

## 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 will learn about the fall and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel. The events leading up to the exile were tragic, as was the exile itself. However, God was faithful, both through the ministries of Elijah and Elisha explored last week as well as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah to call his wayward people to repentance. Time and again he gave them an opportunity to repent. Each time they failed to repent and turn to him with all their heart. The catastrophe of the exile of the people of God to the north is tragic on two levels: 1) God's covenant people are uprooted from the covenant land; 2) Other nations are brought into the land occupied by the northern kingdom and are given the opportunity to follow the Lord, but fail to do so. As we study this unique time in the history of God's OT church, let us keep in mind what God is doing in redemptive history.

Part One: *The Final King* – A couple of weeks ago we did a survey of the kings of the kingdom of Israel. We stopped just short of discussing the reign of the final king: Hoshea. In the Hebrew language, Hoshea means, *salvation*. He had this reputation, “...he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him” (17:2). We do not know exactly what this means, unless he simply neglected the worship of Baal. One thing we do know about his reign is that he was instigated by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser to form an insurrection against the former king, Pekah and assassinate him. 2 Kings 15:30 states, “*Then Hoshea, the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham, the son of Uzziah.*”

According to Assyrian records, Tiglath-Pileser rewarded Hoshea with the throne of Israel. He then, became a vassal king of the Assyrian empire responsible for implementing the will of the empire over the northern kingdom of Israel. Hoshea was content to be a vassal king so long as Tiglath-Pileser reigned over Assyria, but when he was succeeded by Shalmaneser, Hoshea rebelled and sought to create an alliance with the king of Egypt. This led to Hoshea's imprisonment and the eventual destruction of Israel.

Part Two: *A People Dispersed* – It becomes increasingly apparent to the student of the Bible, that the various political maneuvers of the day have more significance than random occurrence. It is also obvious that God is using the decisions of fallen man, both inside the covenant community as well as outside the covenant community to accomplish will. Despite the above scenario in which King Hoshea sought to form an allegiance with the king of Egypt, and thereby engendered the wrath of the Assyrian king, God had orchestrated the decision-making process of both kings so that his pre-determined will would be accomplished. The Westminster Confession of Faith is helpful in understanding this process. WCF chapter 3 part 1 states, “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will,

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freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”

We mentioned when we were studying the reign of Jeroboam I, how God prophesied at that time that the northern kingdom would be exiled into captivity because of the sins of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:15-16). It is clear from the text at hand that each succeeding generation that sinned in the same manner as Jeroboam contributed to the verdict even though the prophecy was given well in advance. In other words, the judgment for sin which occurs at a specific point in space and time is the result of sins committed at other moments in space and time. The flip side of this reality is the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Christ bore the sins of every elect person who has ever lived regardless of when and where they lived. By this means, the OT saints received atonement in the same manner as the believers living in the NT era. The cure was separated by time in the historical reality of man, but was made effectual a-temporally to all the elect.

Likewise, what the Westminster Confession identifies as “second causes” can be demonstrated in sacred scripture through the scenario described above. Hoshea’s actions as well as Shalmaneser’s reaction are both second causes, which brought about the fore-ordained will of God disclosed through the prophet Ahijah when Jeroboam I was still king. Judah, too, will face the judgement of exile (as the author of the book of Kings mentions in 17:19-20). However, God had fore-ordained that Judah in general and the lineage of David in particular would be preserved until the coming of the Messiah. His covenant of grace with David and his descendants after him made this preservation a certainty. By so doing, the Davidic covenant is a continuation of the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants that came before.

2 Kings 17:6 states, *“In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.”* This tale ends in sadness, with the people of the Lord dispersed and exiled from the land of the covenant, the land from which the dominion of God’s kingdom rule was to be portrayed for all the world to see.

Part Three: The Danger of Spiritual Syncretism – The author of the book of Kings provides an explanation for the exile and dispersion of the northern kingdom that is notable and should be considered seriously and prayerfully. We read, *“And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced. And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watch tower to fortified city. They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger, and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, ‘You shall not do this.’ Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying ‘Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets. But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God”* (17:7-14). When one considers the lengthy commentary provided by the author of Kings, it becomes clear that the true sin of Israel, which

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eventually led to their dispersion was an attempt to syncretize the pure faith of Israel with the surrounding faiths and religions popular in the ancient near east.

The Hebrew word that is translated as “secretly” in verse nine above is the word, סָפַר and means to cover (as in overlaying with gold a vessel made of brass or wood). Since it is apparent from the history of the kings that Israel made no attempts to hide their worship of Baal and other foreign gods, this meaning of the word, makes the most sense. The sin of the people of God is that they sought to “embellish” their worship of God by making it as much like the religions of the surrounding culture as possible. Again, when one reflects on the sin of Jeroboam, who made two golden calves and announced to all Israel, “*Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt...*” (1 Kings 12:28), it becomes clear that Israel conceded to the sin of spiritual syncretism early during the dividing kingdoms and never departed from the sin of Jeroboam.

There is a pastoral application that can here be made as to the danger of seeking to overly accommodate culture. While it is true that God disclosed himself to his people in the OT through cultural accommodation, such efforts resulted in culture being redeemed as opposed to pure religion being defiled. When we are willing to compromise on the teaching of sound doctrine in order to make our religion more appealing to the world, then we too, risk the subtle sin of spiritual syncretism.

Part Four: A Missed Opportunity – There is an interesting occurrence in the life of the people of God that will be somewhat repeated in redemptive history later in the future. The casting away or dispersion of the people of the covenant from the land of the covenant opened a door of opportunity for gentiles, those outside the covenant, to be brought into the religion of God’s people.

In 2 Kings 17:24-29 and verse 33 we read, “*And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities. And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the Lord. Therefore, the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So, the king of Assyria was told, ‘The nations you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land. Therefore, he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.’ Then the king of Assyria commanded, ‘Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there, and let him go and dwell there and teach them the law of the god of the land.’ So, one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in shrines of the high places that the Samaritans had made, every nation of the cities in which they lived. So, they feared the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.” This passage indicates that there was an opportunity for the gentiles who were strategically relocated to the land of Israel by the Assyrians to become “God-fearers”. However, they, not unlike the members of the house of Israel, fell prey to the sin of spiritual syncretism.*

Conclusion: As we pause to ponder the dispersion of the people of God from the land of the covenant, we should appreciate the gravity of what has occurred. Never in the history of God’s people had such a thing happened. God foretold the possibility of such judgment should his people fail to obey. It is only as an exiled people that the church of the OT learned the value of covenantal separatism: a holy God is to be worshipped exclusively. This will become painfully obvious to the kingdom of Judah as well, and will be a determining factor in their exile and return.