

Kings and Prophets 13-09-27a

This is Friday, the 27th of September, 2013. We resume, continue, expand, and accelerate our study of kings and prophets tonight. We'll be at the Conjunction, which is sort of an arbitrary one of first and second kings.

As you know, in the Hebrew Bible, this is one book, but we will be looking at the career in particular of the prophet Elijah in the Northern Kingdom, as it is described for us here. And uniquely so, we have barely a mention of Elijah in Chronicles, but we have quite a bit of detail here in Kings. Let's take a moment as we address ourselves to this portion of God's Word to go to the Word in prayer and ensure that this will not just be dusty history from the past, but something meaningful and efficacious in our souls and in our hearts, shall we pray? Father, we thank you for this opportunity to study your Word together, to come to understand more fully the wonderful calling and opportunity that you have given us in this life.

We know that the things that we learn about the nation of Israel and the kingdoms in the North and the South in ancient days are directly pertinent and illustrative and emblematic of truths that are important for us to know and apply as we seek to live before you. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will be our teacher, will enable us to see these things come alive and that we'll recognize their illuminating power for the decisions and the priorities and the actions that we observe in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray that we will accurately interpret your Word, that we will find those things in it, that you would have us to understand, and that each one of us will be blessed, encouraged, strengthened, and equipped through our study this evening.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. We spent a little bit of time looking at King Jehoshaphat, which took us over to Chronicles last time. We've been sort of circulating in the time frame of King Ahab in the North, Jehoshaphat in the South, the career of the prophet Elijah in the North.

We noted with some interest that God did not send prophets with a proclamation ministry to the southern kingdom of Judah during this time. We have a prophet or two drifting North, but there is not a prophet that comes and assists Jehoshaphat in the South with guidance from God or rebuke, correction, elimination of enemies or any such thing. And why is that? Because these miraculous and spectacular confrontations are necessary in a place where there's the need for repentance, there is a need for change of direction, and there is the potential for imminent divine judgment, and God warns and God confronts through His prophet the idolatrous, recalcitrant, apathetic, disobedient, in some cases outright rebellious population in the northern kingdom with a succession of miracles and prophetic declarations.

Much more quiet down in the South, less spectacular but far more substantial. What's interesting about this, and depending on how much you've gotten into the succession of kings in the North and in the South, right now where's the good king? Down in Judah. What's his name? Jehoshaphat, right? Shaphat, judge.

Yahweh is the judge. Everybody recognizes it down there. There is the circulation of the word of God.

There are teachers among the people actively cultivating spiritual health and vitality. It's a strong population with a relatively good king. There's very few negatives associated with Jehoshaphat.

He makes a few mistakes, but as I like to say, don't we all? But he does a great deal of good. Where's the evil king? In the North. What's his name? Ahab.

Who's he married to? Jezebel. Where is she from? What's her hometown? Tyre, the region of Tyre and Sidon. Her father is the king of Tyre and he was also a priest of Baal, Melkart, Baal of Ekron, this whole horrible cult.

What do you know about Tyre in this general area of history? Have we had any contact with Tyre prior to this? Can you name a king of Tyre? Remember Hiram, king of Tyre? What's he famous for? Not too terribly long ago, he was a great friend of King David. Who sent all of the workmen and the cedars of Lebanon and all the rest of those things down? Who cooperated and helped in the construction of the temple? He was a friend of David and he was instrumental in Solomon's construction of the temple and seems to have been a good guy. And now, in the space of a few generations, you've got the father of Jezebel as the king of Tyre and as a priest of Baal and he is no friend to the God of Israel.

You don't see cooperation with establishing worship in Jerusalem, now you've got the active prosecution of Baal worship by his daughter Jezebel. You can see the deterioration, there's still a friendly relationship, Tyre and the northern kingdom are literally in bed together, but not for good. What is the result? Instead of the construction of the temple for God, you have the construction and prosecution of Baal worship.

Now you've got 450 prophets of Baal and another 400 prophets of Ashtar, Baal's consort, that's 850 professional Baal-Ashtar worship teachers and spokesmen influencing, spread throughout the communities. You don't think these people all hung around in a big group, they spread out, they take mission trips, they do seminars, they're scattered through the people encouraging this false God worship. The widow to whom Elijah goes after he leaves the Brook Cherith and Elijah is sort of crisscrossing the nation.

Do you happen to know or remember where Cherith is, the Wadi Cherith or the Brook Cherith where Elijah stays during the years of the flood, no rain, where is that relative to the Jordan? It's east of the Jordan, he's on the other side of the Jordan. Where did people often go when times were hard in the land? There's a famine in the land, where would they go? They'd leave the land and either go east or south and so he's in the trans-Jordan, he's on the other side. This is where you've got Gilead and we've got these contested towns that were taken by the Ben-Hadad and you've got a lot of things over there.

In earlier days, even before the days of King David, before the days of any king in Israel, do you remember that there was a famine in the land and some Israelites left and went to Moab, dwelt in the land of Moab, which is also on that side of the Jordan a bit further south and this is where you get the story of Ruth, Naomi, widowed on that side of the Jordan and then they come back, they come home, come back to Judah and then you have Boaz, the kinsman, redeemer, but similar situation. It was not uncommon in a time of hardship to go across the Jordan. But then Elijah comes back after the brook dries up on the east side, where does he go? He goes all the way across and up to near Sidon, which is near Tyre, it's in the same district up there, it's all under the hegemony of Jezebel's people and he stays at Zarephath, which is just outside Sidon and the famine and the drought have extended even up there.

This widow is about to die, she's Syrophenician, as we like to say, she's not an Israelite lady and so Elijah, during this time of judgment on the land, first of all goes outside the land to the east, now he goes outside the land to the northwest and God preserves Elijah in those environments that are basically outside the part of the land that he has focused his judgment upon, which is in and around Samaria. So we've seen that, we've seen the stark contrast with what's going on down in Judah, where there is no indication of drought, famine or pestilence down there, instead you have widespread acknowledgment of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of David, the worship is stimulated and advanced by this teaching. And so the prophet is up north and he is proclaiming judgment, he is proclaiming the need for repentance and that's kind of where we are.

Now, I said that we were going to give very light treatment to chapter 21, which is the story of Ahab coveting Naboth's vineyard. And you could spend a lot of time on this chapter because it is very, like the rest of this, it is very dense, it's very compact, it's full of things that you can explore and exploit in terms of revealing divine truth. But I want to look at this perhaps in a way that you wouldn't expect.

Let's just re-familiarize ourselves with the story here. Chapter 21 of 1 Kings, it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel next to the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house.

For it I will give you a vineyard better than it, or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money. Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you. Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him.

For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers. He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no food. He is pouting.

But does anything strike you about this? Naboth is a common citizen, Ahab is the king. As degenerate as things have gotten in northern Israel with regard to the worship of God, there are still what we fondly refer to as Judeo-Christian values in our day that prevail. He is the king,

but what does he not do? What does he not even consider doing? I'm the king, I command you, I'm just telling you by my majestic fiat here that your field is now mine and you ought to be glad I'm letting you keep your life.

The inheritance laws in Israel and the refusal of Naboth to sell is recognized and honored by Ahab. Ahab isn't a king that can just say, troops, kill the man, take his land, I'm the king, that's how it's going to be. They have not developed this absolute monarch dictatorship idea in the northern kingdom despite the idolatry.

Ahab just has to respect the man's decision, even though he's the king. But, and here's a turning point, and this is one of the reasons this chapter is in the account and this story is given such emphasis, but Jezebel, kind of reminds you in the flood story when it's talking about how wicked everything was and distension, God's nostrils, imaginations of men's hearts, only evil all the day. Then it says, but God remembered Noah during that time of judgment.

Well, here you have, but Jezebel his wife came to him. Where is Jezebel from again? A godless pagan background in Tyre. She is not Israelite.

How many times have you seen the people of God recognize that it is necessary to marry within the clan? Abraham sends up north to find a wife for his son Isaac. Rebecca says, go to my people, to her son Jacob, to find your wife. Esau marries the women from the locality and it turns out badly.

Anytime they marry outside the land, outside the faith, outside the heritage, bad things seem to follow. So Jezebel his wife came to him and said, why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food? He says, well, I spoke to Naboth. Give me your vineyard.

If it pleases you, I'll give you another. He says, I will not. So in verse 7, Jezebel says, you now exercise authority over Israel.

You need to be more like a king of Tyre. You need to be more like the pagan kings, the godless kings. What constrains you here? You're the king for crying out loud.

Eat food, let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with a seal and fakes up this false charge against Naboth and has him judicially executed unjustly, unfairly.

He's framed. Take him out and stone him that he may die. Verse 11, the men of the city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of the city did as Jezebel had sent to them.

She perverts the justice system in Israel that is supposed to preserve righteousness, is supposed to keep people sanctified to God. She exploits it, perverts it, and uses it as an instrument of murder. They proclaimed a fast.

They seated Naboth. Scoundrels came and sat before him. Naboth has blasphemed God and

the king.

In verse 13, they sent to Jezebel saying, Naboth has been stoned and is dead. Verse 15, it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead. She said to Ahab, arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money for Naboth is not alive, but dead.

Now what's supposed to happen? What was the principle? What was the legality that Naboth cited when he refused to enter into any sort of bargain for Ahab to take possession of that land? It belongs to his family. It belongs to his clan. It belongs to his tribe.

And that is not anything Ahab can lay claim to. But because he is dead and offering no objection, he's now going to not say, well, we need to find the heirs and the signs. There are other members of the family.

This was the whole reason you had the Leveret Law and many other provisions in Israel to maintain these tribal clan and family possessions. But by the simple fact that Naboth isn't there to object, Jezebel says, just take it. Just step into the vacuum.

I heard some things being discussed this week in the news about exemptions to the health law being stated for certain people in government. Well, you're in this particular part of the government. You don't have to comply with the law.

And they were saying it was done by executive fiat. The president just declared it. There's no basis in the law that was authored in his name.

And for his sake, there is no basis in the law to grant exceptions. He just told some people they have an exception. There's no law behind it.

There's no basis for it. He just told them it's just fiat. It's just a declaration just based on the force of his own personality, I guess, that, well, you all do not have to comply with this law.

Says who? But there's always this issue of enforcement. I've mentioned before that in the time of the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the Cherokee Nation sued and took a case all the way to the Supreme Court against the state of Georgia, which was confiscating, murdering Cherokees, taking their land illegally and claiming that because it was within the state, it was the right of the state to just lay claim to it and sell it to whomever they would. And so they would just go in, murder all of the Cherokees living there and just assign title deed of the land to whoever they wished.

The Cherokees said, wait a minute, we've got treaty guaranteeing that this land is ours as long as the grass grows and the river flows. They took it to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court upheld the validity and the legality of those treaties and told the state of Georgia, you cannot confiscate that land. You certainly should not be turning a blind eye to the murder of hundreds and even thousands of these legitimate owners of this land.

And you must return it to them and allow them to live there. Andrew Jackson, who was all in favor of manifest destiny and expansion and, you know, minimal trouble said, well, the Supreme Court has made this decision. Let them enforce it.

And he refused to lift a finger, wouldn't send any troops, put no pressure on the state of Georgia. And so the state of Georgia went right on doing the very same thing they had been doing in spite of the Supreme Court decision declaring the legality of the case that it was Cherokee land. And that decision is still on the books and it's never been rectified and it's never been enforced.

So by fiat, a declaration can be made. And that's what's happening here. It is a trampling of the law.

The reason I'm describing this is, I hope, the same reason God has put this chapter in the book. Sometimes we think, well, does it really matter if people don't understand God the way I do, don't worship God according to biblical truth? Does it really matter as long as society functions, I can go to the store and buy my goods, I can work at my job, I can receive pay, I can live in the land and let's just live and let live. Let's be tolerant.

As long as we just go along to get along, won't it all be fine? But this is a classic example. And I think the reason it is detailed for us here is to show that when worship of God is a neglected, when the people of God become apathetic and indifferent, when God ceases to be a factor, ceases to be central, especially in a group claiming to be his people and claiming his name, living in the land given to them by his grace and under his blessing, there is inevitably going to be the infiltration and perversion of those basic civilizing influences and benefits that come in the civic area, in the cultural area, in the interactions between people. What is happening here? The Israelite values of respect for the individual, his property and his privacy are eroded by the incursion of ideas that are foreign and from the outside.

How did this begin? Did Ahab intend to disintegrate the moral fabric of his nation when he married Jezebel? No, they probably thought it was a great political marriage and alliance. Didn't King Solomon marry women to seal bargains and secure the borders and so on? But look at Solomon's history. When he marries these foreign women, you start having high places, you start having false worship.

And what does it do? It begins to erode and the culture and the values and the fabric of the society begin to disintegrate, to decline, to corrupt. And this is an example. You can clearly see that if it had been up to Ahab, he would have turned his face to the wall, pouted and probably gotten over it.

Well, I can't have my garden. But what happens? You have embraced, you have enfolded foreign woman with foreign ideas and a foreign form of worship. And this is just the point of the spear.

This is just an individual example. It is going to get worse. This is going to go national.

It's going to be a lot more than just Naboth before this is over. The offspring and the fruit of this marriage is going to be a curse, not just here, but down in Judah. The daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, Athaliah, is going to become the wife of the king in Judah.

The king in Judah is going to marry in the same way and for some of the same reasons that Ahab married Jezebel. And so you've got a double importation. Omri, marrying his son Ahab to Jezebel, imports this time bomb of evil in the person of the queen.

That couple is going to have a daughter, Athaliah. And in the same way, this evil is going to be exported down to the place where things are good, down to where Jehoshaphat is teaching the people. And we saw that wonderful deliverance by God in the face of a threat and the worship and the joy and the singing and the celebration and the appreciation and the reflection of the glory of God down in Judah.

There is a poison dart coming into that situation because a king coming after Jehoshaphat is going to marry Athaliah. And she is going to eventually author murder that will virtually wipe out, if it wasn't for the preservation of one individual, the line of David would be wiped out. Where are you going to get the Messiah if he can't be the son of David? And this go along to can't we compromise? Look at my goodwill.

I'm going to turn a blind eye to the evil that you represent and that you embrace. Let's all sit down and watch a movie. Oh, look, Behind the Candelabra is on.

Let's watch that and celebrate the diversity of homosexuality. Let's celebrate it at the Emmy Awards as they did this year. Let's applaud and congratulate ourselves for our tolerance and our acceptance and our lack of any sort of bigotry and any prejudice or any discrimination because those are evil words.

Prejudice is evil. Discriminating is evil. People used to be applauded for having discriminating taste.

Paul says, I pray that you will come to know the difference, ta differenta, that you can discriminate, that you can discern the better things. And in their humanly engineered efforts to achieve goodness without God, people import evil, celebrate evil, promote evil, worship evil, and inevitably those values that preserve freedom, privacy, property, individual autonomy are eroded. Ask Naboth how well it worked out with the importation of the values and the ideas of Tyre and Sidon.

Ask people in Judah. And what's interesting to me is, and again, stepping back a little bit and looking at what we've seen over these past few weeks, you've got this rampantly degenerating kingdom up in the north and under Jehoshaphat you've got a wonderfully healthy, one of the high points of all of Israelite history is the reign of Jehoshaphat with the people celebrating, even Moses in the wilderness didn't have people celebrating Bible class and all getting down

and praying and singing praises to God and watching their enemies defeat themselves. This is one of the high points in all of Old Testament history for the people of God is under Jehoshaphat.

But what's going to happen? We're going to end up with a seemingly good king in Jehu up in the north, wiping out this evil household of Ahab and wreaking havoc on Baal worship and so on, locking them into a temple and incinerating them and so forth. And so you've got a good king in this generationally historically and chronically evil area up north. And you're going to have an evil queen down in the generationally historically healthy and worshipful and vibrant spiritual nation down south.

So as God seems to do so often in history, the variables are shuffled and moved from one side of the equation to the other to solve for human responsibility, human attitude, faith and obedience. What if there's a bad king in a bad country? What do you do? What if there's a good king in a good country? What do you do? What if I swap it and put a good king in a bad country? What if I put an evil queen in a good country? And we're going to see all of these permutations in the next few chapters coming up. And it's not an accident.

God works all things together for his purposes. And they are recorded in his word for our instruction. And it is useful.

Sometimes we find ourselves enmeshed in a situation not of our own making. We find ourselves alone. We may be Elijah by the brook.

We may be Elijah up in the northern kingdom. Lord, they've all departed from you but me. Other times we may find ourselves in a healthy group, a healthy society, one that's been historically faithful, obedient, appreciative, worshipful, and suddenly leadership is horrible.

And all kinds of, you know, somebody's trying to take the group or the nation or those with whom we associate in a bad direction. Well, the wonderful thing about this account is we're going to get to see all of these things up close and personal as we continue forward in Kings and Chronicles. But by way of application, think again about Naboth.

We don't know much about him. Doesn't say he was faithful, unfaithful. He's in the northern kingdom.

We don't know who he worshipped. We don't know if he went to one of the altars set up in Dan or Bethel. We don't know if he was friendly with the priests of Baal.

We don't know if he was a latent worshipper of the Lord God. One thing we do know is he was no sympathizer to King Ahab. He wasn't trying to win his favor.

He didn't want to be his friend. He didn't want to enter business with him. He wanted to retain, for reasons we don't actually know, the heritage that had been assigned to his family.

Could have been selfish, could have been just ornery, or it could have been for spiritual reasons. We just don't know. But because he opposed an evil queen, not his king, it's his queen that costs him his life.

And it is a reminder that a bad decision by Omri, Ahab's father, to marry his son to a evil woman from a corrupt and non-Israelite dynasty, has repercussions that affect others and end up having national curse effects that are going to extend not even just to the northern kingdom, but all the way down in the southern kingdom. That one decision, I think, I'll marry my son to the daughter of the king of Tyre. Omri did this.

And look at the results as they domino and as they multiply down through the years. Our decisions affect people beside ourselves. And if we tolerate evil, if we partner with it, if we become friends with it, if we bring it into the periphery, whether it is the things that we watch on television, whether it is the places where we have responsibility, if we do not stand up for those things that are right, those things that are valid, we aren't to be ugly, we aren't to be self-righteous, but there is a line that cannot be crossed.

And when it is crossed, we think, well, that's just on me. No, it's not. You affect your community.

You affect your nation. And the reason this nation is in the trouble that it is in, don't worry about the next election. Don't worry about who runs for president and whether or not she is going to have a second term.

Don't worry about the government shutting down. Don't worry about all of these things that are causing a big stew. Look at it from the perspective we have here in Kings and Chronicles.

This nation is already under judgment. Decisions have been made in the past, over the past four or five decades, that have placed our nation in the inevitable position of judgment. It doesn't matter who you elect.

You could resurrect every great president, every great senator, every great congressman we've ever had, populate the entire government with them, every great Supreme Court judge, all believers, all God-fearing, church-going people, the nation would still collapse under the weight of the judgment of God that comes on us because we as a population have been browbeaten into turning a blind eye to evil, to embracing evil, to even celebrating evil. How many programs on your television now celebrate homosexuality? Emmy award-winning programs. I'm stuck on the Emmys because I was working and the thing came on after the football game and I didn't have my channel flipper and I saw about half of the Emmy thing.

And to my sorrow, applause, standing ovations, self-righteous adoration and congratulation for embracing evil, the evil that is corroding our nation and taking us inevitably to destruction. You see it happening, but that's why we have these passages. The people of God have been through this before.

What should we do as we see this happening around us? We're going to find that there are

7,000 in the North that haven't bowed the knee to Baal. We're going to find that there are still faithful believers in the South, even under the reign of wicked Queen Athaliah. And this is useful for us.

This is helpful for us, whether we're looking at our immediate periphery, whether we're looking at our community or our nation or the world at large with its spendthrift, doesn't matter if I have the money or not philosophy. All of that is here and it will guide us. It will encourage us.

It will inform us and give us direction and confidence and peace, the peace that passes all understanding, regardless of the turmoil and the disintegration around us. We are held by the immutable, unchanging, gracious hands of our Heavenly Father who will never suffer the righteous to be moved. We'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll move forward in our analysis of Elijah at Mount Carmel.