

Kings and Prophets 16-05-12

This is Thursday, the 12th of May, 2016. We have been in our study now of Kings and Prophets for about three and a half years, which is doing pretty good considering all the ground we've covered. We've done quite a few books and we've seen the rise and fall of the Northern Kingdom.

We've seen the downward spiral of the Southern Kingdom and we will continue looking at that tonight. I will endeavor to finish closer to my target end time than has been my want of late. So we'll see how that goes.

That's all. That's a conditional promise. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and then we'll begin.

Father, how grateful we are for another opportunity to spend this time together in fellowship and the study of your Word. It is a refreshment to our souls and an encouragement to our hearts to come to the pure crystal water of your Word and find the strength and the clarity that makes sense of our world and the circumstances around us, focuses our attention, directs our efforts, helps us to formulate goals and values and priorities that are all pointed at eternity. We thank you for the passage that we had before us and this study in the time of King Josiah.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart in a way that is fruitful and effective and meaningful for us as individuals and as a church so that we can function in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name, amen. Well, we spent a sizable chunk of time last week looking at why the promise of God was not fulfilled in this rather spectacular case of King Josiah.

He had a promise of dying in peace, he instead died in war. He had a promise that he would not see trouble but he went and picked a fight and got himself in trouble. And this brought us to the realization that even when God makes a promise, there are either implicit or explicit conditions.

We are heirs of many wonderful promises of God. It is important to know those promises and also to pay attention to the conditions for their fulfillment. Looking at this particular situation, if you reflect on God's withdrawing his grace and withdrawing his support and withdrawing the fulfillment of promise to the southern kingdom in general beginning in the days of Manasseh and extending down even to this wonderfully good king.

The reason we're dwelling a bit on Josiah is he's a really good guy in bad days. We like to think that we are really good guys and it's bad days. So he seems like a pertinent and helpful warning for us and encouragement for us as people who have that heart of wanting God to assume his place in our lives the way Josiah wanted him to assume his place in the worship life of Judah.

We endeavor to restore and lift up the name of God in our hearts the way Josiah did in

Jerusalem to eliminate those things that are detrimental, those things that have torn down and sought to replace the things of God in the kingdom, which in this day of course is our hearts and our lives. And he does a really good job and we like to think that because we are consistent and because we are faithful, because we make an effort, we move aside other things and make sure we're at Bible class. We try to think about what we've learned at Bible class, talk about it with others at times other than Bible class.

And all of that is wonderful. So it is sobering to see that a guy that did all of the things that we are trying to do ended up cratering, augering in as pilots like to say. That really comes from the days of propeller driven aircraft.

If you auger in, you get a real visual of that, don't you? You don't just impact on the ground like a post hole digger, you just auger, you go below the surface. And it is very alarming in a sense to see this guy that began so well and did so many wonderful things end so badly. And as you know, as with Olympic sporting events, as with even local sporting events, it isn't how you begin, it is how you end.

It isn't all... You know, have you ever noticed that they don't really take the pictures at the starting blocks? They take pictures at the finish line. I saw a very early appearance of Jerry Seinfeld on the Tonight Show. One of the few things I watch anymore is old, 20, 30 year old Tonight Shows.

And Jerry Seinfeld had just started his program back in the early 90s. And part of his little routine that he did on the Tonight Show, they were anticipating the 1992 Olympics, I think. And he said, isn't it tragic? And you can imagine him delivering this much better than I. But these guys work and train, these men and women train and knock themselves out and devote themselves entirely to an effort for four years, preparing for the Olympics.

They go there and they win the silver medal. He said, I can't think of anything worse than the silver medal. The gold medal, of course, is you won.

The bronze medal is, well, at least I got something. But the silver medal, you are the first of the losers. And many times, you get the silver medal because you lost by like three 100s of a second.

Three 100s of a second. And then he went on to imitate how fast that is. And I was just, oh, I was good.

Three 100s of a second. He was talking about a guy that finished a race and lost by three 100s of a second. He said, you know, if he'd had a pimple, he might have won.

It's how you finish. It's how you finish that counts. You are sitting here and most of you have been sitting here, some of you since you came out of the nursery, and many of us have endeavored to live our lives to please God for a long, long time.

And there are all sorts of things that can set in that make us forget about finishing well, but it is all about finishing well. I mentioned in the last couple of weeks, you look around in the world of politics. There are some people that that devoted their lives.

There are famous coaches who had wonderful, long careers and were revered. And then right at the end, some peccadillo, some scandal emerges and everything is obviated. Everything is set aside.

Everything is forgotten, colored, tainted, tarnished, negated. And it's a tragic thing. The longer you persist and the further you make it in serving God and pleasing God, and we know that we can foul up, we can sin and God forgives us.

But there is a species of failure that wrecks years of faithfulness. It's how you finish. Josiah has a wonderful career, but he does not finish well.

The southern kingdom of Judah has a storied history, but its demise is as inglorious and tragic and fraught with evil as its sister to the north. Turn with me to the second Kings chapter 21. This is back a few chapters back in the days of Manasseh.

This is where God declares that judgment is coming. We know about that judgment. We know we declared it.

We know it has something to do with the sins of Manasseh. What we're going to review here quickly is the charge. What is the basis upon which God says, I will not fulfill my promise.

Watch for the nature of the failure. Now, why are we doing that? As goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in the new. If we can see what it is that God saw and changed his mind about fulfilling his promise, preserving, protecting, defending, blessing, perpetuating that southern kingdom, this would be a useful thing for us to know so that we ourselves don't suffer the same fate, right? Well, you can start out with David and Solomon, but if you end up with some of these last gasps of miserable failure, it really casts a shadow over the beginning.

Chapter 21, 2 Kings. Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king. He reigned 55 years in Jerusalem.

Did he have plenty of opportunities to wake up and change his path, wake up and remember to heed the warnings that were available to him? He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. So here's number one. This is something that he failed to do.

What did he fail to do? He failed to be different from the world, from the ungodly. He blended, he matched, he's indistinguishable from. The nations that God cast out.

So if note to self, don't be indistinguishable from the world and match it in my pursuits, in my investment of time, in my priorities, in my estimates of what is good and what is bad, in my

estimates of what counts and what doesn't count, right? Should we stand out when compared to the world? The obvious answer is yes, but the more interesting question is, how do I stand out? How should I stand out? How should I be different? Am I distinguishable? Would anybody look at me and wonder the reason for the hope that is in me? That's failure number one. He did according to all the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. No separation from sin, no distinction and wall keeping evil at a distance.

He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah, his father, had destroyed. He raised up altars for Baal and made a wooden image as Ahab, king of Israel, had done and he worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord.

He didn't just revere these other gods and invest in them and spend time building temples and setting up worship of them. This actually displaced. It wasn't even just alongside the worship of God, it displaced God.

It happened in God's house. Now, ten commandments. What's number one? Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

You can't even start the list. What's number two? Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image with the idea of worshipping it. You know, the Jews wouldn't put pictures on their coins because they thought this meant no pictures of any kind.

What did it really mean? Thou shalt not make unto thee idols. Don't set up. It is a concomitant.

It comes right after number one. Number one and number two, the first two, this is 20% of the ten commandments, right? And love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength. Law and the prophets are summed up in this and love your neighbor as yourself.

You can't get any more obviously off base, obviously evil than this. So he built these altars and images. Verse six of second Kings 21, he made his son pass through the fire, which means he engaged in child sacrifice.

Now, we don't necessarily see a parallel today. People say, well, you know, there's a real problem with abortion in this country, certainly and around the world. But we're talking about as goes the kingdom in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in the New Testament age.

So what is the parallel here to causing your son to pass through the fire, your child to pass through the fire? What is the spiritual parallel? What did your son represent? This is the future. This is God's blessing for your posterity, for your ongoing presence, as it were, the future of your family, of your clan, of your tribe. This is possession of inheritance.

This is the one to whom your inheritance should go. Instead of conferring and transferring blessings, instead of training up the child in the way that they should go so that they will not depart from it, what does he do? He roasts him alive to Baal. This is not euphemistic.

This isn't a figure of speech here. The man roasted his own child in a bronze image of Baal, Molech. Call it what you will.

It's child sacrifice of the burn him alive type in the misguided belief that this would appease this Canaanite false God, a false belief which obviates the future, negates the future, takes away the future. By my choices, I now cannot fulfill my responsibility before God to train up my child in the way that they should go. I have made choices that make that impossible.

I have made the posterity and the inheritance that should be a part of my spiritual life impossible. This is an irreversible decision, isn't it? You can't unpass your child through the fire to Molech. You can't reach into the fire and pull them back out and it's all good again, any more than David could undo the Bathsheba incident and get Bathsheba's first child with him back.

It's irreversible. It's irretrievable. He practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and consulted spiritists and mediums.

So in the making of decisions, in the evaluating of circumstances, in looking for wisdom and guidance, he does not go to God. He goes to false sources. And remember, the king is the biggest example.

He's the leader for the entire nation. And so his example, do you remember? Well, if you're old enough, do you remember back when we had our president from 1980 to 1988 and his wife was famously consulting horoscopes and people that do star charts and all that? It greatly alters your assignment of credibility to the mental health of people who think that there's merit in that. But the king is doing it.

And what does this imply? What does this connote about God and his presence and his power and his covenant relationship with the nation? Well, the king doesn't care anything about it. Why should I? The king must know something. He's up there consulting these others.

Bad example being set and appealing to other sources of wisdom, knowledge and guidance, other problem solving devices. Are we capable of doing that, even though we're believers? Do we? You know, here's a problem. And our first place to look is, you know, well, I'll I'll Google that.

I'll find a I'll find the wisdom of the times. Let me let me find out what the experts are saying. What are the PhDs have to offer on this? What's the latest scientific conclusion that will guide me? What's what's the what's the latest human wisdom? That's what he's done here.

He even said a carved image of Asherah that he made in the house, which the Lord had said to David and to Solomon, his son in this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name. How long? Verse seven, there was the last word in verse seven. How long did God say he would put his name there forever? It's a promise, right? I will put my name there forever.

Did God put his name there? Yes. Did he keep it there forever? No. Why? Conditional promise forever is only forever if the conditions of the promise are met, and that ought to sober everyone forever is only forever when the conditions of that promise are met.

I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers. Here's the condition only if they are careful to do according to all the commandments of all that I have commanded them and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But verse nine, they paid no attention and Manasseh seduced them to do.

Notice which came first. Manasseh seduced them. But what happened before that? They paid no attention.

If they had paid attention, Manasseh could not have seduced them. If you are locked on the word of God and the will of God under the ministry of the spirit of God, you cannot be seduced. You cannot be misled.

You cannot be deceived. You cannot reach out and take the fruit because it is desirable to make one wise. Your heart departs first and your feet then follow.

They paid no attention and, parentheses, as a result, Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. Remember in the New Testament where Paul is talking and it says, I think it's Paul, it would have been better for them if they had never gotten clean and left the pig wallow than to have found the truth and then go back like the dog returning to its vomit. It would have been better for them if they had never come to a knowledge of the truth and come to it and then abandon it.

Your fate is worse. Why? Because from those to whom much is given, much is expected and your responsibility is higher when you know better. Jesus says in another place that the servant who knew his master's will and did not do it will be beaten with many stripes, where the servant who wasn't too clear on the master's will and didn't do it will be beaten with few stripes.

Your knowledge increases your level of responsibility. We have plenty of knowledge. So what do you think our level of responsibility is? It's not low.

They paid no attention, they were seduced, they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. At least the Canaanites never had any command of God. They didn't have a standard of righteousness.

They never entered into a covenant. The Israelites do the very same thing as those nations, but they are also breaking their covenant and flying in the face of the God who gave them birth as a people and as a nation, the God of their fathers. So yes, it is a worse offense.

The Lord spoke by his servants, the prophets saying, because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations. He has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him and has made Judah sin with his idols. Therefore, thus says the Lord God of Israel, I am

bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.

I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. And this is tragic because Judah typically had such a better track record of good kings, faithfulness, teaching. Remember the days of Jehoshaphat and Joash and several waves of reform and revival down there.

And to be judged with the same judgment as the northern kingdom and the house of Ahab is tragic. It's a tragic level of loss. Do they get credit? Does God say, well, because you've done well in the past, your judgment will not be as severe? Does he say that? Does he say because you left the finish line at a greater speed and you ran most of the race with better form and better, you know, partial times, the fact that you're slowing down now, well, I'll give you credit for the earlier successes.

No, the very same judgment is going to fall on them because they are ending just as badly. You can lose your inheritance earned faithfully over a long period of time. You can fumble it away.

You can be saved yet so as by fire, you can compromise, you can taint, you can destroy the fruit of the earlier part of your Christian life. When you had enthusiasm, when you were faithful, when you were obedient, you can lose it all. That's the witness of scripture and it ought to sober us and it ought to motivate us to not fade in the stretch, to not stumble when the finish line is in view.

God is not kidding around. The one who bears fruit, God will prune so that we bear more fruit. He doesn't make preserves and stick it in the basement and say, okay, well, I don't really care what you do now.

I've got these jars of preserves down in the root cellar and that's good enough. We need to run with patience the race that is set before us. We need to fight the good fight.

We need to persevere. You have need of endurance so that you finish well. Turn back with me just to see why God has thrown over the fulfillment of promise.

Go back to 1 Kings 8. 1 Kings 8, this is Solomon dedicating this very temple that God says he's going to knock down, the place that he said he would put his name, the place where he promised that he would preserve the people. 1 Kings 8, Solomon says here, he stands before the Lord in verse 22, he stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven. And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like you who keep your covenant and mercy with your servants who walk before you with all their hearts.

It could have stopped a little sooner and it would have been better for us, wouldn't it? You keep your covenant and mercy with your servants, period, or you keep your covenants and mercy, period. It doesn't stop there. With your servants who walk before you with all their hearts, that's

commandment number one, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength.

You have kept what you promised your servant David, my father, you have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled it with your hand as it is this day. Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what you promised your servant David, my father, saying, you shall not fail to have a man sit before me on the throne of Israel only if your sons take heed to their way that they walk before me as you have walked before me. Now, turn over to chapter nine, first Kings chapter nine.

Came to pass, Solomon had finished building the house, all his desire he wanted to do. The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said to him, this is first Kings nine three.

The Lord said to Solomon, I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before me. I have consecrated this house, which you have built to put my name there forever. And my eyes and my heart will be there perpetually.

That's a promise. Think about that. The eyes of the Lord and the heart of the Lord will be there perpetually.

Now, if you walk before me as your father David walked in integrity of heart and in uprightness to do according to all that I have commanded you. And if you keep my statutes and my judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever. What was Solomon's request? Lord, you've kept your promises to my father David as it is this day.

Now, Lord, please keep your promise that there will not fail to be a man on the throne under the ages. Right. That was Solomon's request.

God says, I'll keep that promise if. This is the answer. I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David, your father, saying you shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.

But if you or your sons at all turn from following me and do not keep my commandments and my statutes, which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them. Seen any any descriptions of that taking place here anytime this evening, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them and this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight. If the temple in the Old Testament.

Is the place of God's presence and through disobedience, apathy and indifference, God says, I will cast it out of my sight. What is the equivalent? In the New Testament day. What is it that God is going to cast out of his sight if we are disobedient, if we are faithless, if we get occupied with other things and put other priorities and other sources of solution in the place of God, what is it he's going to cast out? In the Old Testament, it was the temple.

Where's the temple now? Where's Solomon's temple? Was blasted to the ground. Even it's replacement. There's not one stone left upon another for the very same reason.

Now, what do you think is going to happen to the temple of God in our souls? If we get distracted, if we fail, if we falter, if we foul up, is it? Well, I guess God just won't be able to use me. I won't be quite as fruitful. I'll just kind of be in a backwater somewhere.

I'll just sort of be ignored. I'll be in the rear with the gear. What does God say about failure here? I will cast it out of my sight.

Now, what happened when God cast Solomon's temple out of his sight? How much of it was left? No thing. How much of the second temple is left after 70 AD? No thing. You got the Jews over there banging their heads on a retaining wall that they think might have been underneath some part of the ground that used to support the temple.

There is not even a shadow. They don't even know exactly where the thing was. It is so gone.

That is you. That is me. If we follow this pattern of failure to keep up our part of the bargain.

As for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss and say, why has the Lord done this to this land and to this house? They will answer because they forsook the Lord, their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and had embraced other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore, the Lord has brought all this calamity on them. They will hiss, their ears will tingle.

Right. This is why even King Josiah, with his reform effort. Ends up being an example of what happens when you don't heed the conditions.

I cannot emphasize this too strongly. We take for granted our spiritual blessings. We take for granted that God is with us, that God will hear us when we pray, that God will provide for our needs, that God will receive us into glory, that we have a bright future when the Lord Jesus comes to receive us to himself, that we will have something left with which to dress ourselves in terms of righteousness at the judgment seat of Christ, that we have some sort of white robe, that we'll have some sort of a pony to ride when the Lord Jesus comes back.

In Revelation chapter 19, complacency, assuming these things are true without being diligent to fulfill the conditions is dangerous. Nobody sets out to fail. Nobody sets out to lose the race.

Nobody gets up in the morning and says, well, let me see how many ways I can fail today. It's never our intention. And many times we're not even honest enough to acknowledge that we have failed or that we're not measuring up or we're not doing what we're supposed to.

We tell ourselves stories. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. You can't trust the propaganda coming from your heart.

Where do we get objectivity? Where do we get a true evaluation? Why do you think thy word

have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee? We have to go look in the mirror. As James says, look into the law, God's law, and witness our reflection. Take stock.

See where there's a lack, where there's a shortfall. Examine yourself. See if you're in the faith, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

God gives grace to the humble, and it takes humility to be honest and say, you know, if I'm honest and objective, if I evaluate myself, I have not really set God as first priority. I haven't been attentive to the details of my call to obedience, my call to be body of Christ, my call to honor the Lord God with all my heart. My call to love one another, love my neighbor as myself.

I harbor a lot of attitude sins. I have some real problems that I haven't seen fit to address. I haven't let God's grace in.

I haven't let the hammer of God's word come in and break those rocks into pieces. And I need to, and I am going to, because I do not want to lose all of the blessings that God has thus far conferred upon me. I'm not going to be apathetic just because the guillotine blade has not yet fallen.

Remember the false sense of prosperity when the Assyrians got busy, they saw Babylon on the flank and they turned their attention around and Israel expanded. They said, look, everything is great. We must be doing something right.

And then when it all fell to the ground, they blamed Josiah and his reforms. We should have stuck with those Canaanite gods. I mean, how self-deceiving can you get? For our final passage, turn over to Ezekiel chapter 43 real quickly.

Ezekiel 43. Remember when Ezekiel gets snatched up by the hair of the head and taken by the spirit back to Jerusalem and he's looking around? And he says to him, after what he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east and behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters and the earth shown with his glory.

It was like the appearance of the vision, which I saw like the vision I saw when I came to destroy the city. The vision was like the vision which I saw by the river Khabar and I fell on my face. The glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate, which faces toward the east.

Christ. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Then I heard him speak to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me.

And he said to me, Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile my holy name, they nor their kings by their harlotry, or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places." What's right outside the temple wall? Garden of Uzzah. When they

set their threshold by my threshold, what's he talking about? Say it again.

Garden of Uzzah, their threshold right by my threshold. These things are side by side, they're separated by one wall. Their doorpost by my doorpost, with a wall between them and me, they defiled my holy name by the abominations which they committed.

Therefore, I have consumed them in my anger. It was worse than just doing the abominations. It was worse than just worshiping the idols.

It was worse than just setting up to acknowledge the hosts of heaven and seek the soothsayers and all that. It was worse. Why? It was right next door to the temple where God had put his name.

That's the risk that you and I run, because when we bring these things into our heart, we're putting doorpost to doorpost, threshold to threshold, right next to the wall where God's dwelling is supposed to be in us. The Lord does not take it lightly in the Old Testament. He didn't take it lightly in Jerusalem and in Judah, and He will not take it lightly with us.

But the portion of this text to latch onto is the glory of God does come to His temple when it is prepared, when it is ready, when it is qualified, when the conditions have been met. And it doesn't get any better than that. The indwelling glory of God in our hearts.

Jesus said, the one who has my commands and keeps them, He's the one who loves me. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. I will come to Him.

My Father and I will come to Him and we will make our abode with Him. That's the glory. That's the Shekinah coming into the temple and remaining and abiding and blessing, fellowshiping, saving, keeping.

Such a contrast. We can either experience that or we can be the days of Manasseh, the days of Josiah, the days of Zedekiah, the days of Ezekiel and Daniel and Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah going into the darkness of captivity and judgment simply because we did not choose to remember the terms of the covenant. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. It has such wonderful places of encouragement and blessing and promise. You have promised that You will never leave us or forsake us.

You have promised that You will uphold us with the right hand of Your righteousness. You have promised that You will never leave the seat of the righteous baking bread. And at the same time, we see such tremendous episodes of judgment and of consequence.

We thank You for the rebuke and the correction portions of Your Word. We thank You for the doctrinal and the instructional parts of Your Word. We thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus who, through His work on the cross, has made it possible for us to be related to You for

eternity, for Your Holy Spirit that abides with us, seals us under the day of redemption, and makes these things meaningful and pertinent to us in our individual hearts.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that God the Holy Spirit will impress them on us, show us the specific ways where we can improve our obedience, our faithfulness, the expression of our love for You and for the Lord Jesus. We pray it in His name. Amen.