

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Age of Kings: What can history, even biblical history, possibly reveal to us about God? What was God up to in the reign of King David and his son Solomon? Why did God destroy ancient Jerusalem and send them into exile for seventy years? What relevance can the age of Old Testament kings possibly have in the life of a twenty-first century believer? Why did God speak prophetically to his people during this period? These questions and more will be considered in this class. We will explore together God's redemptive historical work revealed in the pages of scripture and see how the mission of the people of God both then and now has always been the same.

The objective of this class is: to gain an appreciation for the period of the northern & southern monarchies in the OT, and understand the relationship between the redemptive work of God and the events that unfolded during this specific time in history. Careful attention will be given to both the Davidic Covenant as well as the decline and exile of the people of God.

Introduction: This week we direct our attention to the southern kingdom of Judah and explore the dynasty of King David from the time of the division between the northern and southern kingdoms until the kings leading up to the Babylonian captivity. We will undoubtedly be surprised with the differences between the two kingdoms, something particularly highlighted in the accounts shared in 2 Chronicles, as well as the similarities between the two. The periods of idolatry, albeit fewer than those detailed in the accounts of the northern kingdom, reveal that the worship of false gods presented a greater challenge in general to the religion of the southern kingdom than syncretism appears to have caused. The greatest challenge to the kingdom in the south revolved around the central character in the kingdom to the north: the dynasty of Omri and the household of Ahab. Ahab's daughter nearly annihilated every living descendant of David, threatening to bring to a swift end the covenantal promises made to David as well as Moses and Abraham before him. However, God did not allow this to happen. The nail-biting scenario will be explored below. Attention will also be given to periods of reform and revival within the southern kingdom, events that occurred much more frequently than among their northern counterparts.

Part One: An Interesting View of History – In the early pages of the account of Ahijah's reign (note that he is referred to as Ahijam in 1 Kings 15:1-8), there is a description of the division that occurs in the days of his father Rehoboam that resulted in the two distinct kingdoms of Judah and Israel. This description might be a bit different than you remember it.

Ahijah confronts Jeroboam on the field of battle, and offers the following justification: *"Hear me, oh Jeroboam and all Israel! Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord, and certain worthless scoundrels gathered about him and defied Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and irresolute and could not withstand them. And now, you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods. Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him. We have priests ministering to the Lord who are sons of Aaron, and Levites for their service, they offer to the Lord every morning and every evening burnt offerings and incense of sweet spices, set out the showbread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand that its lamps may burn every evening. For we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken him. Behold*

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God is with us at our head, and his priests with their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you.” This description is notable for two primary reasons, both of which are given below.

There are a couple of comments that should be made regarding the above text. The first, which should be obvious to the student of the Bible is the manner in which Ahijah misrepresents history. You will recall from the prophecy of Ahijah, the prophet, relayed in 1 Kings chapter eleven that God himself severed ten of the twelve tribes from the dominion of Rehoboam and gave them to Jeroboam because of the sins of Solomon: his love for many foreign women, which led him to construct idolatrous shrines throughout the land. The secondary cause employed to accomplish God’s ordained will (to use confessional language) was the resoluteness of Rehoboam (his failure to cut the people of God some slack), not his irresoluteness referenced here by Ahijah. It is possible that Ahijah was thinking of Rehoboam’s failure to fight against Israel and recapture the northern kingdom under his dominion, but, according to scripture, Rehoboam did indeed assemble an army of 180,000 chosen warriors (1 Kings 12:21-24), but God instructed him, *“You shall not go up and fight against your relatives, the people of Israel. Every man return to his home, for this thing is from me.”* So, Ahijah’s understanding of history is incorrect on two accounts.

Secondly, Ahijah spends a great deal of time differentiating between the pure religion of Judah and the defiled faith of the northern kingdom. In this, he is correct, albeit somewhat hypocritical. In fact, it is undoubtedly for this reason that God allows Ahijah to be successful at an endeavor which he had explicitly forbidden Rehoboam to undertake. 2 Chronicles 13:18 states, *“Thus the men of Israel were subdued at that time, and the men of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers.”* God used Ahijah, despite his skewed perspective of history, as an agent of judgement in the life of Jeroboam.

Part Two: Good Kings & Bad – Below is a brief survey of the Davidic Dynasty prior to the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Asa: Asa succeeded his father, Abijah, to the throne, and has the following reputation, *“And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment”* (2 Chronicles 14:2-4). It was during the reign of Asa that the first covenant renewal occurred. His reign spanned 41 years. Ahab came to reign in the 38th year of his reign.

Jehoshaphat: King Jehoshaphat began reigning in the 4th year of King Ahab and reigned for a period of twenty-five years. *“The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel.”* (2 Chronicles 17:3-4). During his reign, peaceful relations were established between Judah and Israel (1 Kings 22:44). However, the price of said peace was a marriage alliance (Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, was given in marriage to the crown prince Jehoram) that would prove costly.

Jehoram: Jehoram came to reign prior to the death of his father and seemingly held co-regency for a period of two years (2 Kings 8:16). After his father’s death, he killed all his brothers as well as other princes in Israel (2 Chronicles 21:4). Jehoram had the following reputation: *“He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what*

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was evil in the sight of the Lord." Towards the end of his life, he contacted a deadly intestinal disease and died. He was not buried with the righteous kings of Judah (with David) since he was so closely allied with the house of Ahab and transgressed accordingly.

Ahaziah: Ahaziah, the youngest son of King Jehoram, succeeded his father because all his brothers had been killed. He only reigned for one year. He made the providential decision of accompanying Joram, the king of Israel into battle against the Syrians and was slain after the battle by Jehu the son of Nimshi.

Athaliah: The only queen to reign as sovereign over the kingdom of Judah, she was not part of the Davidic dynasty, and posed the greatest challenge to the southern kingdom of Judah. She nearly annihilated all the descendants of king David.

Joash: Joash was rescued by his mother, Ahaziah's daughter and wife of Jehoiada the high priest at the time. He was rescued when he was only a year old. He was declared as king of Judah, being the only remaining descendant of King David, and Athaliah was put to death. Under the tutelage of Jehoiada, the priest, Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord; a massive renewal of the covenant transpired. However, after the death of Jehoiada, *"... the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then, the king listened to them. And they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs"* (2 Chronicles 24:17-18).

Amaziah: Amaziah succeeded his father, Joash, as king and reigned for a period of twenty-nine years. His reign can be characterized accordingly, *"... he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart"* (25:2). He defeated the Edomites and brought back their idols to worship in Jerusalem. Because of this, God delivered him into the hand of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel.

Uzziah: Uzziah, also known as Azariah in 2 Kings 15, succeeded his father, Amaziah, as king of Judah. He reigned for a period of fifty-two years. According to scripture, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father, Amaziah, had done. He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper"* (2 Chronicles 26:4-5). However, at the end of his life, he overstepped his boundaries and attempted to offer incense before the Lord, something that only the sons of Aaron, the priests were allowed to do. Consequently, he was a leper until the day of his death.

Jotham: Jotham reigned sixteen years and his reign is characterized as, *"... he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the Lord."*

Ahaz: After Jotham, his son, Ahaz reigned in Judah. According to 2 Chronicles 28:1-4, *"He did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father, David had done, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, and he made offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree."* Both Syria as well as Israel to the north, fought against and defeated Judah. However, *"In the time of his distress, he became yet more faithless to the Lord..."*

Hezekiah: Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz to the throne of Judah and reigned in righteousness before the Lord. During his reign, a mass revival and return to the covenant occurred resulting in a renewed temple

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worship and a nationwide observance of the Passover. The scripture states, *“Thus Hezekiah... did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.”*

Manasseh: Manasseh succeeds Hezekiah, and is the opposite of his father. According to the scriptures, *“He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel”* (2 Chronicles 33:2). He reigned over Judah fifty-five years. He did repent towards the latter part of his life, but Judah still bore the judgment for the innocent blood he shed.

Amon: Amon succeeded his father Manasseh, and he, too, sinned after the manner of his father’s sins and *“... incurred guilt more and more.”* His servants conspired against him and murdered him. He reigned two years.

Josiah: The poster child for OT reform, Josiah reigned for thirty-one years. He was instrumental in instigating a nation-wide return to pure worship of YAHWEH. He reopened and purified the temple in Jerusalem, which had been defiled in the days of Manasseh. He threw down the golden calves erected by Jeroboam in Bethel and Dan, and expunged idolatry from the land. The book of God’s law was rediscovered during his reign leading to a national renewal of the covenant.

Part Three: Judah’s Greatest Challenge: When discussing the northern kingdom of Israel, we concluded that the greatest challenge for the people of God in the north from the days of Jeroboam onward was the sin of spiritual syncretism. This is evidence throughout the various dynasties and individual monarchs of the north because even those who did not worship Baal or the Asherim, sinned after the similitude of Jeroboam. This refrain occurs countless times throughout the history of Israel’s kings. For Judah, however, the greatest threat was not spiritual syncretism, but the near annihilation of the promised seed.

The earliest promises of God’s Covenant of Grace (Genesis 3:15) entailed the coming of a seed. Originally, this was simply, *“...the seed of the woman.”* Then, after Genesis chapter twelve and the election of Abraham, the “seed” was narrowed to the descendant of Abraham. The narrowing further occurred with the Davidic covenant wherein the “seed” was limited to a physical descendant of the house of David. For this reason, the sinister plot of the enemy in ancient Judah was aimed at destroying the seed of David, an act that was nearly accomplished. You may recall that the exception to the Davidic dynasty among the sovereigns of the kings of Judah mentioned above was Athaliah, the daughter of king Ahab and wife of Ahaziah. Jehoshaphat opened the door to the enemy when he developed peaceful relations with the house of Ahab. The means of said relations was the marital alliance between the crown prince of Judah (Jehoram) and the daughter of Ahab (Athaliah). After Athaliah’s son (Ahaziah) was killed by Jehu, she immediately seized the throne and, *“... destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah”* (2 Chronicles 22:10). For seven long years, most of God’s people to the south were led to believe that the promises of God to King David had failed. It was not until a seven-year old Joash became king that Judah (and Athaliah) realized the faithfulness of God in spite of the attempts of the evil one.

What if Athaliah had succeeded? Then the “seed” would not have been born, and God’s covenantal plan of redemption would have been thwarted. Likewise, had King Herod succeeded to destroy the infant Christ with all the other infants in Bethlehem, the purpose of God would have been derailed. The

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triumph of Judah over their greatest challenge, and the providential preservation of the Christ-child offers an OT and NT assurance to God's people that God's will is undefeatable and his plan as good as done!

Part Four: Covenantal Protection – So, what is the most significant difference between the kingdom of Judah and that of their northern counterpart? Why was there more consistent reforms and spiritual renewals among the people of God to the south than among those in the north? Why were the people of Israel (ten formalized tribes to the north) ultimately expelled from the land of promise without witnessing a mass return as will be the case for the people of Judah? What is the difference? The answer to these questions has absolutely nothing to do with the qualitative difference between the two people; they were both unfaithful. If Israel's unfaithfulness persisted longer than Judah's, then it was an issue of endurance and not an issue of superior morality on the part of God's people to the north.

The key is found in a reoccurring text stated throughout the books of both Kings and Chronicles. 1 Kings 15:4-6 states, *“Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life.”* The same meaning is conveyed in the book of Chronicles by means of the following description: *“Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever”* (2 Chronicles 21:7). So, why was the experience of the people of God different in the north than in the south? Was it because David was such a man that God was beholding to him? No, the difference can be attributed to nothing less than the fact that God had a covenant with David (the mediator of the covenant), and thereby all the elect of God whereby he would preserve David's seed until the coming of the promised King who would reign from David's throne (the symbol of God's dominion rule in the earth) forever. In other words, God preserved the house of David and all who submitted to the rule of the house of David for the sake of *Christ*. Unless this pivotal point is understood and committed to heart, the role of the age of kings in redemptive history cannot be fully appreciated.

Conclusion: This week we have explored the dynasty of David from the split between the northern and southern kingdoms through the kings leading up to the Babylonian exile. Next week we will conclude our journey through the Age of Kings by studying and prayerfully meditating on the destruction of the temple of God in Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Judah into the land of Babylon. We will reflect again on the overall role of the king in redemptive history, and pause to consider how our own understanding of the life and ministry of Christ is shaped by this pivotal period of time.