

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: Today we conclude our lesson on the Age of Kings. We will examine closely the last few kings who followed King Josiah to the throne and observe the tragedy that befell them. We will also discuss the historical account of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, listening carefully to the commentary that is provided by the author of Kings and Chronicles. Finally, we will reflect on the period of the kings in redemptive history giving special attention to the divine intent behind the various actions that occurred (to the extent that scripture allows us such knowledge) and reflect on how truths learned impact and transform our everyday lives.

Part One: *The Final Kings* – After the death of Josiah, there are a series of kings that succeed him, both his sons as well as brothers, which all have one thing in common: they are selected and deposed at will by a foreign sovereign. From this point forward, God's people will never truly be free from the vantage point of possessing the ability to govern themselves. However, it is precisely during this time that God pulls back the curtain a bit more to reveal through the mouth of such prophets as Isaiah and Jeremiah more detail in his plan of redemption. A brief description of the kings that followed Josiah is given below.

King Jehohaz: He was a son of Josiah (presumably the first-born) and he reigned for a period of three months in Jerusalem. He had the following legacy, *"...he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done."* At the time, Egypt was still a major superpower, and Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him appointing his brother, Eliakim, to be king in his place and exacting a heavy tribute from Judah.

King Jehoiakim: Pharaoh Neco replaced Jehohaz with Eliakim (which means, "the one whom El has raised up) and changed his name to Jehoiakim (the one whom Yahweh has raised up). Such a name change might be inconsequential if it were not for the fact that Yahweh was the covenant name for God, and the Pharaoh was not familiar, relationally speaking, with the God of the covenant. Regardless, he reigned for a period of eleven years and left the following legacy, *"...he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done."* Egypt became less of a threat during his reign, but Nebuchadnezzar came up and forced Jehoiakim into servitude for a period of three of the eleven years referenced above. According to the author of 2 Kings, *"The Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites, and he sent them against Judah to destroy it..."* (2 Kings 24:2). 2 Chronicles 36:6 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar came up and bound him in chains and carried him away to Babylon. Jehoiachin, his son, succeeded him.

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King Jehoiachin: Jehoiachin succeeded Jehoiakim to the throne of David and reigned for three months. His name, which seemingly expressed the hopes of God's people despite their unwillingness to do anything about it, means "Yahweh will fortify his people". He too, had the following legacy, "...he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father had done." He surrendered to the king of Babylon who imprisoned him along with his family and carried off the treasures of the house of the Lord as well as the king's house. According to 2 Kings 24:14, "He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land." In Jehoiachin's place, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah, the son of Josiah to be king.

King Zedekiah: Mattaniah (meaning gift of Yahweh in Hebrew) was appointed to be king by Nebuchadnezzar who changed his name to Zedekiah (meaning Yahweh is my righteousness). Again, the fact that a heathen king would bestow such a name on a member of the covenant household and a descendant of King David is ironic to say the least. Zedekiah reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar came against him and the city of Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it burning the house of the Lord, the king's house and all the city to the ground breaking down the walls and leading into exile the remnant not taken during the reign of Jehoiachin. Zedekiah had both his eyes put out by Nebuchadnezzar after witnessing the murder of his sons. Then, he too, was taken to Babylon in chains. The last thing the last king of Judah saw were his sons slaughtered before his eyes by a foreign oppressor.

Part Two: *The Destruction of Jerusalem* – The City of Jerusalem is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and his army and the temple of God is decimated. We will look at how it happened and why. How? 2 Kings 25: 8-10; 13-17; 21b offers the most detailed description of the destruction of the city and temple. We read, "In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – that was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the Lord, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke into pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service, the fire pans also and the bowls. What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what of silver, as silver. As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight. The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits and on it was a capital of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits. A latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, were all around the capital. And the second pillar had the same with the latticework. So, Judah was taken into exile out of its land. The realization that the greatest accomplishment of the period (the city of Jerusalem, the seat of the great king, and the temple of Yahweh) was disassembled piece by piece for the amusement of foreign, heathen kings, leaves the people of God gasping in wonder. What is God doing, and why?

The author of both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles does not leave us to wonder long. They offer the following explanations respectively, "Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood and the Lord would not pardon" (2

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Kings 24:3-4). Also, we read, *“The Lord, God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was not remedy”* (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

There is a two-fold explanation given in scripture for why God allowed Jerusalem and the temple to be destroyed and his covenant people carried into exile. First, the sins of the kings of Judah (and consequently the people of Judah). 2 Kings places much of the blame on Manasseh (interestingly, one of the only kings whose repentance is noted in scripture). The specific sin of Manasseh was the shedding of innocent blood. Remember, that God instructed his covenant people that the life of all flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:14). Pursuant to the Noahic covenant we read, *“From his fellow man, I will require a reckoning for the life of man”* (Genesis 9:6). It is quite probable that the blood shed by Manasseh was spilt in sacrifice to Molech, the ancient Canaanite god (2 Kings 21:6). Even then, during the reign of Manasseh, God informed his people, *“Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sins with his idols, therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah, such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day”* (2 Kings 21:11-12; 14-15).

Second, the covenant people of God were forced into exile because they failed to listen to the disciplinary voice of the Lord through the mouth of his prophets. According to the author of 2 Chronicles they, *“... kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets.”* This repeated refusal to listen to the correction offered through covenant *hesed* resulted in God’s people being expelled from the land of the covenant, without the leadership of the king of the covenant and no access (via the temple) to the God of the covenant. The greatest sadness of the text from 2 Chronicles is how it ends, *“... there was no remedy.”*

The author of Chronicles offers further insight that confirms what we will learn in detail next semester: the people of God had rejected the observance of the Sabbath. We read, *“He (Nebuchadnezzar) took into exile... until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate, it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years”* (2 Chronicles 36:21). There is a rhythm to the universe, a rhythm that is part of a creation ordinance. This rhythm is that of Sabbath and all that it entails, i.e. setting apart time for rest and the worship of God. If the OT church’s failure to honor the Sabbath was significant enough to contribute to their exile from the land of the covenant, might the NT church learn something from this?

Part Three: A Summation of The Age of Kings – Over the course of the last fifteen weeks, we have sought to prayerfully study and discover what God intends to disclose about himself through the scriptural account of the period of the kings. In order to summarize what we have learned; a brief overview of the high-lights will here be provided.

We began our class having just finished the period of the judges. We concluded that one of the hallmark characteristics of the period of the judges was the statement, “there was no king in Israel, everyman did what was right in his own eyes.” One might reasonably ask, why would a king in Israel make any difference? However, in retrospect we see that it did, not so much in breaking the repetitive cycle of apostasy and repentance, but furthering God’s plan of redemption. Why would the people of God need

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a human king if God is truly their king? I humbly suggest that the answer to this question is best found in the book of Hebrews chapter 2 verse 17. It states, *“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”* In other words, for Christ to be a faithful high priest, and in the same respect, a faithful king, he had to become man. This is particularly important in light of what John says about the Incarnation of Christ, *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:11-12).

The adoption here referenced by John the apostle is retroactive as well as proactive, meaning the elect who preceded the miracle of the Incarnation were adopted on the merit of Christ’s future coming, his life, death, and resurrection. Likewise, all who follow the Incarnation are adopted by God on merit of the same. In this respect, it is not only important, it is necessary for God’s people to follow a human king. It is also necessary for God’s people to submit to the kingly rule of one: God himself. In the eternal wisdom of God, he wills that both mutually exclusive truths become reality in the Incarnation of the King of Kings, the true *seed* of David.

We have witnessed the king after God’s own heart (David), and have observed the Covenant of Redemption as it is progressively revealed in the eternal dynasty of David. A resting place for God’s presence among his people was constructed during this period of time, and it was destroyed. The observation was made that the reigns of Solomon, David and even Saul were used as means of making possible the construction of the marvelous edifice that was the meeting place between God and man. From the time of the divided kingdom onward, God was faithful to preserve both the house of David as well as all who submitted to him. By submitting to the house of David, the people of God were submitting to the rule (dominion) of God in the earth. Therefore, it was such a grievous matter when the kings of Judah led the people of God astray.

With the destruction of Israel and the expulsion of the Northern Kingdom into exile, we saw a foreshadowing of what was to come. Judah too, would fall and the holy temple be destroyed. What now? As the ashes of the age of king’s simmer and turn dark, we see a new light dawning. The period of exile and return will be marked by some of the most significant promises to God’s OT church regarding the coming of a King who will set all things right again. This hope is the optimistic note which the author of 2 Chronicles uses to conclude his account of the kings of Judah. Yes, God is just, but He is merciful too! The 35th chapter of 2 Chronicles ends with the phrase, *“וַיַּעַל”* meaning, *“let him go up”*. To go up, was typically used for one who was ascending to the house of the Lord. This is what the age of the kings is designed to do: create within the people of God a longing for the king described in the Davidic covenant. God’s merciful preservation of the Davidic dynasty throughout centuries of rebellion is for the sake of preserving the promised seed until the coming of Messiah.