

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 3b 2 Kings: Division Through Disobedience (Part 2)

Presented by the



LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE
CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

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2 Kings begins where 1 Kings leaves off. Ahab is dead and his house and his queen Jezebel are awaiting their destruction, which has been delayed, at least for the present, although Ahab's son Ahaziah dies after falling through a lattice. Meanwhile, Elijah hands off the mantle of his prophetic ministry to Elisha before departing for heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot made of fire. Elisha launches a successful prophetic career like that of his master. He brings a child back to life, makes iron float, magically purifies poisonous food, kills a pack of irritating children by sending bears after them. Normal prophet stuff. He also helps save Israel from the Aramean army, temporarily blinding them, and then treating them to a feast before releasing them. He also helps end the famine that has been afflicting Samaria. When Elisha comes especially and deals with the siege that's brought on by the enemy, I love that we get a glimpse into what spiritual warfare is truly like that we don't see in our temporal world. As Elisha, I almost picture him leaning him in a lounge chair, drinking a beverage of some refreshing type as his servant is nervous and saying, "Elisha, how could you rest? Don't you see the enemy outside our gates? They're so strong. They're going to siege us and we're going to die." And I love what Elisha says. Elisha says to God, "Lord, give him spiritual eyes." A snapshot into that heavenly realm that we don't normally get to see. And as his servant has the spiritual vision that's been given to him for that brief period of time, he sees in between the invading armies and the city that he's in the angels of the Lord on chariots as a protection and a buffer in between them and the enemy. That's powerful, exciting stuff. And what I love most about that is the God that did that inhabits you and I, if we're a child of God, in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Now, however, we have some bad news as we look at 2 Kings also. Israel and Judah both need to deal with many horrible kings, Jehoram and Ahaziah being but a couple of the culprits. Jehu, a soldier ordered to rebel by God, ends up dispatching both of those guys. He also finishes Jezebel off. Her eunuchs chuck her out the window and the dogs eat her corpse. But Jehu himself is an imperfect king of Israel, continuing to follow the sins of Jeroboam. How sad. Judah gets a rather better king when Joash comes on the scene, to whom Elisha gives some very sage advice and he helps vanquish some of Judah's enemies. Eventually, Assyria destroys the northern kingdom of Israel, thanks to the persistence of Jeroboam's sins and other idolatries. The 10 tribes are being scattered and moved to other places. Assyria attempts to destroy Judah as well, but thanks to God's intervention, the Assyrian army is slaughtered by an angel before they can enter Jerusalem. The righteous king Hezekiah, who was supposed to be one of Judah's very best rulers, survives. Thanks again to God's help, he manages to tack another 15 years onto his life and he reigns after nearly dying. Yet again, bad follows good and the wicked king Manasseh starts doing all sorts of idolatrous things, again like sacrificing some of his own children in a fire, presumably to Molech. Despite the best efforts of a super good teen king Josiah, God's wrath is kindled against Judah. Whereas the Assyrians had crushed Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invades Judah as the story ends, destroying the country and sending most people into exile in Babylon. Bad times for the nation of Israel. And that's all part of the fabric in which this book is written.

The Book of 2 Kings is a narrative history and a prophecy concerning the affairs of the divided kingdoms which happened in 1 Kings. The author is anonymous. However, some suggest that it would be the prophet Jeremiah who some, again, believe wrote 1 Kings also. It was written about 560 to 538 B.C., soon after 1 Kings. In fact, if you notice in the Old Testament, the way it was really originally written in the Hebrew, 1 and 2 Kings were one book until they were separated in the Septuagint. There's some key personalities in this book. In fact, quite a few of them. We see Elijah, at least a short time, and Elisha. We see the woman from Shunem, Naaman, Jezebel, Jehu, Joash. There's Hezekiah and Sennacherib, Isaiah and Manasseh, Josiah and Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and last but not least, Nebuchadnezzar. A slew of celebrities that we still talk about today and learn good and bad lessons from the lives they lived. Its purpose really was to demonstrate the value of those who obey God and the fate of those who refuse to obey and make him their ultimate ruler. The time period that's covered by this book saw the emergence of the first writing prophets in Israel. Amos and Hosea went to the people of Israel, while Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah prophesied in Judah. Both groups calling the people to repentance and warning them of God's coming judgments. The author devotes extensive space to Elisha's ministry after Elijah was taken to heaven, giving special attention to the numerous miracles Elisha performs. None of the kings of Israel are described as having done right in God's eyes. None. Zero.

Can you imagine living for that time period and being somebody who was devoted to God? We sometimes feel like that in the world in which we live where it seems that more and more world leaders are refusing to acknowledge the God that we have dedicated ourselves to serve and to follow. What an inspiration to know that even as zero kings from Israel were willing to follow God, that you still saw a remnant was always there. You may be called to be that remnant. Don't lose hope. Continue to be obedient. Each of those bad kings led the people into what seemed like a deeper and deeper level of idolatry. Now, several of Judah's kings were righteous, notably Jehoash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Hezekiah held off the Assyrians by trusting in the Lord alone for his deliverance. Josiah later instituted an even greater spiritual reformation. Neither effort, however, was enough to stem God's eventual judgment on the nation in fulfillment of the curses of the Mosaic covenant that is in Deuteronomy 28.

Now, this book is similar to 1 Kings in the fact that it has two main sections of the breakdowns. We have chapters 1 to 17, and we read of the rulers of the divided kingdoms who lead them to their fate in exile. The prophet Elijah concludes his ministry and hands over his reins to another up-and-coming prophet who God will use named Elisha and which has for decades and centuries confused so many of us to know the difference sometimes between Elijah and Elisha, with their names being so close together. Elisha is an apprentice of sorts and he follows Elijah as he follows God's lead. Notably, interesting how we know nothing about Elijah's background really. We know more about Elisha's as we see that he comes from more a family of affluence and gives up quite a bit in an affluence or profitability situation to follow God or Yahweh. And God takes Elijah soon into the Book of 2 Kings in a whirlwind to heaven, and his apprentice asks God for a double portion of Elijah's spirit and it was granted to him in 2Ki 2:9. In Elisha's ministry, he carries out twice as many miracles as Elijah did.

And as God does this through his prophet, we see once again that it's in order to direct people's eyes towards Yahweh.

Now, we find in these chapters also details about kings and dynasties, which ultimately disobey and ignore God's orders and his provisions. Finally, during the reign of the last king who was evil named Hoshea, the Assyrians take the northern kingdom into captivity. They've neglected the warning and coming judgment announced by the prophet Hosea. And it's fitting then that the more evil of the two kingdoms, the northern, is the kingdom that goes into permanent captivity. In fact, there's no record or evidence of these 10 tribes of Israel ever returning from exile.

Now, in chapters 18 to 25, it's apparent that the southern kingdom isn't really doing much better and soon they would also face God's judgment. We see in 2Ki 17:13-14 in particular this given. "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and every seer saying: 'Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments, my statutes, according to all the law which I command your fathers and which I sent to you through my servants the prophets.' However, they did not listen, but stiffen their necks like their fathers who didn't believe in the Lord their God."

There's some other key passages that would be notable for us to pay attention to. In 2Ki 17:7-8, just a few verses before what I just read, we see this: "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced." Again, the warning. They all chose that, and as a result, God had to judge. God doesn't desire to judge his people. He desires to bless them. But we make choices, and as a result of that, God responds to those choices that we make.

We see in 2Ki 22:1-2 also, "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." You know what I see that we notice over and over again? Is when a king chooses to follow God, he's frequently said 'like his father David did.' You think of the legacy. And we all know the sins that David did. We all know the choices that he made that brought amazing devastation on his family and even the kingdom. But we know at the end of it all that David confessed his sin, repented of his sin, and took the punishment that came as a result of it. And I encourage you, child of God, if you in your life have sinned, don't think that God can never use you. Just like David is still being referred to as a man who followed God, that can be your legacy. Start today to make it such.

We see in 2Ki 24:2 another key verse. The Bible says this: “The Lord sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against him. He sent them to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by his servants the prophets.” The following up or the following through of God’s warning, “You obey me, I’ll bless you. You disobey me, and I will have to punish you.” The last key passage that we see is in 2Ki 8:19. It says this: “Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah.” Mentioned David again, we see. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever. What legacy are you currently living and will you leave for those that come behind you and your nuclear family, but even in those that you touch in the family of God?

2 Kings depicts the downfall of this divided kingdom. Prophets, as we noticed, many of them are listed here, or at least referenced back to this section of Scripture, warn the people that the judgment of God is at hand. But even knowing it is that close, they won’t repent of their sin. The kingdom of Israel is repeatedly ruled by wicked kings. And even though, as we mentioned, a few of Judah’s kings are good, most of them still lead the people away from the worship of the Lord. The few good rulers, along with God’s prophets, can’t stop the nation’s decline. The northern kingdom, as we mentioned, is destroyed by the Assyrians, and about 136 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians.

We see mainly three prominent themes here in the Book of 2 Kings. First, we see that the Lord will judge. His people, when they disobey him, when they turn their backs on him, he will judge. The Israelites’ unfaithfulness was reflected in their evil idolatry of the kings and resulted in God exercising his righteous wrath against their rebellion. Second, we see the word of the true prophets of God always comes to pass. Because the Lord always keeps his word, so too are the words of his prophets always true. Third, the Lord is faithful. He remembered his promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:10-13. And despite the disobedience of the people and the evil kings who ruled them, the Lord did not bring David’s family to an end. And in fact, we see the line of Christ come through David’s line.

Now, 2 Kings is a history book. From the Old Testament of the Bible and this history, we see books that show us and contain the important historical milestones that the nation of Israel did turn on, how they turned away from God, how they made feeble attempts to turn back to God, and how ultimately God turns them over to foreign rulers. And it’s interesting how we see that God preserves things, as it’s stated in 2 Timothy 3:16 in his word. And these are important things for us to learn. As has been stated by a famous man, “If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it.” Learn from these people.

2 Kings describes how the kings of these nations refused to obey God’s law. The kings and their people didn’t respect God. Instead, they served these evil gods, and as a result, the behavior of the people became more and more wicked. However, there are a few people who truly serve God, and God sent these servants that he called prophets to warn the evil people.

And we find even today, as you turn on the news, as you go on the Internet, we're frequently confronted with more and more evil on our world. But you will still hear voices of truth. And God states clearly in his word how to define those who are false prophets and those who are true prophets. Listen to the Spirit of God in you. Follow what the word of God says as you listen. And be led by godly men who will point you towards Christ even if the world as a whole seems to be rejecting him.

We see that the nations of Israel and Judah, though, refused to obey the prophets. And you will have many that will refuse to obey God's prophets and see that even today. But God, as a result, allows enemy nations to attack. These nations destroy Israel and later Judah. And the soldiers who took the inhabitants of Israel; they take them and the inhabitants of Judah to foreign lands, not even allowing them to live in the place that they called their home. But God still cared about Israel and Judah. God promised that in the future, these people or their children or grandchildren would return home.

2 Kings begins with the end of the story of Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet of God, and God didn't allow Elijah to die. In fact, Elijah is one of two individuals that, as far as we know based on Scripture, never had a physical death. Enoch being the first. As the Bible says in Genesis, Enoch walked with God and continued to walk with God, and God finally brought him home. And Elijah who is carried out in a chariot of fire. Can you imagine leaving that way? Can you imagine Elisha being there? Elijah even tried to discourage Elisha from following him, but he goes, "No. Wherever you go, I'll go." And Elisha got to experience and see the prophet of God being taken up in a fiery chariot. I can't even imagine. And that story, by the way, is in 2 Kings 2.

Elisha, as we stated, becomes a great prophet in his own right. Indeed, Elisha's work was even greater, as we said, than Elijah's. And God gave Elisha power to do many wonderful things, hence that double portion of his spirit. In 2Ki 4:8-37, we see where Elisha gives life to a child. We see in 2Ki 4:38-41 where he makes poisonous food safe. And then we see in 2 Kings 5 a familiar story to many people. But by God's power, Elisha cures Naaman of his leprosy, who is the captain of a foreign army. And then we even see Israel winning many battles without a fight because of Elisha. You can see that in 2Ki 6:8-23 as an example.

The king of Israel, Jehoram, saw many of these wonderful things, but he was still an evil king. He still served false gods. And his wicked mother who was Queen Jezebel was still alive. What a negative influence she was. Then God sent Elisha to a man named Jehu. Elisha appointed Jehu king of Israel. Jehu killed both Jehoram and Jezebel. God promised that these evil rulers would die a terrible death, and they did. Jehu also killed many other evil people. Jehu even killed the priest of the false god named Baal, but Jehu still served other false gods. So even Jehu didn't truly live in a way that worshiped the real and true God. We see that in 2 Kings 9 and 10.

There were also terrible troubles in the nation of Judah. Queen Athaliah tried to kill the whole royal family, but a little boy named Joash survives. A priest named Jehoiada helps Joash. Joash was only seven years old when the army's captains killed Queen Athaliah. And Joash became king in 2 Kings 11. And for many years, Joash was a good king. He repaired the temple or the house of God that was in Jerusalem. But then after Jehoiada died, Joash did some evil things. Isn't it amazing? If you look back in the Old Testament, David made some of his greatest sin choices after his good, godly friend Jonathan died. And Joash was doing so well until his good, godly counselor Jehoiada dies. Folks, who are you allowing to influence you in your life? What counsel are you listening to? What voices are you allowing to penetrate your mind and be able to guide you and direct you? Make sure they're men and women who are godly. And then embrace their faith. And then you'd be a legacy liver that passes it onto the next generation and influences them.

Joash unfortunately does a lot of evil things after Jehoiada dies. He takes some holy objects from the temple. That was a huge no-no. And he killed Jehoiada's son who was a prophet or a holy man. In 2 Chronicles 24:22, we read of that. Soon afterwards, Joash's officials kill Joash (2 Kings 12). After this, there were many evil kings. There were wars. There was even a war between Israel and Judah. And there were also some prophets. The prophet Jonah even lived at this time. The last king of Israel was Hoshea. The king of the nation of Assyria attacked Israel, and he destroys Israel. You'll see that in chapter 17. The king of Assyria gave the land to people from other countries. So he went in there, conquered the land, took all the Israelites out, and divides up the land and gives it to other nations that were loyal to him. What a devastation of a nation that should have been serving God and reaping its benefits. How different from when they saw themselves just cross the Jordan River, see Jericho defeated, and were able to revel in gardens they hadn't planted and houses they hadn't built. And now it was all taken from them. Why? Because they chose to serve false gods instead of Jehovah God. We need to choose to serve the real God only.

Now, the nation of Judah still exists. Its next king was a good king named Hezekiah. Hezekiah trusted God, but he made some important mistakes. When Hezekiah was in trouble, he prayed to God, so God sent the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah. And God helped Hezekiah. We see in chapters 18 to 20. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, however, was an evil king. Very evil king. Manasseh served terrible gods and he was a cruel man who killed innocent people. God was angry when he saw these evil actions, so he finally allows his mercy to come to an end on the nation of Israel and decides to destroy them by having the Babylonians come in in 2Ki 21:1-18. But then Josiah becomes king. Josiah was Manasseh's grandson. He was just a boy when he became king. Josiah was a good king. In fact, he was Judah's greatest ever king. We see that in chapters 22 and 23. Josiah serves God. He loves God's law and he encourages the people to trust God. And he even, again, repairs the temple like one of his former relatives had done. And for a brief period of time before Babylon comes, God is kind to the nation of Judah. He didn't punish Judah during the life of Josiah. But after Josiah's death, all the rest of the kings were evil, so God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to attack Jerusalem. And just as Assyria came in and wiped out the nation, so we see the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, comes and destroys Jerusalem, the capital city.

He destroys the whole country called Judah. It was so sad. Jeremiah, who was another prophet, wrote about this event in the Book of Lamentations. When the kings served God, God helped them. When the kings did evil things, God opposed them. God sent his servants the prophets to warn the kings and the people, but when they refused to obey, God punished.

We need to learn a lot here from the Book of 2 Kings. We need to learn that we are to serve God only, not false gods. Now, today, be mindful, I don't see many, and there are places in the world where we still see them worship carved gods, stone gods, wooden gods. But many of us worship false gods. What is a god to you? A god is any that takes the place of preeminence that God Jehovah should only have. It can become your family. It can become your job. It can become your church. It can become your community. It can become your identity. What are your false gods? Are you willing to eradicate them and serve Jehovah God alone? If we choose the path that they chose in 2 Kings, we will suffer God's judgment. Now, I encourage you not to obey God out of fear, though. Not that kind of fear, but the awe of God to think that God loved me so much that he sent Christ and he gave me his word and he put the Holy Spirit in me. What other options would I even want to choose than to serve God? So learn the lessons. If we do evil deeds, God must send judgment, but he might send someone to warn us ahead of time. So listen. Be vigilant. Listen to the advice given.

Jesus uses the stories like the widow of Zarephath from 1 Kings and Naaman in 2 Kings to illustrate the great truth of God's compassion toward those the Jews deemed unworthy of God's grace: the poor, the weak, the oppressed, tax collectors, Samaritans, even Gentiles. By citing the examples of a poor widow and a leper, Jesus showed himself to be the Great Physician who heals and ministers to those in the greatest need out of the sovereign divine grace that he gives. The same truth was the basis of the mystery of the body of Christ, his church, which would be drawn from all levels of society and still is male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. We see that in Ephesians 3:1-6. Many of the miracles of Elisha foreshadow those of Jesus himself. Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:34-35), healed Naaman of leprosy (2Ki 5:1-19), and even multiplied the loaves of bread to feed a hundred people, with some leftover (2 Kings 4:42-44). Sounds an awful lot like the things that Christ did.

God hates sin and he won't allow it to continue indefinitely. If we belong to him, we can expect his discipline when we disobey him. A loving father corrects his children for their benefit and to prove that they indeed belong to him. Now, think about those of you that are mothers and fathers out there. I have the privilege of having four children, and there's been many times that even though I didn't want to, and that phrase that when I was a child, my dad would sometimes say, "This is going to hurt me more than I hurt you," and I thought, "I don't think so," but being a father, I understand it's difficult to inflict pain and punishment on your children. But because you love them and you want them to learn the lessons that will protect them and set them on a path where they could have the best life, you have to inflict pain and punishment when they're disobedient.

It's interesting how God may even at times use unbelievers to bring correction to his people, and he gives us warnings about delivering judgment. As Christians, we have his word to guide us and warn us when we go astray from his path. Like the prophets of old, his word is trustworthy and always speaks the truth. God's faithfulness to his people will never fail even when we do. Be a person of the word. Know truth. That's the best way to be able to defeat the lies that are out there. Know truth. Don't study the counterfeits. Study the truth. Get in the word of God. Take the personality and the way that God made you and make the word of God relevant daily in your life as much as possible to know how we can defeat the evil one and have the best, most fruitful life that God has planned for us.

The story of the widow and the leper are examples for us in regard to the body of Christ. Just as Elisha had pity on these, they were from the lowest levels of society, we are too the ones that should welcome all those who belong to Christ in our churches and even reach out to those that the world as a whole rejects and show them his love. I love what Acts 10:34 says. God is not a respecter of persons, and neither should we be. World affairs played a heavy role in Israel and Judah's destinies, yet the author of 2 Kings directly connected the Israelites' apostasy led by their wicked kings to their national destruction, pointing it out as God's judgment on his wayward children. Despite repeated warnings from God's prophets to turn from their ways and return to God, the people continued to live in sin. To their regret, they did not believe that God would allow their nation to be ruined by foreign invaders. Again, does that sound familiar? "Well, maybe he will bring judgment, but not now. Maybe I could get away with this. Maybe I'm the exception." How foolish a thought. Yet God didn't forget his promise to David either. He saved a remnant from among the people and kept the royal line intact so that one day his people can return to their land to await the promised redeemer. 2 Kings teaches us an important life lesson. Actions have consequences. Repent. Sin will incur judgment. God warned it, in fact, through the prophets. Israel and Judah learn the hard way that God means what he says. How will we learn? Consider your heart. Is it hard and resistant to God, or can you acknowledge your sin and turn back to him? Today is a new day. I love that the Bible says his mercies are new every day. Repent of your sin today. Change the way that you're living if you're in sin. And child of God, embrace Christ anew and afresh, and follow him to experience his presence and his power in your life, just like we learn in this book of 2 Kings.