to the days of Moses). Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan who, after he'd finished counting the donations and paying the laborers, returned to the palace and read it to the king.

When Josiah heard the words of the book, he was greatly convicted and tore his clothes. He realized that the previous generations, particularly during the recent reigns of Manasseh and Amon, had not obeyed the LORD's commands and had provoked His wrath. Josiah assembled a team of servants led by Hilkiyah to go inquire of the LORD as to what he and the people of Judah should do to make things right.

II. PROPHECY AND COVENANT (2 Kings 22:14-23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:22-33)

Hilkiyah and his team came to speak with Huldah the prophetess. She stated that God planned to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah for their perpetual disobedience and sinfulness. However, because Josiah was humble and deeply grieved over his people's waywardness, the forthcoming destruction would not occur during his reign. Hilkiyah brought word back to Josiah.

The king summoned all the people of Judah to gather at the temple in Jerusalem. He read the words of the book of the covenant that had been found to those present. Standing beside the pillar, Josiah pledged to obey all the commandments written in the book and to wholeheartedly honor the LORD's covenant. All the people agreed and joined in his promise.

III. REFORMS AND PASSOVER (2 Kings 23:4-27; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19)

From the days of his youth, well before Hilkiah's discovery of the lost book, King Josiah implemented many religious reforms intended to lead his people back to the LORD. These extensive efforts were solidified and accelerated after the lost book of the law was found and read. Josiah's reforms extended beyond the boundaries of Judah into areas of what had formerly been the northern kingdom.

Josiah brought out all of the vessels in the temple that had been made for false gods, burned them, and carried their ashes to Bethel. He did away with all of the idolatrous priests who burned incense on the high places throughout Judah. He removed the Asherah from the house of the LORD, burned it, ground it to dust, and threw it in the graves of those who worshiped it. He broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes and of the women who wove hangings for Asherah that were in the temple. He tore down the high places and defiled Topheth, the place where parents made their children pass through the fire. He did away with the horses and chariots which had been dedicated to pagan gods. He destroyed heathen altars and sacred pillars. Josiah actively and vigorously sought to purge Judah of its impurity and sinfulness.

Josiah tore down the altar that King Jeroboam had built at Bethel a few centuries earlier just after the northern and southern kingdom split. He ground its stones to dust. Then he looked out upon the mountain and saw all of the graves of Israel's false priests. He exhumed all of their bones and defiled them by burning them on the demolished altar. However, he did not burn the remains of the prophet from Judah or the old man from Bethel, thereby fulfilling the prophecy which had been made (1 Kings 13:2, 31-32).

Josiah also reinstated the Passover. The people of Judah commemorated the Passover with a great celebration in Jerusalem. He also removed mediums, spiritists, and all sorts of other abominations throughout the southern kingdom. Josiah turned to the LORD with all of his heart. Nevertheless, God did not alter His previously declared plan to judge Judah for its sin.

IV. UNTIMELY DEATH (2 Kings 23:28-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27)

Babylon, who had formerly been a part of the Assyrian Empire, had been gaining strength over the past few decades. It had rebelled against the weakening Assyrians and, along with a few allies, had already captured its capital city Nineveh. Assyria had relocated its capital to Haran. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marched north to Haran in order to help the Assyrians in their ongoing struggle with Babylon. However, as he and the Egyptian army passed through Judah, Josiah came out to meet them in battle. Josiah didn't want the Assyrians to succeed and therefore sought to prevent Egypt from assisting them.

Neco asked Josiah to withdraw and let them pass, but he would not. So, though they were not enemies with each other per se, Egypt fought against Judah at the Battle of Megiddo. Tragically, Josiah was killed in the fighting around the age of 39 or 40. His body was brought to Jerusalem where he was buried in his own tomb. All of Judah was devastated and mourned the righteous king's untimely death. The prophet Jeremiah, who had begun his ministry in Jerusalem during

Josiah's reign, even wrote and chanted a lament for the fallen king. Josiah's son Johahaz took his place.

CONCLUSION

Before we close, let's identify a few prominent figures who lived during this time period. I just mentioned Jeremiah - he was the 2nd of the major prophets chronologically, following Isaiah. Also, around this same time, both Zephaniah and Habakkuk lived and prophesied, making them the 8th and 9th minor prophets chronologically. All 3 of these men spoke about the upcoming fall of Judah and urged its people to repent.

Whenever I think about Josiah, my mind always goes to the lost book that was found during his reign. When he read it, realizing that it was the very Word of God as recorded by Moses, he came under great conviction. He didn't perceive it as out-of-date or irrelevant though it had been written over 800 years earlier. Instead, he held it in great regard and perceived that his people's plight was a direct result of their disobedience to its laws. Josiah understood that God's Word had a direct application not only to his life, but to that of Judah and Jerusalem.

That said, I wonder how many professing Christians today have a lost book in their house? Somewhere their Bible just sits on a shelf, collecting dust and slowly turning yellow. Perhaps they know where it is, but they never open it or read it, so its message is lost for all intents and purposes. Friend, do you not realize the immeasurable value and power of God's Word? It can transform your life, as it did for Josiah and has for countless others over the generations - myself included. Find it. Open it. Read it. Obey it. Share it.

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin

Originally preached on 12/8/2024

He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away. - Job 12:23

In last week's message, we discussed the Biblical account of Josiah. He was a righteous, godly king who led Judah well. He implemented many reforms, reinstated the Passover, and purged his kingdom of pagan altars, shrines, pillars, and so forth. However, his life was cut short when he decided to fight against the Egyptians at the Battle of Megiddo. He had hoped to prevent them from allying with the Assyrians in their ongoing war with Babylon, but his efforts failed and he was killed during the conflict.

This morning we are going to take a look at the next 3 kings who followed Josiah. Their names were Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. We will see the end of the Assyrian Empire, the withdrawal of Egypt from the region, and the beginning waves of Judah's exile to Babylon. Some of the events mentioned in this sermon are described in the books of Jeremiah, Daniel, and/or Ezekiel. Others are documented in the historical writings of Josephus.

I. JEHOAHAZ (2 Kings 23:31-34; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4)

After Josiah's death, the people took his son Jehoahaz and made him king. He was 23 years old when he became king and his mother's name was Hamutal. He only reigned for 3 months, but even during that short span he was known as an evil king who did not fear the LORD.

After winning the Battle of Megiddo against Judah, the Egyptian army proceeded north and joined the Assyrians at Haran as planned. However, the Babylonians were too strong for their allied forces to overcome. As a result, the Assyrians were defeated and their empire collapsed. Babylon had become the dominant kingdom in the Middle East. Having lost, Pharaoh Neco and the Egyptians started for home, retracing their steps through Judah. As they passed through Jerusalem, Pharaoh Neco captured their king, Jehoahaz, and imprisoned him temporarily at Riblah before carrying him away in exile to Egypt, where he later died.

Pharaoh Neco appointed another of Josiah's sons, Eliakim, as Judah's new king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He imposed a fine on Judah of 100 talents of silver and a talent of gold, likely because they had dared to confront him earlier. He required Judah to pay an annual tribute, and subjected them to Egyptian dominance. Although the southern kingdom was still intact and would continue to be for another 23 years, it was no longer an independent state.

II. JEHOIAKIM (2 Kings 23:35-24:7; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8)

Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he was made king and he reigned for 11 years. His mother's name was Zebidah. Like his brother Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim did not walk in the ways of the LORD.

Though he was technically “king”, he answered to the Egyptians. He exacted a heavy tax on the citizens of Judah in order to pay the required tribute to Pharaoh Neco.

During the 4th year of his reign in 605 BC, the Egyptians allied with the remnants of Assyria’s army to battle the Babylonians at the Battle of Carchemish. The Babylonians crushed them yet again and then advanced southward to Judah. The Egyptians completely withdrew from the region, leaving Judah vulnerable to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, led his forces to Jerusalem, where he ransacked the temple and took some of its precious articles back to his homeland. He also bound Jehoiakim and brought him to Babylon, along with many of the young men, youths, and other nobles from Judah including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. This was to be the 1st wave of deportations and it marked the beginning of the Babylonian Exile.

Nebuchadnezzar released King Jehoiakim after a few years of imprisonment, allowing him to return to Jerusalem. However, Jehoiakim was subservient to Babylon and required to pay an annual tribute to them, which he did for 3 years. During these years he persecuted the prophet Jeremiah, who also lived in Jerusalem, because he preached of Judah’s imminent judgment as a result of its idolatry and sin.

After the 3rd year, Jehoiakim stopped paying the tribute, a brazen act of defiance and rebellion. The Babylonian army returned and laid siege on Jerusalem, led by Nebuchadnezzar. During the siege, Jehoiakim was killed and his body was tossed over the wall, perhaps in hopes that the Babylonians would end their assault. However, they did not withdraw. Meanwhile, inside the besieged city, the people of Jerusalem made Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, the new king.

III. JEHOIACHIN (2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10)

Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king. His mother’s name was Nehushta. Like his father, he was a bad king. He ascended to the throne during the midst of the Babylonian siege in 597 BC and only reigned for 3 months before surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachin, his mother, and several of his servants, officials, and commanders were bound and taken as captives to Babylon. Jehoiachin would remain in Babylon for the rest of his life and the line of David would continue through his offspring.

In addition to this, the Babylonians took more treasures from the temple, the king’s palace, and cut the gold vessels that Solomon had made into pieces. They took 10,000 captives - including soldiers, craftsmen, and smiths - and led them away to Babylon, leaving only the poorest people behind in Judah. The prophet Ezekiel was included among the exiles of the 2nd deportation. Having deposed Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar appointed his uncle Mattaniah (yet another of Josiah’s sons) as king and changed his name to Zedekiah.

CONCLUSION

By the end of Jehoiachin's brief reign, the southern kingdom was just a shell of what it had been. It no longer had any independence or strength, but rather had become a vassal state of the Babylonian Empire. Its "king" answered to and served Nebuchadnezzar. Its wealth and treasures had been plundered and taken away. Most of its prominent citizens had been carried into captivity. Although Judah would continue to exist for another decade, God's judgment had clearly fallen upon it and the 70 year Babylonian captivity had already begun (Jeremiah 25:11).

Judah would suffer the same fate as their brothers Israel had faced some 120 years earlier. While the Assyrians toppled the northern kingdom, the Babylonians would soon conquer the southern kingdom. The descendants of Jacob, all 12 tribes of Israel, would be held accountable for their disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. Although they were God's chosen people and had been the recipients of His grace and favor for generations, they were not exempt from His justice. No one is.

In 2026, less than 2 years from now, the United States will celebrate its 250th birthday. Over the past 2½ centuries, the LORD has blessed our nation in countless ways. For all its flaws, the United States is still regarded as a beacon of freedom and hope for people around the world. We have the wealthiest economy, the strongest military, and the most diverse population. I am proud to be an American and pray that our country will endure for generations to come (or until Jesus returns). That said, God does not overlook our sin and He will bring judgment upon us if we continue to walk in it. We should pray that the United States will turn back to the LORD.

Next week we will conclude this study with a final message about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple of God. We will talk about the last king of Judah and the end of the divided kingdom era. I hope you'll join us then. God bless you.

Zedekiah and the Fall of Judah

Originally preached on 12/15/2024

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." - Mark 10:18

Well, this is it! After almost 8 months of study, this morning we will complete this year's series on the "Divided Church: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms". Today's message is the 35th and final sermon in this collection. It is called "Zedekiah and the Fall of Judah".

At the end of last week's message, young King Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar. The besieging Babylonians entered Jerusalem, looted the temple and palace, and carried away some 10,000 people, including Jehoiachin and his family, into exile. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah as his replacement, subject to Babylon of course.

I. BESIEGED AND DEFEATED (2 Kings 24:18-25:7; 2 Chronicles 36:11-17)

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king. He was Jehoiachin's uncle, the son of Josiah and Hamutal, and brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. He reigned for 11 years in Jerusalem and did evil in the sight of the LORD. During these years he had several interactions with the prophet Jeremiah which are detailed in his book. Zedekiah served Nebuchadnezzar until the 9th year of his reign, but then rebelled against Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar led his army back to Jerusalem and laid siege on the city again. After 2 years, the people inside Jerusalem were starving and desperate. When the Babylonians finally breached the city's wall, Judah's soldiers fled southward toward Arabah. They were scattered and in disarray. The Babylonians pursued them and captured Zedekiah on the plains of Jericho.

The Babylonians took Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah and passed sentence on him. Then they made him watch as they killed all of his sons. Afterward they put his eyes out, bound him, and brought him to Babylon as a prisoner. Though Zedekiah's children were viciously slain, the line of David was not severed but continued through the offspring of Jehoiachin.

II. BURNED AND PLUNDERED (2 Kings 25:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:18-19)

A few weeks later, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, returned to Jerusalem with his men. They burned the temple, the palace, and all of the houses in the city. The Babylonian army also tore down the walls of Jerusalem. All of those left in the city, including those who had deserted to the Babylonians during the siege, were carried away into exile. The prophet Jeremiah was initially among this group, however he was released and returned to Jerusalem. Only the poorest were left to be vinedressers and plowmen.

The Babylonians broke the bronze pillars, stands, and sea into pieces and carried them away with them. They also took the bronze pots, shovels, snuffers, spoons, and other vessels that

were used for temple service. They even took the firepans and basins, which were made of fine silver and gold. They plundered a great amount of bronze, consisting mostly of that from the 2 pillars and their grand, ornate capitals.

III. EXECUTED AND EXILED (2 Kings 25:18-21; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21)

Nebuzaradan arrested Seraiah, the chief priest, Zephaniah, the 2nd priest, and 3 of temple officials who were left behind in Jerusalem. He also seized an overseer of Judah's remaining soldiers, 5 of the king's advisers who were left in the city, a scribe who was trying to muster the people against Babylon, and 60 other men. He brought this group to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah where they were executed. So, the southern kingdom of Judah fell in 586 B.C. and its people were led away into exile. This exile, which had already started almost 2 decades earlier, would last for a total of 70 years, as prophesied by Jeremiah. The fall of Jerusalem marked the end of the southern kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The final few verses of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles pertain to events that occurred after the Divided Kingdom Era had ended. For that reason, we will not cover them in this series. Hopefully we will address them along with several other related passages in a future study about the Babylonian Captivity. Until then, we'll just leave them be...

Over the course of the past several months we have carefully examined the Biblical histories of Israel and Judah during the divided kingdom years. Along the way we have learned several timely lessons, been provided with many practical examples, seen God's just and righteous character displayed, and made numerous personal applications. This morning, as we've now come to the end of this series, let's take a final, overarching look at these 35 sermons and ask ourselves... What do they say about and how do they point us to Jesus?

As stated previously in this series, during the Divided Kingdom era there were 39 kings and 1 queen that ruled over either the Northern or Southern Kingdom. Of these, only 8 of them were described as good kings who "did right in the sight of the LORD" - all in Judah. But even these 8 were morally flawed in some way, as the Bible intentionally points out. Let's do a quick review of them specifically:

Asa - near the end of his life he trusted in the Aramaeans to defeat Israel and in the physicians to heal his diseased feet, rather than trusting in God.

Jehoshaphat - throughout his life he repeatedly allied with wicked Ahab and his sons, and he allowed his own son to marry Ahab's daughter. His moral compromise endangered Judah.

Joash - reigned righteously as long as his mentor Jehoiada was alive, but afterward turned to wicked advisors and began acting corruptly which led to his assassination.

Amaziah - achieved military success early in his reign, but became prideful and arrogant which led to his defeat, humiliation, and eventual assassination.

Uzziah - near the end of his life he became presumptuous and burned incense on the altar in the temple, became angry at the priests who confronted him, and was struck with leprosy.

Jotham - though he practiced righteousness and obedience personally, he did not purge Judah of its false worship or idolatry and did not lead them toward God.

Hezekiah - towards the end of his reign he foolishly and naively showed off his treasures to the Babylonians, was rebuked for his boasting, and was nonchalant about Judah's future judgment.

Josiah - stubbornly relied on his own instincts and insisted on fighting against Pharaoh Neco rather than listening to God's word. He was killed as a result.

All 8 of these "good" kings were imperfect and tainted by sin in some way. The truth is, no human king can ever lead in perfect, unblemished righteousness. The people of God need a better king - one who is completely pure, holy, just, and good. We need a king that is without sin, who is almighty, and who always does what is right. Is there such a king? If so, who is he?

His name is Jesus. He completes the line of David. He is the King of kings, who ever reigns. He is the divine Son of God who conquered sin and defeated death. He makes salvation available to all who trust in Him as Lord. He rules over creation in truth and righteousness. He is the King that all others point to (Daniel 7:13-14) and is the central focus of this entire series... and in fact of the entire Bible. Are you a citizen of His kingdom?

Kings, Queens, and Prophets During the Divided Kingdom Era

All dates are approximate

Judah (Southern Kingdom)	Israel (Northern Kingdom)	Prophets of Judah and/or Israel
Rehobam (954-938 BC)	Jeroboam (954-934 BC)	Iddo-J, Ahijah-I, Shemaiah-J, 2 Anonymous-B
Abijam/Abijah (937-935 BC)		
Asa (934-894 BC)	Nadab (934-933 BC) Baasha (933-909 BC) Elah (908-907 BC) Zimri (907 BC) Tibri (907-904 BC) Omri (907-898 BC)	Azariah-J, Hanani-J, Jehu [^] -I
Jehoshaphat (894-871 BC)	Ahab (897-878 BC)	Elijah-I, Obadiah*-I, Micaiah-I, 3 Anonymous-I
	Ahaziah (877-876 BC) Jehoram/Joram (875-864 BC)	Jehu [^] -J, Jahaziel-J, Eliezer-J Elisha-I
Jehoram/Joram (876-864 BC)		
Ahaziah (864 BC)		
Athalia (863-858 BC)	Jehu (863-836 BC)	
Joash (857-818 BC)		Joel*-J
	Jehoahaz (835-819 BC)	
Amaziah (817-789 BC)	Joash/Jehoash (819-804 BC) Jeroboam II (803-763 BC)	Anonymous-J Jonah-I
Uzziah/Azariah (799-748 BC)		Zechariah ^{^^} -J, Amos-I Hosea-I
	Zechariah (762 BC) Shallum (762 BC) Manahem (761-751 BC) Pekahiah (750-749 BC)	
Jotham (747-733 BC)	Pekah (748-729 BC)	Isaiah-J, Micah -J
Ahaz (740-726 BC)		Oded-I
	Hoshea (728-720 BC)	
Hezekiah (725-697 BC)		
Manassah (696-642 BC)		Nahum-J
Amon (641-640 BC)		
Josiah (639-609 BC)		Huldah-J, Habakkuk-J, Zephaniah-J, Jeremiah-J
Jehoahaz (609 BC)		
Jehoiakim (609-598 BC)		Daniel-J
Jehoiachin/Jeconiah/Coniah (597 BC)		Ezekiel-J
Zedekiah (596-586 BC)		

J - Prophet primarily in Judah
 I - Prophet primarily in Israel
 B - Prophet for both Judah and Israel
 ^ - Same person
 ^^ - Not the minor prophet
 * - Date disputed