

Kings and Prophets 15-06-05a

This is Friday, the 5th of June 2015. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We have pretty well finished the Northern Kingdom and we are pursuing the following years, another 140 years-ish of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

We are in 2 Chronicles and we will be resuming toward the end of chapter 28. 2 Chronicles chapter 28. We'll be looking at the parallels in 2 Kings chapter 16 as well.

So if you have that multi-ribbon marker, you can put one in each and we can just flip back and forth. And there will be others. You will have enough fingers to keep your place in all of the books to which we look.

But let's begin by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you for this day. Thank you for the ways that you bless us, watch over us, and provide for us.

And we thank you for this opportunity to spend time together in mutual encouragement and ministry, receiving the blessings that come from our time together and the upbuilding that takes place as we pursue together a better understanding of where we fit into your plan and the resources that you've made available to us to live a life that is pleasing in your sight, that is a part of the positive side of your work on this earth, and that prepares us for the eternal future and eternal life with you. We pray that each one of us will be blessed and gain fresh insight and motivation from the things we look at tonight. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. The 8th century BC, and we're right in the middle of it, circa 750, we saw in the Northern Kingdom began pretty much with the reign of Jeroboam II, and within 30 years the Northern Kingdom was gone. And yet in the early days of Jeroboam II, it was a time of unparalleled prosperity.

God had backed off of judgment, was seeking those in both Israel and Judah who would turn to him by whatever means. The application of judgment was not turning the nation, and so God gave them a different kind of opportunity. It was a prosperity bubble, if you will.

It was a short-term respite from pressure, both internal and external. What did they do with it? Well, they just got worse morally, spiritually, in their relationship with God. It was not taken as the opportunity that it was, and they soon disappeared.

At this same time, in the Southern Kingdom, similar circumstances prevailed, and the prosperity in the Southern Kingdom is going to last about 15 years longer than it did in the North. And so if we back up a little bit, we've looked at the kings Uzziah and Jotham and Ahaz already. If you back up to the earliest days of Uzziah, remember he's the leprosy guy.

He's the one that had such success and got full of himself and decided that he could be all that and a priest too, and grabbed a censer and went in and thought he would just strut his stuff

before the Lord, and that didn't work out too well. I want to quickly review one detail out of that whole chapter that gave us the description of Uzziah's reign and all of his accomplishments. Remember what a builder he was, and the military flourished, and he retook territory that hadn't been there since the days of David.

He built fortifications. It was just a great economic boom. Everything seemed to be on the upswing, and the question that the people needed to be asking themselves at that time is, Is this a reflection of our spiritual health, or is this an opportunity that God is giving us despite our spiritual status? Is he backing off of judgment to give us the opportunity to stop and reflect in the calm and quiet of no pressure, in the calm and quiet of prosperity? Prosperity, and this is the first point of application.

Times of peace and times of prosperity do not automatically mean that God is happy. Just because we're doing well, just because we're not under pressure, we're not under persecution, we are not afflicted, we are enjoying circumstantial benefits, financial, economic, professional, scholastic, social, personal. Always wanted to develop this hobby, and now I've done it, and I get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

Always wanted to get to this particular place, have this kind of a house, live in this kind of a neighborhood, drive this kind of car, have this kind of accessory or benefit. Just because we achieve those things, there is a tendency to think the way the friends of Job thought. Well, if you're in good with God, you're going to be blessed.

And if you're having a hard time, then you've obviously got sin in your life. Remember that? Very simplistic. God blesses good people, God judges, disciplines, curses bad people.

And we tend to think the people are good if the circumstances are good, and the people are bad if the circumstances are bad. Nothing could be less correlated than circumstances to spiritual health and well-being. They do not correlate.

There are wonderful spiritual giants living in places like Nigeria, where there is tremendous persecution and affliction. And there are horrifically bad Christians living the life of affluence and prosperity here in the U.S. of A. You cannot make the mistake of correlating circumstances to spiritual health and well-being. There is no reliable correlation at all.

You see this in the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam. You see it in the Southern Kingdom in the days of Isaiah. They are contemporaries.

And in both places, God allowed great recovery, great prosperity in the material, circumstantial world, despite an incredible spiritual malaise, spiritual malignancy, especially in the North. And as we've seen, within 30 years of this tremendous peak prosperity, not seen since the days of Solomon, they will be gone. It reminds me of a chainsaw.

Those of you that have used a chainsaw know that as you're grinding away through log after log and branch after branch, all of a sudden the chainsaw accelerates in speed. You get the

trigger in the same place and suddenly it really is going fast, much like a toddler shortly before bedtime. Wow, this thing is really running now.

Well, that's the last of the gas going out of the tank and both your child and your chainsaw will shortly be non-functional. It's just this tremendous buzz at the end and then nothing. By the way, interestingly, people physically near the point of death, if it's not an accidental death or deaths of a particular type, often experience this.

People that have been unresponsive, near comatose and so on, just before the moment of death, sometimes they suddenly revive and they sit up and they look around and they speak cogently for something measured in minutes and then they're gone. There is this final aliveness, this final dynamic expend all remaining, is what we call it in the artillery. Whatever you got in the truck, pull it out, let's shoot it off, and we're going to go empty back to the base.

So this is sort of what's going to happen in the north, this one last great boom followed by complete bust. You would think that in the southern kingdom, watching this happen and seeing a parallel time of prosperity, they would be chastened. They would take a lesson.

They would take note. They seem to be insensate, insensitive, incapable of taking that. I'm sure there were editorial articles about, well, you know, those people in the north, here's all the things they're doing wrong, and nobody turning the laser beam analysis on themselves.

As you see that turning point from Romans 1 to Romans 2, look at all of these that suppress the truth of God and unrighteousness and they choose the creature instead of the creator and turn themselves over to this, that, and the other. And you, oh man, are doing the same thing in Romans 2. We have a necessary need when we start spotting all of the flaws and all of the crooked pictures on the wall to say, maybe I ought to just kind of swivel the periscope around and aim it back at myself. Judah doesn't do this.

Now we're in the days of the ministry of the prophet Zechariah in the days of Uzziah. Remember 2 Chronicles 26.5? As long as he sought the Lord, Uzziah, in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God, God prospered Uzziah. Now, we just got through saying prosperity doesn't correlate automatically to spiritual health.

However, there are times when we are doing what we're supposed to and God blesses us. In the Old Testament, this often took circumstantial physical prosperity form because this is our picture. Sacrifices had a literal form that are spiritual in nature now.

Prosperity in our day, in our lives that is of an immaterial form is pictured in the Old Testament. Nations of Israel and of Judah this way. As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.

This is 2 Chronicles 26. But take particular note of one verse that we read a week or two ago and that is verse 11. It's talking about in verse 9 that he built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, the valley gate, the corner buttress of the wall, built towers in the desert, dug many wells,

much livestock, low lands and plains, farmers, fine dressers in the mountains and in Carmel, for he loved the soil.

Man of the earth, grow, put the seed in the ground and let it grow 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold. He loves that stuff. Look at verse 11.

Moreover, Uzziah had an army of fighting men who went out to war by companies, according to the number on their roll, as prepared by Jael the scribe and Masaiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains. These are the three main functionaries that get things done in the army, the military side of things. They're advising as these fortifications are built, tactical, strategic analysis and organization of the men and keeping records, having the muster rolls.

Jael is keeping track of all this. It's a wonderful, systematic, well-organized approach, right? Now, after Uzziah's malfunction and he has to be separate because he's leprous, we know that there is a co-regency and his son Jotham has to co-reign and this extends for a long period of time. So you have Jotham as early as 750 and Uzziah is going to last from 750 down to about 739, which is 11-something years of co-regency.

Then Jotham will take over. But interestingly, even before this, and Edmund Thiel in his *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, if you read about this, this is one of the most interesting times in the kingdom of Judah because you actually have a king and two co-regents during this time. It's the only time I can remember in the whole history of Judah where this happens.

But I just said that Uzziah dies in 739, right? And from 750 to the end of his reign, Jotham goes four more years beyond his father Uzziah. He goes all the way to 735. However, in 743, when both Uzziah and Jotham are still alive, Ahaz becomes a co-regent as well.

So during the time beginning 743 to 739 with Uzziah's death, for those four years, you have King Uzziah, you have soon-to-be-king Jotham, and you have soon-to-be-soon-to-be-king Ahaz. All of them are going to count these years in their reign. The chronicler is going to count these years in all of their reigns.

So Uzziah's days, 750 to 739, Jotham's days, 750 to 735, and then Ahaz, his reign backs up to 743, and it's going to go all the way down to about 728 or so. Interesting time in the southern kingdom. Three individuals in a hierarchy, the father, the son, not the spirit, but the grandson.

The father, the son, and the grandson. This, interestingly, is also a time when one of our most important Bible books, as though one could be more important than another, but certainly one of the most fascinating to study, comes into being. Keep your, well, you don't have to keep your place because you can find it again.

Turn to Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah 1.1. We did the book of Isaiah a few years ago. The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah,

Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah cover a lot more than just those reigns.

We saw how far down the line Isaiah's book extends. But Isaiah the prophet, Isaiah who initiated this prophecy, ministers beginning in the days of Uzziah, extending through Jotham and Ahaz, as we've seen these three all overlap for a few years, and then down into the reign of the next king, whom we are about to study, Hezekiah. Well, let's just scan, because we don't have a great deal of time, but let's just scan the content in the first few chapters of Isaiah.

If your New King James is like mine, you have a heading just above verse 2. Does yours say what mine says? The wickedness of Judah? Okay. Well, in the days of Uzziah and Jotham and Ahaz, how prosperous is Judah? It's very prosperous. We just reviewed some of the stuff that's in chapter 26 of 2 Chronicles.

Territorial expansion, economic prosperity, jobs, military, towers, soil, agriculture. It's booming. It's boom times in Judah.

And yet, the condemnation comes from the lips of the prophet, because circumstances do not correlate to spiritual health and well-being. They just don't. You can't say anything about our own or anyone else's spiritual health based on circumstances.

Why did the wicked prosper? That wouldn't be a question if the wicked never prospered. Why are the righteous afflicted? We wouldn't ask that question if the righteous were always blessed and prosperous. The wickedness of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. And if you remember the beginning of our study in Isaiah, God calls to witness the heavens and the earth, the physical creation, to bear witness to the spiritual deficit in Judah. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not consider.

And we can stop right there. You can peruse the content of these chapters, review it at your leisure, but this is the key. Even dumb animals learn who's got the food, who operates the security, who it is that has control of their environment.

Right? You can't have any kind of a sentient pet without realizing that they very quickly recognize you as the person that feeds them, gives them treats, lets them out, lets them in, gives them a walk, whatever else they want. Talking particularly about the four-legged canine brand of pets. Most of us have experience with these.

And it is as though God says, you know, a dog has no trouble identifying its owner and being consistently loyal and looking to that owner for the things it depends upon, but not the people of God. God's people do not know, my people do not consider. It's such a rebuke to realize that we are somewhat smarter than animals, and yet we are more stupid than animals.

Well, that's the summary, and then the detail is given. And it goes on for pages. Look at chapter

6 of Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I've mentioned it three times tonight, what year did King Uzziah die? Gotcha, didn't I? 739. Very good. 739.

That's the year King Uzziah died. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah says, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne. Think about that.

In the year that the earthly king died, I saw the heavenly king on his heavenly throne, which makes us realize that the grass withers, the flower fades, but God and His Word abide forever. Where do you want to fasten hope and faith and confidence of the future? On earthly kings or on heavenly kings? People are announcing right and left. If you'll listen closely tomorrow, I will be announcing my candidacy for the presidency of the United States.

Everybody else is doing it. I think I'll just throw my hat in the ring as well. I've got about as much chance as they do of winning, so why not? People who are pinning their hopes for some sort of economic or especially moral or spiritual turnaround based on who gets elected to the presidency this time around should go practice facing into a strong wind and spitting, because that's about as much chance as you have.

I don't care who they elect. Dust off Theodore Roosevelt, prop him up in the White House. It's still going to make no difference whatsoever, and he is by far the greatest president, in my opinion, we ever had.

He's the only one that really understood the way things need to work. Anyway, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on the throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it, you have the seraphim with the six wings.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory. And you have this wonderful revelation.

Verse 8, the voice of the Lord speaks and says, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Isaiah says, Here am I. Send me. If we get to watch the replays and the reruns, I'm going to be interested to know how long of a gap there was between the question and that answer. You see the Lord high and lifted up.

You've got seraphim, this vision of incomprehensibly grand and glorious presence of God. God speaks and says, In the presence of the angelic myriads, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Isaiah is on his face in the dirt. There's no answer.

No answer. The distant sound of a ticking clock perhaps. A scraping sundial shadow or something.

And after a... I think he says, Hey, you're on. It must be you. Nobody else is speaking up.

Well, here I am. Send me. Or maybe he had a grasp of it and just spoke right up.

I wouldn't want to do him an injustice. But I know if it was me in the ground, I wouldn't be thinking, Well, I'll speak up. And then some angel interrupts or the Lord Jesus interrupts.

I would just want to be sure nobody else was going to stick their hand in the air before I did mine. So God says to Isaiah in verse 9, Go and tell this people, Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.

Did you ever have your parents say, Keep it up. Just keep it up. You'll see what happens.

Just go right on. Just keep doing what you're doing. That's what this is.

You just keep hearing without understanding. You keep watching and not perceiving. Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes.

This is their response to the message. This is taken out of context to say that God sovereignly shuts the eyes of some people so they can't see and opens the eyes of others so they can see. God opens with, I need a messenger to go speak to these people.

And as he speaks, it is the speaking that is going to reveal those who have closed ears and tight shut eyes and calloused over hearts. The often used illustration, you can put adobe clay and butter out in the sunlight. One of them is going to get softer and one of them is going to get harder in the very same sunlight.

Wax is going to melt in the heat. There are other things that solidify in the heat. You cook your ceramics in the heat and they become hard and brittle.

It's the same heat, but there are two different reactions to it depending on what you're made of. The difficulty in those analogies is we decide what we're made of. And if anybody doubts that, if anybody is still wrestling with the Calvinist view that it's all foreordained, go over and read what Paul says to Timothy.

If a man will cleanse himself from sin, he can be a vessel of honor. In that Romans 9 thing, in every house there are vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. Vessels of honor, gold, silver.

Vessels of dishonor, wood and clay. And people say, oh see, you're just foreordained. You're either a vessel of honor, or a vessel of dishonor.

The same Paul writing to Timothy says, a man can cleanse himself by God's grace from his sin and make himself into a vessel of honor. There is no biblical basis for predetermination of human fate. We're made in the image of God and that means we have free will.

Our free will does not exist in the material universe. It exists perhaps in the same place as dark energy and dark matter outside of this universe. And therefore it is not subject to heredity, environment, some sort of pachinko effect.

Well, I couldn't help it. I was born upside down. I was born naked and it traumatized me.

No. There is no excuse. Romans chapter 1 says, what may be known of God is manifest so that those who suppress the truth are without excuse.

It doesn't say they haven't heard. It doesn't say the messenger wasn't eloquent enough. It doesn't say Isaiah didn't get up off the ground and start preaching fast enough.

It doesn't say, well, I was too slow. I was genetically not smart enough. I was too smart and my own mind tricked me.

If you'd have made me a little dumber then I could have had that simplistic faith. But I'm just too smart. I'm too smart for that faith stuff.

You really needed to give me a mountain of evidence. Then I could have believed. But this simplistic faith, that might have been good enough for people before me.

But look, I'm from the IT generation. I'm way, way too well informed for this whole God thing. Listen, that is the unconscious assumption of most of the people who claim to be atheists today.

I'm just too doggone smart for that stuff. You're going to have to come up to my level to communicate about God. No.

The existence, presence, and righteousness of God are communicated to every heart. Anybody that says, well, I'm not aware of any such thing. I didn't feel that.

You know what they're looking for? You know what they're expecting? That God is going to come and manifest Himself in an irresistible way. God can communicate via the Holy Spirit, via creation, via eternity in our hearts. And we can say, hey, that's not sufficient for me.

I need a ball of lightning. I need an angel. I need Jesus to stand at the foot of my bed.

I need my arm to wither and go back. I need the ten plagues to descend. Then I'll believe.

No, you won't. You'll be Pharaoh. You'll be Jeroboam.

You'll be Ahab. It doesn't matter how many miraculous things you'll explain in a way. I was hallucinating.

I ate something that didn't agree with me. I was deceived. My senses were confounded.

Somebody played a trick. It is the heart. And people that say that they have no sense of the presence of God aren't looking for the presence of God, aren't interested in relationship with God.

If they were, that awareness would come. God says, you will seek me and you will find me when? When you search for me casually? When you search for me occasionally? When you search for me when the chips are really down? When you search for me at the end of your life,

right before you take your last gasping breath and go rigid and cold? When? You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Lack of a wholehearted interest in God is the basis for condemnation, judgment, and ending in the lake of fire.

If you're not interested, and there's people who aren't. Satan's not. A third of the angels in heaven aren't.

How much more evidence do you think Satan needs of God and His omnipotence? Is there anybody that knows more about God than Satan? He was the guardian cherub of the throne room of God. He was in and out. He had the keys of the throne room.

He was God's executive officer in the heavenly realms. The capital G Garden of Eden, the fiery stones. He worked daily in the very presence.

He had an access card to the penthouse level that nobody else had. Satan reject God on a lack of sufficient revelation? No. He made a choice.

I will five times. I can do what God does. I can run gangs of angels.

I can lift my throne above the stars. I can do this stuff. We don't need Him.

And when people decide they don't need God, they're not interested in God, seeing they see and they don't perceive. Hearing they hear and they don't understand. Their heart is calloused over.

Is a calloused heart going to have a sense of the presence of God? No. Why? I chose to be in that condition. So, this is Isaiah's call.

Go to a hard-headed, hard-hearted, blind and deaf people and deliver my word. And that's what he's going to do. We want to learn from history.

Learn from the divinely inspired record of God's dealings with His people. We are His people. Like Israel was the sheep of His pasture, we're more than sheep.

We are His children. We can be heirs and co-heirs with Christ as sons. Romans 8, whom He foreknew, He did all those things so that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Where are those brethren? We have access to the very throne room of God through Christ. He's opened the way. Better access, as good access as Satan ever had.

So, we want to look at this and learn from it. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see what the ongoing situation is in Judah in the days of Isaiah, Jotham, Ahaz, and into the reign of Hezekiah.

Three and then the fourth. Three and then the fourth. When we come back.