

Kings and Prophets 14-05-09a

This is Friday, the 9th of May, 2014. We continue tonight our study in the book of 2 Kings, which in the larger sense is our Kings and Prophets study. And happily in this passage tonight we have kings and we have a prophet.

And since he's got a double portion we can pluralize him, so Kings and Prophets. 2 Kings chapter 6, we resume in the vicinity of the verse 8. We'll take a moment as is our custom to pause and dedicate our time and our concentration to the Lord and ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study. Father, we are humbled in your presence remembering where we come from and what we bring with us.

We are made of dust, unto dust we will return. And it is only the animating presence and power of your Holy Spirit and the living truth of your Word within us that links us to the Lord Jesus Christ and through him to you. We thank you for those gifts.

We thank you for your grace and your compassion on us in sending the Lord Jesus to die for us when we were yet sinners. We thank you for the training and the experience and the fatherly care that you invest in us day by day, week by week, in the course of our relatively brief lives here on earth. We thank you for this portion of your Word.

We thank you for the truth that it holds for us and the enlightening view that it brings to our lives. We thank you for the grace that you have given us. We thank you for the grace that you have given our souls.

We pray that as we look at it together, that your Holy Spirit will teach us and impress these things in our hearts in a way that will be meaningful and will change the way we live, will elevate us above the mundane and the temporal and the temporary so that we can live in the light of eternity. We can live in the light of the opportunities we have to be pleasing and serviceable in your plan and purpose and that we can glorify the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in His name.

Amen. In 2 Kings, of course, we're in the days of King Joram or the other Jehoram, if you will, up in the northern kingdom. The prophet is Elisha and for some reason, even though there are far more fertile fields and he could build a larger church, if you will, down in Judah, he recognizes that the place to which he has been called is the same place his predecessor was called and that is the northern kingdom, the area of the dwelling place of the ten tribes.

And there is a certain amount of reconciliation maybe that would have to go on in the mind of a prophet that is called to such a desert, spiritually speaking. But at the same time, he, I think, would also recognize the need. There is a significant portion of the population in the southern kingdom who understand the plan and purpose of God, who are receptive and have ears to hear when someone teaches.

And we've seen this in the past where the king was able to send teachers throughout the land of Judah and there are generations in Judah who are going to enter into the millennial kingdom and into the kingdom of the Father thoroughly equipped for every good work because of their faithfulness. And their story is largely unrecorded and not emphasized. Instead, we are seeing our attention directed to these people in the northern kingdom.

Why is that? Why are we looking at the bad guys instead of the good guys, at those who have to have their bell rung time and time again to be reminded of their covenant and reminded of their God? Well, those who are already walking as they should do not need correction and rebuke and instruction. It is those who need correction and rebuke and instruction who get it. And through the generations beginning in Old Testament days and down through the time of Christ and into the church age, God is interested in repentance.

There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over many others who need no repentance. Why is that? You think that God would be happier with the people who do it right from the outset. Well there is a little bit of a double entendre there because very often those who need no repentance are so identified only in their own mind.

And they believe themselves to need no repentance when in fact all of us need change of mind. None of us have arrived, none of us have arrived in the right direction. The extent of our corruption is impressive.

And we get a few things straightened out and we get a few areas of our life headed in the right direction and we think we're done. And we like to think we're done. We like to think that all is well when in fact every one of us all the time has some area in our life that needs the prophet to point out that error, who needs the correcting and rebuking and instructing in righteousness, the doctrinal presentation to turn us.

This is why the Bible spends so much of its time focusing on people with that problem because we are people with that problem and don't think we're not. We are. The pastor, the elders, the women, the kids, there's nobody in the church, in the church age that doesn't need this sort of negative example to put into the mouth of the Holy Spirit, to put the words into His communication to us that will whisper in our ear if we begin to turn to the right hand or to the left.

And contrary, it's typical to look at what modern human educators say about how to train children, that it should all be positive reinforcement and just tell them how well they're doing and give them a cookie when they don't malfunction and bribe them to do well and just always be positive and affirming. And God and the Word of God constantly say, you don't need affirmation, you need instruction, correction, rebuke. You need to be whopped up side of the head when you start to turn and you need to be whopped on the other side of your head when you turn the other way and it's a constant state of correction because the heart is deceitful, we are made of dirt, we are corrupt, we are fallen and we have to be ever vigilant, ever watchful.

Watch, Jesus told the apostles, the most advanced believers of the generation, He said, watch and be alert that you do not enter into temptation, that you don't enter into it in the sense of falling for it. Vigilance, watchfulness, be on your guard, put on the full armor of God because there is attack, there is going to be the potential for failure every minute of every day. Let he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Take heed, be watchful, be careful. So that's why we have this study, that's why we are in the northern kingdom and not in the south. That's why God spends chapter after chapter focusing on people who think they are doing well and they are not.

And there is no more evident example of that than our passage tonight which is labeled in my New King James, The Blinded Syrians Captured. I would title this, The Blinded Israelites Rebuked. That's what I would put here.

The Blind Northern Israelites Rebuked. They are given a piece of instruction and the question is, what are they going to do with it? That's not the way this story is typically told but I will offer some observations and point out some clues here that suggest at least to me that that's really what's going on. We pick up in verse 8, The king of Syria was making war against Israel.

He consulted with his servants, my camp in such and such a place. Now this is not a full on siege. He hasn't marched all of the armies down.

He wants to position himself for a surprise attack. We talked about this in preceding weeks. But he can't achieve the element of surprise because every time he tries to sneak in and poise for this attack, he is pointed out.

They see Israelites up on the ridge and their position is given away. They can't mass there because by the time they do Israel will have done the same. They don't have such force of numbers that they can achieve a victory simply by overwhelming force.

The Arameans, the Syrians here are about as strong as what Joram has got and in a pitched battle it's just going to turn into like the trench warfare in World War I. Everybody is just going to chew each other up. The Syrians figure the only way they can really prevail is to capture Samaria by surprise, to hit them where they ain't and take advantage of a weak spot. So they keep deciding, well it looks like their reconnaissance is thin here, let's mass here and we'll make a big surge and apply force at an area of weakness.

Well every time they try this they are found out, they are discovered. Ben Hadad says there's no way their reconnaissance is this good. We've got a traitor in our midst who is telling them our plans.

There's a leak. We've got an intelligence problem. They've got a decryptor, they're taking our coded transmissions and decrypting them.

The Syrians say no, they've got Elisha and Elisha can tell the king of northern Israel what you

say in your bedchamber. He's got supernatural knowledge of your innermost thoughts and plans, which is true. Now my question is how do they know this? If there is a leak in intelligence it is in the court of Joram.

Joram's got an intelligence leak. That's how the people in Syria know that the word is coming via Elisha. And why does the king of Syria immediately think that there's a spy in his midst? Because he's got a spy in Joram's capital.

That's why. And he says wait a minute, is it a double agent? What's going on here? Because somebody is doing to him, the king of Syria, what he's doing to the king of northern Israel. That's why it's the first thing that comes to his mind.

And how do they immediately know that Elisha has given him the word? Because this happens time after time and the spy is saying, well forget that one, Elisha's already told him. Elisha's already let him in. How does the officers of the king know this? That's how.

So the king of Israel sent someone to the place that the man of God had told him and warned him and it was ever watchful there, not just once or twice, this becomes a pattern. And it can't be coincidence, it can't be a lucky guess, it can't be just bad luck for the Syrians and so they quickly figured this out. So Elisha the prophet, verse 12, tells the king of Israel your words that you speak in your bedroom.

How do they know what words Elisha is telling the king? Because there's a leak, that's why. And how frustrating is it to have a spy right in the throne room in Samaria and still not be able to achieve surprise or to prevail? And so Ben Hadad is just fit to bust. So he says, well we've got to eliminate Elisha, he's the problem.

We've got to get rid of this guy that is the king that is somehow providing this information. He's like the supernatural spy. So we've got to get rid of him.

And as I mentioned, how bright is this guy to think that he's going to sneak up on Elisha if Elisha knows when he's sneaking up on the king? But this is the dim bulbiness of the atheistic mind and they're not rational. If you spend any time debating atheists, as some of us do, they are not rational. Reason is like water rolling off duck feathers.

You can pour all the water on a duck you want, it just rolls right off. You've seen the ducks, we go walk the dogs up there and the ducks go clear under water and come back up and they're just dry as a bone. They dive and they look for food down in the shallows.

They come back up and they're just dry as they can be. Well, that's logic. Point of application, be sure you know what you're doing if you decide to reason with unbelievers because their unbelief, now you can do this just to sort of get the parameters of their position.

You can do it for your own entertainment, which is what most of us do. It's just amusing. And it's kind of tragically, it's tragicomic in the sense that you think look at the overt blindness and

willful disbelief that is manifest, but be careful if there's somebody you know and you really have a heart for them and you really want them to, you will never reason someone into the faith.

You will never argue someone into belief. Never. It will never happen.

Belief is not a matter of reason and it's not a matter of argument. It is a matter of response to the revealed word of God. The Ethiopian eunuch, God didn't send Philip out in the desert and say, now when you see a chariot come by, hop on board and give him 17 reasons why Jesus is the Christ.

What did they do? They looked at scripture. Philip explained and elucidated scripture and the eunuch could not wait to believe. Where is water? I want to be baptized.

He was lock, stock and barrel sold because he responded not to Philip or to Philip's erudition, but to the word of God. Once it was made clear to him, that is the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Our logic will never make a dent.

You can swing the mighty hammer of four and you are not going to dent the head of an atheist. I promise you. It will never happen.

But the word of God, you plant those seeds, it's the word of God, the word of God, the word of God. It needs to be clear, it needs to be simple and it needs to be on point. We're not debating the pre-tribulation rapture here.

It is, there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. There is sin, there is righteousness, there is judgment. The answer to that problem is Jesus Christ.

That's all the truth that is required for a salvation decision, for a faith change of heart and change of mind. We're going to see tonight that when believers are in a state of disobedience, apathy, indifference, even rebellion, God also similarly simplifies the truth. God doesn't go back and send a prophet that unrolls a great scroll of the law and begins to parse out the commands in all the different places that they have disobeyed.

This is going to be an object lesson and it's very simple and it's very basic. If you really desire to get through to someone who needs a change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God or who needs a change of mind away from disbelief in God and faith in God, keep it simple. Simple truth, simply presented at the heart of the issue.

What about the heathen? Neither one of us is a heathen. We're talking about you. Well, what about this? What about that? What about how many can fit on the head of a pin? No.

Sin, righteousness and judgment are what God the Holy Spirit has already presented and the truth that is the answer to anyone who finds themselves seeking as a result of that revelation is

Jesus Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And the same is true for your household, said Paul to the Philippian jailer.

They are practically atheists in the Northern Kingdom and God through Elisha is going to make a similarly simple and clear point. The danger here is the threat of the threat of Syria coming down and demolishing and annihilating the Northern Kingdom. This is sort of a metaphor for death.

You're here now but you will be gone. You used to exist and now you don't because you have been destroyed. That's the problem.

Why is it that you're losing the land of your inheritance? Why is it you're being destroyed instead of living in a land flowing with milk and honey? Because of disobedience, because of indifference and apathy toward God and the covenant relationship you have with Him. This is the problem. This is the issue.

And you can expect that God's prophet and any miraculous action that God takes is going to direct attention to that simple truth for you and me. If things are not going well, there are only a few reasons why that can be true. I like to believe that because I have been learning and adding new tools to my toolbox, God is going to give me projects where I get to use those tools.

I've got this great tool. It's the most recent gift I got from my dad and it's the coolest thing. It looks like a long thing that would have something on the end but it's got a little small saw blade on it.

There are all kinds of unique things you can do with that. For one, book repair. I don't have time to explain all the details but there are times when you want to saw a book.

Sometimes you want to saw it one way. I'll give you a quick example. On the binding of a book, look at this.

I'm going to have to do this to this one of these days. I'm the cobbler whose children have no shoes. When the cover does come off in a way that I can't reattach it and I make a new one, I take the pages and these Smith sewn pages, which is the only kind of Bible you should buy is one that's genuinely sewed and doesn't have a glue bar on the back.

Well, when this stuff through use comes off, one of the ways you hold it all together when sections start falling out and you're sticking them in, do not scotch tape them. Do not put Elmer's glue on them, please. If that happens, bring it to me.

Please bring it to me. Anyway, so you want to reattach this. What do you do? You take this special tool, this great tool that's so easy to work with.

You put this thing between two boards and a vise, get it nice and straight, nice and even and cut slots across the signatures on the back. Then in these shallow grooves, you lay a special

kind of string that will bend all day and never break, never degrade, never abrade. You lay it in there using just the right kind of glue that is acid free and flexible and you run those strings and because they're the right kind of strings, they will fray and you fan them out on each side like this and you tuck those fans underneath a part of the boards on the front and the back.

But the key to it is getting these perfect little slots across. They're not too deep. They're not too wide.

They're just right. Well, this little tool is perfect for that. This is our spiritual privilege.

God, as we learn in his word, as we study these things, gives us these tools. It's a new tool. You've got to learn how to use it.

If you're a computer person, you get a new piece of software. You go to the menu and you drop it down. You see all these things.

You don't know what it is. If it's Photoshop, if it's SQL Management Studio or whatever it may be, you've got all of these things. Well, you've got to go in and the best way to learn it is not to do a tutorial, not to go ask somebody on the web.

Get the piece of software when you have a need on a project and use it. And you'll try it and it doesn't work and you say, oh, I see. I have to do this.

You learn to use the tool and it's just right. So, when things are not going well, ideally, if you have pressure, hands up anybody that just doesn't know what I'm talking about. No pressure, no problems, no friction in your life.

Everything is just greased lightning. You get up in the morning and angels waft you to the bed of roses. When things are not going well and there's resistance and there's friction and it doesn't go according to plan, you put things down on your list and they don't happen and a whole new list gets handed to you that is wet because the power went off and the plumbing broke.

Here's the thing. Hopefully, for us, this is a chance to use these new tools. God is saying, look, I just gave you this nifty saw.

Here's your chance. Follow the steps. Use this tool and you're going to love this tool and you're going to appreciate me for giving it to you.

If you're in the northern kingdom of Israel in Elisha's day, this is not why things are going bad. Because when God hands them new tools, they just sit in the box. They never get opened, they never get used, they never get looked at because they're not repairing anything.

They're not doing anything meaningful and useful and so when things go bad for them, it is a knock in the head saying, change your mind. All day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people, God says. So if we encounter, as one does, difficulties, the

first question to ask ourselves is now, I mean if you're smart enough to even ask the question, is this suffering for blessing or is this suffering for discipline? Am I being spanked and encouraged to turn back into a right way? Is that why I've suddenly lost momentum and I seem to be twisting slowly in the wind? I'm like the electrician hanging from the ceiling that's just black and crisp and I didn't repair the light, I fried myself as I got up there.

Is that the case? Well, the solution is to change my mind. This is the foundational truth that you find in the first part of Hebrews chapter 6, right? Not laying again the foundation of change of mind away from futile actions toward faith in God, operating in faith, operating in trust. God has a plan and program and we get it and we're in it and we're on it and we're carried by His grace toward a destination that is meaningful and has everlasting consequences.

Well, this is the other case. This is the Northern Kingdom and they're apathetic and when bad things happen to them, it is God saying, hello, God here, just thought I'd remind you we have a covenant relationship, the days of your life are passing, the time of your national existence here is drawing to a close because you have forgotten your purpose, you've lost your way. If I wanted a bunch of evil and apathetic people, I'd have left the Canaanites here.

I would have let the Amorites continue to dwell in the land but their iniquity was full and I used you to remove them out so that you could replace them and be different, to be a light that would shine. Well, Northern Israel has utterly forgotten this. So that's what's going on and when you look here in chapter 6 of 2 Kings, the Syrian problem doesn't go away.

It comes and it gets stopped but it doesn't leave. How come this isn't the, you remember what happened with the Hezekiah and the Assyrians? You remember that story? That's a little bit of a different outcome, isn't it? You know what happens at Armageddon? It isn't people running away as high as the horse's bridles, it's blood as high as the horse's bridle. Problem solved.

Gog Magog, when all these miscreants led by Satan after the thousand years are over come and surround the camp of the saints and it looks like they're about to be annihilated, God doesn't spook them and they all run away. God doesn't feed them and they walk home, you know, contented with their, you know, burping along the way. Well, that was sure good.

That's not what happens. Problem solved, right? You notice here the problem does not leave, the problem is just got a hand in its face. Not yet, not now.

It just doesn't succeed in its objective but it isn't taken out of the way. You ever have a problem like that? Keeps coming up, never gets solved but it just gets a hand in its face. Talked to the hand.

Still talking, not dead, not gone, not chased away, just at arm's length. Well, so the king when he decides to solve the Elisha problem in verse 14, sent horses and chariots and a great army there and they came by night and surrounded the city. Horses and chariots always speak of overwhelming strength.

This is the, you see, this is the armored cavalry. This is the mechanized, these are the tanks. This is the APCs.

This is as strong as it gets. In the ancient world, what's stronger than horses and chariots? Oh, I hear the horses and chariots are coming. Well, release the dragons.

I mean, they don't have anything else. You know, horses and chariots, the only thing you can do is hope that you've got more horses and chariots than they do, right? It's not like, well, send forth the rocket-propelled grenade corps and we'll take care of these horses. That's the maximum strength.

It's the strongest thing there is. And so when this comes down, he's going to send them and they came by night and surrounded the city. So, the servant of the man of God arose early, who I think is Gehazi, because this is earlier.

This is out of sequence. He went out and noticed there was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. That's the second time horses and chariots are mentioned.

This whole chapter, by the way, just as a clue, when you see stuff repeated, that's what to highlight. That's what to circle. God's made this so easy.

We're talking Northern Kingdom here. These are not rocket scientists, you know, seminary students with advanced degrees. And so there's repetition.

The king has sent horses and chariots. The servant walks out and sees horses and chariots. And so, alas, my master, what shall we do? So he answered, do not fear those with us more than those who are with them.

Elisha prayed, said, Lord, open his eyes that he may see. The Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. A little bit of repetition there.

Something else important. There's a theme here. What are you looking at? There's a lot of power in the world.

There's a lot of power in the opposition. So what do you look at? Do you look at the power of the opposition or do you look at the power of God? And it's repeated. Open his eyes that he may see.

And the Lord opened his eyes and he saw. Horses and chariots. Horses and chariots.

Oh look, more horses and chariots. Fiery horses and chariots. The horses and chariots of the army of the Lord God, which are greater.

Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Why around Elisha? Because Elisha is the man who knows about them, who can see them, who has confidence in them and is not disturbed.

Elisha is not worried about the army of the Syrians because he's looking at a different army. So the Syrians came down to him. Elisha prayed and said, Lord, strike this people with blindness.

And he struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now these people cannot see. So it was, Elisha says to them, this is not the way, this is not the city.

Follow me. I will bring you to the man whom you seek. And in a way this is true because the whole thing, their original objective was to go down to Samaria and hopefully capture Joram, right? And they're frustrated by Elisha.

So they're making an intermediate objective out of Elisha. What are they going to do once Elisha is out of the way in their plan? Go back after the capital city of Samaria and try to capture or kill the king, right? So in a way the king is the guy they ultimately seek. They just don't know it.

They've been sent to an intermediate objective. Strike them with blindness. So follow me.

And when they had come to Samaria, Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see. The Lord opened their eyes and they saw. Repetition.

And the theme of sight here, what do you look at, what do you see? If you are willing, God will show you great and mighty things which you know not of. So now that they see that they're inside Samaria, the king of Israel saw this and he said to Elisha, my father, shall I kill? Shall I kill? And this isn't actually the word kill. It's more the word strike or smite.

And if you look at the JPS for this, the Jewish Publication Society, I think that's how they translate this, is to smite. And he says, shall I strike? Shall I strike? And what Elisha replies here is, you shall not strike. You shall not smite.

Would you kill? And I don't think this is a very good translation. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? What he says here is, you didn't take these guys with your sword nor with your bow. You didn't capture them with your sword.

You didn't kill them with your bow. So you don't have the power of life and death over them. They were brought to you.

It's not up to you to determine their fate. Set food and water before them, and this is actually, the word food there is lechem, as in Bethlehem. It actually says bread, but of course the word bread means food in general.

Set food and water, mayim, before them, that they might eat and drink, and go to their master. Now, pop quiz, pop quiz, what have been the repeated elements up to this point? What was repeated a lot? Strength, forces of arms, chariots and horses was repeated. Eyes open, eyes shut, eyes open, eyes shut.

The guy that is blind to God's power is made to see it. The guys who can see are made blind to

the man of God and the city of the man of God, and that at his word, the, by the way, do you think that Gehazi here could see angels from then on? This was sort of a one time thing, wasn't it? He sort of put the magic glasses on, you know, they live or whatever it is, and he can see them, but he doesn't have this power from then on, it's an episode, it's a one time thing. Now, how often do you think Elisha saw this sort of thing? Elisha hears what is said in secret, Elisha sees what is invisible.

As we go to the break, just flip over to Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11, you know from your mental geography of the word of God that this is the faith chapter, right? And look at the Moses section, this is verses 23-29, Hebrews 11, it's all about Moses. By faith Moses when he was born was hidden three months by his parents because they saw he was an exceptional child.

They saw. By faith he was hidden because they saw that this was a provision from God and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith Moses when he became of age refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward.

He saw the riches of Egypt, but what did he see that was more real than the riches of Egypt? The reward, the heavenly reward, the divine truth. His parents saw what ordinary people could not see in the baby Moses. Moses surrounded by the wealth of the richest nation on the planet could see beyond that to the reward.

It's all about seeing. By faith he, Moses, forsook Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king. What was it that his parents did when they saw the child? They did not fear.

What did Moses do when he saw the reward? He did not fear. Same result, they saw, they had faith and they did not fear. Look at verse 27, by faith he forsook Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king.

Why? Read it out loud. What's the end of 27? Oh, louder than that. He endured as seeing him who is invisible.

Moses endured 40 years in the wilderness and another 40 years leading the people of Israel to the promised land, 80 years of life seeing him who is not seeable. It's all about open eyes. This Moses section in Hebrews 11 is about the open eyes.

That's the challenge for us. Who's blind and who sees in northern Israel? Who is blind and who sees? What is the reality? Is it the chariots and horsemen of the Syrians or is it the chariots and horsemen of the Lord? And the prayer of the prophet is, Lord open his eyes that he may see. This is God's will and God's expectation of us is that we will open our eyes.

What does it say in Ephesians chapter 1? Paul says, I pray that you will come to know the eyes of your heart having been enlightened. The eyes of your heart. Not the rationale of your heart,

not the evidence in your heart, it's the eyes of your heart.

You can see what is invisible, enduring, seeing him who is invisible. Well, this is the challenge in northern Israel. We're going to go and take our break and when we come back, what are they going to do with what they see? There is going to be one of the most blindingly obvious bread episodes.

It is like unto two bread episodes in the New Testament that we have studied in the Gospels. You see people eating bread. What do you really see? Is it just people eating bread or is there something bigger going on? Remember when Jesus asked the disciples in the boat, you saw the people eating the bread.

You saw the baskets of fragments that were taking up. Do you not yet understand? Can you not draw conclusions from what you have seen? Well, the prototype for the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 is the feeding of the Syrian raiding band here. And so that's what we'll look at when we come back.