

Lesson 91

Kings of Israel and Judah

The kings of Israel and Judah eventually led their nations away from God.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The history of the divided kingdom of Israel is one of warning. The kings were responsible for the spiritual state of their nations, whether they remained faithful and obedient to God or turned to idolatry and wickedness. God gave them years to repent but eventually judged both nations with captivity.

Key Passages

1 & 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles (selected verses)

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the pattern of the kings of Israel.
- Describe the pattern of the kings of Judah.

Memory Verse

Philippians 3:13–14 But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Today's lesson is about another prophet of God. God used prophets throughout the Old Testament to send messages of encouragement, judgment, and warning, and to perform miracles in his name to show his glory. The prophet Elijah ministered to the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. He had a powerful ministry in spite of the turmoil, the victories, the defeats, and the depression he often endured (1 Kings 17–19).

Through Elijah we come to know that God is a jealous God. When we hear the word jealous, we often think it refers to being envious of someone—wanting something they have for ourselves. We tend to consider jealousy a sinful reaction. So, when we hear that God is jealous (Exodus 34:13–14), we wonder what it means. God cannot sin, nor does anyone physically possess anything he would want, since everything belongs to him (Psalm 50:12). His jealousy is not the sinful jealousy we often consider. So, what is it? God's jealousy is a desire for his own glory! God's jealousy is provoked when we worship anything above him. In the Bible, his jealousy is related to idolatry (Exodus 20:4–5, 34:14;

Deuteronomy 4:23–24, 5:9, 32:21; Joshua 24:19–20). As the Creator, God is the only one who rightly deserves to be worshipped. As the Creator, he is righteous in his jealousy to be exclusively worshipped, and those who bow down to other gods will surely face his wrath.

Elijah knew that there is one true God and that he alone is to be worshipped. But at that time, King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, ruled over Israel in Samaria. Ahab worshipped the false god Baal, built a house for Baal, set up an altar to Baal, and erected wooden images to worship (1 Kings 16:31–33). In fact, Ahab did more to provoke God's anger than any other king of Israel (1 Kings 16:33). And God would reveal his jealousy when Ahab promoted pagan worship. Into this idolatrous environment God sent Elijah, who stood before King Ahab and pronounced that the Lord God of Israel would stop the rain and cause a severe drought in the land (1 Kings 17:1).

God did not spare Elijah from this drought but did care for him in supernatural ways—first at the brook Cherith where he found water to drink and food from ravens sent from God (1 Kings 17:3–4). Then God sent him to Zarephath, a city on the Mediterranean Sea, to a widow who was commanded to provide for the prophet of God (1 Kings 17:9–10). Although destitute, she was able to do so by God's miraculous mercy and grace (1 Kings 17:11–14).

God eventually sent Elijah back to challenge Ahab and the 850 false prophets who worshipped pagan gods (1 Kings 18:1, 18:18–19). Elijah persuaded King Ahab to assemble with the false prophets and all Israel at Mount Carmel for God's determined confrontation. There, he asked the Israelites, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Altars were built, sacrifices were prepared, but the challenge was fire. Whoever would answer the plea for fire to burn the sacrifice was the true God (1 Kings 18:24). The Baal worshippers called, danced, howled, and cut themselves with swords and lances—to no avail. The one true God would not allow them to succeed (1 Kings 18:26–29). He was restraining the demons behind the inanimate idols. Their efforts were futile.

Now Elijah was prepared to show the power and glory of the true Creator God. The altar was prepared, and lest anyone doubt God's authority, Elijah ordered that four jars of water be poured onto the sacrifice and over the wood. This was done three times! Even the trench around the altar was filled with water (1 Kings 18:33–35).

Elijah cried out to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob). Then, the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water that was in the trench. The people fell to the ground and proclaimed that the Lord, he is God (1 Kings 18:38–39).

At Elijah's command, the prophets of Baal were seized and executed at the brook Kishon (1 Kings 18:40). This fulfilled God's law that any false prophet should be killed (Deuteronomy 13:5). And as Elijah prayed to the Lord from the top of Mount Carmel, a cloud appeared and the drought ended with heavy rainfall.

In Israel, it was evident that Baal was nothing and God was everything. God is not mocked. His truth will prevail, and the whole world will one day know that he is the only true God and that salvation comes only one way—through his Son, Jesus Christ, crucified on a cross and raised again to life!

Historical/Apologetics Background

Elijah had a long ministry in both the northern and southern kingdoms. He was born in Israel and is said to have come from Tishbe (1 Kings 17:1). As God's prophet, Elijah was called to fulfill many different roles. He delivered messages of national judgment because of idolatry and messages of judgment to individual leaders. His ministry was affirmed by the working of many miracles. These signs were a mark of the authenticity of Elijah's work on behalf of God. He stopped the rain (1 Kings 17:1), raised the dead (1 Kings 17:22), called fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), and performed other signs.

Elijah ministered during the early part of the divided kingdom, a time when there was rampant idolatry in Israel and Judah. As he constantly called the tribes back to worship Jehovah, he faced a religious system that was based in works and superstition rather than in truth. The demonic influence in the religious systems of the Gentile nations was obvious and was a constant cause for judgment against Israel and Judah. God used the nations surrounding the two kingdoms to bring judgment on the people.

Elijah was one of the earliest of the prophets proclaiming to the Israelites the message of repentance and reconciliation with God, but that message would be repeated by others over the next several hundred years. The Jews did not remain faithful to God as a nation, but they repeatedly involved themselves in spiritual adultery with other gods—the idolatry that is still present in all other religions today. As we look at the world around us and our own hearts, the words of John Calvin ring true: "From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols" (Institutes Book I.XI.8). 1 Corinthians 10:14 warns us to "flee from idolatry." God alone is worthy of praise and deserves first place in our hearts.

God is faithful, and as he did in Elijah's time (1 Kings 19:18), he will always reserve a remnant who worship him in truth and who declare his Word to the next generation.

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