

JUNE 16

1 Kings 15:25-17:24

It is interesting to see that some of these kings reigned for decades. In the US, a president is in office for eight years and no more. In Israel back then it wasn't unusual for a king to reign for 20 - 40 years. If he was a good king, that was great. If he was a bad one, it meant that a culture of ungodliness was created. What we are witnessing here is that once evil was introduced into the lifestyle of the people, it never went away. The northern kingdom never had a good king. But even in Judah, if a good king appeared, there was cultural compliance and bad things went underground during the reign of a good king; but the ungodliness returned "bigger and better" as soon as an evil king came into power. Israel is now on the road that will lead to exile. God will do some pretty mighty things to prevent this, but in the final event, the miracles will only serve to justify the judgment of God on the people. When you see God doing amazing things, it always means that a critical crossroads in history has been reached. Today those crossroads are reached and one of the most famous OT prophets steps into the gap, Elijah. Elijah will be used to try to direct the hearts of the people back to God, just as John the Baptist would try to do the same through his preaching years later, to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus, their Messiah.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 513, has a helpful overview of the kings and the prophets, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets." (You'll find this overview at the end of this document.)

1 Kings 15:25-34

Notice that God used an assassin to bring judgment on the house of Jeroboam. Just like the proverb for today, evil is repaid by evil. It is stunning to think that an evil man like Baasha ruled for 24 years. That would be like three presidents in the US, each filling two complete four-year terms. Sin was now completely entrenched in the people and culture of the northern kingdom.

1 Kings 16

V. 2 Notice who took responsibility for making Baasha the king. God does the same today, therefore we need to be careful about bashing those in authority. For disciples of Christ who are following Him in the US, the harvest (not the White House) is our focus and mission.

V. 5 We'll read over and over about the mighty things these kings did. They did, in fact, fight battles and do good things. Here, however, the point of the history is the explanation of what drove the nation of God to ruin and how He fought to show them grace to repent. The plan of redemption was still moving forward, but the Lord was showing the depth of sin in people. All of this history shows us the power of sin and the grace and wisdom of God.

V. 7 Note that God was still sending prophets.

V. 15 This guy Zimri becomes a by-word. Later Jezebel will call another guy named Jehu, a "Zimri." Notice that he only reigned for seven days.

V. 23 Omri only reigned 12 years, but he would introduce the most evil of any king into the already terminally ill nation. He did this through his son Ahab and the wife that he chose for him.

Vs. 29-34 Notice all the mentions of Baal and Asherah. This was all very sexually driven. How could the people resist?

V. 34 Notice that Jericho was rebuilt under the influence of Ahab. As Joshua prophesied in his curse on Jericho, the builder lost his oldest and youngest son. There was no fear of God or regard for His Word. I'm sure the people knew about the curse, but either thought it was all superstition or that their gods would defeat the curse.

1 Kings 17

Enter Elijah. Now, just to understand how important this time and these people are, look ahead and answer this question: How many chapters of 1 and 2 Kings are about Ahab and/or Elijah?

V. 1 Drought and famine were "promised" curses for disobedience. Why this happened now was that God was giving Israel fair warning. Apparently this drought was also a judgment on Baal who was supposed to have brought fertility and all the elements necessary for the growth of crops. Everyone would know that Elijah and Yahweh were responsible for this distress, and that no amount of worship to Baal would help bring rain.

This confrontation took place face to face with Ahab, probably in the palace in Samaria.

Vs. 2-7 Elijah's life was in danger, but God promised to care for him. It's interesting that when a miraculous event happened that only God could perform, people wanted to kill the messenger, as if that would make God go away.

Elijah being fed by the birds was like Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount about observing how the Father feeds the birds and not being anxious for our food, only sort of in reverse. We don't know what Elijah was like before God called him, but God was clearly building his faith for the next steps and for the next years.

Vs. 8-16 Jesus will almost be killed for referring to this story years later. Notice that the woman had great faith and obedience. She was at the end of her resources, yet she had heard about Elijah and obeyed when he tested her. This was ironic that Elijah would find this amazing degree of faith and obedience outside of Israel. It was also ironic that God was hiding Elijah in Jezebel's homeland, a place where they would never look for him.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that God didn't tell Elijah what to do until the brook dried up. And too, Elijah was content to wait and then obey. This was a part of his growth in faith.

Vs. 17-24 There would be many "random" miracles performed by both Elijah and Elisha, and you wonder why, especially knowing that the people will not repent and will be sent into exile. These acts of God were known, and these men, during their lifetimes, were well-known messengers. The people could have turned to these prophets of God. The miracles were evidence that God was present and would and could do anything if the people would seek Him. The miracles, especially with Elisha, seem very disconnected, but they accumulated into a huge cloud of witness. When the people didn't respond to God through the messengers He had sent, that "cloud of miracles" became a witness of judgment against the people. God is doing this same thing today and it will be a component of His judgment during the Tribulation.

In a way, this happens with us too, as disciples. Once we have witnessed to our neighbors and have established friendly relationships with them, they know something about where they can find help and get answers. Obviously we keep praying for them and try to further the relationships and help them, but it really is up to them. The sad reality is that if God couldn't get people to come to Elijah and Elisha through all the things these guys did, our neighbors wouldn't be impressed even if we did a miracle on the front lawn. Sin is deep and only God the Father can open a person's heart to Christ. We keep loving; and when they are ready, they'll ask.

Acts 10:23-48

Talk about a situation that the Spirit designed for God's glory.

V. 23 At this point we see that some "brothers" accompanied Peter. Later, we'll see who they were.

V. 25 You couldn't find anyone more sincere than Cornelius. Remember, this guy was not just a commander, but he was also a trained and deadly soldier of Rome.

V. 28 This shows that there was tension in the church. Peter had not only known Christ for three years before the coming of the Holy Spirit, but this is more than three years after the coming of the Spirit. Even as a believer, Peter was still inwardly bound by Jewish custom and tradition.

Nowhere in the Law of Moses did it forbid Jews to enter a Gentile's house. Peter might also have said this for the sake of the "brothers" who were with him.

V. 33 Cornelius brought in his entire household: wife, kids, servants and officers. This guy's heart was so open that it was another, "What must I do to be saved?" situation.

Vs. 34-43 This is the world's shortest sermon. Notice the elements in it. Peter said just enough to say it all and Cornelius heard enough to believe and be saved.

V. 35 Since Cornelius was a worshiper of Yahweh, we can assume that when a person fears God, it is not their conception of God, but the God who reveals Himself in the Word. Even C.S. Lewis seems to have been lured by misunderstanding and "god thoughts" to believe in a type of universalism, that any sincere person could be saved by worshiping their own conception of God. There is one God and all men must believe in Him on His terms, not theirs. As Peter has already said, there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved. Salvation is only in the name of Jesus.

V. 37 It seems like Peter assumed Cornelius had heard of Jesus and what had happened in Jerusalem.

Vs. 39-43 Now, notice the elements of this short declaration of the gospel.

Vs. 44-48 Peter hadn't even finished speaking, and they had already believed and welcomed the truth of what he said.

V. 45 This is important. The believers from the circumcised were amazed. It doesn't say "Jews," because they were of the Circumcision Party, Christians who believed that a person could not be a Christian unless they were circumcised and held the Law of Moses. There was already a party within the Jerusalem church of red-neck fundamentalists. These are the brothers who had gone with Peter. They would become a major stumbling block to the church in Jerusalem, a problem in many churches Paul planted, and they would be a hindrance in Paul's ministry. Because of this entrenched, bigoted fundamentalism, the main hub of the early church, as it reached out to the Gentile world, would become the city of Antioch, not Jerusalem.

Notice that because of the suddenness and the way the Holy Spirit came, they were amazed. It is hard to be against something when you've just had your sandals blasted off. And, Cornelius and those in his house had received the Holy Spirit without having to be circumcised. They hadn't even been baptized with water. It was hard to argue that you couldn't receive the Holy Spirit unless you were circumcised or baptized. It can be assumed that these Italians were praising God in Hebrew, a language they didn't know. I wonder if they still used their hands expressively when they talked. ☺

This was a complete replay of what happened at Pentecost. The Jewish Christians were hearing the Lord praised in the high Hebrew of Jerusalem and in the "hick" Hebrew of Galilee. Notice the difference however. On Pentecost, the unsaved unbelievers were spoken to by the miracle of hearing God proclaimed and praised in their home (foreign) languages. Here, the "unbelievers" are bigoted Christians who resisted believing this could happen. Paul said that tongues was a sign for "unbelievers," but the nature of the unbelief was a very Jewish unbelief. Jews would always be the focus of this gift in the New Testament.

V. 47 This is a challenge by Peter to the red-necks. Notice the words, *just as we have*. The implication is more "in the same way we received Him." Peter will make this clearer when he says this tomorrow too. It may also be suggested that some of these men were in the upper room when the Spirit came at Pentecost.

V. 48 Since Peter did the commanding, that means the "circumcision" guys baptized the uncircumcised Gentile believers. Cool.

Tomorrow we'll get the rest of the story.

Just a word on being a "world" disciple: One of the most important passages for a missionary is in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. We are to reach out to all people and all cultures, giving our own race and culture no preference. The Bible, not a country or ethnicity, judges what is right and wrong in a culture. For Paul, as a former true-blue Hebraic Jew, it was not easy to give up his culture; but for the love of Christ he did it, giving up himself to belong wholly to Jesus.

The reality is, if some believers in North America were to actually see what Abraham, David, Daniel or Jesus looked like, they might be reluctant to have them in their churches. They would have been short and dark-skinned. Abraham and Daniel might have worn an earring...or two (the Babylonian-Persian influence). Their garlic breath and hygiene would have probably sent us out of the room. Our pictures of Jesus as a tall, good-looking Caucasian man (with long hair) are horribly inaccurate and feed our racial preferences. And in spite of what we think, none of those men read the King James Version.

One more application to 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. If those verses apply to other cultures, they also apply to those we are trying to reach in our own culture. As disciples of Christ in the harvest, we need to be open to the harvest, becoming all things to all men. Unbelievers are not required to adapt to our culture in the church. Anything unnecessary in our church culture that keeps them from understanding Jesus and coming to Him is an unnecessary hindrance. Paul and the Spirit say so.

Psalm 134

This sounds as if the people coming to Jerusalem are asking God's blessing on those who serve at the temple. It's always a good idea to thank the Lord for the people who serve. There also seems to be the encouragement to the priests and Levites to worship God with open hearts as they serve before Him.

Proverbs 17:9-11

There is a lot of warning in these verses. So much of this is what you see in church fights, not to mention fights everywhere else.

Going backwards,

V. 11 It seems that in a controversy, a person shows the evil in their heart by being rebellious, in which case they encounter a punishment in keeping with their intent. The bad get bruised by someone worse.

V. 10 In a controversy, a sensitive person suffers, but learns. The prideful just rant, thereby showing they don't understand the situation.

V. 9 In a controversy, a good person overlooks the ranting, trying to make things work because they understand the love of God and the mission they are to be pursuing for Him. Those who allow controversy to brew in their hearts, and spread bitterness and doubt, bring disunity between people and keep people from the truth.