

KINGS OF ISRAEL II: 1 & 2 KINGS

WEEK 3

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September 10, 2019

OUTLINE

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

Prophetic Episodes

Escalating Evil, Revelation, Judgment

ELIJAH'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY

A Divine Contest

The Life of a Prophet

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COMING OF JOSIAH

I Kings 13 has some ironic elements. Why should the lying prophet experience no judgment, while the special prophet is mauled?

- ▶ God does not show favoritism: the *man of God* disobeyed the word just like Jeroboam. God will not allow his word to be profaned (cf. James 3:1).
- ▶ The word he received was unequivocal, clearly contradicted by the local prophet.
- ▶ His body was preserved. He lost his life, but he would receive a proper burial.

A final observation: it is unusual for a prophetic agent to be named. Here, we know it will be Josiah. Cyrus the Great is another exception in Isaiah.

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the entire history, there is a scaling of judgment and revelation to the evil. It shows God's *exceptional* patience and mercy. This comes out in a few ways:

- ▶ God seems to send more prophets, more miracles to get the attention of his people.
- ▶ Many of these judgments take the form of discipline and therefore revelation/instruction. Given that God promises to leave a remnant, whoever is left may learn from the past.
- ▶ Even with a clear judgment articulated in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, God waits 500 years to go all in. He scales things slowly and steadily even though he has the right to execute judgment immediately.



SCALING EVIL

The central issue addressed is deviation in worship and idolatry.

1. High Places—The high places seem tolerated to some extent even if not sanctioned. For example, God appeared to Solomon at one of them in spite of prohibition in Deuteronomy 12. Also, the continued existence of the high places was mentioned but did not impugn a given king's reputation.
2. Idols at Bethel and Dan—Jeroboam sets the mold as a kind of anti-David by creating his idols at Bethel and Dan as rival places of worship. Godly kings are linked to David, ungodly kings are compared to Jeroboam I.
3. Baal Worship—The author goes out of the way to condemn this in his assessment of Ahab. It is also central to the major contest at Mt. Carmel.
4. Child Sacrifice—Giving your own child to another god is a supreme act of defiance, rebellion, and ingratitude—especially considered in light of Gen 1:28, Romans 1:21-23.





SCALING JUDGMENT

1. Divided Kingdom—Solomon's failure, nearly as bad as some of the worst kings, precipitates the loss of ten tribes to wholly unworthy kings.
2. Vassal kingdom(s)—Going from a suzerain in Solomon, the kingdom begins paying tribute ("you will be the tail.")
3. Destroyed Dynasties—The houses of Jeroboam, Omri (Ahab), and Jehu have terminal dynasties. Only David's is preserved through the disobedience.
4. War and Loss of Land—Ongoing battle with nearby kingdoms (Moab, Aram) and eventually larger ones (Assyria, Babylon). They captured bordering cities and regions before complete take over.
5. Siege—Several episodes of siege end without total destruction due to miraculous intervention. Meanwhile, the people badly suffer.
6. Conquered—Israel and then Judah eventually succumb to siege. Judah's puppet kingdom delays exile for a time.
7. Exiled—The final judgment is not just that you must submit to a foreign king, but that you will be pulled from your land.



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ELIJAH IN EXILE

More later, but Baal is primarily a storm and fertility god. Extreme drought by Yahweh's word is a bold testament to Baal's impotence (cf. plagues of Exodus).

During this period, Elijah has to leave most likely for safety and survival:

- ▶ The ravens (!) feed him east of the Jordan (outside of the promise land) and he drinks from a ravine.
- ▶ As the ravine dries up, he goes to another place outside of Israel, to be fed by the widow of Zarephath.

His absence (and so no word of God) doubtless raises the tension in Israel. God's servant is well-fed while Israel suffers under Baal's reign.

MOUNT CARMEL

Why do you think God brings rain when he does?

1. The desperation of Israel has reached its peak: three years of drought and famine!
2. The people have been convinced by the contest on Mt. Carmel:
 - ▶ The prophets with their violent rituals accomplish nothing even in their moment of extreme need.
 - ▶ Elijah stacks the cards against himself with the water. It's also a bold statement to waste water at a time like this!
 - ▶ He prays a simple prayer only to be answered by a blast of heavenly fire.
3. Elijah prays for it! (Cf. James 5:17) Notice his persistence: six times he sends his servant to a cloudless sky.

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ELIJAH'S SORROW

In I Kings 19:4b-5, we read of Elijah:

He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

What reasons might there be for Elijah's gloomy, suicidal thoughts?

- ▶ Intense spiritual battle can be spiritually exhausting, even when victorious.
- ▶ He might have also just been *physically* exhausted. After the Baal contest, he ran 17 miles (Carmel to Jezreel; 18:46) and then went another day's journey into the wilderness (19:4).
- ▶ There might be feelings of guilt of fleeing Jezebel (19:2).
- ▶ Elijah's strange clothing (2 Ki 1:8) and life in the wilderness (cf. Jeremiah) imply that he might have had a more introverted, melancholy temperament.

ELISHA'S DISCIPLESHIP

Elisha demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to his calling:

- ▶ He killed the yoke of oxen—this is anywhere from two to twenty-four oxen (depending on interpretation). Either one is a massive statement.
- ▶ He used his plowing equipment to roast these oxen. These two together signal a clear statement of departure from his life of wealth.
- ▶ Curiously, he did not burn bridges to follow Elijah: he kisses his parents goodbye and uses the meat of the oxen to feed his household.

Concretely, what might this look like for us?

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