

Kings and Prophets 13-07-26a

This is Friday, the 26th of July, 2013. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets. Tonight we'll be picking up with the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings chapter 17.

We'll take a moment, as is our custom and our privilege, to go to the Lord in prayer individually and collectively to express our gratitude and ask God's blessing on this time that we spend together. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for another opportunity to spend time studying your word together, seeking to improve our understanding not only of what your word says, but how we can live in the light of its truth day by day, moment by moment. We pray that as we look at these passages from your word and examine the life of the prophet Elijah, that we will each find that truth that you have for us that will encourage us, motivate us, strengthen us, convict us where we fail and equip us for those good works that you have ordained that we should walk in them.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have been prosecuting our understanding of the divided kingdom in Israel and have traced the kings in Judah, beginning with Rehoboam and coming down to Jehoshaphat.

We have looked at the kings in the north, beginning with Jeroboam and have arrived at Ahab. This gives us the opportunity now that we have sort of caught up our kings to go back and take a look at the prophets and our first major prophetic presence is the prophet Elijah. Now we have seen Micaiah, we have seen a man of God pop up here and there but the great ministry of the prophet Elijah now comes into view in the days of Ahab.

And this account begins just as we see Ahab coming to the throne in Israel in 1 Kings chapter 16 verse 29. In the 38th year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria 22 years. Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.

And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal which he had built in Samaria and Ahab made a wooden image or asherah. These were sometimes idols made of wood, other times they were more of a totem type of thing.

Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him, which is quite a trick if you remember what some of these previous guys have done. And I just want to pause and roll over in our minds for just a moment what it means to make the Lord God angry, angry. The God of the universe, the God that engineered the galaxies, the infinitude of time and space, brought into being all of the angelic hosts, every particle of matter, every manifestation of energy, everything that we know of, the very fact of our own thinking and consciousness, all brought about by the Lord God in heaven and you as

an individual are making him angry.

It's a great classic sermon by Jonathan Edwards called Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. And it's one of those that sparked revival and repentance all over the nascent American landscape in the days it was delivered because it ought to scare us. We tend to think of God as sort of a monumental presence that is so vast and above and beyond that he's immovable, he's impassive, he saw everything from the beginning, he's just sort of got everything on cruise control and he's watching and observing from beneath half-closed lids and he's just up there and he's so big and vast and he's got so much other stuff going on that he doesn't pay attention.

Here's one guy on planet Earth and God is angry. This ought to be something that we think about from time to time because it is an expression, obviously it's an anthropopathism, pathos meaning to feel or to have a passion and anthropos meaning something that is expressed in human terms or something that we do that is ascribed to God so that we can get an idea or just a glimpse of his attitude and his policy and his tendency toward either grace or judgment. Ahab made these things and did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

Roll up all of them together. Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri. Roll them all together and they don't make God as angry as Ahab does.

I am amazed that Ahab reigns for 22 years. You would think God would just incinerate him. His heart would explode.

His brain would explode. He would explode. He and Jezebel would both explode.

But they don't. And this is why God runs the universe and not one of us because when we get angry we start wreaking destruction, mental, emotional, physical, just depending on what your predilections are and how much you think you can get away with in the long term. We get destructive in our anger.

And God gets angry. But God, from a human perspective, bides his time. He's got larger purposes and he does not let his anger get in the way of his purposes.

This is one of the ways, as a point of application, that we ought to strive to be like God. Be ye holy for I am holy. We recognize that God is right to be angry.

This obviously isn't a sinful anger. God doesn't have an anger management problem, does he? He doesn't need therapy. He doesn't need counseling.

He gets angry, but notice God does not burst the bonds of his self-control when he's angry. He puts up with Ahab for 22 years. That's longer than some of you have been alive.

Twenty-two years. To recognize that there is an issue over which we can be righteously

indignant but not let it cause us to diverge or to stumble or to depart from the path that we should walk and the policies that we should follow and the priorities that we should observe and the goals that we should pursue and fulfill. Be angry all you want, but don't let the sun go down on your wrath.

Be angry and sin not. One of the ways that anger leads us into sin is when it deflects us from those priorities and goals and staying within the bounds of the righteous road that leads to that straight gate of life. Nothing wrong with being angry, especially when it is rooted in a passion for what is right and a passion for what is good.

Perfectly fine to be angry. You can look at what goes on at the national level. You can look at what goes on locally.

You can look at crime. You can look at injustice. You can look at suffering and feel angry.

But it has to be contained within the moral bounds, the precepts, the ordinances, the statutes, the commands of God. And it cannot be allowed to take the wheel and swerve us off the right road. God Himself gets angry, very angry, but He bides His time.

He has a plan and a purpose in northern Israel as we will see tonight. So despite this anger, more than all the kings of Israel who were before Him, in His days, Heel of Bethel built Jericho. And we saw this in the past few weeks.

This long-standing pronouncement of the Word of the Lord is flouted. It is well known that God does not want Jericho rebuilt. God doesn't stop it, but the curse on the one who flouts the Word of God is fulfilled.

And it doesn't matter how long ago it was given. This is hundreds of years earlier. It doesn't matter.

The Word of God stands. I think about this every time I look at a crack in the sidewalk when I'm mowing and I see grass shooting up between those two pieces of concrete. God gave a command thousands of years ago to the vegetation on this planet to be fruitful and multiply.

And the plants and the descendants of the plants and the infinite generations of plants that have come from that, every new seed, every new plant, every new seed, every new plant for generation after generation still faithfully follows the command of God. And you see green plantage growing in the most bizarre places. I saw a plant growing in the floor of a guy's car one time.

Look down at your feet. In fact, I've seen that twice. A little seed fell down there.

Here's something growing in the carpet. It's such a shame to us that brainless plants follow the command of God and spring up and survive and weather droughts and you put seeds in a pyramid with a mummy and for thousands of years they're dormant. You take them out, put a

little water on them, they still obey God's command and they germinate and they send out roots and stems and they flower and germinate and multiply because God told them to.

God has a plan and a purpose and creation is subordinate to Him. He allows latitude within bounds but it is all within His purview. Heal is mentioned here as rebuilding Jericho because this is a new threshold of disregard for the Word of God and it is a shame.

Now, we've been talking about Ahab. What's he the king of? Northern Israel, right? Where is Jericho? We've talked about from Dan to Bethel and all the stuff Jeroboam did with the calves and the high places and the fake priests and all of that. Where's Jericho? It's walking distance from Jerusalem, right? It's a burb.

It's a short walk. Remember Jesus telling the story of the men passing by on the road, the good Samaritan and the guy in the ditch? And Jesus walked over to Jericho and back. You get your Bartimaeus story going on in the outskirts there.

So this is a reminder that this attitude of disregard for the Word of God is striking very close to the southern kingdom. And this would have been a sign that was visible to everybody in both kingdoms. This isn't something that happened up in Galilee someplace.

Jericho is right there. This is like Frisco is to Plano. This is like Richardson is to Plano.

It's just right next door. Well, we want to take a look at something here because now we come to chapter 17. And chapter 17, verse 1 says, Elijah the Tishbite, or Elijah from Thisbe.

Well, this introduces a fresh chapter in not only the book, but in the historical account that we're looking at. And I want to just put it in a little bit of context. It has been 58 years since the kingdom split.

From the time that Solomon died and the northern and southern kingdoms went their separate ways with Jeroboam and Rehoboam, it has been 58 years. In the north, how many kings have we had? There's Jeroboam. There is Nadab.

He didn't last too terribly long. There's Baasha. There's Elah.

There's Zimri. There's Omri. And then Ahab.

So if you're numbering the northern kings, what number is Ahab? Number 7. He is number 7 of the kings in the divided kingdom period in the northern kingdom. He's number 7. Now, what was the progression? What were these guys most notable for? I just made myself a little list. I just numbered these kings 1 to 7. And I said, number 1, Jeroboam.

We have a lot of information about him, but what was the overall thematic statement you can make about Jeroboam? He corrupted worship in the northern kingdom. He made the calves. He commissioned the false priests.

He encouraged people to stay up there. He invented a new feast. He encouraged high places.

He introduced and encouraged all kinds of false worship. Why? Because he was a big believer in Baal? Because he was a fan of having a whole pantheon of false gods? No. It tells us specifically he was afraid that if people went down to the southern kingdom, to Jerusalem, to worship, they would return to God and decide they didn't want him as king and kill him.

So he encouraged false worship. He eroded, another way of putting it is, he corrupted and eroded genuine worship of God for political purpose. It was to keep himself on his throne.

He didn't give two hoots in a rain barrel about God or gods or anything else. This was a way of controlling the people. Controlling them by manipulating worship.

The same thing happens today all over the world with various religions. Religion is a tool to control the masses for political ends. You see this.

I don't have to give you many examples for you to realize the veracity of that. Nadab, second king, son of Jeroboam, walked in all the ways of his father. Remember it says he caused Israel to sin.

We talked about what does it mean to cause them to sin. He was the second generation. Jeroboam is the first generation of them that hate me, policy wise.

Nadab is the second. Walks in all the ways of his father. Encourages and expands what his father did.

Third one is Baasha. Baasha murders Nadab and wipes out the entire house of Jeroboam. Murders them all.

Destroys them all. According to the word of the Lord. God said this is going to happen because this is the third generation.

This would have been the third generation coming to the throne of them that hate me. This is sort of the three generation curse. So Jeroboam is dead.

Jeroboam's son is murdered. And then all of the ones who could possibly succeed Nadab to the throne by blood relation to Jeroboam are slain. So that's three generations taken in death when Baasha comes to the throne.

Fourth, you have Elah. Elah comes to the throne. He's a drunk.

And he's a drunk and defenseless in Tirzah. And he gets himself murdered by Zimri. Zimri is a conspirator and a traitor.

But I want you to notice something about Nadab. Nadab was murdered by Baasha, right? And this is a first. Nadab has the distinction of being the first king in Israel, north or south, for what?

To be assassinated.

This is assassination. This is kind of like Abraham Lincoln. Of all of our presidents, Lincoln was the first one to be assassinated.

Nadab is assassinated. This sends a shockwave. This has never happened since the days of Saul.

They tried to talk David into assassinating Saul, and he refused. He said, you do not touch the Lord's anointed, no matter what he does. This is the first assassination.

And this is a shockwave. This is a wakeup, as we will see. And Baasha dies, and his son Elah comes to the throne.

But Elah does not last too long. He is murdered by Zimri, the conspirator. Zimri only lasts a week before he self-immolates in the palace.

And Omri is more or less publicly acclaimed as king. And then you have that little division of the kingdom and so on. But what does the Bible say about Omri, who is number six? Worse than all before him.

He is worse than all before him. There is a progression of going from bad to worse, to worse, to worse, to worse. And by the time you get to Ahab, number seven, he provokes God to anger more than all who were before him.

He is worse than all who were before him. But they always go back and talk about the sins of Jeroboam. It is an expansion and a growth of that.

So we have seven kings in these 58 years when Ahab comes to the throne. He is number seven. Now, here comes Elijah in chapter 17.

And I asked the question last time, and I said, you know, be thinking about this. See if you can figure out an answer. Why does God send Elijah? And when He sends Elijah, why does He send him to the northern kingdom? Where are the faithful people? Where are the ones that are still worshipping where they are supposed to, and there are a lot of people still faithfully adhering to God? They are down in the south.

Elijah doesn't show up there. Why? Well, God seems to be dealing with the northern kingdom in a supernatural way. Let's review.

The first supernatural thing. In the days of the kings, He split the kingdom, Jeroboam, Rehoboam. What's the first supernatural thing that happens? What's the first miraculous thing you can remember that happens? Remember when the man of God goes up and confronts Jeroboam for building that false altar? He got the withered hand.

It withers and then it is restored. And then the altar splits open according to his rent in twain, falls apart at the word of the prophet. How many signs is that? Well, it's three really.

You wither the hand, you repair the hand, and blow up the altar. So it's three signs all at once. It's sort of a threefer.

It's like a hat trick. It's a prophetic hat trick. You get three for one.

But Jeroboam's altar and Jeroboam's hand, that's the first sign. That's 1 Kings 13, 1 through 10. Remember that? This is a sign, public, well-known, viewed by thousands of people, and it's a wake-up call to the northern kingdom.

So let's label that number one. Number two, you have that little dialogue. The king invites the prophet home and the prophet says, I've been told not to.

Then you've got that whole tête-à-tête with the false prophet, the wannabe prophet up in the northern kingdom that God's not using for anything. And because the prophet disobeys, he dies, he's slain. And then you've got that mule thing with one living and one dead prophet, and you've got that whole double entendre there of one prophet living, one prophet dead, coming into town.

And this is well-known. And it spins 21 verses on that in 1 Kings 13, the prophet's fate. That's a sign.

Everybody hears about this. Everybody hears about this weird interaction between these two prophets, the guy burying him in his own tomb and identifying with him and that. That's a second sign, the prophet's fate.

And that guy, the one that dies is a prophet to Jeroboam. The other one is really Jeroboam's prophet who doesn't prophesy, but he's up there in Jeroboam's kingdom. So I would say the first sign, we have Jeroboam's hand and Jeroboam's altar.

The second sign is Jeroboam's true prophet and Jeroboam's false prophet. Third, in chapter 14, we saw, remember Jeroboam's son got sick? And he said, send to the man of God. And he says, as soon as his mother crosses the threshold, that child is dead.

Not going to survive. Now, we just had a royal birth, quote-unquote, over in Britain. The Duchess of something or other had a baby over there.

And the whole world is focused on it. What's his name, what does he look like, where's the pictures, etc. Do you not think that when this royal child dies, everybody in the kingdom knows about it? Of course they do.

It is a third great sign. And it's also a double sign, because two of the king's intimate family are involved. His wife and his son.

It isn't just the son pining away, wasting away and dying. It involves the wife. So we had a double sign with the hand and the altar.

We had a double sign with the good and bad prophet, so to speak. And now we've got a double sign with the wife and with the son. The son doesn't die without the wife and mother crossing the threshold.

When she comes into town, despite the word of the Lord. Look, if you believed God, and God said if you get anywhere near your child, he'll die. What would you do? Any loving mother that believed the word of the Lord would head the opposite direction.

And try to go live, you know, find a new continent to live on. So that their child would live there, do anything. Sacrifice themselves any way they could to save their child.

What does this woman do? Disregards the word of the Lord. What is the common theme in these first three signs to the Northern Kingdom? Jeroboam disregards the word of the Lord. When he tries to rebuke the prophet, his hand is shriveled.

But when he turns to God and makes a request, God hears. Even in his sinful condition, God hears and God answers positively. What about the second one? When the prophet is obedient, he lives.

When the prophet is disobedient, he dies. What's in the third sign? This mother hears the word of the Lord, knows the word of the Lord, goes against the word of the Lord, and her son dies. There is a fourth sign.

And that's the murder of Nadab, who ends up coming to the throne. The other child has died. It's an assassination.

This is a shockwave. This is like the Kennedy assassination. This is the Lincoln assassination.

This reverberates. Nobody has ever had a king, a sitting, living king on a throne in Israel, murdered before. Not only that, but the whole family is wiped out.

It's genocide. It's huge. There's dozens and dozens of people.

Everybody from the house of Jeroboam is murdered. It's a bloodbath. It's St. Valentine's Day massacre.

It's the Twin Towers. In Israel, there's nobody that doesn't know about this. What has happened to the kingdom? What is going to happen to the kingdom that this kind of violence can take place? And there's two parts of this.

The king on the throne is slain, and everyone who might come to the throne or is remotely connected to or related to the king is slain. So you have another two-part sign. The king himself, that'd be bad enough, shocking enough.

But the entire family, anybody with a drop of Jeroboamic blood is slain. Yes, I did make that up. Sign number five.

Remember chapter 16, verse 1? Just flip back a page in 1 Kings. Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, you have the word of the Lord. This is another supernatural revelation in the northern kingdom.

Still, nothing like this has happened down south. Name me one prophetic word that has come to anybody down south, except telling Rehoboam, don't slay your brothers to the north. What's happened down there since then? But here's another man of God coming back to the grossly evil, violent, blood-bathed north, going to the evil king, Baasha, and giving him prophecy.

And what does it say? In the same way that your bunch has slain all of these people, all of your guys are going to be slain. Your whole house is going to be slain. That was the fifth big sign.

And what does Jehu say according to the word of the Lord? I lifted you out of the dust, made you ruler over my people Israel. You've walked in the ways of Jeroboam and have made my people to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins. I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house.

I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. The dogs will eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city. The birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the fields.

You're going to die, your house is going to die. People in the city are going to die, people in the fields are going to die. You've got this sort of two-part, bifurcated part of the prophecy again.

It's not just Baasha that's going to die, all of his house is going to die. It's not just the ones in the city that are going to die, it's also the ones in the fields that are going to die. Baasha rests with his fathers and the word of the Lord.

And notice, even in chapter 16, we have the word of the Lord through Jehu given twice. Once in verse 1 and again in verse 7. If we didn't get the fact that this was a double sign, it's given to us twice. It's repeated twice.

Very, almost redundantly, unless you're observing this double pattern in every single one of these signs to the northern kingdom. Now, I refer you back to the end of the book of Genesis, when Joseph brings his sons to his father Jacob, who is on his deathbed, and says, Father, bless my sons. What did Jacob do? Who's the firstborn? Manasseh.

Who's the younger? Ephraim. What does Jacob do? He crosses his hands and puts his right hand on Ephraim's head. Am I right about this? So, who gets the double portion from Jacob? Ephraim.

What do we call the northern kingdom? Ephraim. It's called Ephraim, because the Ephraimites come to characterize it in the same way that the southern kingdom, even though the Benjamites are down there, it becomes called Judah. You basically end up with Judah and Ephraim, who are the only two brothers, so to speak, left standing.

Judah got the rulership, the scepter will not depart until Shiloh comes. Ephraim gets the double portion. It ratchets all the way down to Joseph, and from Joseph to Ephraim.

God is dealing with the northern kingdom of Ephraim, and every sign He gives them is a double sign. It's a double sign all the way down. That's now six signs.

Five is the prophecy to Baasha. Six, what I should say is that's five double signs so far. Baasha, we've seen the duplicity in each of those through the first five, right? What is sign number six to the northern kingdom? What is at the end of chapter 16? How does chapter 16 close? Heael rebuilds Jericho.

How many sons does Heael lose when he rebuilds Jericho? You can say it out loud. How many sons does Heael lose when he rebuilds Jericho? Two. Remember that? Read the end of the chapter.

Heael, Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram, his firstborn, and with his youngest son, Sigub, he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua, the son of Nun. That's sign number six to the northern kingdom.

Do you not think everybody knew what happened when Heael rebuilt Jericho? And everybody was saying, wow, who would have thought that that prophecy spoken by Joshua, that curse pronounced through Joshua, holds centuries later? But it did. He lost two sons. That's sign number six, double sign number six.

What is sign number seven to the northern kingdom going to be? What are the first few words of chapter 17, verse one? Elijah the Tishbite. And what's going to happen when Elijah takes off in his fiery chariot? You have Elisha. Elijah is like a double prophet.

What's notable about Elisha? What does he get from Elijah? A double portion of his spirit, right? You've had seven kings in northern Israel. Ahab's number seven. You've had seven signs to the people in the northern kingdom.

Elijah is number seven. What is God's purpose? What is He trying to do in the northern kingdom, despite their gross, gross evil, despite their heinous sins of the high hand? What is God doing up there? Well, think about that. We're going to pause and take our break, and I'll suggest an answer when we come back.