

Kings and Prophets 14-06-20a

This is Friday, the 20th of June, 2014. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We will resume in 2 Chronicles, chapter 21, verse 16.

We'll pause for a moment and give each of us a chance to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father, thank You for this opportunity to gather, to be blessed by the gifts that You've given to those who are assembled. We thank You for the Lord Jesus and the incalculably great gifts that we enjoy through our relationship to You in Him.

We pray that looking at this passage of Scripture tonight, Your Holy Spirit will teach us and impress on us the truths that are pertinent and meaningful and that will result in application and in being fruitful in those works that You have ordained, that we learn and grow as we execute them. We know that we are here for a purpose. Each day has a purpose.

Each event, every moment in our lives has been planned and coordinated before we were born to give us the opportunity to fulfill Your purpose and to be a part of the outworking of Your plan now and in times to come. We pray that as we study together and as we fellowship together, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. We pray it in His name.

Amen. We have come in the ongoing chronicle of the kings of Israel and Judah to the reign of Jehoram in the southern kingdom. He is the son of Jehoshaphat.

We saw last time that Jehoshaphat, being a wise king, suspected, I think, that there might be some tension among his many sons in terms of the succession to the throne. Probably for multiple reasons, he distributed his sons in little mini-kingdoms, city-states, throughout Judah. This is almost a feudal situation where they would have sort of a fortified city where they could stay, where they could have their militia, as it were, or their bodyguard, and they would be able to protect themselves.

However, the elder brother, despite these precautions, slew them anyway. And these were good young men, and we get that connotation from their names. And this, in a way, is a judgment on Judah.

Here's the thing, and this is our first point of application for tonight. We saw during the reign of Jehoshaphat, back in the book of 2 Kings, how diligent he was to ensure that there was availability of the word of God, that it was taught, that it was widely disseminated and distributed throughout the land. That being the case, I ask myself the question, why this fratricide, why this slaughter takes place? There are reasons why God allows hardship, disaster, what we consider to be bad things.

Sometimes it is a learning experience. Sometimes it is beneficial for us to struggle against resistance. This is how we become stronger.

You can't build muscle unless you push against resistance. You can't become a better runner unless you push against the upper limit of your endurance and your cardiovascular fitness. It is generally true that without some pain, there is very little gain.

And God will allow pain into our lives. And many times, when we are doing what we're supposed to do and when we have the right attitude, this is an opportunity. It may seem like a setback.

It may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But it's an opportunity. And we can see that although it is difficult, there is the peaceable fruit of righteousness that will follow, even if it's discipline for us.

There are other times when the reason God allows calamity or evil or disaster to intrude into our lives, it is because we have failed to lay hold of opportunities. We have failed to incorporate the Word of God, the plan and purpose of God, our relationship with God into our goals, our values, our pursuits, the investment of our time day by day. Now think about this.

We meet twice a week for double sessions. That's four Bible classes a week. It's maybe four to five hours in a week.

All the rest of the seven times 24, whatever that is, 168 hours maybe, is our own. If the time we spend in Bible class is the only time we really consider our identity in the plan and purpose of God and we sort of squander the opportunity to apply it in the story problems of our hours and our days, God is going to notice. It's amazing.

I've been on an airplane, so just prepare yourself. I've been up in the, looking down upon the vast teeming hordes of people. I've been in the airport looking at just thousands of people milling about, every single one of them staring into their smartphone.

And this, as you well know by now, always makes me wax philosophical. But we have got to think about who we are and why we're here. Even though there's all these people, God isn't interested in them the way he is interested in you.

You know why? Those people almost entirely aren't interested in God. At best, many of them may have a superficial, and I don't mean to be judgmental, I am observational. I read what these people write.

I hear what they say. I see how they live. And there is only a very small fraction within even the Christian community that is actively pursuing.

And they're scattered through all different denominations, all different towns and cities. There are people everywhere who are doing this. But as a fraction of the, say, American population, I would bet that it's a single-digit number.

And probably a low single-digit number. Where God looks down and sees that someone is

asking and seeking and knocking. Someone is hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Someone is taking up their cross and seeking to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we are by no means, in no way, shape or form, the only people trying to do this. There are many, many people doing this.

But as a percentage of the population, it's very small. Now, as God looks down on the continent of the United States and sees all those lit up cities. And all of the teeming swarms of humanity like ants.

Building and paving and lighting and traveling and just swarming over the earth. Who do you think He's paying attention to? The 90-something percent that aren't interested in Him? Or the single-digit percent that is? Who do you think He's looking at? Who do you think He is investing divine resources in? It's you. You're not hiding in a crowd.

You're not invisible. You're not part of a shapeless mass multitude that God is treating as a group. Each of us who are seeking to tread that narrow road and go through the straight gate is directly in the gaze and the purview and the scrutiny of God in heaven.

And don't think you're not. You are. So, we are accountable.

We are responsible for what we learn. When we come and assemble and look at the truth of God and we see what's here, now there is responsibility to do something with it. That's what happened in Judah.

Jehoshaphat ensured that the population of his kingdom, and what a good king he was to do this. He has the heart of his forefather, David, to do this. He took active steps.

He even went up to the mountains of Ephraim and found people up in the northern kingdom who had an interest. And he said, Come where we love, value, and communicate the word of God. And many of them did.

So now, for many years, they have heard that teaching. Just like us. They have had the plan and purpose of God presented to them.

Just like us. And they are accountable for what they do with that information. They have an opportunity to reflect the glory of God.

Just like us. So, what happened? After these years and years of faithful teaching and communication of God's word, what was the response in the southern kingdom of Judah to this bounty, this wonderful provision of teaching? You see it in what happens in the government of the nation. In the same way that in this country, apathy and indifference and disregard and outright overthrow and rejection of the word of God is reflected in the government of the nation.

It's reflected in supreme court decisions. It's reflected in policies. It's reflected in the downgrade

and the disintegration of values and integrity and those things that reflect God's glory in a nation when it begins with people's attitude and response to the word of God.

That's the beginning. And you cannot push a rope. You can't try to legislate back reflection of the glory of God.

What you have to do is call people back to respect for God, respect for His word, for a response in the hearts of people. And where there is not that response, the nation will disintegrate. It has ever been true.

It was especially true in Israel. And you remember in the Old Testament you have the nation reflecting the truths that pertain to our internal nation, our soul. And the government is our mind and our reason and our decision-making and our choosing.

We are captains of our own ship. We are masters of our fate in the sense that God has granted us that authority over ourselves. And in some cases in the larger venue of our family.

But we're accountable for what we do. And when the nation, when the people as a group and as an overall average are indifferent, apathetic to the teaching of the word of God, and that's what happened in Judah, you're going to see it reflected in the leadership. In the same way that when you and I are apathetic and indifferent to what we learn from the word of God, what we see in its pages, what God the Holy Spirit impresses on our hearts, when we don't live in that light, our government, our reasoning, our decision-making, our priorities and our goals are going to become faulty.

And it's going to get us in trouble. We're going to create our own misery. I used to have an abbreviation in my notes.

Sim. And it's not simulated virtual people living in Sim City. It's self-induced misery.

That's what has happened in Judah. This is why after this wonderful King Jehoshaphat, you have this king, Jehoram. And it is a portent of things to come that one of his first official acts, once his father dies, remember he's co-regent for several years, as soon as Jehoshaphat is no longer able to object, he systematically wipes out every one of his brothers, murders them and their families, and anybody who looks like he might be a rival.

This doesn't happen in a nation whose God is the Lord. This doesn't happen in a nation of faithful growing believers. You're going to get an Asa or a Josiah or another Jehoshaphat to protect and further the positive attitude and the spiritual growth and vitality of that nation.

It's a promise of God. Why do they get a bad king? Because there is apathy and indifference to that teaching. They did not respond.

They did not turn. They didn't avail themselves. And don't think that it doesn't happen to us the same way.

If God graciously gives us insight and understanding of His Word and we don't respond and appreciate and seize the opportunity, there will be consequences. And it starts in the government. It starts in the mind.

Our judgment will be faulty. We will think we're doing right and we're doing wrong. Jehoram thought this was a good move for him.

You know what? The only way I can perpetuate my reign is to get rid of my brothers. Little did he know that because of that action, instead of extending and perpetuating his reign and securing his throne, the wrath of God comes down and he will not last two years from this point. It's a total reign of just under eight years.

Five of it was a co-regency with Jehoshaphat. And from the time he kills his brothers, the clock of his death is ticking. And it's an ugly, ugly, slow, painful, living death.

Verse 14. Behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction, your children, your wives, and all your possessions. That gets overlooked.

All your possessions. This means there are royal flocks and herds. There are gifts of exotic animals and things that he's received.

Disease is going to break out in everything he owns. His material possessions, gold and silver and things like that, are going to be taken away. They'll be thieved away.

It'll be embezzled. There will be corruption in his government that takes those things away. Not only his family and his people, but his possessions are under this curse.

He did not honor God with everything that had been given to him, so everything given to him is going to be taken away. You will become very sick with a disease of your intestines. Now, why a disease of the intestines? Why not leprosy? Why not blindness? Why not any one of a number of other things? Why isn't he just murdered by a conniving, ambitious general in his bed? A disease of the internal organs connotes, suggests, internal problems in the spiritual realm.

Intestines, this is where you process what you take in. And remember, the king in Israel evermore, from David on down, is emblematic of and a reflection of, all the way down to the Herods, the heart and mind of the people of whom he is the head and the representative. And this tells us what's the matter in Judah.

They have taken in the Word of God. They did not process it. They did not extract the useful, nutritious, energy-providing, beneficial portions.

And of all of the possible afflictions that God could place on this king, it is an affliction where now he cannot process what he eats. And it is painful, egregiously so. It's a horrible way to go.

And this isn't just God vindictively saying, I'm going to really make you suffer a painful death. It tells us something. The reason it tells us what he died of, this is a reflection not only on him but

on the people who did not digest the bread of the Word of God.

And if you do not use it, you will lose it. Him that has not, even what he has will be taken away. Moreover, the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians.

And they came up into Judah and invaded it and carried away all of the possessions that were found in the king's house. Now this is kind of a mixed blessing for the Arabians and the Philistines because his stuff is cursed. And in a way, this is like the Philistines taking the Ark of the Covenant.

They've come in and, oh boy, bounty and booty, and the cattle are diseased, the sheep have got problems, and all of this stuff is under God's curse. And so in a way, they are taking unto themselves their own destruction. You don't hear a whole lot about the rise of the Philistines and the Arabs after this because of the mighty strength that they gained by sacking Judah.

This is kind of like capturing radioactive gold and then dying of poisoning later on. But it's God's ironic sense of humor. He's already cursed this stuff, and Jehoram is going to lose it anyway, but he's going to see it get lost.

But little does he know, this stuff is all just ticking time bombs because it's under a curse. So there was not a son left to him as he did to his father, so it is done to him. He wiped out all of his father's sons except himself, except one.

All of his sons are going to be wiped out except one. Now, what is the name of this son? This is sort of a trick question. What's his name? That's half right.

That's half right. Look in chapter 22, verse 1. What's the name of the surviving son? Well now, which is it? Is it Jehoahaz or Ahaziah? You all know enough Hebrew by now. What is the difference in these two names? Let's look at the first one.

What is it? Jehoahaz. What's the first element there? Y-W-H-Yahweh. Y-H-W-H.

Yeho, that's the divine name at the beginning. Yeho Ahaz. Look at the second one.

First element is Ahaz. What's the second one? What's the second part of that name? Yah. It's the same element.

First time it's at the front, second time it's at the back. Jehoahaz and Ahaziah, all you've done is move Yahweh from the first position to the last position. From the first position to the last position.

It's the same name. And at the center is Ahaz, which is the Hebrew verb that means to hold. So when you move God's name from one position to the other, He changes from being the subject to the object, or the object to the subject.

So in one case, the emphasis is He holds the Lord, and the other is the Lord is my holder. The one who holds, the one who sustains, the one who possesses. And which one is which? Well, the Y in Ahaziah, Ahaziah, my holder is Yahweh, where formerly it was Yahweh holds.

And it changes from the general to the specific, because the nation is losing the Lord as its keeper. Now it's the king who holds that name. But I want to look a little bit at this chapter 21 before we leave it, because there is an interesting structure here.

And we haven't looked at a chiasm in a while, and I think we have a chiasm here, and I just wanted to point it out real quickly. In verse 5, you have a chronological notation. Jehoram was 32 years old when he became king, and he reigned 8 years in Jerusalem.

And just as a side note, when he became king, it was around 853 BC, as near as you can figure it out. This is the year of the battle of Karkar, where Shalmaneser III of Assyria came down and attacked. And he crossed the Tigris, he crossed the Euphrates, he was coming down from Assyria.

And this is the beginning, this is the early incursions of what will eventually be the Assyrian crisis in 721. A couple of generations later, they're going to come and actually overwhelm the entire northern kingdom and take it out. But they've had ambitions for decades before that.

And so in the 850s, you have Shalmaneser III coming down, crosses the Tigris, crosses the Euphrates, virtually unopposed, collects tribute, subjugates the peoples on his march, coming around and down. And so the kings in the region see him coming, and they confederate. And so you have a confederation of 12 kings.

We only know who 11 of them are, actually. But this confederation includes Haydad Ezer of Damascus. He's the Syrian guy.

Ben Haydad, same guy. Haydad is my help, Haydad Ezer. Ben Haydad, son of Hazal, he's the same guy.

Ben Haydad II and King Ahab. Remember, earlier on, Ahab was still alive and still the king. Ahab confederates with the Syrians and with some other folks, a total of 12.

And we have archaeological evidence for this. There is a stela called the Kirk Stela. And you can look this up.

They've got pictures of it on the web, K-U-R-K-H, the Kirk Stela. Well, Shalmaneser says, oh, I accomplished a great victory. Here's all the kings I beat.

But, of course, they always say they won, whether they did or not. The interesting thing is none of these kings was dethroned or deposed. There's no record of them sending any tribute.

So it's a little bit iffy if Shalmaneser just did a big PR job when he got back home and declared kind of a standoff as a great victory. But this Kirk Stela names Ahab and names the other kings

that they came up against. Well, that's the year we're talking about.

That's the year when Jehoram first became co-regent. And it's possible that because of all of this turbulence up north and because of Jehoshaphat's age and the political situation, he brought his son on board to help figure out what to do. So just sort of a chronological literal milestone there in terms of ancient history.

Thirty-two when he became king and he reigned eight years, most of that was co-regency with Jehoshaphat. And there was a time of opportunity. It's not like people didn't know Jehoram.

It's not like they couldn't see what kind of king. And there was this time of opportunity. If people had said, you know what, if God is not on our side, we're going to end up in a really bad way when this guy becomes king, when Jehoshaphat dies.

And they were just indifferent. God gave them this grace period of five years to realize what might happen. And Jehoshaphat was apparently incapacitated in some way.

He himself should have known his son and whether he had the same problem as David in that he couldn't bring himself to reign in an excessively ambitious son. David had this problem with Absalom and later on with Amnon and just couldn't quite turn the corner in terms of parental discipline and fatherly and kingly responsibility to the nation. Why Jehoshaphat didn't see this guy coming, he had to have been fading.

But it was God's will because it was God's desire that the nation reach this decision point. This happens to you. This happens to me.

We will have an opportunity once we have learned the Word of God and things have been revealed to us from the pages of Scripture. God the Holy Spirit teaches them to us, shows them to us. We get a grip on them.

There is a window of opportunity where God will challenge us to apply them, to live in their light. And if we're slow, God will start to paint on the horizon the brewing storm clouds of calamity and say, look, don't think that this isn't serious. Don't think that this doesn't matter, that you don't have a responsibility.

Do you see that there is a potential threat here? You need this information. You need to get on your spiritual horse and ride. And if we are oblivious, indifferent, distracted, too busy, got some other priority, something else, and looking at people all staring into their smartphones, don't think that this is not the age of allurements.

It is the age of distraction. It is the age of seduction. It's seductive.

Who, sitting for a few minutes, doesn't want to say, well, you know, I could be on the web. I could play Solitaire. I could play Crazy Red Birds or some game.

I'll check on the sports. Free TV in the airport. Load our app.

Just as a side note, a little IT free, no charge. Every app does just like cookies in your browser, where it's going to phone the mothership with all the stuff you do on your phone. And when you turn on your phone, before you do anything else, every app that you have loaded is going to start uploads, from your phone to the mothership.

Google on down. Everybody. Why do you think they give you an app for free? Because you are giving them your interests and your browsing history.

And it's no accident, the ads that you suddenly see, even on your phone, your location, all kinds of stuff, go right out the unscreened windows of your phone to people interested in selling you something and getting the money out of your bank account. Anyway, this is the challenge. Not to miss the opportunity.

If we end up in the five year period where Jehoshaphat is scrolling off and Jehoram is coming in, wake up and fall on our faces before God. Thank Him for His word. Thank Him for His grace.

Dedicate ourselves to living by faith. Seeking out and following that narrow road. Setting our sights on the straight gate that leads to life.

Looking for the divine element in every mundane task that we do. Do it as unto the Lord and not unto men. That is how we preserve our spiritual kingdom from what happens to Judah.

This is the southern kingdom and it's starting to sound like the northern kingdom. This isn't a withered arm. This is rotted intestines spilling forth.

And it is a sign. It is a portent. It is a gigantic... It's as big as the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in terms of communication to Judah.

You better wake up because as goes the nation, so goes the king. As goes the king, so goes the nation. Look at your king.

His bowels are spilling out. His stuff is being destroyed. All of his offspring are murdered.

All of his possessions have been taken. The nation itself, and when you see this chiasm, which we'll look at right after the break, you'll see where the focus is. One thing we know about a chiasm, it makes it easy because where it crisscrosses, that's the most important thing.

And that's what we'll see when we come back from our break.