

Reflections on 2 Kings



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The books 1 Kings and 2 Kings are considered as one book by most biblical scholars. In the study of 2 Kings, certain helpful lessons can be gleaned from the lives of specific kings recorded in the historical narrative.

References to 1 Kings may at times be highlighted but the emphasis will be on the spiritual responses of the kings in 2 Kings.

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(A) Be On Your Guard

“Either you destroy the power of Satan in your life by putting on the whole armour of God and keeping it on, or Satan will destroy you.”

“Satan is not challenging you to a mock battle; this war is a life-or-death struggle. If you do not believe me, look what he has done to God’s servants in time past. Charging full speed ahead at many a dear saint, he has battered their armour and the grace of God in them was almost unrecognisable. All this he does when he catches a saint off guard. Do you remember David? Oh, the battering he took by removing the breastplate of righteousness in the manner of Uriah! He sustained a dreadful wound, being shot right through the heart. This war is a spiritual holocaust. Either you destroy the power of Satan in your life by putting on the whole armour of God and keeping it on, or Satan will destroy you. The great saints of every century have been tried in the fires of temptation. And to a man they have been singed whenever Satan found the smallest chink in their graces. Do not disregard what history has repeatedly shown to be true”.

(William Gurnall in *The Christian in Complete Armour*)

As we study 2 Kings, we see one king after another, except for a few, in northern Israel or in southern Judah, destroyed spiritually by the evil one. Many were turned to idol worship and the worship of Baal. Other apparently good kings in Judah succumbed to the temptation of pride, arrogance and disobedience after initial success in their walk with God.

Surely, this should cause us to be on our guard in our spiritual walk and ministry. The enemy does not sleep and he is at work constantly, “prowling like a lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We need to consistently put on the whole armour of God by putting on Christ in our hearts and lives and always being open to the teaching, guidance and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Remember that we are not fighting against flesh and blood; our battle is a spiritual battle and we need Him every hour.

(B) Some lessons from certain kings in 2 Kings

There are numerous lessons for us to consider as we study the lives of various kings from the book 2 Kings. These lessons are applicable to our own lives and ministry as believers.

Before we discuss the kings in 2 Kings, we must consider Jeroboam, son of Nebat. His life and legacy are described in 1 Kings 11-14. What is more, he is mentioned twelve times in 2 Kings. Thus, understanding his significance is foundational for us to grasp the lessons found in 2 Kings.

Jeroboam son of Nebat was introduced as a diligent young man with potential. When God decided to divide the kingdom of King Rehoboam, the prophet Ahijah told him that God had given him 10 tribes to rule and if he obeyed the Lord and kept His commandments, the Lord would give him an enduring kingdom. Jeroboam was also told that the kingdom of Rehoboam was divided because the latter and his people had disobeyed the Lord God and were not faithful to Him.

What followed was rather tragic. King Jeroboam used his human intellect and logic to anticipate that he would lose his kingdom to King Rehoboam and be killed if his people were to worship God in Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. So he thought it best to have his own altar in the north for worship; he instituted false gods(golden calves), appointed his own priests and encouraged his people to treat the idols as God and to refrain from going to Jerusalem.

Although Jeroboam was given the northern kingdom to rule as God's steward with the instructions to obey God and His commands, Jeroboam decided, knowingly, to make it his own kingdom and to preserve it by his own human wisdom. In the process, he abandoned the true worship of the true God and introduced idolatry and false worship. His legacy became a stumbling block in the history of northern Israel and all the subsequent bad kings followed the negative example of the sin of king Jeroboam, son of Nebat.

From the human point of view, it seems logical to disallow the people from going to the south to worship. Jeroboam forgot that it was God who gave him the kingdom to rule and God would keep his kingdom if he were to obey Him and walk in His ways. Even though God sent a man of God to pronounce judgement on the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam did not repent and turn back to God and His ways. King after king followed in his idolatrous ways and it finally ended with Israel being defeated and destroyed by Assyria. Obviously, Jeroboam's dependence on his wits did not give him an enduring kingdom.

We too have the tendency to depend upon our own wisdom and ways to serve God and to build our security here on earth. We use our human intellect, logic and so-called wisdom to plan and to preserve our future and our security. We bend God's instructions to fit our own understanding and we may even use spiritual terms to justify our decisions and actions. But God is not fooled. We may begin with great potential like Jeroboam; we may even begin with God's approval and guidance. However, when we fail to be good stewards of God, seeking to build our own

kingdom and to preserve it without God, we may end up like Jeroboam and also destroy subsequent generations and ministry.

(C) Specific Lessons from the Life of King Jehoshaphat

King Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22), son of king Asa, of Judah, was a good king. He followed the example of King David's earlier days and did not serve the Baals. He sought the Lord God and followed His commandments carefully. The Lord blessed him and established his kingdom. Jehoshaphat removed the high places and the Asherah poles. He also sent his officials and the Levites to teach the people the book of the Law of God. He grew greater and greater and built fortresses and store cities in Judah.

When Moab and Ammon came to make war against king Jehoshaphat and Judah, he depended on the Lord and led his people to trust God, resulting in the routing of the enemy and a great victory by the hand of God.

But king Jehoshaphat made one major mistake; he allied himself with king Ahab of northern Israel. He must have known that king Ahab was a worshipper of Baal and his wife was the notorious Jezebel. Why did he take such a step? Perhaps, he thought it was a wise political move, securing peace with Israel and securing peace with all the neighbouring countries as well. He depended on his political acumen and assessment, ignoring the possible serious spiritual dangers that might follow. He probably saw no major problems in this move as long as he himself followed the ways of God closely.

How wrong he was! King Ahab persuaded him to join him in the battle against Ramoth-Gilead and he consented. Although he was sceptical of the prophecies of Ahab's prophets, and requested for a prophet of God, he still went along with king Ahab even though Micaiah, a prophet of God, prophesied against this venture. He was naive enough to allow Ahab to disguise himself while he himself wore his royal robes. King Jehoshaphat nearly got himself killed, save for the intervention of God.

His alliance with Ahab caused him to arrange a marriage for his son Jehoram with a daughter of king Ahab, Athaliah. His son, Jehoram, killed all his siblings after ascending the throne. It was a common practice in northern Israel for a new king to kill all the other contenders, including siblings but the practice was generally unheard of in the southern kingdom, Judah. King Jehoram probably took the cue from his wife Athaliah who brought along all the evil ways of Israel with her. When Jehoram's son, Ahaziah, was killed, along with Ahab's son, by Jehu, it was the same queen Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, who seized the throne and killed all the other royal offspring of the house of Judah except for Joash who was hidden by his auntie. It could have been the end of the line of king David in Judah if queen Athaliah was successful in eliminating all the royal offspring. This could not happen if king Jehoshaphat did not ally with king Ahab in marriage. What was thought to be a wise political move could have ended in a very serious outcome, not to mention the king Jehoshaphat's near escape from death in the battle at Ramoth-Gilead.

King Jehoshaphat was rebuked by the prophet of God for acting wickedly in making an alliance with king Ahab and subsequently also with Ahab's son, king Ahaziah. The ships he made with king Ahaziah were destroyed and broken by God who was displeased with this.

Judah's subsequent involvement with the worship of Baal and Asherah probably had its root in the marriage alliance of Jehoshaphat's son and Ahab's daughter. Athaliah was, in all probability, greatly influenced by her mother Jezebel in the worship of Baal and idols.

It is sad that a good and godly king like king Jehoshaphat has been responsible in some ways in introducing idolatry to Judah and it all began when he allied himself with king Ahab.

This holds important lessons for us. We may love God and serve Him but we must be mindful not to compromise our faith and our faithfulness to God by embarking on wrong relationships and unhelpful associations. We may think that it is wise to establish good networking and some of us are inclined to be friendly with everyone and to please them in the hope of securing a good reputation among many. This may generally be alright but we must be discerning in this. Close relationships with various ones or various groups that end up with us being negatively influenced rather than influencing others positively for God may spell disaster for our spiritual lives and ministry. The evil one can dress as an angel of light and he is very capable of sending various ones into our lives who appear to be positive but are actually snares for our lives.

(D) More Lessons on More Kings

We continue to consider various lessons from the lives of the kings of northern Israel and southern Judah. What is pertinent is that these lessons are very close to home and very relevant to us in our present context.

We look at king Amaziah (2 Kings 14), son of king Joash, the only surviving royal offspring from the killing of all the offspring by queen Athaliah and king Uzziah (also known as king Azariah), the son of king Amaziah.

For these sharings, the cross-references are from 2 Chronicles chapters 25 and 26.

King Amaziah did what was right before God but not wholeheartedly. In his military campaign against Edom, besides depending on his own army, he hired 100,000 soldiers from Israel. A man of God counselled him not to let the soldiers from northern Israel to join his army as God was not with Israel. Amaziah listened to the counsel and dismissed the soldiers from Israel although he had paid them.

King Amaziah secured a great victory against Edom but unfortunately, he brought back the gods of the Edomites and worshipped them. When a man of God questioned his foolish action, before the man of God could finish his communication, king Amaziah stopped him with this question: "Have we appointed you as an adviser to the king? Stop! Why be struck down?"

King Amaziah would not listen and God subsequently delivered him into the hands of the king of Israel.

King Amaziah's son, king Uzziah, was outstanding and successful in various military campaigns and became famous, receiving tributes from many countries. He had a large well-trained army and a formidable array of military hardware.

However, after becoming famous and powerful, king Uzziah was unfaithful to God and entered the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. The high priest and eighty other courageous priests confronted him and did not allow him to do so, as this task was only reserved for consecrated priests, descendants of Aaron.

King Uzziah became very angry and while he was raging, leprosy broke out on his forehead and he had to be hurriedly ushered out. He had leprosy until the day he died.

What is common to these two kings, father and son?

It is arrogance and pride. Both forgot that there is a king above them, the King of kings, God Himself. They both sought to put themselves above God. Amaziah was not willing to listen to God's Word communicated through His servant and, in fact, he wanted to harm the servant of God. King Uzziah similarly raged against the high priest and priests who rightly and courageously stood in his way. He could have been killed before the altar of incense and the outbreak of leprosy may in fact be God's mercy to him.

Whatever success we can achieve in our service to God, we must always remember that the glory and honour belong to God alone. Scriptures remind us that although

God dwells in the heavenly places, He also dwells with those who are humble and contrite in spirit. We must never assume that we have accomplished much in ministry and service through our own abilities. We must continue to nurture a humble spirit and refrain from exalting ourselves. At the same time, we must be open and teachable to God's instructions and even rebuke. Otherwise, pride will be our undoing as it has been to many who have gone before us.

(E) Lessons on King Hezekiah, King Manasseh and King Josiah

King Hezekiah was a good king. He did what was right before God like king David and he was well known as one who trusted the Lord God. It was not easy to trust God when an enemy as vicious as Assyria, which destroyed the northern kingdom Israel, was besieging

Judah. Yet King Hezekiah turned to God in prayer and he beseeched Isaiah to also pray for the kingdom. And God hearkened to his prayers. Consequently, God destroyed the army of Assyria and sent them back to their homeland.

Then he became very ill and was told to be ready to depart from this earth. Hezekiah's response seemed not so consistent with one who trusted God explicitly. He in fact cried out to God to remember his good deeds and he turned to the wall and sulked. Here is a suggestion of a possible attitude problem and a response that projected a spirit of entitlement; he was reminding God of all his good deeds and that he was entitled to a better deal than to die at an early age.

In spite of this, God extended grace and mercy to him and allowed him to recover and to live on for another fifteen years.

It was during this extra fifteen years that Manasseh was born and he became king at the age of twelve. King Manasseh was the worst king of all in Judah; he not only worshipped idols, he rebuilt the Asherah poles, practiced divination, consulted mediums, extended worship to the stars and sun, caused his son to be burned up and was even worse than all the kings of the Amorites. Manasseh shed innocent blood and he reigned in such an evil way for fifty-five years. Although he did repent in the later part of his life, his reign caused God to be determined to punish Judah in the same manner that He punished Israel.

If king Hezekiah had died without the extra fifteen years, Manasseh would not have been born. Hezekiah could have died as a king with a good reputation, as one who trusted God explicitly and Manasseh would not be around for fifty-five years with apostasy and an evil reign.

Additionally, after recovering from his illness, king Hezekiah welcomed the envoys from Babylon and showed them all his treasures. The prophet Isaiah told him that all these treasures would be taken away to Babylon in the future when the Babylonians conquer Judah. Surprisingly, king Hezekiah was unmoved by this statement; he seemed indifferent to this revelation and concluded that it was good, as long as there was peace during his reign. Here again, there seemed to be an expression of self-centredness, without much concern for what would happen to his descendants and to the kingdom of Judah in the future. It seemed that Hezekiah was also unconcerned for the glory of God and God's reputation. For this prophesied future would mean God's kingdom Judah would be conquered and Jerusalem, the place where God's temple dwelled, would be overrun.

Before his illness, as he prayed to God to defend the city against Assyria, Hezekiah seemed to be very concerned that the Assyrian officials were belittling the reputation

of the one true God. Here again, one wonders if Hezekiah were to die in his illness, this episode with the Babylonian envoys would not have taken place.

We see that it is very easy to have a sense of entitlement towards God and we expect God to bless us because we have served him well and we become upset and sulky when negative things happen to our lives, whether it be illness, relationship problems or financial problem. We must acknowledge that all that we are and all that we can accomplish as believers are through the grace and mercy of God. As servants of God, any good we do is to be expected of servants and we should not carry this sense of entitlement in our lives.

Not accepting God's decisions for our lives and clamouring for what we desire may not necessarily be a good thing when we get what we want. King Hezekiah would have been spared of leaving a legacy with king Manasseh doing evil for fifty-five years and his lack of vigilance of showing all his treasures to a potential formidable enemy of the future. Manasseh's evil reign was the 'straw that broke the camel's back'; God decided to terminate Judah in the same way He terminated Israel and Manasseh was a major contributing factor that sealed this decision.

King Josiah, the grandson of king Hezekiah, was a very good king and well known for his spiritual reforms for Judah. He not only destroyed all the negative paraphernalia of idol worship set up by King Manasseh, he also desecrated them and sought to ensure that they did not make a comeback. In the eighteenth year of his reign, he was given a copy of the Law found in the temple. King Josiah was alarmed by what he read in the law and he knew that the people had sinned greatly against God. So he humbled himself before God and led his people in the same direction. Even though he was told by the prophetess that God would not punish the nation during his reign, king Josiah did not respond like his grandfather in an indifferent manner. He continued his reforms, desecrating the altar at Bethel and instituting a great Passover.

King Josiah was described as one whose heart was tender to the Word of God expressed in the Law. He was not indifferent to what he read in the Law and he was certainly moved to take remedial actions and humbled himself before God and encouraged his people to do likewise.

This is a wonderful attitude to nurture. We must be open, sensitive and teachable to the Word of God. As we hear His Word during Worship, during reading and meditations of Scripture, do we receive them as His Word. Are we doers of the Word or just hearers only? One must not be over-familiar with God's Word to a point of being indifferent; or even worse, to a point of being hardened in our hearts to what God has to say and reveal. For Israel, Judah and their kings, God sent His Word again and again through His prophets but they would not listen. Are we truly hearing and listening to His Word and what He is communicating to us in these days?

(F) The Fall of Judah and the Last Kings

We saw King Josiah as a good king who conducted many reforms for the nation. However, King Josiah died at the hands of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt.

His son Jehoahaz (2 King 23) succeeded him but he lasted only for three months. He did evil before God. He was initially imprisoned by Pharaoh, then sent to Egypt where he died. Pharaoh took his brother Eliakim and made him king, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Egypt was subsequently defeated by Babylon, and king Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon. He also did evil in the sight of God and he rebelled against the king of Babylon. God sent marauding bands of Moabites, Ammonites and Chaldeans to attack Judah to destroy it because of the terrible sins of king Manasseh.

King Jehoiakim ruled for about eleven years but he ended up in chains at the hand of Babylon. During his reign, the prophet Jeremiah sent him a scroll from God, dictated to the prophet and written down by Baruch. However, king Jehoiakim not only rejected the Word of God, but he was downright arrogant and defiant, cutting the scroll bit by bit, and throwing it into the fire. The message in the scroll was to surrender to Babylon, for this was from God, but Jehoiakim refused and sought also to harm Jeremiah and Baruch. King Jehoiakim was so different from his father King Josiah who listened to God's Word with a tender heart and humbled himself. King Jehoiakim not only refused to listen but also acted defiantly against God, His prophet and the written word of the Lord.

Following the death of Jehoiakim, his son Jehoiachin became king and did evil. He met the wrath of Babylon, and the city came under siege. King Jehoiachin also lasted three months. Then he, his mother and servants were taken captive into exile to Babylon. The king of Babylon carried all the treasures of the house of the Lord, the treasures of the house of the king of Judah and the gold in the temple, together with the mighty men, the craftsmen and the smiths, leaving behind only the poorest people.

Daniel was probably one of those carried into exile with his three friends.

Jehoiachin's uncle, another son of king Josiah, was then made a puppet king by the king of Babylon and the name given to him was Zedekiah. King Zedekiah also did evil before the Lord and he rebelled against the king of Babylon. Although he sought counsel secretly from the prophet Jeremiah, he was not willing to listen to God's Word through Jeremiah because of his fear of the officials. We are reminded of one who also feared the people and sinned against God – Aaron built the golden calf and declared it as the God of Israel when Moses was up in the mountain, receiving the ten commandments.

The king of Babylon put the city of Jerusalem under siege for almost two years. The famine was severe and the city was finally broken into. The king and his men fled but were overtaken by the Babylonians in the plain of Jericho. It is ironic that the first battle and victory for Joshua and Israel was at Jericho and the final king of Judah was captured at Jericho.

This time around, the whole city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed, including the temple of God. As for King Zedekiah, he was brought to Riblah. His sons were killed before him. Then he was blinded, bound with fetters and made into a eunuch.

The people of Judah and her king thought that the temple where God's name dwelt could not be overcome by the enemy, but God had already left the temple. Just as in the time of Eli the priest when the army of Israel took the ark of God into battle against the Philistines and were confident of victory, God was no longer with His people because of their evil deeds and sins. It reminds us not to depend on external religiosity when our lives are lived unrighteously and we still cling to the idea that God is for us. When there is no loving relationship with God, resulting in a life of trust and obedience to God, we may not be truly born again.

Subsequent to this, Gedaliah was appointed governor by Babylon to take care of the land, but he was assassinated by Ishmael and his men. Johanan and his fellow soldiers drove the killers away. Nevertheless, those who remained were afraid of the Babylonians as the Babylonians who were with Gedaliah were also killed by Ishmael.

The remaining people turned to the prophet Jeremiah to pray for them and to ask God for guidance. They told Jeremiah that they would surely listen to the Word from the Lord, whatever it might be. However, when Jeremiah told them to remain in the land and not fear the Chaldeans, they accused Jeremiah of seeking to harm them. Against the advice from God through Jeremiah, they decided to retreat to Egypt. This was in spite of the fact that God had warned them that they would die in Egypt from war and famine. That spelled the end of the rest of the people of Judah in the land of Egypt. Again, we see the irony that the people of God who were rescued by God through Moses from Egypt in the great exodus returned to Egypt in disobedience to God's Word and died in Egypt.

However, King Jehoiachin received favour from the king of Babylon; he was released from prison, had his meals in the presence of the Babylonian king regularly and was given a regular allowance. Herein lies a glimpse of hope for the people of God: the descendant of king David is still alive and God's promise to David that his sons will continue to reign is not lost. We know that ultimately, it is *the* son of David, the Lord Jesus Himself who will reign forever as the King of kings.

We see God's grace showered upon His people and their kings despite their rebellion and evil: He sent prophet after prophet, He rescued them again and again but they continued to rebel and disobey until finally the whole nation, northern Israel and southern Judah, was sent into exile. God still remained faithful to His promise and the promise is finally fulfilled in His Son, the final prophet, the final high priest, the final sacrifice, the lamb of God, the ultimate King!

It started in the time of Samuel the prophet when the people clamoured for a king like all the other nations. They were actually rejecting God as king and they followed the ways of the nations and sought to be like them. In fact, they wanted to be kings of their own lives. We see the sad end of a people who followed the ways of the gentile nations and wanted to be their own king.

This is a solemn reminder for us not to make the same mistake. God's grace to us is undeserved, so we need to be humble; His sacrifice for us in His Son is costly, so we need to be holy; His love for us is unconditional in His Son, so we can be at peace and not seek to earn His approval by our merits and performance. He who started a work in us will perfect it at the second coming of His Son; His Spirit and enabling will

enable us to persevere to the end. But let us not follow the ways of the disobedient people of Israel and take His grace and love for granted. God is a God of love and also a God of wrath: it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!