

2 Kings

Monday: 1 Kings 22-2 Kings 3

Tuesday: 2 Kings 4-7

Wednesday: 2 Kings 8-11

Thursday: 2 Kings 12-16

Friday: 2 Kings 17-20

Introduction

If you have been following these devotionals closely, and have been paying attention to the charts, then you will notice two problems with the chart for this week.

First, it doesn't match last week's. The chart for 1 Kings ended with Israel at the bottom of the page, wallowing in the blood of Ahab, while Judah was soaring at the top of the page. This week you will notice that Judah is at the bottom of the page and Israel is at the top. Here's why. The 1 Kings chart was designed to show peaks and valleys that represented walking or not walking in a right relationship with God. When Jeroboam erected his two golden bulls in Dan and Bethel, he sent the kingdom of Israel on an irreparable downward trajectory. There was no way that Israel could have been on the top of that chart. This week the purpose of the chart is different. In the 2 Kings chart things are laid out in more of a geographical configuration. Israel was the kingdom in the north and Judah was in the south. The enemies -- Aram, Assyria, and Babylon -- were northwest of Israel while Egypt was to the Southeast of Judah. Please read this chart from left to right, as a time line, with the ups and downs of the kings still representing right relationship with God. You will notice that red indicates an "evil" king while green represents a "good" king. (Jehu is orange

because he wasn't evil, but he didn't quite make it to "good" either)

The second problem is that...well...the chart is messy. If, when you first looked at this chart, you thought, "what a confusing mess of jumbled spaghetti," then rest assured...you're right. 2 Kings is a jumbled mess. It is the story of two nations who slowly ran themselves into the ground and ultimately were destroyed by their enemies because of their lack of obedience to God.

That being said, notice that there are some key players and key events in 2 Kings.

Elisha

Elisha was the spiritual successor to Elijah. After the mighty prophet of 1 Kings was whisked away by the chariot of fire, Elisha took command of the spiritual leadership of Israel. The first seven chapters of the book are dedicated to the amazing ministry of this miracle-working man of God. It is an interesting study to compare the life of Elisha with the life of Jesus. They did similar miracles, went to similar places, and taught similar things. When Elisha died the kingdom of Israel quickly unraveled and was destroyed.

Jehu

Jehu was an "almost, but not quite" kind of king. On the good side, he single-handedly served as the vehicle through which God eradicated the line of Ahab from the face of the planet. He purged Israel of the paganism introduced by Jezebel and watched as the dogs fulfilled prophecy while munching on her body. On the down side, Jehu did not rectify the sin of Jeroboam and left the golden bulls standing

in Israel. He took the nation to the one-yard line, and then fumbled the ball. He got rid of most of the cancer, but left enough of a seed behind to metastasize and kill the whole nation.

Destruction of Israel

Finally, in 721 B.C., God used the nation of Assyria to utterly destroy the kingdom of Israel. All ten tribes that comprised that kingdom were annihilated by the intermarriage that was forced upon them by their Assyrian oppressors.

Hezekiah

The story of Hezekiah is a brief breath of fresh air in the middle of a putrid history. Hezekiah did what no other king had done since David; he destroyed the high places and brought the focus of worship in Judah back to the temple where it belonged. The syncretism of the high places was the constant virus that kept the nation from experiencing true health in the presence of God. Because of Hezekiah's reformation the imminent invasion from Assyria was miraculously abated as Sennacherib, their pompous king, was sent running back to Nineveh with his tail between his legs.

Manasseh

One of the most radical, whiplash-inducing reversals of all time was the succession of Manasseh to his father's throne. If Hezekiah was the most righteous king of post-David Judah, then Manasseh was the most wicked. In a matter of a few short years Manasseh not only reintroduced the paganism that Hezekiah had destroyed, he also plunged the nation even deeper into evil that was beyond comprehension. The witchcraft and demonism that

Manasseh allowed, even within the temple walls, left an irrevocable bitterness in God's mouth that He was not able to forget. Manasseh sealed Judah's doom.

Josiah

Two generations after Manasseh's reign of sin, a second king like Hezekiah ascended to the throne. Through a reconnection to the Law of Moses, Josiah spearheaded a radical reformation of Judah's religious landscape. While Josiah's reforms were true, thorough, and authentic, they were too late. God spared Josiah in response to his devotion, but the nation itself could not escape from the damage that Manasseh had done. As soon as Josiah was gone, the threads of the nation began to unravel.

Destruction of Judah

In 586 B.C., after several years of oppression and messing around with a puppet king on the throne of Jerusalem, Babylon finally burned Jerusalem to the ground, Temple and all. King Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument that God used to bring judgment to His wayward children. It was a dark day when the smoke of the burning Temple reminded the world of God's promise to Solomon when he had built that beautiful building. God warned Solomon that if the people ever lost their focus and turned their hearts toward other gods that He would remove His protective presence from the Temple and in burning ruins would become the laughing stock of the world. And so it was.

Jehoiachin spared

Although it occupies very little space in the context of the whole book, the fact that Jehoiachin surrendered and was taken as a prisoner to Babylon is incredibly

significant to the big picture of God's master plan of redemption. God had promised David that the king of Israel would always come from his line. Had Jehoiachin been killed (as most kings would have been at the hands of the conquering empire) then the line of David would have destroyed. When we read in Matthew 1, in the genealogy of Jesus, we see that Jehoiachin (he is called Jeconiah in Matthew's gospel) is listed. Jehoiachin stands as a glimmer of hope and a reminder to the fact that God is the God of covenant. No matter how bad things get, He will never break His promises. God always keeps a remnant of hope among His people. God loves us and does not desire to see us suffer the way we do. Our suffering is the result of our own poor choices. Yet, God will not give up on us. Through God's faithfulness, He preserved the line of David and made the way for the ultimate King, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, to come into the world and settle the score once and for all.

Monday: Men Who Made a Difference

2 Kings 2:1-18

Describe the relationship between Elijah and Elisha?

What request did Elisha make of Elijah?

What spectacular event happened to Elijah?

How was Elisha received and perceived by the company of prophets once Elijah was gone?

Food for thought:

Every journey is marked by special moments or events that become mile markers along the way. While much of the journey will fade into the blur of daily events, periodically something very significant happens that punctuates the monotony and stands out as being significant. So far in our journey through the Old Testament we have stopped to see such mile markers as the fall of Adam and Eve, the calling of Abraham, the giving of the Law to Moses, and the promise made to David. Today we have come to another one of those events. The story of Elijah and Elisha deserves our attention.

The following article from the New Bible Commentary does an excellent job of underscoring the significant place that these two men play in the history of Israel and in the story of God's redemptive plan for the world.

The journey in this narrative took in places which were heavy with associations with Israel's past. Gilgal (v. 1) was the first stopping-place after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan. Male Israelites born during the wilderness years were circumcised there, and a Passover was celebrated (Jos. 5). Bethel (v. 2), some 14 miles into the central hills, was the place of Jacob's encounter with God (Gn. 28). Jericho (v. 4), in the Jordan valley not far from Gilgal, was the first town to fall to Joshua (Jos. 6), and the Jordan (v. 6) had miraculously stopped to let Israel enter the land (Jos. 3).

Apart from the detour to Bethel, the journey therefore focuses on places connected with Israel's entry into the promised land. The purpose of this, or at least of the writer's account of it, is to draw attention to the special roles of Elijah and Elisha

in Israel's history. Previous events in Elijah's life recalled aspects of Moses' ministry, e.g. like Moses, Elijah received a revelation of God on Mt Horeb, and his slaughter of the prophets of Baal had echoes of the aftermath of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:25–29). Now he crossed to the eastern side of the Jordan (in a manner similar to the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses' leadership), where Moses' ministry also came to an end. Indeed, the end of Moses' life was almost as mysterious as that of Elijah's (Dt. 34:6). The parallels between the lives of the two men are underlined in the NT when they both appear speaking to Jesus at his transfiguration (Mt. 17:3).

There is a theological significance to the parallels between Elijah and Moses. Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai/Horeb, the prophet (Dt. 18:15; 34:10) through whom Israel was brought into that covenant relationship and made the people of God. Elijah was the prophet through whom the people were turned back to the Sinai covenant and Israel's special status was saved. In short, the parallels with Moses dramatically heighten Elijah's importance in Israel's history and in the books of Kings in particular. H. H. Rowley ('Elijah on Mount Carmel', BJRL, 43 [1960], 190–219) neatly summed up the relationship between the ministries of Moses and Elijah: 'Without Moses the religion of Yahweh as it figured in the Old Testament would never have been born. Without Elijah it would have died.'

If Elijah is identified as a second Moses, Elisha would appear to be in the mould of Joshua. As Joshua succeeded Moses as leader of the people, so Elisha succeeded Elijah, crossing the Jordan on dry land from east to west as Joshua did (v. 14) and following in Joshua's footsteps by going on to

Jericho (vv. 15–22). (Even Elisha's name recalls that of Joshua. Elisha means 'God is salvation', while Joshua means 'Yahweh is salvation'.)

Elijah's departure demonstrated the power and mystery of God. It was foreknown by Elisha and the groups of prophets at Bethel and Jericho (vv. 3, 5) and finally occurred in a way which defies a clear description (v. 11). Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (v. 9) reflects the inheritance-right of a firstborn son (Dt. 21:17), and we may see a connection between this and Elisha addressing Elijah as his father (v. 12). It amounts to a formal request that he might be heir to Elijah's ministry. The condition which Elijah imposed (v. 10) probably involved Elisha understanding his departure rather than simply witnessing it. Elisha's cry, 'the chariots and horsemen of Israel' (v. 12), showed that he perceived Elijah to be the true might and protection of God's people. He tore his clothes as a sign of mourning at the people's loss.

When Elisha approached the Jordan and it divided for him as it had done for Elijah, the event confirmed that the spirit active in Elijah now rested on him. The prophets from Jericho therefore acknowledged him as their new master (v. 15). However, they had not understood Elijah's departure as well as Elisha, for they insisted on searching for him. Elisha knew this to be useless (vv. 16–18).

In the fifth century bc, the prophet Malachi predicted that the return of Elijah would precede the 'great and terrible day of the Lord' (Mal. 4:5). In its context this indicates a prophet who would repeat Elijah's ministry of calling the people back to God (Mal. 4:6), but it led to much speculation that Elijah would return in person (cf. Mt. 17:10; Mk.

8:28). *Jesus indicated that the ministry of Elijah had been resumed by John the Baptist, fulfilling the words of Malachi (Mt. 11:14; 17:11–13).*¹

Tuesday: Good News!!

2 Kings 7:3-11

What terrible events had just happened in the city of Samaria prior to this passage?

What miracle did God do in the Aramean camp?

What was the immediate reaction of the lepers when they made their discovery in the camp of the Arameans?

What conviction overtook the four lepers? (v. 9)

What did they do about it? What was at risk?

Food for thought:

It is difficult for us to imagine the plight of the Samaritans in this story. The Arameans had been surrounding the city for so long that there was no food left. The people were so hungry that they had actually resorted to eating their own children! To have lived in the city of Samaria seems like it must have been the absolute lowest place a person could get in life. Yet, there was something even lower. You could have been a leper in the city of Samaria during the siege. Now that was the lowest of low positions!

As we track with the story of these four hopeless, yet courageously desperate lepers, let's draw an analogy to this tale. Imagine that the city of Samaria represents humanity and that the surrounding camp of the Arameans represents sin. Because of the fall, sin has surrounded the city of man and has cut it off from its source of food and water; the life-giving relationship with God for which it was created. The effects of sin are morbid, leading humanity to cannibalism and self-destruction. Can you create the analogy in your mind?

Now, here we have four hopeless lepers. They realize that they are in a lose/lose situation. If they stay at the city gate they will die. (After all, no one even wanted them when times were good.) If they go into the enemy camp they will be killed. Yet, if they go into the enemy camp there might be the outside chance of a last meal. They reason that it would be better to be shot at dawn on a full stomach than to die a miserable death of starvation at the city gate. So, they make a courageous move and walk into the enemy camp.

Lo, and behold, what do they find? God had done a

miracle. God has driven the enemy out of the camp and removed the threat from the city. No longer was the enemy cutting off the food lines. They were gone. Not only were they gone, but they had left behind food and riches to boot.

Imagine their feeling in that moment. Here are a four of the lowest of the low, men who had been treated as sub-human their whole life, now sitting in the lap of luxury and feasting like kings!

How would you have felt in that moment? What would have been your attitude toward the Samaritans? It would have been very easy for the lepers to have thought to themselves, "Finally, we get sweet revenge. All these years the Samaritans have cast us aside and gloated in their bounty. Now it's payback time. Now we have the bounty and they are suffering. They are getting what they deserve. Let them rot!"

What did the lepers actually say? They realized that they had "good news" for the dying citizens of Samaria. They were convicted that it was wrong to sit around, enjoying the bounty of God's blessing, while the city lie sick and dying. They had to go back and announce the good news to their fellow citizens.

Now let's return to our analogy. If Samaria represents the condition of humanity being ravaged by sin, and if the Aramean camp represents sin itself encircling humanity, then we are the lepers. As followers of Jesus we have entered into the truth that God has miraculously defeated the enemy, by no merit of our own, and has made the bounty of life with Him available to all who would enter into it. We are sitting at the table of God's blessing, feasting in a peaceful and bountiful, life-giving relationship with

Him. How does it feel?

Now, how do you feel about the rest of the people who are still in the city, starving to death? Do you think, "Hey, I found this on my own, they can find it on their own as well," or, "those sinners deserve what they are getting." Hopefully, you will become as convicted as the lepers and realize that it is not right to sit and enjoy this bounty, hoarding it for yourself, while others are perishing in ignorance. You have good news to share. You have tasted the Kingdom of God, and you have what they need...the bread of life.

The question is; what are you doing with it? Who do you know that is starving to death spiritually? Are you praying for them? Are you being the Kingdom of God in their lives through word and action? Are you being authentically intentional with your conversations with them, trying to open the door for God?

Let's pray today that we would have the attitude of the lepers and shout to the city, "We have 'good news' for you!! Taste and see that the Lord is good!"

Wednesday: Nice Try

The full story of Jehu spans across chapters 9-10. A nice summary of his reign can be found in 2 Kings 10:28-31

What was the religious climate of Israel when Jehu was anointed king?

Who was Jehu's partner in cleansing Israel? (10:15-17)

What did Jehu do right? (10:28, 30)

Where did Jehu miss the mark? (10:29, 31)

Food for thought:

In the aftermath of the reign of king Ahab and his wicked Sidonian Queen Jezebel, the kingdom of Israel was pretty messed up. Jeroboam had launched them on a trajectory of idolatry when he established the golden bulls in Dan and Bethel. Ahab followed that downward trajectory and buried them deeper in the muck and mire of witchcraft, spiritism, and everything that was detestable to God. Through the prophet Elijah, God had promised to eradicate Ahab's family from the planet.

Jehu was the man chosen for the job. He was the physical tool used by the hand of God to bring justice to the family of Ahab, much like Joshua's leadership was the tool used to bring justice to the Canaanites. Jehu did a fabulous job at it. Through him Israel was cleansed of all the Baal worship that Ahab and Jezebel had introduced.

Jehu was a hero, right? Jehu was a spiritual giant in Israel right? If God grades on a curve, then, yes, he was. The problem is that God doesn't grade on a curve, He grades by a constant standard. Jehu was the one and only king in Israel's history that tried to make an effort to pull the nation out of sin, and yet, there was the issue of those silly bulls in Dan and Bethel. Jehu didn't touch those. It's as if Jehu was a kickoff receiver in a football game who caught the ball in his own end zone, plowed ahead down the field, juke and faked and sprinted his way past the 50, past the 25, and got all the way to the one yard line... about to score...then dropped the ball. All that work for nothing. What a waste.

So where is the hope in this devotional? Who is the hero in this story? The hero is Jehu's partner,

Jonadab.

Read this clip from the Word in Life Study Bible:

People sometimes excuse or justify their immoral behavior with the attitude that “everybody’s doing it.” But that notion is false. Not everyone is doing it. Not everyone is giving way to popular opinion. Some people maintain their moral convictions – even those which are not based on specific biblical teachings.

Jeremiah shows us an example. The wicked people of Judah were faithless when it came to keeping the covenant, so God gave them a case study in loyalty. He told Jeremiah to offer wine to a group of people called the Rechabites (Jer. 35:2), a family descended from Jonadab the son of Rechab (35:6). The Rechabites refused Jeremiah’s offer (as God knew they would), based on a centuries-old tradition established by their ancestor.

In the days following King Ahab’s evil rule in Israel, God raised up Jehu (see 2 Kin. 9:2) to completely destroy Ahab’s descendants. In carrying out this task – which Jehu did with zeal – he recruited Jonadab to join with him (2 Kin. 10:15–17). Perhaps to display his loyalty to the Lord, Jonadab commanded his descendants to refrain from drinking any alcohol, and to live in tents as nomads (Jer. 35:6–7), just as the Israelites had lived in former times. The Lord did not command Jonadab or his family to live this way. Jonadab established these rules, and his descendants followed them of their own free will.

Thus the Rechabites showed that it is possible to remain faithful and obedient to God, no matter what other people may be doing. After all, if this family could remain loyal to convictions that were not even

prescribed by God, then surely the rest of the people could hold fast to beliefs and standards that God had commanded (35:12–16).

The same principle applies today. Here and there in modern society, we find groups of people who steadfastly maintain traditions or lifestyles that they have inherited from their ancestors. They go about their business seemingly undeterred by the fads and fashions of the surrounding culture. But if these groups are able to hold onto their convictions, is there any reason why those of us who claim to follow Christ should not maintain the moral standards and doctrinal truths that the Lord has established in Scripture?²

Like it or not, we live in a world that is more like Israel than like Judah. Our society and our churches have been seriously infected by very worldly philosophies. What those philosophies are and where we draw the lines are issues for another time and for serious consideration. For now, ask God to reveal to you where the compromises have been made in your own life. Ask yourself how you could be more like the Rechabites than like Jehu.

Thursday: The Day of Reckoning

Today we will dip one more chapter into tomorrow's reading in order to encapsulate the force of what we have read.

2 Kings 17:7-23

What event does the phrase "all this" represent in v. 7?

According to this passage, why did these events take place?

Food for Thought:

On Monday we said that journeys and histories are punctuated by bright spots that are worthy of stopping to remember. Unfortunately the same is true for dark spots. The Holocaust memorial and the Vietnam Memorial are edifices that have been built, not in celebration of bright moments in history, but as timeless reminders of man's capabilities for evil. They exist as a hopeful deterrent to future generations to keep them from following the same tragic path.

Today we must make one of those stops along our journey. Chapter 17 is a haunting reminder of:

- ☀ the reality of sin
- ☀ the reality of God's justice
- ☀ the reality and the severity of the consequences associated with prolonged disobedience to God.

In our feel-good society we don't like these moments. We don't like pain. We don't like consequences and taking responsibility for our actions. Well, too bad. There it is. Jeroboam blew it, the people had a "go with the flow" attitude, nobody stepped up to the plate to do anything about it, and, eventually, SLAM! the terrible foot of Assyria came crashing down on the nation and destroyed 90% of the nation of Israel... forever.

There is no happy, redemptive, good-guy-wins-at-the-end-of-the-story, rah-rah finish to this tale. Israel was gone.

Chapter 17 is a living testimony to the words of Paul in Galatians 6:7, "*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*" As risky as

this may be in a devotional designed to encourage you each day so that you can be fed and face the challenges of the world, we are going to end today on a downer. As you move out into the world today, keep the crushing blow of the Assyrian foot echoing in your soul. In the Kingdom of God there is no time to mess around. There is no space for cheap compromise. God is God. He loves you and invites you into an authentic relationship with Him. He is a jealous husband who will not tolerate a cheating wife. Keep your eyes on Him today and don't let yourself get distracted.

Friday: A Godly King!

2 Kings 18-19

How is Hezekiah described in 18:3-8?

What threats did Sennacherib make against Jerusalem?

What was Hezekiah's response to these threats?

Put Hezekiah's prayer, found in 19:14-19, into your own words.

How did God respond to Hezekiah's request? Why? (19:35-37)

Food for Thought:

Finally, we meet another hero. Hezekiah was a good king. What made Hezekiah different than Jehu? Why can we celebrate the life of Hezekiah? Why did God defeat Assyria for him when he used that same nation to destroy Israel? It all comes down to follow-through and a matter of the heart.

There are two points to be made for today:

- 1. Hezekiah was willing to cut down the high places.** Ever since Solomon took his nose-dive off of the mountain of godliness, Judah had been infected with the disease of syncretism. Syncretism means “to combine or attempt to combine the characteristic teachings, beliefs, or practices of differing systems of religion or philosophy” (from Collin’s Dictionary). When Hezekiah became king, the people of Judah were still going to the Temple to worship God according to the Laws of Moses, BUT they were ALSO going to the high places outside the city to worship the various gods of the Canaanites. You might say they were covering their spiritual bases. How many times do we see that in our culture? We read news stories about first ladies who drive from their protestant church services over to their astrologer so that they can consult with dead people for guidance. And in response to this behavior, the average American says, “hey, whatever works!” This form of hodgepodge spirituality that picks and chooses pieces of all belief systems (syncretism) seems to be, at first glance, a very loving way to get along in the world. It is most definitely the spirituality of our times. Yet, as bigoted and intolerant as

this may sound, that philosophy is the death of a society. It's what got Israel into trouble, it's what will get our nation into trouble, and it's what will get your heart into trouble if you are not careful. Hezekiah knew this, and he did something about it. He tore down the high places and set Judah back on the right track.

- 2. Even good things can become objects of idolatry.** One of the most intriguing parts of this story is found in v. 4 where it says, "He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it." Do you remember the story from Numbers 21? The camp of Israel had been infested with poisonous snakes. In order to counteract this pestilence, God instructed Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole and anyone who looked at the snake would be healed from the venom. That snake had been preserved throughout the nation's history as a symbol and a memorial of God's grace and deliverance from sin. Now, in Hezekiah's time, the people had become so far removed from the truth of God's nature that they had lost sight of the meaning behind the symbol and had begun to use it as an idol; as something at which to direct prayers.

How typical of we humans. It happens in every generation. One person builds a system of "doing church" or has a truly miraculous experience as they were authentically walking with God, and the next generation venerates it and worships it, as if it was the source of the power. Hezekiah was wise enough, and courageous enough to realize that there was no symbol important enough, not even a cross

with a snake on it, to keep around if it was going to get in the way of people authentically knowing God.

Many times you will hear people talking about killing a “sacred cow” in order to save an organization. In today’s reading, Hezekiah was willing to kill a “sacred snake” in order to save the kingdom. What symbols or philosophies are still lurking around in your personal shrine? Are there still forms of worship that you can’t do without? Are there still ways of thinking that are comforting and “easy” into which you slip when the faith-walk of living in the Kingdom of God gets burdensome? Are you willing to let them go in order to know God more fully? Ask God to expose them to you and give you the courage to stand strong like Hezekiah did.

(Footnotes)

¹ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (2 Ki 2:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

² *Word in life study Bible*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Je 35:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.