

Kings and Prophets 16-09-01a

This is Thursday, the 1st of September, 2016. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets, having extensively sampled or perhaps briefly sampled, depending on how you look at it, the prophet Jeremiah. We're back to the narrative of his days, the declining and closing days of the kingdom of Judah, really beginning with King Josiah, good King Josiah, who refurbished and rebuilt the temple, found the book of the law, followed its instructions, celebrated the greatest Passover that had been seen for centuries, but made something of a strategic mistake in not understanding his times and got himself killed.

So we're picking up at the death of Josiah and the next four kings of Judah, which are going to follow one another in rather rapid succession. In Jeremiah's day, we know the background, God's attitude, the reasons for God's judgment, the prevailing heart of the people, and the necessity for faithful believers, that's hopefully us, to pay attention to the word of God in such circumstances. We are now in similar circumstances and will find ourselves ever more so as our nation declines, as our economy tanks, as our international problems increase, and we're in a different version of much the same situation, both nationally and spiritually.

So this is fruitful observation for us to see how should we behave, what should we expect, how will God lead and guide, what should we do, what should we not do? Well, there's plenty of guidance and plenty of example in this section of God's word, almost like no other for the historical circumstances that we find ourselves in. So we'll be watching for that as we pick up the narrative now in both 2 Chronicles chapter 36 paralleled in 2 Kings chapter 23. And you can kind of keep a finger in both of those.

We're going to try to glean the details from both as we go forward. But let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our study to the glory of God, to the hope and aspiration that our time together will build us up in the faith, both individually and collectively, and that the Lord Jesus will be more and more evident in our lives as a result. Shall we pray? Father, it is a wonderful comfort to remember that it is not by might nor by power, but by your spirit that we are enabled and we are gifted, we are guided, we are motivated, we are cleansed, and we are prepared for service and for useful function in your overall plan and purpose, both now and in the ages to come.

We thank you for that privilege. We thank you for the Lord Jesus in whom we enjoy these wonderful privileges and opportunities. We pray that tonight, as we look at this time in the history of your people, Israel, specifically the kingdom of Judah, that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us see its pertinence and its application in our daily decisions and the way we think, the way we prioritize, the goals that we set and pursue, so that it will not just be words on a page, it won't just be an interesting historical footnote, but it will be something that the Holy Spirit can use to shape us and mold us ever more closely in the image of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in his name. Amen. So, Josiah, the last knock-it-out-of-the-park good king

in Judah.

This was the opportunity for people to follow with all their hearts. And there is a superficial response. This is sort of the seed hitting the shallow soil, springing up in a day, looking enthusiastic and positive, and happy days are here again.

The parallel that comes to my mind when you think about King Josiah is the parade known as the triumphal entry. The Sunday before Jesus was crucified. You can't see a needle swing a greater distance from positive to negative than the hosannas and the garments and palm branches in the path of the Lord Jesus.

And four days later, they're all screaming with their fists in the air, crucify him, crucify him. Not necessarily the same people, but the representative voices of the nation say one thing. And so soon afterward, it is the Lord coming to his own and his own receiving him not.

That parade, that tragic entry on that Sunday, Palm Sunday, is so promising and hopeful in its aspect, but it's an emotional and shallow response, not a deeply felt and widely held conviction. And you get a similar feel when you read about the reforms of Josiah. It all seems to be so great.

Everything's on the upswing. We're set for another couple of hundred years of God's blessing on Judah. And yet within just a handful of years, a single digit number of years, the nation is going to be gone.

The temple will be destroyed. The articles of worship will be carried away into Babylon. And it is a reminder that even when we see hopeful signs, whether it is nationally or in the world of Christianity, you think, well, there's a there's a sweeping revival.

There's a renewal. There's a renaissance. There's a movie with a Christian theme comes out or some new study comes out.

And if you think back, if you've been here long enough to think back over the decades, some of us can remember more decades than others for various reasons, either because we've been here that long or we've got a good enough memory. But there have been successive waves within Christian circles that really made everybody think we're on the road to a real spiritual renewal. And in the 1950s, it was the Billy Graham crusades and into the 1960s.

And you think, look at these people just streaming down the aisles and coming to Christ. The ecumenical movement where denominations are trying to get together and agree on things and be the church, capital C, so to speak. There was within evangelical Christianity a little bit narrower experience.

You had several verse by verse, book by book teachers that came out in the in the 1960s and 70s and had a wide following, mailed out thousands of tapes every month all over the world. And we thought, you know, this is really going to build a solid core. There were churches that

followed this pattern and had pastors that were what they called the second generation of these isagogical and categorical and exegetical teaching style that we thought, well, this will really form a spiritual backbone.

And the Bible church movement sort of transcended some of the limitations of denominations. You had the four spiritual laws and the wordless book and evangelistic efforts that seemed to really catch fire. The navigators were big and Bible Memory Association was big and Child Evangelism Fellowship was big and popular and had people, thousands and thousands of people all over our country in missionary endeavors.

And all of these things seem to be harbingers of fresh spiritual health and vitality. And yet in the culture, we saw decline after decline after decline beginning in the late 60s, especially, although you can see the roots of it and the cracks in the foundation even before that. With excess prosperity, there is no truer thing than what the Bible says about the love of money being the root of all kinds of evil.

And with the post World War II prosperity, people no longer felt a need. This is principle number one for tonight. And watch for it as we go through these declining and closing days in the southern kingdom of Judah at the point that we no longer feel a need for God, a need for God's spirit, a need for God's word, a need to find, claim and follow God's will.

That is where decline begins. You don't necessarily see the symptoms for a good while after. But in the United States, when we were fighting world wars and when we had the depression, when we had a lot of internal and external problems, many people were driven to the foot of the cross, were driven to the throne of grace, recognized that there was a need for power, guidance, wisdom, salvation outside and beyond ourselves.

After World War II, with a booming economy and burgeoning prosperity and urbanization and capitalization and all of these things, the growth of entertainment, movies and television really began to dominate. Music began to dominate and replace thoughtfulness and conversation and dialogue and discourse and thoughtful reflection on the meaning of life. You don't have time for it when your mind is chewing the bubble gum for the brain that is entertainment.

And because of that, we lost our sense of need. One of the challenges for any teacher of any subject, and especially of the word of God, is to begin each teaching session, each class with establishing in the minds of the hearers that sense of need. I was taught this as an artillery instructor.

If you're going to cover complementary angle of sight, you don't even have any clue what that is. But it is a bend in the trajectory that is due to compensating for elevation. If I'm shooting from level ground to a target that's on that same level, all I have to worry about is just my trajectory.

But if I'm shooting from level ground to a hilltop, I've got to raise the tube, right? To achieve

that same range, I'm going to fall short because it's on a hill. So I've got to add a little bit of elevation to achieve the same range because I've got an altitude that I also have to climb. And when I raise the tube, the shape of the trajectory changes.

It's like your garden hose. You put your thumb over it, if you're more well off, you have a little pistol grip thing on there, and you can see this with a garden hose. As you raise the hose, the shape of that arc changes.

Well, that compensation beyond just raising it for the altitude, compensating for the change in shape of the trajectory, that's complementary angle of sight. Well, I've got to explain that to young lieutenants before I teach them how to calculate it. If you don't calculate this, you will never hit your target.

You will always fall short. And people can die. Enemies can advance.

Bad things can happen if you don't know what this is. And remember to calculate for it in your calculation. So we establish a sense of need.

Now, you think about the days of Josiah. Remember the Assyrians who have been dominant for several hundred years now have to turn their attention because the Babylonians have come out from under Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's father has defeated the Assyrians and has established independence for Babylon.

And he's now the bully on the block. And Assyria has had to turn around and turn their back to the area of Israel and Egypt. And face the Babylonians.

And into that vacuum, the kingdom of Judah has been able to expand. And so everything seems like it's on the upswing. We have more territory.

We have more grazing. We have less interference. The Assyrians are no longer a threat.

Our commerce is booming. Our economy is expanding. Our population is growing.

We're moving into the land that used to be northern Israel that's been dominated for so long by the Assyrians. Happy days are here again. And why is there this decline? We talk a lot about the decline and fall of the northern kingdom and the decline and fall of the southern kingdom.

In both cases, if you look at it, they were on a wave of prosperity right before they fell. We have wonderful prosperity in our lives. We have gadgets.

We have technology. We have conveniences. We have comforts.

We have air conditioning. We have the Internet. We have a solution or an app for everything, right? I was thinking yesterday about just the simple access to water that we have.

You turn a tap. They just replaced the faucets in our building because they were acting a little

funny. But these faucets are motion activated.

You just walk up to the sink and stick your hands out and the water comes on. Ours, at least, you have to tap it. And sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

But these, you just walk up and make an appeal. You just hold out your hands to the faucet and it responds with water. And I'm thinking, you remember the days when people used to have to trek down with a bucket to a stream and try to find a clean spot and make sure there wasn't livestock upstream.

And try to get a bucket full with no fish in it and whatnot and no algae or whatever else and bring it back and heat it up and boil it and make sure it's safe to use and to drink. Now, I just wave my hands and here comes the water. Remember Jesus standing up on the last day of the feast? Let him that is thirsty come to me and out of him will flow rivers of living water.

But we don't have a sense of need. I heard a statistic just last night, a man discussing a book. I think the title of it is *The End of the White Church in America* or something to that effect.

And they were interviewing him on NPR, on PBS, on the public station about this book, *The End of the White Church in America*. And he was talking about the fact that in previous generations, little kids would be taken to church. When they got in their teens, they were still going to church.

But when they left home, there would be a decline in church attendance. And people in their late teens, early 20s, into their late 20s were the lowest demographic of church attendance. But then in their 30s, it would pick back up.

He said for the first time in history, the last couple of generations in America, there's been no rebound. If they're taken to church as kids and teenagers, they leave in their late teens and early 20s, but they're not coming back. And he was giving reasons for why he thinks that is.

But one of them is when people move out into human life, we used to realize that we needed wisdom and we needed guidance. And we recognized that there were shortfalls and shortcomings. We were sinful.

We were fallen. We were corrupt. We needed a savior.

This is what is lacking in Judah is the sense of need. There is no sense of need. And because of that, the reforms of Josiah don't stick.

They're not embraced. They're not taken into the heart. So just as background, and I've taken a few minutes to describe this, but we can talk about the decline all day long and just say, those silly people, they just didn't love God and they didn't worship God like they should have.

But why? Why was that? We can ask ourselves the same question. Why am I not more motivated? Why am I not more diligent? Why am I not more prayerful? Why do I not spend

more time in reflection and in digestion of the things I learned from the word of God? Why am I not better at application? Why am I not being more victorious over my besetting sins? Well, here's a question. What is my sense of need? Do I feel the need for God in my life? And if not, why not? Let me ask you a second question.

Is there any of us that doesn't actually need God in our lives? We don't actually need biblical wisdom. We don't actually need the influence and power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We've pretty well got everything wired and we don't really need that.

I mean, we know, at least on an academic level, that's absurd, right? We all are corrupt, fallen, in us dwelleth no good thing. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. And if it wasn't for the presence of God, we would be devastatingly worthless and would get to the judgment and it would be as big a bonfire as any that ever gets lit for wood, hay and stubble, right? We know this at an academic level.

We know that's what the Word of God teaches. We know it to be a fact at an academic level, right? But on a day-to-day basis, does that compel? Does it persuade? Does it drive us to our spiritual resources? Or is it like smokers that know there's a surgeon general's warning, but they don't quit? Or they know that driving while texting is dangerous, but they do it anyway. Yeah, I know that, but I'm not acting on my knowledge.

Well, this is the link. Watch what happens when people in a nation who have had a stellar example in Josiah, have had 18 years of his reign to get the message, to assess the value of God's presence and God's power and God's purpose for their nation. And it did not stick.

So what happened? Look at 2 Chronicles chapter 36. 2 Chronicles chapter 36. This is after Josiah.

This is after the wonderful Passover, after the refurbishing and rebuilding. God's got a beautiful temple. But you can see at the end of the previous chapter, the rest of the acts of Josiah, his goodness according to what was written in the law of the Lord, his deeds from first to last are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

And we've reviewed that in some detail. Chapter 36, 2 Chronicles. Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem.

Now, this something unprecedented in either the northern or southern kingdom is about to happen. Josiah has four sons, all of whom will occupy the throne of the southern kingdom. No king has ever had four sons all sit on the throne.

And this is something of a testament to Josiah. It is something of a blessing. You remember God said, David, you will not lack a man to sit on the throne because you've been faithful.

You're a man after my own heart and so on. In 2 Samuel chapter 7. Well, you get the idea that God honors the heart of Josiah by putting four of his sons on the throne. So the first of these is

Jehoahaz.

Now, the people of the land here doesn't just mean it was by public acclamation. This actually is a reference to sort of a legislative body. It's the elders of Israel, the representatives of the clans in Judah and Benjamin, the ones that are left down in the south there.

They're sort of a council of elders. They make this decision. It wasn't just sort of a public mob decision.

This council met, you get this information if you flip back a few pages to chapter 33 and verse 25. The people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Ammon. Remember that Ammon reigned two years in Jerusalem and he got assassinated.

Well, there was this council that tracked down his conspirators and killed them. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place. Well, this same council of elders that put Josiah on the throne after Ammon was assassinated have reconvened here to put his son Jehoahaz on the throne.

Now, this individual is not the oldest son. Josiah's oldest son is Yohanan, followed by Jehoiakim, Zedekiah and Shalom, who is also Jehoahaz. And Jehoahaz is the one they chose.

So this isn't a primogeniture succession, if you will. Of the four available sons, they've chosen the youngest, Shalom or Jehoahaz. Well, as you keep reading here in 2 Chronicles 36, Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he became king and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.

The council, wonderful as they may have been in their deliberations, didn't make a successful choice. Why? Because the king of Egypt, who is this? Pharaoh Necho. What did he just get through doing? Killing Josiah for interfering with his march north to join up with the Assyrians and battle the Babylonians.

Necho deposed him in Jerusalem and imposed on the land a tribute of 100 talents of silver and a talent of gold. The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king in his stead. This is Jehoiakim.

Eliakim is Jehoiakim. These names get confusing. Just remember Yeho, that prefix is the Yahweh portion.

Eli is the name for God. Remember Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani, my God, my God. Well, Elohim or El, Eli, our God, my God, Eliakim or Yehoakim.

It's just a swapping of the divine element at the beginning of the name. But Yohanan is still skipped over here for whatever reason. Maybe he has died at this point.

But the Jehoiakim is the one put on the throne or Eliakim and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz, his brother, and carried him off to Egypt. So there's sort of a hostage situation.

Remember when Joseph did this with his own brothers and kept Simeon, I think, behind and wanted them to bring Benjamin. So they held Simeon hostage while they went back and sent them to their father. Well, this is kind of a, OK, you rule, and I'm taking the one that all the people really wanted, and I'm holding him hostage.

You do anything against my wishes, and this guy is going to be executed. So in verse 5, Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, his God.

Now, think about the symbolic value of this. The council of elders, who would be the duly appointed authorities to make decisions about who's going to be king. That's how Josiah got on the throne, right? What happened? They are elbowed out of the way, and the pharaoh of Egypt picks the king.

What did God say? We don't have time to go back and review the blessings and cursings of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, but when you get down to the fourth cycle of discipline, you no longer have control of your government. You are puppetized by those around you. You are coerced and forced into things by outside forces.

That's what's happened to Judah. This is, if you count the five cycles of discipline, some of you remember that phrase from years gone by. Well, this is the fourth cycle.

You no longer control your own destiny. And the fifth cycle is where you go out, and that's just around the corner. But this is the fourth cycle.

And the pharaoh of Egypt, what does Egypt represent? This is the land of bondage. This is slavery to sin. This is, out of Egypt, I have called my son.

You're delivered. You're set free. You're taken to the land of promise.

Well, now the place from which you were delivered by God to no longer be in bondage and be under taskmasters, that pharaoh is calling the shots over you. This ought to be a warning. This ought to wake people up.

But this goes on for 11 years, and there's no appeal. The priests don't call the people to prayer. They don't go before the Lord.

They don't say, Lord, we realize we want to turn this around. We're returning to you. The answer, in other words, to economic, international, social upheaval for faithful believers is to go to the Lord, for a nation is to go to the Lord, to return to the Lord.

The answer to the election this fall and the next four years of a presidency isn't to campaign, isn't to pick between candidates. It is to do what we can for spiritual renewal, blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord, right? That's what they do not do. And so the movement of the big blocks in national affairs dominates.

Now, what are faithful believers doing while all this is going on? Waiting, listening to Jeremiah, listening to the other prophets that have already spoken, and watching and waiting in prayerful anticipation for what God is going to do. Restful, peaceful, not stressed, not worried, but aware that this is a judgment phase coming on the nation, watching and waiting for the word from the Lord. God always gives detailed information.

You remember in the tribulation what Daniel, what Jesus said, Daniel's abomination of desolation. Jesus said, when you see the abomination of desolation, head for the hills. That's specific information with a specific trigger point.

Jeremiah delivered the same thing, didn't he? He said, when you see the Babylonians come, do not resist, do not fight them, do not mount some sort of effort to overcome them militarily, comply. Let them take you captive, go with them quietly. You will be preserved.

If you fight them, you will be destroyed. That was God's specific word. It was timely and it was specific.

Every time judgment comes on a larger group that contains faithful believers, you look at it in the word of God. There is specific instruction given to the faithful believers. The marking angel comes around and puts his mark and says, these are to be preserved.

And the ones who are preserved will follow specific instructions. Daniel and his three friends knew what to do. They were faithful, they were diligent, they were prayerful.

Remember Daniel praying three times a day and he never wavered from that. And God blessed him with insight and understanding. Rest in it, watch for it.

Don't panic, don't fall apart. Watch for the guidance of God. It will come, it will be timely and it will be specific for us.

That pattern never changes in scripture. Peter gave specific instructions to the believers in the diaspora. Paul gave specific instructions for believers in the latter days.

He said, here's what you do when you see good being spoken of as evil and evil being spoken of as good. And men in the latter days being lovers of themselves, lovers of money, unfaithful, unholy, without self-control and all the rest of it. We have specific instructions there, right? Look at them, follow them, rest in them.

That's what Jeremiah and the faithful did in this day. That's what we do in our day. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we'll see what the outcome is as two of Josiah's four sons to sit on the throne have now passed before our eyes.