

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 pick up the pace a bit and study an overview of the various kings of Israel from the death of Jeroboam, the divinely appointed leader of the Northern Kingdom, to the catastrophic reign of Hoshea, the king during the carrying away into captivity of the ten northern tribes. As we read through the pages of scripture, one does not wonder so much why Israel was eventually overcome and led into captivity, what one wonders is why it took so long. One cannot read the account of the kings who repeatedly "sinned after the sin of Jeroboam" and not see God as gracious with each new generation. There were times in the history of the northern kingdom that God seemed silent. However, what was more the case than not was a constant message from the mouths of his prophets pleading with his wayward children to repent and refuse the worship of false gods.

Part One: The End of the House of Jeroboam – The account of Jeroboam's death is given in 1 Kings 14:19-20. He reigned for a period of twenty-one years and was succeeded by his son, Nadab. Nadab reigned over Israel for two years, and left this legacy, "*He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin*" (15:26). When it comes to the sins of the fathers, they are often the same sins that are continued from one generation to the next. Even with the Israelite kings that followed Jeroboam that were not descended from him, they too clung to his legacy of worshipping false gods.

After two years reigning in Israel, Baasha, the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar (not to be confused with the former prophet by the same name), conspired against Nadab and killed him. What should be noted is the fact that Nadab not only led Israel to sin in the same manner as his father, but he also used his resources fighting the covenant people of God. Verse thirty-two states, "*And there was war between Asa and Baasha King of Israel all their days.*"

One final word about the sins of Jeroboam before we move away from discussing his dynasty to study the remaining kings of Israel. According to the prophecy delivered to Jeroboam by the prophet Ahijah, the sin of Jeroboam alone was enough to result in Israel's captivity. 1 Kings 14:15-16 states, "*The Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger. And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin.*" These verses reveal to us long before the ministries of the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, that God had ordained Israel to destruction because of their blasphemous idolatry. Each generation from this point forward is allowed to live and be a part of the good land of promise solely because of God's grace.

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Baasha: Baasha reigns over Israel from the city of Tirzah for twenty-four years. His reign is characterized in the following manner, *“He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin”* (15:34). God’s word came by the mouth of the prophet Jehu against Baasha saying, *“Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, behold I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat. Moreover, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it”* (16:2-4;7).

There are four notable things from the above passage that should be commented on: 1) God chose Baasha to be the ruler of God’s people just as he had chosen Jeroboam. The absence of a divine anointing is not indicative of an unsanctioned king. God sovereignly presides over the affairs of mankind, and brings to power whom he will (Daniel 4:35). 2) Baasha’s leadership caused God’s people to sin. 3) Baasha was cursed with the same curse as Jeroboam because he sinned against the Lord. 4) Baasha was judged by God because he destroyed the house of Jeroboam. One might wonder, wasn’t it God’s will for the house of Jeroboam to be destroyed? After all, God told Jeroboam that he would do so through the mouth of Ahijah the prophet. There is only one human being that has ever lived that is qualified to judge without bringing judgment upon himself: our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of exacting judgement during the days of his first advent, Christ received judgement, the judgment of the elect so that all who believe in him might have perfect righteousness. When he returns during the Parousia, then all judgment will be entrusted to him (John 5:22). Until then, the best human efforts to pursue justice will be tainted with injustice; however, we are not absolved from such a pursuit.

Elah: After Baasha, Elah, his son, reigned in Israel for a period of two years. Zimri conspired against Elah, and slew him seeking to reign in his stead. He did to the house of Baasha, what Baasha had done to the house of Jeroboam (16:12).

Zimri: Zimri reigned for seven days and died by his own hand.

Part Two: The Dynasty of Omri – There are three dynasties in the history of the people of Israel, with the interim periods sprinkled with ambitious rulers who failed to produce a secure successor to their thrones. The House of Omri is one of the three. Omri reigned for a period of twelve years, six from the capital city of Tirzah, and six from the city of Samaria. Omri purchased the city of Samaria from Shemer, and used the city as the new headquarters of his kingdom. His reign can be characterized as follows, *“Omri did what was evil in the sight of the lord, and did more evil than all who went before him”* (16:25). He, too, walked after the sin of Jeroboam, and committed iniquity by serving idols. His son, Ahab, succeeded him to the throne.

Ahab: Ahab reigned over Israel through the newly founded capital of Samaria for twenty-two years. It is during his reign that we are given the most significant insight into the spiritual life of the northern people of God, primarily through the ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. We know that Ahab surpassed even his father in the sins that he committed and led Israel to commit. The scripture relates, *“And Ahab, the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife,*

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Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar to Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (16:30-33). One of the hallmarks of the spiritual conditions of Ahab’s reign is the fact that the accursed city Jericho, which was set apart to the Lord for destruction in perpetuity, was rebuilt (16:34).

Prior to Ahab’s reign, Israel served and worshipped other gods. In fact, the reason that judgement was brought upon the house of Jeroboam was because of the golden calves he built and placed in Bethel and Dan. So, why would it have been a more severe sin to worship Baal than the calves of gold? I humbly suggest that the worship of the golden calves was a false association with Yahweh, an attempt by a presumptuous king to syncretize the worship of YAHWEH into a religion unique and distinct to the northern kingdom of Israel. In other words, when Jeroboam built the calves of gold he made the pronouncement, *“Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (12:29).* There was a willful attempt on the part of the king to replace YAHWEH with a likeness of a golden calf. This would not be a new religion per se, but a corrupt one that consisted of a syncretized form of pure religion and veneration of idols. It would be an extreme over-accommodation of cultural associations to the point of making the Lord (YAHWEH) represented by an image. Judah would later commit the same sin with the bronze serpent (2 Kings 18:4). In the case of the worship of Baal, the entire storyline of redemptive history was at risk of being lost. The worship of Baal was not simply associating YAHWEH with an image of gold or silver and worshipping the one true God in a way contrary to his command, it was the veneration of demons. Ahab opened the door to deeper sin: idolatry pure and simple. Under his leadership, the worship of Baal usurped the cult of the golden calves as the distinctly northern religion.

Ahab’s reign will be explored in greater detail next week when we study the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Ahab is eventually killed in battle and is succeeded by his son, Ahaziah.

Ahaziah: Ahaziah reigned two years in Israel. He seemingly had an accident in his house (2 Kings 1:2) and died from the effects of the fall. Since he had no son, his uncle Jehoram became king in his stead.

Jehoram: Jehoram (Joram), another son of Ahab reigned in the place of his brother, Ahaziah. During his reign, the Syrians rise against Israel and oppress them militarily for a period of years. The first mentioned alliance between the house of Israel and the house of Judah occurs, ultimately contributing to the death of Ahaziah, the king of Judah. Joram is killed at the hand of one of his own, Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat. With his death, the house of Ahab is annihilated.

Part Three: The Dynasty of Jehu – Elisha the prophet calls for one of the sons of the prophets (apparently, a title indicating someone who was attending the school of the prophets, a pre-exilic seminary where prophets were trained), to Jehu, one of the commanders of Joram’s army to anoint him to be king. Here, once more, we see the role of the prophet’s anointing at a time of change in the leadership of God’s people. God is sanctioning this change in leadership, even commanding it. The young prophet does what is asked of him, and Jehu (seemingly to his surprise) is supported by all his peers. He immediately mounted his chariot and drove in the direction of Jezreel, where Joram was recovering from his battle wounds. When he is away off, the watchman announces his coming and Joram sends two messengers to determine if Jehu bears news of peace or war. When both messengers fail to return, he prepares his own chariot and rides out to meet Jehu. It does not take him long to

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realize that Jehu's motives are treacherous. While he is fleeing, he takes an arrow to the back that pierces his heart, and he falls dead in his chariot.

Jehu is used greatly of God to "clean house". Not only does he kill Joram, but he also kills Jezebel, the queen mother, Ahaziah the king of Judah and son-in-law of to the house of Ahab dies as well. The seventy sons of Ahab are all slain, and every worshipper of Baal is utterly annihilated. Unfortunately, there is this all too familiar characterization of Jehu's reign, "*Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin – that is the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan*" (10:28-19).

Because of his mighty exploits for God, God promised that Jehu's sons to the fourth generation will set upon his throne. The dynasty of Jehu would be the longest lived in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years in Israel, and God begins to give them a foretaste of what is to come. 2 Kings 10:32-33 states, "*In those days the Lord began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, that is Gilead and Bashan.*" God is merciful and longsuffering, but the day of reckoning is coming.

Jehoahaz: Jehoahaz succeeded his father, Jehu, and reigned over the throne of Israel for seventeen years. Jehoahaz continued to sin after the similitude of Jeroboam's sin, and God began to sell Israel into the hand of the king of Syria. Jehoahaz, "*...sought the favor of the Lord...*" and the Lord sent them a savior (13:5) so that they dwelt safely in their homes once again. The way this is worded in the text is reminiscent of the period of the Judges in which the time of apostasy would be followed by God's disciplinary wrath, and then repentance on the part of God's people to which God responded by sending a savior.

According to Donald J. Wiseman, the savior in this case was, "...Adad-nirari III of Assyria who in 802 and 796 BC marched back to the Mediterranean and took heavy spoil en route."¹ If this was indeed the savior in question, it demonstrates quite beautifully the sovereign providential care of God for his people, using even heathen kings to accomplish his will.

Joash: Joash reigned in the place of his father, Jehoahaz and he reigned for sixteen years. His reign is described accordingly, "*He also did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin, but he walked in them*" (13:11).

Jeroboam II: Jeroboam reigned after the death of his father, Joash, for a period of forty-one years. He restored the border of Israel, "*... from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah...*" During his days, the prophet Jonah seems to have had an active ministry (14:25). The people of Israel continued to suffer from the hand of the Assyrians (of which Nineveh was the capital), and God used Jeroboam II to deliver his people (14:27). Nevertheless, Jeroboam II, "*Did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*"

Zechariah: Zechariah reigns after Jeroboam II, his father, for six months. Shallum conspired against him and killed him. Thus, the dynasty of Jehu was ended.

Shallum: Shallum reigned one month in Samaria. He was killed by Menahem who reigned in his stead.

¹ Wiseman, Donald J. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 & 2 Kings*. Pg. 255.

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Menahem: Menahem reigns ten years in Israel. He continued to sin in like manner as Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Pul (or Tiglath-Pileser III), the king of Assyria came against the land of Israel, but Menahem taxed the people of Israel heavily to render to Pul 1,000 talents (75,000 pounds) of silver. By so doing, Israel was given a few more years in the land, a bit longer to repent.

Pekahiah: Pekahiah succeeds his father, Menahem and reigns over Israel for two years. He continued sinning after the manner of Jeroboam, and Pekah, his captain conspired against him and killed him.

Pekah: Pekah reigned twenty years over Israel from Samaria. Pekah, *“Did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.”* During his reign, the first wave of captives were taken from Israel by Tiglath-Pileser. The long-foretold destruction and exile of the Northern Kingdom was about to ensue. Hoshea the son of Elah conspired against Pekah and killed him.

Conclusion: The story of the leaders of the Northern Kingdom is a sad one. When one witnesses, the travesty propagated by one man (Jeroboam) continued from each successive generation, you cannot help but wonder, what if? Just as redemptive historical acts define a people’s identity, so too do idolatrous, sinful ones. As the first are covenantally conveyed from generation to generation, so are the second. We know this because every living person is under the covenant of works or grace. If works, sin is a downward spiral that will progressively mar the image of man and bring judgment on each passing generation. If grace, God’s intervention into the lives of sin-plagued creatures brings restoration, healing and hope. As we turn next week to explore the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, it will become clearer that God was at work even amid the sin-torn world of the Northern Kingdom. Where sin increased, grace abounded even more (Romans 5:20).