

OS DIVISION DEFIANCE

AND

COMMENTARY


the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

ADULTS



FALL | 2025

GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

WE NEED THE TRUE KING

The last verse in the book of Judges—a book that chronicles the downward spiral of disobedience of those who were called to be radically different as the people of God—is one of the most depressing verses in the Bible: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Judges 21:25). Is this not a fitting definition of sin? In this one verse, we see the prideful root of self-lordship, self-exaltation, and self-determination at the core of all our rebellion. We are, in our own minds, the gods of our own universe; we choose whatever is right and wrong for ourselves, and anything that imposes some authority over us other than our own autonomous minds, hearts, and desires is a constraint that must be thrown off.

As sinners, we are like the Israelites of old, convinced of our own truth, our own ideas, and our own wisdom. Our sin has blinded us to what is truly good and right, and it's precisely because of this blindness that we need a true king.

We need a king who tells us the truth, guides us with justice, and leads us in righteousness—a king who can open our eyes to these things and more. Because we are enslaved by sin, the true king must not only be our ruler but also our rescuer.

In Jesus, we find this King—the One before whom every knee will bow and whose greatness every tongue will eventually confess. In Jesus, the true King has come. He is the King of love as well as the King of power. In Jesus, and in Him alone, will we finally find all our desires for peace, security, and wholeness met.

We must then acknowledge that every other king we seek to enthrone is only a substitute for Jesus. It is far better for us to trust in Jesus, not only as our rescuer but also as our ruler, and to acknowledge that all authority has been given to Him.

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THE EDITOR

Our lives are a series of decisions and choices we make that can result in positive or negative consequences. If we try to base these decisions on our own thoughts and morality, we will soon realize that it will lead to pitfalls in life. That's why we need God, His Word, His Spirit, and His people to help us and teach us the way toward life. But even with those things, we may choose not to listen and still choose our own prideful ways.

This is as true of us as it was of God's people of old, the Israelites. Though God sent prophets to point them toward the right path, the Israelites chose their own path many times, deciding to do evil in the Lord's sight. The few that were faithful, from kings to commoners, found joy in the Lord and His Word. But those who weren't found that they made their own destructive paths. And in the end, the split kingdom of Israel and Judah both failed to be faithful to the Lord and both became captive to their enemies.

Through it all though, God's mercy and compassion still overcame. God did not destroy them completely as they deserved, but He sent prophets to let them know a day of hope was coming, a day when a Savior would come and lead and guide them and take away their sins. God would restore and refresh His people, and they would follow Him toward life everlasting.

These prophets were pointing to Jesus, the Messiah. He is the hope that we all need. He took on our sin and made atonement, which restored our relationship with the Father. He put His Spirit in us and established a new covenant that we would have life with His presence forevermore. Praise be to God!

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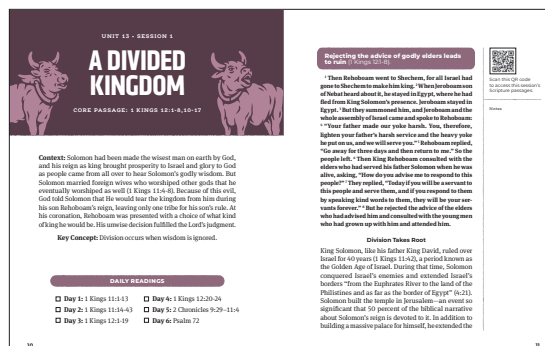
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HOW TO USE THE COMMENTARY

The Commentary is a vital tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here are different ways on how to make the most of your time with it:

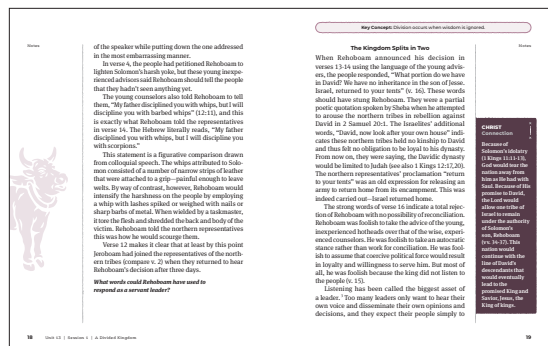
1) AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE LEADER GUIDE



The Leader Guide takes you through the same Personal Preparation your group members will follow in their Personal Study Guide so you can experience that with them during the week. And then the Leader Guide provides you with step-by-step instructions for the weekly Group Experience, including the learning activity and application questions.

You can use the Commentary to supplement your learning and personal preparation. The context, key concept, and daily readings as well as the Scripture breakdowns and discussion questions in the Commentary will be the same as in the Personal Study Guide and the Leader Guide. But the bulk of the content is unique, so read through the Commentary to gain additional insight for your group's questions and discussions during the Group Experience.

2) AS A PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Your leader and your group may want to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for a more in-depth study of the Scripture passages in the sessions provided. Your group may be more knowledgeable and seasoned and may want to delve deeper into the nuances of Scripture as you explore how Scripture points to Christ throughout the Bible.

Leaders may also choose to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for their group because it is easier to read with a larger font than the Personal Study Guide.

If used in this way, the Commentary is designed to be used before the group time and then during the group time. Read through the session to be prepared for your group time. The context, key concept, and daily readings will give you the background and focus you need to study. The various headings and subheadings give you the bullet points that connect to the key concept. Answer the questions provided to prepare beforehand to discuss during the group time together. The Head, Heart, and Hands questions help you apply what you have learned. Use the margins for whatever notes you might need to jot down.

3) AS A LEADER GUIDE

BIBLICAL STORY

The northern kingdom was composed of 10 tribes, while the southern kingdom was composed of 8 tribes. The word "tribe" refers to a group of people who share a common ancestor and live in the same area.

1 Kings 12:1-15

And so Solomon's great kingdom was divided: Israel in the north with ten tribes, Judah in the south with one tribe. While it seems this political division could have been avoided if Rehoboam had acted differently, the division actually was God's will. "This turn of events came from the Lord to carry out his word, which the Lord had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Shalom the son of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 12:15).

While on the surface it appears individual opinions, personalities, and choices, as well as larger social and political forces were the reasons for historic changes in the world. It's helpful to be aware that we exist and affirm that God is at work in history to accomplish His purposes. Daniel 2:21 tells us God raises up and removes kings as He directs the course of world events. Yet for us, and from our perspective, we feel as if we are doing it. So we need to keep our focus on Him "who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). For our God is sovereign. He is the Lord of history as well as of eternity.

What are some ways you need to humble yourself to bring peace instead of division?

Key Concept: Division occurs when wisdom is ignored.

HEAD:
What are some ways we can increase our exposure to God's wisdom?

HEART:
How can we develop compassion for others to serve them like Jesus would?

HANDS:
How will you seek and follow wise counsel for a difficult decision in your life?

the Commentary as a leader guide. For the best learning experience, having the Leader Guide along with the Commentary will be beneficial as the Leader Guide has a guided path to lead the group time, a group activity to foster discussion and group interaction, and further details about the Head, Heart, and Hands application section.

But if you choose not to use the Leader Guide, you can use the Commentary as a leader guide by following the pages in order with your group, highlighting important ideas and concepts along with the headings and subheadings to add further insight to the key concept. Ask your group what was interesting to them, and use the questions provided to further your group discussion. And as you wrap up with the Head, Heart, and Hands questions, allow the group to discuss how to apply what they've learned. End with prayer requests and praises that you can jot down in the margins.

If your group chooses to use the Commentary as their personal study guide, then you as the leader can also use

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 13

DIVISIONS



1 KINGS



MEMORY VERSE

“Then Elijah approached all the people and said,
‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the
LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.’
But the people didn’t answer him a word.”

–1 Kings 18:21





A DIVIDED KINGDOM



CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 12:1-8,10-17

Context: Solomon had been made the wisest man on earth by God, and his reign as king brought prosperity to Israel and glory to God as people came from all over to hear Solomon's godly wisdom. But Solomon married foreign wives who worshiped other gods that he eventually worshiped as well (1 Kings 11:4-8). Because of this evil, God told Solomon that He would tear the kingdom from him during his son Rehoboam's reign, leaving only one tribe for his son's rule. At his coronation, Rehoboam was presented with a choice of what kind of king he would be. His unwise decision fulfilled the Lord's judgment.

Key Concept: Division occurs when wisdom is ignored.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 1 Kings 11:1-13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 1 Kings 12:20-24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 1 Kings 11:14-43 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 2 Chronicles 9:29-11:4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 1 Kings 12:1-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 72 |

Rejecting the advice of godly elders leads to ruin (1 Kings 12:1-8).

¹ Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. ² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard about it, he stayed in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon's presence. Jeroboam stayed in Egypt. ³ But they summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam: ⁴ "Your father made our yoke harsh. You, therefore, lighten your father's harsh service and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." ⁵ Rehoboam replied, "Go away for three days and then return to me." So the people left. ⁶ Then King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was alive, asking, "How do you advise me to respond to this people?" ⁷ They replied, "Today if you will be a servant to this people and serve them, and if you respond to them by speaking kind words to them, they will be your servants forever." ⁸ But he rejected the advice of the elders who had advised him and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and attended him.

Division Takes Root

King Solomon, like his father King David, ruled over Israel for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42), a period known as the Golden Age of Israel. During that time, Solomon conquered Israel's enemies and extended Israel's borders "from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt" (4:21). Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem—an event so significant that 50 percent of the biblical narrative about Solomon's reign is devoted to it. In addition to building a massive palace for himself, he extended the



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

walls of Jerusalem, developed trade and commerce with other nations, established smelting centers for iron and copper that Israel exported, and imported exotic goods by both naval expeditions and caravans (1 Kings 10:11-22). In fact, Solomon obtained so much wealth that he was acknowledged as the richest of all kings (2 Chron. 9:22-28). All in accordance with what the Lord promised him: “I will give you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again” (1 Kings 3:12).

To accomplish all of this, Solomon needed vast administrative personnel, laborers, and supplies. Thirty thousand Israelites were employed in preparing the cedars for the temple (1 Kings 5:13). Over one hundred and fifty thousand resident aliens were put to work in constructing the temple (2 Chron. 2:17-18). To feed and support all of this Solomon needed “150 bushels of fine flour and 300 bushels of meal, ten fattened cattle, twenty range cattle, and a hundred sheep and goats, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and pen-fed poultry” every day (1 Kings 4:22-23)!

To pay for all of this, Solomon collected taxes from the people and merchants, and he received tribute from foreign nations—at least 25 tons of gold annually (1 Kings 4:21; 10:14-15). To collect taxes from the people, Solomon established 12 administrative districts and appointed officials over each (4:7-19). Land taxes were levied on Israelites for their land and produce. A tithe was required to be paid on all livestock and farmland. Each Israelite paid a ransom tax on reaching the age of 20. A house tax was imposed on any in Jerusalem who owned a house. A city sales tax also was established in Jerusalem. As time went

on, taxes and other sources of revenue to support the government increased.¹

Toward the end of his life, due to his idolatry, Solomon faced challenges from several quarters (11:14-40). An Edomite named Hadad, who had escaped to Egypt as a young boy when Joab conquered Edom, returned as an adult and became a threat to Solomon's kingdom (vv. 14-22). In Damascus, Rezon, who "loathed Israel," arose and sought to establish a Syrian kingdom to Solomon's north (vv. 23-25). But most significant of all was Jeroboam, the man Solomon appointed over all of the Joseph tribes. One day, the prophet Ahijah encountered Jeroboam in an open field. Ahijah took off his new cloak and tore it into 12 pieces. He handed 10 pieces to Jeroboam and announced that God was tearing the kingdom from Solomon and giving 10 of the tribes to Jeroboam (vv. 26-39). When Solomon learned of this, he attempted to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt and found asylum under King Shishak (v. 40). But the Lord would bring about in Rehoboam's life the prophecy given to both Solomon and Jeroboam.

How can believers faithfully fulfill their responsibilities to lead and to serve?

Rehoboam Seeks Counsel

King Solomon had now died. Rehoboam, one of Solomon's four known sons, was set to succeed him. This time there was no rival claimant, no struggle for power or elimination of family members. Rehoboam, whose mother was Naamah of Ammon, was 41 years old.

While the Lord had promised both David and Solomon that one of their descendants would always rule on the throne of Israel, there was no established

THEOLOGY Connection

CHRISTIANS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER: All

Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. (cont.)

method of dynastic succession. When King Saul died, David was anointed king over Judah (2 Sam. 2:4,11). Then after seven years of civil war and negotiations with the northern tribes, David finally was anointed king over all Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-3). After David died, Solomon eliminated his rivals—Adonijah was executed, Abiathar was deposed and exiled, Joab also was executed, as was the rebel Shimei. So when it came to Solomon's successor, all Israel had gone to Shechem to make Rehoboam king (1 Kings 12:1).

Why did they gather at Shechem? First, geographically it was a central location in the country. But more importantly, this was the place the Lord first appeared to Abraham in Canaan and promised the land to him (Gen. 12:6-7). Shechem was also the place where, immediately after entering the land under Joshua's leadership, Israel fulfilled their promise to Moses to reaffirm the covenant (Josh. 8:30-35). Further, it was where the tribal confederation again pledged their commitment to the Lord and his covenant after conquering the land (Josh. 24). The northern tribes may not have been contesting the dynastic succession; perhaps they just wanted to negotiate more favorable terms.

According to 1 Kings 12:3, the leaders of the northern tribes summoned Jeroboam, and along with them he came and spoke to Rehoboam. Verse 12 places Jeroboam there on the third day to hear Rehoboam's decision, but verse 20 reads as if he did not arrive until sometime during the negotiations.

The northern representatives brought forward their specific complaint in verse 4: Solomon had placed a heavy yoke—an unbearable burden—on the northern tribes in terms of conscripted labor and taxation,

and they wanted the burden lightened (v. 10). They pledged that if Rehoboam would do that, they would serve him. The representatives referred to their people's burden as a harsh yoke.

A yoke was used to hitch large draft animals to a plow or wagon. In their metaphorical use of the word, they referred to the burden described in 9:15-25 that Solomon had placed on them for all of his building projects and for the support of the expanded kingdom.

Rehoboam told the representatives he needed three days, during which time he would consult with the elders who had served his father Solomon (v. 6) and with the young men who had grown up with him (v. 10). After that, he would inform them of his decision.

Rehoboam consulted with the elders first. This was a wise course of action. Rehoboam's father had taught him, "Whoever listens to counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15). Solomon also had said, "Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeeded" (Prov. 15:22). The elders obviously were older than Rehoboam and had considerable more life experience. Such elders had a significant influence on decisions the king would make. These elders counseled moderation and unity. They urged Rehoboam to become a servant leader. They urged him to respond to the people by speaking kind words to them. They told Rehoboam that if he did this, the northern tribes "will be your servants forever" (1 Kings 12:7).

Jesus told His followers that they were not to seek to "lord it over" others but "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27). Jesus also stated, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt. 23:11).

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Servant-leadership is more than just a model that glues the leader to his or her people. It is also a sign of obedience to Jesus, who left his home in glory to become part of humanity (Phil. 2:6-8) and washed his disciples’ feet, giving them an example that they should follow (John 13:14-15).”³

–Musa Gotom
(1941–2024)

Such should be true of all Christians who are called to leadership positions in society, in the church, or in the home. Husbands and fathers are to lead their families as servant leaders. Chuck Kelley stated: “Servant leadership is necessary. It is costly, very costly. And it is ultimately the whole point of the Kingdom of God.”²

Rehoboam had also not learned that actions taken can have an impact into the future. When the wise elders said about the northern tribes they will be your servants forever the Hebrew literally reads “for all the days.” It means “always” or “forever,” but the point was that Rehoboam’s present action would have a long-term consequence. Rehoboam neglected to develop the long view in making life decisions—a crucial mistake.

Why is listening to wisdom and experience so important?

Being a self-serving leader rather than a servant leader brings division (1 Kings 12:10-17).

¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him told him, “This is what you should say to this people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you, make it lighter on us!’ This is what you should tell them: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist!

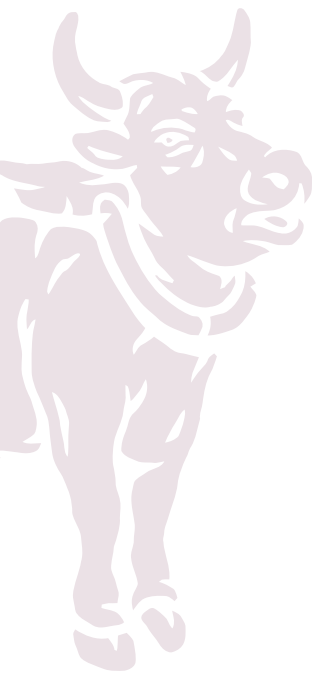
¹¹ Although my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips.’”

¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had ordered: “Return to me on the third day.” ¹³ Then the king answered the people harshly. He rejected the advice the elders had given

him ¹⁴ and spoke to them according to the young men's advice: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips." ¹⁵ The king did not listen to the people, because this turn of events came from the LORD to carry out his word, which the LORD had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat. ¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them, the people answered him: What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Israel, return to your tents; David, now look after your own house! So Israel went to their tents, ¹⁷ but Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites living in the cities of Judah.

Rehoboam Heeds Foolish Advice

The young men Rehoboam turned to for advice were those of his own generation: they had grown up with him. Rehoboam himself was young, inexperienced, and non-assertive—an easy mark for "worthless and wicked men" (2 Chron. 13:7). These young counselors were descendants of courtiers and officials, some of whom probably were of royal descent and now served in various capacities in the government. Their advice, also related mostly in direct speech, was diametrically opposed to the wisdom of the elders. They told Rehoboam that he needed to take an even stronger stance than his father had to show the complainers who was in charge. They told him to tell the northern representatives, "My little finger is thicker than my father's waist!" (1 Kings 12:10). This was a vulgar proverbial statement that literally employed the word "loins" as a euphemism in comparison with the term little finger. The proverb lays stress on the superiority



of the speaker while putting down the one addressed in the most embarrassing manner.

In verse 4, the people had petitioned Rehoboam to lighten Solomon's harsh yoke, but these young inexperienced advisors said Rehoboam should tell the people that they hadn't seen anything yet.

The young counselors also told Rehoboam to tell them, "My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips" (12:11), and this is exactly what Rehoboam told the representatives in verse 14. The Hebrew literally reads, "My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."

This statement is a figurative comparison drawn from colloquial speech. The whips attributed to Solomon consisted of a number of narrow strips of leather that were attached to a grip—painful enough to leave welts. By way of contrast, however, Rehoboam would intensify the harshness on the people by employing a whip with lashes spiked or weighed with nails or sharp barbs of metal. When wielded by a taskmaster, it tore the flesh and shredded the back and body of the victim. Rehoboam told the northern representatives this was how he would scourge them.

Verse 12 makes it clear that at least by this point Jeroboam had joined the representatives of the northern tribes (compare v. 2) when they returned to hear Rehoboam's decision after three days.

What words could Rehoboam have used to respond as a servant leader?

The Kingdom Splits in Two

When Rehoboam announced his decision in verses 13-14 using the language of the young advisers, the people responded, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Israel, returned to your tents” (v. 16). These words should have stung Rehoboam. They were a partial poetic quotation spoken by Sheba when he attempted to arouse the northern tribes in rebellion against David in 2 Samuel 20:1. The Israelites’ additional words, “David, now look after your own house” indicates these northern tribes held no kinship to David and thus felt no obligation to be loyal to his dynasty. From now on, they were saying, the Davidic dynasty would be limited to Judah (see also 1 Kings 12:17,20). The northern representatives’ proclamation “return to your tents” was an old expression for releasing an army to return home from its encampment. This was indeed carried out—Israel returned home.

The strong words of verse 16 indicate a total rejection of Rehoboam with no possibility of reconciliation. Rehoboam was foolish to take the advice of the young, inexperienced hotheads over that of the wise, experienced counselors. He was foolish to take an autocratic stance rather than work for conciliation. He was foolish to assume that coercive political force would result in loyalty and willingness to serve him. But most of all, he was foolish because the king did not listen to the people (v. 15).

Listening has been called the biggest asset of a leader.⁴ Too many leaders only want to hear their own voice and disseminate their own opinions and decisions, and they expect their people simply to

CHRIST Connection

Because of Solomon’s idolatry (1 Kings 11:11-13), God would tear the nation away from him as He had with Saul. Because of His promise to David, the Lord would allow one tribe of Israel to remain under the authority of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam (vv. 34-37). This nation would continue with the line of David’s descendants that would eventually lead to the promised King and Savior, Jesus, the King of kings.

BIBLICAL Study

The Northern Kingdom was comprised of ten tribes, while the Southern Kingdom was said to have the one tribe of Judah. But what about the remaining tribe of the twelve, the tribe of Benjamin? (Levi, the tribe dedicated to the Lord, was not included in the twelve.) Benjamin still existed, as King Saul was a Benjaminite, but because of an egregious sin (Judg. 19–21), Benjamin had been decimated and absorbed within the tribe of Judah (1 Kings 12:20–23).

accept and follow unquestioningly what they say. Listening to people and hearing their issues and complaints affirms that a leader is approachable. It builds trust. It demonstrates to those being led that they are supported in their most basic concerns. It proves the leader cares for his or her people. This is why James, the Lord's brother, wrote: "My dear brother and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen" (Jas. 1:19).

And so Solomon's great kingdom was divided: Israel in the north with ten tribes; Judah in the south with one tribe. While it seems this political division could have been avoided if Rehoboam had acted differently, the division actually was God's will: "This turn of events came from the LORD to carry out his word, which the LORD had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 Kings 12:15).

While on the surface it appears individual egos, personalities, and choices, as well as larger social and political forces were the reasons for historic changes in the world, as believers it is necessary that we realize and affirm that God is at work in history to accomplish His purposes. Daniel 2:21 tells us God raises up and removes kings as He directs the course of world events. Yet for us, and from our perspective, how God is working in the world's political events is not often self-evident. So we need to keep our focus on Him "who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). For our God is sovereign; He is the Lord of history as well as of eternity.

What are some ways you need to humble yourself to bring peace instead of division?



HEAD

What are some ways we can increase our exposure to godly wisdom?



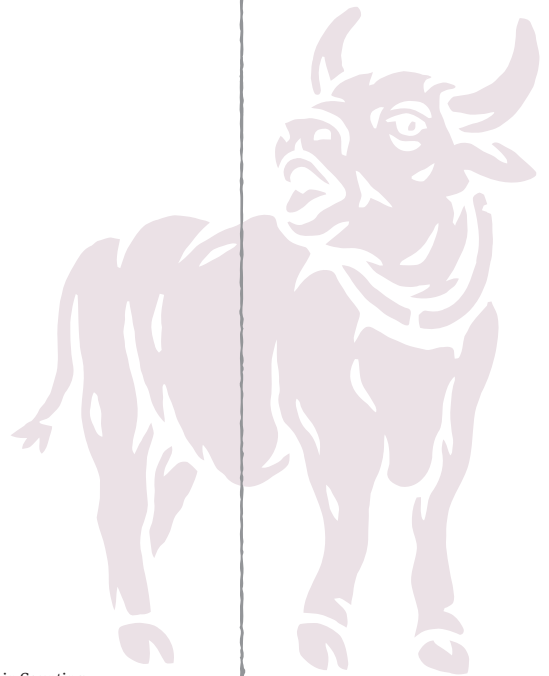
HEART

How can you develop compassion for others to serve them like Jesus would?



HANDS

How will you seek and follow wise counsel for a difficult decision in your life?



References

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DIVIDED KINGS

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 12:25-32; 14:21-26

Context: After King Rehoboam's disastrous start, the northern tribes united under Jeroboam and made him their king. Rehoboam mustered 180,000 troops from his tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight against the rebel Israelite tribes. The prophet Shemaiah brought Rehoboam a message from the Lord: "You are not to march up and fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Each of you return home, for this situation is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). Judah listened to the Lord and went home, but both kingdoms were at odds with each other for several decades.

Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 12:25–14:20
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 14:21–15:24
- ☐ **Day 3:** 1 Kings 15:25–16:34
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 11:5–14:1
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 135

Self-interest skews our worship and leads to idolatry (1 Kings 12:25-32).

²⁵ Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built Penuel. ²⁶ Jeroboam said to himself, “The kingdom might now return to the house of David. ²⁷ If these people regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will return to their lord, King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill me and go back to the king of Judah.” ²⁸ So the king sought advice. Then he made two golden calves, and he said to the people, “Going to Jerusalem is too difficult for you. Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” ²⁹ He set up one in Bethel, and put the other in Dan. ³⁰ This led to sin; the people walked in procession before one of the calves all the way to Dan. ³¹ Jeroboam also made shrines on the high places and made priests from the ranks of the people who were not Levites. ³² Jeroboam made a festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the festival in Judah. He offered sacrifices on the altar; he made this offering in Bethel to sacrifice to the calves he had made. He also stationed the priests in Bethel for the high places he had made.

Jeroboam Builds His Kingdom

Jeroboam had already proven himself a capable leader. Solomon had placed him over thousands in the workforce from the Joseph’s tribes (1 Kings 11:28). Further, when the northern tribes met with King Rehoboam to discuss their grievances, it was Jeroboam, whose name may mean “he pleads the people’s cause,” representing their concerns.¹ After Rehoboam showed he would



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

not make any concessions to the northern tribes, the tribes made Jeroboam king over all Israel (12:20).

Jeroboam not only was a capable leader, he was smart politically. We are told the first step Jeroboam took was to build Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and live there. In other words, Jeroboam made the place that was well-associated with the patriarchs his capital city and the place of his royal residence. Fortifying Shechem was a wise move as it guarded four main roads, with each road connected to a different region.² By fortifying Shechem, Jeroboam protected himself from Egyptian incursions into Israel.

After that, Jeroboam fortified Penuel. Penuel (“the face of God”) was on the eastern side of the Jordan River north of the river Jabbok (Gen. 32:31; Judg. 8:8,9,17). This was the place where Jacob wrestled with God and received the new name “Israel” (Gen. 32:22-32). This city also was on a caravan route that ran from Gilead to Damascus. Thus, Jeroboam protected himself from attacks from the east and northeast—the Amorites and Arameans.

A third city Jeroboam fortified was Tirzah in the highlands of Samaria about seven miles northeast of Shechem. The king eventually would move his capital there, and Jeroboam’s young son would die there as a judgment against Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:17). Tirzah would serve as the capital of the Northern Kingdom for 45 years until the kingship of Omri, who moved the capital to Samaria (15:33; 16:8,15,17,23-24). Tirzah means “delightful” or “pleasing” and is mentioned in the Song of Songs when the man says, “You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling, lovely as Jerusalem, awe-inspiring as an army with banners” (Song of Sg. 6:4).

Jeroboam Builds His Religion

Even though the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had split with Jeroboam getting the larger share, Jeroboam realized there was a unifying factor among all the tribes—their religion—that could result in him losing the loyalty of his subjects and possibly his kingdom. According to Mosaic Law, all Israelites were to make three offerings a year before the altar at the temple, which was located in Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom. Realizing this, Jeroboam said to himself, “If these people regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will return to their lord, King Rehoboam of Judah” (1 Kings 12:27). And if they returned to Judah, he thought: “They will kill me.”

After seeking advice on this matter, Jeroboam made a shrewd decision. Similar to Rehoboam, Jeroboam acted on bad advice. He decided to create a rival religion with just enough similarities to the religion of Judah that his people would adopt it and not be tempted to turn toward the south. Jeroboam thus created a whole rival, syncretistic religion to that which God revealed to Moses.

What are some ways we might skew our worship of God for convenience or self-interest?

The first thing Jeroboam did was establish royal shrines at each end of his kingdom: one in Dan near the source of the Jordan River in the northernmost part of the country and one in Bethel in the southernmost part of the country, only twelve miles north of Jerusalem. Jeroboam told his people, “Going to Jerusalem is too difficult for you” (v. 28), but going to Dan or Bethel

Voices from THE CHURCH

“All that God required Jeroboam to do was obey His Word and follow His commands, and He would assure the new king of blessing and success. But Jeroboam refused to believe this was the truth. Instead, he convinced himself the people of Israel would turn against him once they got a chance.”³
—John MacArthur

THEOLOGY Connection

SIN AS IDOLATRY:

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc., where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-3).

was more convenient. These places not only made the Israelites' pilgrimages more convenient, but both places previously had religious significance for Israel (Gen. 28:11-19; 31:13; Judg. 17-18; 21:2-4). These two places also became shrines connected with royalty (Amos 7:10-17; Hos. 8:4-6).

Second, Jeroboam made two golden calves, one to be housed in Bethel and the other in Dan. Some Bible students believe Jeroboam's golden calves were copied from Baal worship and represented fertility gods. But two statements seem to tell a different story. First, they are called "golden calves," echoing the account in Exodus 32 when Aaron made a god—a golden calf—for Israel while Moses was on Mount Sinai. Indeed, Jeroboam's proclamation, "Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28) is a word-for-word quote of Aaron's statement in Exodus 32:4. Claiming historical precedent for his new state religion was a very shrewd move. These calves would be worshiped until the time of the last king of Israel, King Hoshea (2 Kings 17:16). The prophet Hosea, who ministered in the Northern Kingdom, was shocked that the worshipers were kissing the calves (Hos. 13:2). He rebuked them for not turning to the Lord, telling the people of Israel that they would not find any protection in "the calf of Beth-aven" (i.e., Bethel; Hos. 10:5-6).

One cannot read the words about the people walking in procession before one calf all the way to Dan without thinking of David's leading the procession of the ark into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12-19). That was the third decision Jeroboam made, walking the people of God away from the worship of the Lord that David had walked in, not only figuratively but literally, as Dan

was northward of Jerusalem. Now the Northern Kingdom had established two of its own sacred objects, the one in Bethel and the one they escorted to its shrine in Dan, the one farthest from Judah.

Fourth, Jeroboam also made shrines on the high places. Many high places in Israel originally had been Canaanite places of worship for their idols; the law strictly forbids Israelites from using these pagan places in their worship (Deut. 7:5; 12:3). As for the local shrines, 1 Kings 13:32 testifies that the Israelites built “all the shrines of the high places in the cities of Samaria.” These shrines were used primarily in local celebrations and festivals as most of the people lived in small villages.

In Judah, the priests came from the tribe of Levi, with the high priest coming through Aaron’s line (see Ex. 28; Num. 17–18). To distinguish his religion from that of Judah’s, anyone *but* a Levite could serve as a priest, as long as he brought the right bribe (2 Chron. 13:9). This led to an exodus of Levitical priests from the north (11:13-15).

As a final element in his rival religion, Jeroboam revised the religious calendar so it would be different from Judah’s, while at the same time preserving a similar festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month.⁴ The prescribed festival in Judah that occurred on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) was the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-44), one of the festivals that Israelite males were to go to Jerusalem to celebrate (Deut. 16:13-17). So Jeroboam set up a rival festival one month later to the exact day: “He offered sacrifices on the altar he had set up in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. He chose this month on his own. He made a festival

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“King Jeroboam of Israel, who had proof that God was true, . . . was so warped in mind as not to believe in him. . . . [He] established idolatry in his own kingdom and, with shocking impiety, tricked God’s people into joining him in the worship of idols. Even so, God did not entirely give up sending prophets to reprimand the king, and his successors who continued his idolatry and the people themselves.”⁵

–Augustine
of Hippo
(c. 354–430)

for the Israelites, offered sacrifices on the altar, and burned incense” (1 Kings 12:33). The repeated statement of Jeroboam’s offering sacrifices may indicate that Jeroboam himself took on the role of high priest (see also 13:1,4-5).

The biblical evaluation and condemnation of Jeroboam is stated in 1 Kings 13:33-34: “Jeroboam did not repent of his evil way but again made priests for the high places from the ranks of the people. He ordained whoever so desired it, and they became priests of the high places. This was the sin that caused the house of Jeroboam to be cut off and obliterated from the face of the earth.” Further, in the books of First and Second Kings, every king of Israel is condemned for following in the evil ways of King Jeroboam. Jeroboam set the Northern Kingdom on the wrong course from the start, and its kings and people followed that fateful course until its annihilation (2 Kings 17:21-23).

How can we be on guard against imitations of the true worship of God to which we are called?

God will punish all who follow the detestable ways of the world (1 Kings 14:21-26).

²¹ Now Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king; he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city where the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put his name. Rehoboam’s mother’s name was Naamah the Ammonite. ²² Judah did what was evil in the LORD’s sight. They provoked him to jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had done with the sins they committed. ²³ They also built for themselves high places, sacred

pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree;²⁴ there were even male cult prostitutes in the land. They imitated all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.²⁵ In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt went to war against Jerusalem.²⁶ He seized the treasuries of the LORD's temple and the treasuries of the royal palace. He took everything. He took all the gold shields that Solomon had made.

Rehoboam Built an Army

After the northern tribes revolted, Rehoboam went back to Jerusalem and mobilized 180,000 soldiers from the entire house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin “to fight against the house of Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam” (1 Kings 12:21). However, the Lord sent the prophet Shemaiah to tell Rehoboam not to fight against Israel and that the situation was from the Lord. This time Rehoboam listened to the wise counsel he was given and did not attack the north (1 Kings 12:22-24; 2 Chron. 11:2-4).

While Jeroboam fortified his cities, Rehoboam spent three years building, fortifying, and garrisoning fifteen cities in Judah and Benjamin, among which were Bethlehem, Gath, Lachish, and Hebron (vv. 5-10). Further, he “put leaders in them with supplies of food, oil, and wine. He also put large shields and spears in each and every city to make them very strong” (vv. 11-12). Among the leaders Rehoboam placed over the newly fortified cities in Judah and Benjamin were his own sons, whom he could trust: “Rehoboam also showed discernment by dispersing some of his sons to all the regions of Judah and Benjamin and to all the fortified cities” (v. 23).

Fortifying his kingdom was a wise move because “there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout their reigns” (1 Kings 14:30). This statement probably refers mostly to border incidents. Also, while Rehoboam was solidifying his position, “the priests and Levites from all their regions throughout Israel took their stand with Rehoboam, for the Levites left their pasturelands and their possessions and went to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons refused to let them serve as priests of the LORD” (2 Chron. 11:13-14). Additionally, faithful worshippers of the Lord from all the tribes in the north also fled south into Rehoboam’s dominion. This influx of people strengthened Rehoboam’s kingdom of Judah (vv. 16-17) and fed Jeroboam’s fears (1 Kings 12:26-27). Thus, Rehoboam, as did Jeroboam, strengthened his kingdom politically and economically during the first three years of his seventeen-year reign (2 Chron. 11:17).

Rehoboam Permits Idols

On the religious front, aside from Rehoboam’s initial pride, he seemed to do right, walking “in the ways of David and Solomon” (v. 17). But after the first three years of his reign, “Judah did what was evil in the LORD’s sight” (1 Kings 14:22). In fact, things became so bad that the biblical writer stated, “They provoked him to jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had done with the sins they committed.”

The biblical narrative is specific: “They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree” (v. 23). In other words, Judah accepted and practiced all the evils of Baalism. The “sacred pillars,” or sacred stones, were standing stones that

represented a god and had divine symbols carved into them (2 Kings 3:2). The wooden Asherah poles represented the female goddess consort of Baal in the pagan Canaanite religion. Together, these objects represented both the male and female deities necessary in a primitive fertility religion. All of this God had forbidden among His people (Ex. 23:24; Deut. 16:21-22). That such were found on every high hill and under every green tree shows just how widespread paganism had become even in Judah.

Worse still, there were even male cult prostitutes in the land (see also Hos. 4:14). Oddly enough, the Hebrew term rendered “male cult prostitutes” literally is “those set apart as holy” or “holy men” (*qedesim*).⁶ Further, this term was used collectively to include both sexes, hence it involved both male and female cult prostitutes who enacted with worshipers the fertility rites and rituals associated with Baalism. All of this the Bible calls detestable practices or “abominations” and identifies them with the nations the Lord dispossessed before the Israelites. The Lord clearly had forbidden such practices even before Israel entered the land (Deut. 23:17-18). It is no wonder, then, that the text says they provoked the Lord to jealous anger.

What do you do when you know you need to root out sin?

As a direct punishment for allowing these sins to flourish in his kingdom, the Lord allowed King Shishak of Egypt to go to war against Jeroboam and Jerusalem. Shishak invaded with a force of 1,200 chariots and 60 divisions of cavalry, comprising 60,000 troops (2 Chron. 12:1-3).

GOSPEL Connection

So often the kings of Israel and Judah led their people astray into idolatry that imitated the world, but a true king leads his people to worship faithfully the one true God. Jesus came as this King, for He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

First Kings only mentions Shishak's attack on Jerusalem. His campaign, however, included attacking Israel as well as Judah and Jerusalem. This invasion can be verified by an extrabiblical source. An inscription of Shishak's found on the Amon temple reliefs at Karnak (Thebes) in Egypt claims he fought in about 150 places in Judah and Israel all the way up to the Plain of Esdraelon and captured a number of northern cities.⁷ Possibly this was the reason Jeroboam moved his capital from Shechem to Penuel (1 Kings 12:25).

A careful reading of the text may suggest Shishak did not conquer Jerusalem but enacted a heavy tribute, especially from the temple and royal palace treasuries: "He seized the treasuries of the LORD's temple and the treasuries of the royal palace. He took everything. He took all the gold shields that Solomon had made" (14:26). This was not a small loss.

King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; fifteen pounds of gold went into each shield. He made three hundred small shields of hammered gold; nearly four pounds of gold went into each shield. (1 Kings 10:16-17)

As a face-saving measure, Rehoboam replaced these gold shields with cheaper ones made of bronze, an indication of the lowered economic conditions in Judah (14:27-28). Thus, Solomon's great kingdom suffered three devastating blows under his son, Rehoboam: the loss of the ten northern tribes, the wholesale abandonment of the worship of the Lord, and the loss of Jerusalem's pride and glory to Egypt. Not a good record for the man whose name means "Enlarger of the Nation"!

The Bible's final verdict on Rehoboam is tragic and reveals the whole secret of his failure as king

and leader of his people and nation, yet it points to an important lesson for everyone today: “Rehoboam did what was evil, because he did not determine in his heart to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 12:14).

What role should our holiness as believers play in sharing the gospel with the world around us?



HEAD

Why does God deserve our sole devotion and worship?



HEART

How do you guard your heart to protect it from temptation taking root?

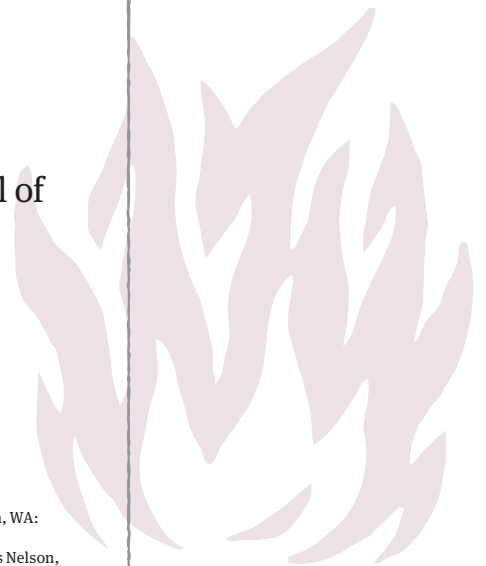


HANDS

With whom will you share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ this week?

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A DIVIDED PEOPLE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 18:20-26,30-39

Context: Following the pattern of Jeroboam, virtually every king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel did what was evil in the Lord's eyes. The worst was Ahab, who set up a temple for the false god Baal in the capital city of Samaria and made an Asherah pole, leading Israel further into idolatry. The Lord sent Elijah to Ahab to prophesy about a three-year drought throughout Israel as a punishment against the wicked rule of Ahab and his father, Omri (1 Kings 17:1; 18:18). With no rain in the land and the famine affecting their food, the time had come for Elijah to present the question to the people of Israel: Who is the true God, Baal or the Lord?

Key Concept: The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.

DAILY READINGS

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 1 Kings 17:1-18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 1 Kings 19:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 1 Kings 18:1-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 1 Kings 20:1-43 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 1 Kings 18:20-46 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 97 |

People will follow the Lord or they will follow counterfeit gods (1 Kings 18:20-26).

²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.” But the people didn’t answer him a word. ²² Then Elijah said to the people, “I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. ²³ Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The God who answers with fire, he is God.” All the people answered, “That’s fine.” ²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don’t light the fire.” ²⁶ So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

Wicked Ahab Came to Power

King Jeroboam ruled over the Northern Kingdom of Israel for twenty-two years, setting the stage for Israel’s pattern of idolatry. He was followed by his son Nadab, who ruled for two years before he was assassinated by Baasha, a commoner from the tribe of Issachar (1 Kings 15:25-31; 16:2). This ended the dynasty of Jeroboam as Ahijah the prophet predicted (14:7-11).



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Notes

THEOLOGY Connection

THE KINGDOM:

The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly, the kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ.

Baasha, whose name means “wicked,” reigned for twenty-four years, making his capital at the beautiful city of Tirzah, where he was buried. He constantly was at war with Asa, king of Judah (15:32–16:7). Baasha was succeeded by his son, Elah, who reigned only two years before he was assassinated while in a drunken stupor by Zimri, a commander of the royal chariots. Zimri then proceeded to kill all the family and friends of Baasha and Elah (16:8–14). Unfortunately for Zimri, his reign lasted only seven days before he perished in a fire at the royal palace that he himself set to avoid being captured by the next king of Israel (vv. 15–20).

This gave rise to the Omride dynasty. Omri was in charge of the Israelite troops and marched against Zimri in Tirzah, resulting in Zimri’s death. For a period the kingdom was torn between Tibni and Omri. Tibni died between four to six years later, and Omri became the sole ruler of Israel (vv. 21–22). Omri made Samaria his new capital and heavily fortified it more than any other city in Israel (vv. 23–24). Samaria would remain Israel’s capital for over a century and a half until they were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Omri established international prestige for Israel. In fact, Israel was referred to as “the house of Omri” and “the land of Omri” on Assyrian inscriptions more than one hundred and fifty years after his death.¹ Yet the Bible only devotes ten verses to his twelve-year reign (vv. 16–17, 21–28). The biblical account focuses on his spiritual record, stating, “Omri did what was evil in the LORD’s sight; he did more evil than all who were before him” (v. 25). What form that evil took we don’t know. Perhaps it was that Omri knew of God’s judgment against the dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha for their idolatry and still he followed in their path.

When Omri died, he was succeeded by his son, Ahab, who ruled Israel for twenty-two years, having about six chapters of the Bible devoted to his story (16:29–22:40). King Ahab fostered the commercial and political interests of Israel through strategic marriages: his own to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of the neighboring Sidonians, and the marriage of his daughter, Athaliah, to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Ahab also enacted a heavy tribute of livestock from the Moabites (2 Kings 3:4-5), and he built and fortified many cities in Israel, including ill-fated Jericho (1 Kings 16:34; 22:39).

But for all his accomplishments and plans, the Bible’s spiritual judgment of Ahab was even worse than his father’s, for twice it is stated, “Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD’s sight more than all who were before him” (16:30,33). This negative evaluation largely was attributed to the fact that Ahab married Jezebel, which introduced Baalism as a state religion. Ahab worshiped the calves King Jeroboam had erected, but he also “proceeded to serve Baal and bow in worship to him” (v. 31). Under the influence of his wife, Ahab built a temple to Baal, a central god of the Sidonians, in the capital city of Samaria, he set up an Asherah pole, and he supported hundreds of pagan prophets with state funds (16:30-33; 18:19). He even condoned human child sacrifice (16:34). It was under the rule of King Ahab that the prophet Elijah ministered in the Northern Kingdom, often confronting the king for his wickedness.

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah appeared out of nowhere and announced to King Ahab that there would be a drought in Israel until Elijah said differently.² Leaving Ahab stunned, Elijah then disappeared for the duration of

Notes



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to discover more about Ahab, Jezebel, and the idolatry of their reign.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“In the example of Elijah we see obedience to God inasmuch as God imposed peril on him. For it was dangerous for Elijah to show himself to Ahab, because Ahab was offended at the drought imposed on the land. Nevertheless Elijah went in obedience to the command of God and showed himself to Ahab.”⁵

–Johannes Piscator
(1546–1625)

the famine, first to hide at the Wadi Cherith, where he was fed by ravens until the water ran out (vv. 2-7), and then at the home of a widow in Zarephath, where her flour and oil were miraculously replenished and where Elijah raised the widow’s son from the dead (vv. 8-24).

The king’s henchmen could not locate Elijah during the three-year drought and famine, and in the meantime, Jezebel had many of the Lord’s prophets slaughtered. Fortunately, a court official named Obadiah hid one hundred of the Lord’s prophets in caves and supplied them with food and water (18:3-4,13). Three-and-a-half-years into the famine, Elijah appeared to Obadiah and told him to tell King Ahab he would meet with him (vv. 1-15). When Ahab encountered Elijah, Ahab accused the prophet of being a troublemaker. But Elijah turned this back on the king, saying, “I have not ruined Israel, but you and your father’s family have, because you have abandoned the LORD’s commands and followed the Baals” (vv. 16-18). At this point, Elijah told Ahab to meet him at Mount Carmel for a contest between “450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah” and himself (v. 19).

The Prophets Came to the Showdown

When the text states that King Ahab summoned all the Israelites to Mount Carmel, it means he called for an official assembly with representatives from all ten tribes, not necessarily all the individuals in the whole nation, to gather together on the mountain.³

Mount Carmel was on the border of Israel and Phoenicia, which included the cities of Tyre and Sidon, making it an appropriate location for the contest since Jezebel and her false gods hailed from Sidon. Mount Carmel, south of modern Haifa, stands just under

2,000 feet high. It is a high point on a mountain range that runs almost twelve-and-a-half-miles between the plain of Jezreel and the coastal plain. Possibly it had been a high place for both the worship of the Lord and of Baal (see v. 30). The valley around Mount Carmel is well-suited for agriculture as two rivers supply it with the rich topsoil that erodes from the Galilean highlands. Thus, it was a natural location for the worship of a fertility god and goddess. Mount Carmel also was an ideal location for the worship of the storm god, which Baal was, as he was believed to calm the winter winds and bring rain from the storms.

After the official representatives and prophets of Baal had gathered on the mountain, Elijah asked them, “How long will you waver between two opinions?” (v. 21). The Hebrew word rendered “opinions” literally is “boughs,” as in branches of a tree. Like branches, human thoughts can shoot off in more than one direction. The word “waver” refers to “limping along” or “moving haltingly.”⁴ The word was used elsewhere for lameness, a physical handicap that excluded a male from holding the office of priest in Israel (Lev. 21:18). Until now, the people had been limping along with one leg for Baal and the other leg for the Lord. In today’s idiom, we might say they were “straddling the fence.” But now they needed to make a choice: Baal or the Lord—there was no middle ground; a syncretistic faith was not possible. So Elijah challenged the Israelites: “If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). But to this challenge, the people remained silent.

How might you challenge the false gods of your culture in a way that people will listen?



On Mount Carmel that day, Elijah stood alone against 450 men. Elijah called for two bulls for two sacrifices. He then gave the prophets of Baal their choice of which bull they wanted—this was to make it clear that Elijah was not using any tricks and thus could not be accused of fraud.

Concerning their chosen bull, the prophets of Baal were instructed to “cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire” (v. 23), and later Elijah would do the same with his bull. After the sacrifice was prepared, the pagan prophets were to call on the name of their god. For the terms of the contest, Elijah had declared, “The God who answers with fire, he is God” (v. 24). The people readily agreed to the terms because they believed Baal, in addition to being the sun god, also was the god of lightning; it should have been no problem for Baal to send down fire.

It probably came as a surprise to the prophets of Baal that their god didn’t answer them immediately. But they kept at it from morning until noon. They begged, “‘Baal, answer us!’ But there was no sound; no one answered” (v. 26). To draw Baal’s attention, they then danced around the altar. Dancing also accompanied Israel’s festivals (2 Sam. 6:14; Pss. 149:3; 150:4; Jer. 31:13), but in this pagan context, what may have begun as a ritual dance seems to have been a means to reach an ecstatic state as the day wore, for they danced wildly and violently, as 1 Kings 18:28-29 indicates. The description of their pagan dancing in verse 26 uses the same word from verse 21 for their mental wobbling. Thus, the false prophets’ wild and frenzied movements were as useless as the people’s divided worship.

What are some modern-day idols that draw people away from the Lord?

Notes

The true God will answer, act, and reveal Himself as Lord (1 Kings 18:30-39).

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near me.” So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the LORD’s altar that had been torn down: ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Israel will be your name”—³² and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. ³³ Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, “Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood.” ³⁴ Then he said, “A second time!” and they did it a second time. And then he said, “A third time!” and they did it a third time. ³⁵ So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water. ³⁶ At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back.” ³⁸ Then the LORD’s fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, “The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!”

The False God Cannot Answer

By noon, Baal had not answered, nor could he. So Elijah began to mock the 450 prophets (v. 27). He told them to shout louder. He suggested Baal may be in deep thought, implying he could not do more than one thing at a time; or maybe Baal had gone on a journey, perhaps suggesting he had gone off to relieve himself; or maybe he was asleep, perhaps echoing the call to awaken the god for the sowing of the crops after his long sleep throughout the summer, or perhaps he had died and needed to be resurrected. In response, the prophets shouted louder and inflicted wounds upon themselves with knives and spears (something forbidden to Israelites, Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1) “until blood gushed over them” (1 Kings 18:28). This may have imitated their annual rite to prompt Baal to release rain.⁶ It must have been quite a sight. All afternoon they kept “raving,” but “there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention” (v. 29)—for Baal was not a real god.

The True God Showed His Power

Now the focus shifts to Elijah as told the people to come closer to him. Apparently there had been an altar to the Lord on Mount Carmel, for Elijah “repaired the LORD’s altar that had been torn down” (v. 30). Not only did he repair this altar in the name of the Lord, but he did so with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 31-32). Elijah’s action was significant because the Northern Kingdom of Israel was composed of only ten of the twelve tribes. Yet Elijah’s construction pictured all twelve tribes united in worship of the Lord, reminding the people of the scene at

Gilgal where the twelve tribes entered the land and set up a twelve-stone memorial (Josh. 4). This was a reminder of God's covenant faithfulness to Israel.

After building the stone altar, Elijah made a trench around it. He then arranged the wood on the altar for the sacrifice, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. Finally, Elijah had four water pots poured three times on the offering and on the wood, which filled the trench that held about four gallons of water. Drenching the altar would ensure that Elijah did not use trickery or flammable materials to light the fire. The four water pots poured out three times also resulted in the number twelve, further stressing the united worship of all twelve tribes of Israel.

Should we try to make our circumstances more difficult to help point people's attention to the Lord? Why or why not?

From morning to evening, the prophets of Baal had called on their god to no avail. Now at the time for offering the evening sacrifice, it was Elijah's turn. God's prophet called on the Lord, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (1 Kings 18:36), using the name for Jacob that the Northern Kingdom called itself. This emphasized the continuity of the Lord's worship in Israel since patriarchal times (Gen. 12–50).

Elijah prayed for three things: First, that the Lord would show He is "God in Israel." Second, that God would validate Elijah as His servant who acted at God's word. Third, Elijah further requested: "Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back" (1 Kings 18:36-37). This brief prayer for God's glory, for His servant's vindication, and for

Voices from THE CHURCH

"You cannot manipulate God with gimmicks. He was drawn instead to the humble, heartfelt prayer of Elijah. Don't buy into the practices of Baal's boys. Believe that God really does hear the prayers of His children when they pray in sincere faith."⁷

—Tony Merida

the people's conversion contrasted with the all-day and fruitless crying out to Baal by his prophets.

Immediately the Lord's fire fell and "consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench" (v. 38). Fire in Scripture often represented God's presence (Ex. 3:2; 19:18; 24:17), God's approval of a sacrifice (Lev. 9:22-24; Judg. 6:20-22; 1 Chron. 21:26), and God's power and judgment (Lev. 10:1-2; 2 Kings 1:10,12). The people's response also was immediate: "When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, 'The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!'" (1 Kings 18:39). This was an answer to Elijah's prayer in verse 37 and a rejection of Baal. Finally, at Elijah's command, the Israelites seized the false prophets of Baal, who were then slaughtered in the valley in accordance with God's law in Deuteronomy 13:1-18; 17:2-5.

How has God answered your prayers, and how did you show your gratitude?

Elijah, along with Moses, is recognized as one of the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament, and he is mentioned by name twenty-nine times in the New Testament. The prophet Malachi, writing at the close of the Old Testament, predicted that "the prophet Elijah" would come as the messenger before the Messiah appeared (Mal. 4:5-6). Jesus connected the fulfillment of Elijah's reappearance with John the Baptist, a prophet with a similar ministry (Matt. 11:11-14). When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, both Moses and Elijah appeared with Him (17:3-4). When Jesus taught in the synagogue at Nazareth, He compared His hearers to the apostates in the time of Elijah, and His hometown audience tried to kill Him (Luke 4:24-30).

CHRIST Connection

The Lord is the one true God, and "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11).

At times Jesus's ministry was reminiscent of Elijah's, caring for a Gentile mother (Matt. 15:21-28; cf. 1 Kings 17:8-16) and raising a child from the dead (Luke 8:49-56; cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24). But more importantly, Elijah's ministry foreshadowed and pointed to the coming Messiah, who is the true God in the flesh, and He is worthy of our worship.



HEAD

How are you forming your understanding of who God is and who is God?



HEART

How are you wavering in your opinions regarding the Lord and potential idols?

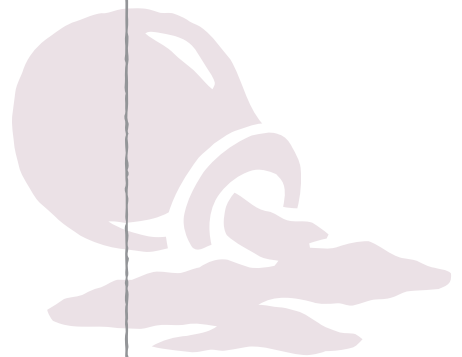


HANDS

What opportunities might you have this week to obey the Lord, whether alone or with fellow believers?

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A DIVIDED RESPONSE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 21:17-29

Context: After Elijah's victorious showdown on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal, whom Elijah executed, the Lord sent torrential rain on Israel for the first time in three years. The drought was over. Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done, and she swore an oath that she would kill Elijah. Some time later, Jezebel found Ahab pouting because his neighbor Naboth would not let Ahab buy his family's vineyard. So she hatched a plot to bring false accusations against Naboth that led to his execution. Then she told Ahab to take what he had wanted. All this incurred the wrath of the Lord against Ahab and Jezebel.

Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

DAILY READINGS

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 1 Kings 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 2 Chronicles 19–20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 1 Kings 22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 2 Kings 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 2 Chronicles 17–18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 58 |

Those who participate in injustice will be judged (1 Kings 21:17-26).

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ “Get up and go to meet King Ahab of Israel, who is in Samaria. He’s in Naboth’s vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. ¹⁹ Tell him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Have you murdered and also taken possession?’ Then tell him, ‘This is what the LORD says: In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, the dogs will also lick up your blood!’” ²⁰ Ahab said to Elijah, “So, my enemy, you’ve found me, have you?” He replied, “I have found you because you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD’s sight. ²¹ This is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your descendants: I will wipe out all of Ahab’s males, both slave and free, in Israel; ²² I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and caused Israel to sin.’ ²³ The LORD also speaks of Jezebel: ‘The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel: ²⁴ Anyone who belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds will eat.’” ²⁵ Still, there was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD’s sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. ²⁶ He committed the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had, whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

Ahab Stole Through Deceit and Murder

We do not know exactly when the conflict between Naboth the Jezreelite and Ahab occurred during Ahab’s 22-year-rule, but it probably occurred late



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

in his reign. The encounter when Elijah confronted Ahab concerning Naboth was also the last interaction between the prophet and the king.

The episode concerns a man named Naboth, who had a vineyard next door to a royal residence Ahab had built in Jezreel, 20 miles north of his capital city of Samaria. Ahab coveted this piece of property. Possibly he wanted it because of its agricultural productivity—“so I can have it for a vegetable garden” (v. 2). However, the Hebrew word *yaraq* can be used to indicate green growth trees and shrubs planted close to a royal palace rather than a vegetable or herb garden. Thus, Ahab may have coveted the land to extend the boundaries of his royal property.¹

Ahab made Naboth an offer: “I will give you a better vineyard in its place, or if you prefer, I will give you its value in silver” (vv. 2,6). When Ahab said, “Give me your vineyard” (v. 2), he was not demanding it or attempting to confiscate it; he was making a legitimate offer to buy it. Naboth, however, refused to sell his land to the king because it was “[his] ancestors’ inheritance” (v. 3). The apostrophe after the plural shows Naboth meant it was his ancestral land. This statement indicates Naboth believed he was following the legal provisions of Israelite families concerning their tribal allotments (Lev. 25:23).

Ahab then went back to his palace in a temper, and when he got there, Ahab acted like a spoiled child: “He lay down on his bed, turned his face away, and didn’t eat any food” (1 Kings 21:4). When Jezebel found her husband so upset, he told her he had offered to purchase Naboth’s vineyard and that Naboth refused his offer. But rather than abide by Israel’s inheritance laws, Jezebel urged her husband to subvert the law

and “exercise your royal power over Israel” (v. 7). In her mind, royal authority trumped God’s law and traditional Israelite values. The king, she argued, was above the law by divine right. In her mind, a free citizen’s legal rights should be no impediment to royal despotism.² So she conspired to get Naboth out of the way so her distraught royal husband could get what he wanted.

To accomplish her plan, Jezebel “wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal” and then “sent the letters to the elders and nobles who lived with Naboth in his city” (v. 8). She instructed them to hold a fast, seat Naboth in the place of honor, and then have two scoundrels accuse him of having “cursed God and the king” (vv. 9-10), a crime punishable by death according to God’s law that she did not even follow until she could use it for her own sinister ends. Obeying the wicked command of their queen, the elders and nobles of Jezreel carried out this diabolical plan and informed Jezebel when the deed was done (vv. 11-14). Not only was Naboth stoned to death, but Naboth’s heirs also were slaughtered so they could not lay claim to the land (see 2 Kings 9:25-26). After Jezebel received word that her instructions had been carried out, she informed her husband and told him to go and “take possession of the vineyard” that she had stolen and murdered to acquire for him (1 Kings 21:15). Ahab then did what his wife told him.

Jezebel had accomplished her evil plan, and no one was the wiser. Except God knew what they had done, and He considered it evil.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Do not be an Ahab and covet a neighbor’s possession. Let not Jezebel dwell with you, that deadly avarice that persuades you to bloody deeds; that restrains not your desires but urges you on; that makes you sadder even when you gain possession of what you desire and that makes you destitute when you are rich.”³

—Ambrose of Milan
(c. 339–397)

Elijah Confronted Injustice

Elijah reemerged for a final encounter with King Ahab at the word of the Lord. The Lord's command to the prophet to "get up and go" (v. 18) literally meant "arise, go down." The Hebrew word *yarad* ("go down") is exact since Jezreel is 975 feet below Samaria's elevation.⁴ Elijah was instructed to meet up with King Ahab in the very place over which Naboth had been killed—his vineyard. There, Elijah was told to announce the Lord's judgment upon Ahab.

How are you challenged and comforted by the truth that God sees and will judge all injustice?

Elijah was given some talking points to say. First, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" (v. 19). Ahab indeed had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard (vv. 16,18), though technically it was Jezebel who had ordered Naboth's murder. She was the one who wrote the letters, signed and sealed them in the king's name, and sent them to the elders and nobles of Jezreel ordering Naboth's murder (vv. 8-11). But the Lord justly held Ahab responsible for Naboth's murder. The king was complicit in the wicked deeds perpetrated, even though he didn't order them himself. He was culpable before the Lord as the king over Israel, the husband of Jezebel, the ruler and judge over his unjustly executed citizen, Naboth, and he clearly had no scruples about profiting off of Naboth's murder.

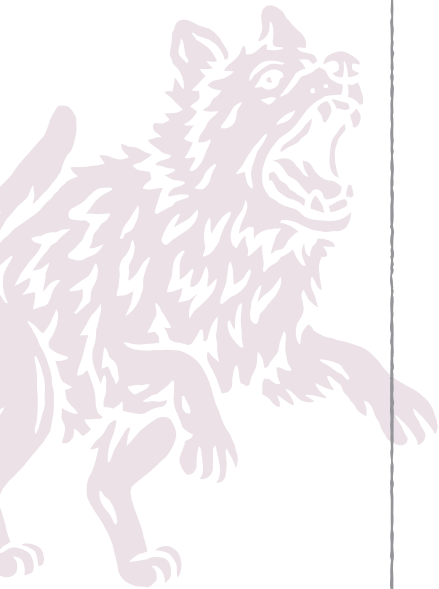
Through the actions of Jezebel, Ahab caused innocent blood to be shed, thus his blood in turn would be shed. So Elijah was to announce his next talking point, the beginnings of the Lord's judgment on Ahab: "In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, the

dogs will also lick up your blood!” (v. 19). In the ancient Near East, dogs were not house pets but scavengers that lived on refuse. In fulfillment of this prophetic judgment, King Ahab, in spite of disguising himself as an ordinary soldier, would be killed in battle by a seemingly stray arrow (see 22:29-36). Ahab’s body would be taken back to Samaria and buried (v. 37), but when his bloody chariot was washed out, “the dogs licked up his blood” (v. 38).

When Ahab saw Elijah, he called him “my enemy” (21:20), recalling the curt way Ahab greeted the prophet in 18:17 before the face-off on Mount Carmel: “Is that you, the one ruining Israel?” Ahab added, “You’ve found me, have you?” Elijah replied, “I have found you because you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD’s sight” (21:20). Ahab, Elijah said, had “given himself over to” or “sold himself” to do evil, and because of this, the all-knowing God sent His prophet to the exact place Ahab would be in order to hear the Lord’s condemnation.

Announcing the second wave of God’s judgment in verses 21-24, Elijah said God would wipe out all of the house of Ahab, putting an end to his dynasty and making it end like the previous dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha. All this would come about because Ahab angered the Lord and led Israel to sin (v. 22).

When the Lord announced, “I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your descendants” (v. 21), the Hebrew uses a present participle. Even though the fulfillment of the prophecy would come in the future, it was so certain to happen that it could be spoken of in the present tense.



- Ahaziah, Ahab's firstborn son, succeeded him as king over Israel. He fell through a latticed window in Samaria and sought insight for his prognosis from the false god of Ekron instead of the Lord. Therefore, Elijah was sent to tell the king that he would not recover from his injuries, and the king died (2 Kings 1).
- Later, Israel's King Joram (also called Jehoram, though not to be confused with Jehoram/Joram, the contemporary king of Judah), a second son of Ahab and Jezebel's, was fatally wounded with an arrow through the heart by Jehu. Afterward, Joram's body was thrown onto the plot of ground that had belong to Naboth (2 Kings 9:24-26).
- Ahab also had seventy other sons who lived in Samaria (10:1), and by the command of the Lord, Jehu proceeded to move against them, calling for their heads, and he "killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel—all his great men, close friends, and priests—leaving him no survivors" (vv. 10-11).

With these actions, the Lord's words through Elijah were fulfilled and retribution for Ahab and Jezebel's murder of Naboth and his sons was carried out (1 Kings 21:21-22; 2 Kings 9:7-9,24-26).

Elijah also delivered the Lord's words concerning Jezebel in particular in 1 Kings 21:23: "The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel." Elijah further prophesied: "Anyone who belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds will eat" (v. 24). An exposed, unburied corpse was a shameful, horrifying, disgraceful punishment in Israelite culture, not only because it would

be eaten by dogs and scavenger birds but because it was a sign of God's punishment.

The Hebrew term here rendered “in the plot of land,” or “in the field,” reads differently in other Hebrew manuscripts, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), and in some modern translations to say “by the rampart” or “by the wall.” The difference depends on one Hebrew letter, whether *hl* (“wall” or “rampart”) or *hlq* (“plot of land,” “field”).⁵ The latter word is found in the fulfillment of the prophecy in 2 Kings 9:30-37 when Jehu ordered Jezebel thrown down from an upper window “and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and Jehu rode over her” (v. 33). After pausing for a meal, Jehu ordered that Jezebel's body be buried, but when they went to get it, “they did not find anything but the skull, the feet, and the hands,” fulfilling the Lord's words through Elijah (vv. 35-36). The dogs ate Jezebel's flesh and turned her corpse into “manure on the surface of the ground in the plot of land at Jezreel” (v. 37).

First Kings 21:25 reiterated that Ahab “devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD's sight” (see v. 20), specifically citing his wife Jezebel's inducement. Ahab allowed his pagan wife to influence him so that he could get what he wanted, and she incited him to commit “the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had” (v. 26).

What qualities should we look for when deciding who influences us?

CHARACTER **Study**

JEZEBEL: Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). A priest of Ashtoreth, Ethbaal came to power by murdering his predecessor.⁶ Jezebel, like her father, incorporated her worship of Baal and Ashtoreth in her political ambitions. She sought to kill the Lord's prophets (18:1-4), and Scripture attributes Ahab's many sins in Israel to her influence (21:25). Her reputation carries into the New Testament to describe one who deceives the church with idolatry and sexual immorality (Rev. 2:20-24).

GOSPEL Connection

Ahab, a thief, a murderer, and one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history, had earned God's judgment, yet he humbled himself before the Lord, and God mercifully delayed that judgment. Like Ahab, we all have earned death as the wages for our sin, but those who humble themselves before the Lord, who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, will never be condemned and will receive God's gift of eternal life with Him.

God shows mercy when sinners humble themselves (1 Kings 21:27-29).

²⁷ When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth over his body, and fasted. He lay down in sackcloth and walked around subdued. ²⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹ "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? I will not bring the disaster during his lifetime, because he has humbled himself before me. I will bring the disaster on his house during his son's lifetime."

Ahab Repented in Sackcloth

Upon hearing the Lord's words, Elijah's declaration of judgment, Ahab surprisingly had a change of heart. And he demonstrated his internal repentance in the traditional outward ways—he tore his clothes, put sackcloth on, and fasted (v. 27). Even Ahab's outward behavior changed: he walked around subdued, or dejected, showing his contrition. The words "walked around," or "went around," describe not merely his gait but his behavior.

Tearing clothes was an outward sign associated with grief, loss, and mourning. Clothing was a valuable commodity as everything was handmade and the garments one possessed were limited. Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, is the first person the Bible records tearing his clothes, which he did because he failed to rescue his brother Joseph (Gen. 37:29). His father, Jacob, was the second when he received the news of his son's supposed death (v. 34). Joshua and the elders (Josh. 7:6), the judge Jephthah (Judg. 11:35), David and his soldiers (2 Sam. 1:11-12), and Ezra the scribe (Ezra 9:3) all tore their clothes in grief.

“To fast” literally refers to “afflicting one’s soul.” It was an act of self-denial. Thus, it was an outward act intended to reflect an internal condition of grief. For the nation of Israel, the Day of Atonement was a national day of fasting over the nation’s sins (Lev. 16:29,31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7). Fasting was designed to express penitence. Individuals as well as groups practiced fasting at various times (2 Sam. 12:22). The prophets declared that fasting without the corresponding right conduct was in vain (Isa. 58:3-12; Jer. 14:11-12; Zech. 8:18-19), which is probably the reason 1 Kings 21:27 states that Ahab walked around subdued.

That Ahab put sackcloth over his body in place of his torn royal garments was further evidence of his genuine repentance. Sackcloth was a course, scratchy, uncomfortable material made from goat hair. Wearing sackcloth symbolized outwardly the pain and discomfort one was feeling inside. Sackcloth was worn as a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37:33-34; 2 Sam. 3:31; Joel 1:8), of mourning over national disaster (Esth. 4:1; Lam. 2:10), and of repentance over sins (1 Kings 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Jonah 3:5; Matt. 11:21). Sometimes only a sash or band of sackcloth was tied around the waist (1 Kings 20:31; Isa. 20:2), but normally it was worn against one’s skin (2 Kings 6:30; Job 16:15) and kept on even at night (1 Kings 21:27; Joel 1:13; see also Jonah 3:6).

What are some ways we might display repentance for our sin before God?

THEOLOGY Connection

GOD IS MERCIFUL:

Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God's withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

The Lord Delayed Judgment

The Lord observed Ahab's repentance and change of behavior. Then the Lord asked Elijah, "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me?" (1 Kings 21:29). To humble oneself involves putting aside ego and admitting one's own flaws and shortcomings. Such is what God calls on nations (2 Chron. 7:14) and individuals (Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6) to do. Humbling oneself outwardly before others is one thing, but Ahab humbled himself before the Lord, and that made all the difference.

Because of Ahab's actions in humility, the Lord postponed the decreed judgment coming on him. While the disaster would not occur during his lifetime, it would come on his dynasty after Ahab had died. And indeed, as 2 Kings 9–10 shows, judgment did fall some fourteen years after Ahab's death in 841 BC, when Ahab's son Joram reigned as king of Israel. As for Ahab himself, he died in battle and was buried in his royal sepulcher (1 Kings 22:34-40). While the Lord did not commission Elijah to deliver a follow-up message to Ahab, the Lord's declaration concerning the king of Israel who had the worst history on record showed His mercy and grace to a wicked sinner.⁷

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul claimed he was the worst of sinners but that he had received mercy (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Indeed, the apostle Peter reminded his past and present readers, "The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). And the apostle John proclaimed, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If the Lord could show mercy to Ahab upon his repentance, if He could forgive Paul, who had persecuted the church, if He could forgive a murdering thief dying on a cross, surely He can forgive you and me—for “now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor. 6:2).

How does God’s mercy extended to Ahab help you to grasp the gospel of Jesus?



HEAD

How do you reconcile God’s perfect justice and His perfect mercy?



HEART

How does it feel to know that mercy is found just by repenting and turning to the Lord?



HANDS

How will you reach out to unbelievers, knowing that the Lord delights in showing mercy to all who repent?

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THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 14 RENEWAL



2 KINGS; HOSEA; JONAH



MEMORY VERSE

“Take words of repentance with you and return
to the LORD. Say to him, ‘Forgive all our
iniquity and accept what is good, so that
we may repay you with praise from our lips.’”

—Hosea 14:2



RESURRECTION

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 4:18-22,24-25,28-37

Context: The prophet Elijah’s ministry ended when he was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha, his successor, went to Shunem, where he met “a prominent woman” who fed him and provided him a place to stay whenever he came that way. In response, Elisha desired to help her in some way. He learned she had no offspring and her husband was aging. Aside from the general desire to bear children, if she were to become a widow with no offspring, the Shunammite woman would be vulnerable and likely oppressed. Therefore, Elisha prophesied that in one year she would have a son, and it came to pass, just as Elisha had promised.

Key Concept: God has the power to overcome death.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 2 Chronicles 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 2 Chronicles 22–25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 2 Kings 2–8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 2 Kings 13–14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 2 Kings 9–12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 30 |

God's people put their hope in Him
(2 Kings 4:18-22,24-25).

¹⁸ The child grew and one day went out to his father and the harvesters. ¹⁹ Suddenly he complained to his father, “My head! My head!” His father told his servant, “Carry him to his mother.” ²⁰ So he picked him up and took him to his mother. The child sat on her lap until noon and then died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut him in, and left. ²² She summoned her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so I can hurry to the man of God and come back again.” . . . ²⁴ Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Go fast; don’t slow the pace for me unless I tell you.” ²⁵ So she came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to his attendant Gehazi, “Look, there’s the Shunammite woman.”

Elisha Prophesied in Israel

Our passage begins in the middle of the ministry of the prophet Elisha, the disciple of Elijah (1 Kings 19:19-21). Upon Elijah’s departure into heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha received what he had requested: a double portion of God’s Spirit (see 2 Kings 2:9-12). While Elijah’s ministry dealt predominantly with rulers, governments, and Israel on a national scale, much of Elisha’s ministry pertained to individuals.

Second Kings 4 contains four short narratives that can be grouped by the topic of life and death.

- First, a widow’s life and future were in danger because a creditor wanted to take her two sons into debt slavery (4:1-7). Elisha instructed her to



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to access this session's
Scripture passages.

Notes

CHARACTER Study

ELISHA: A prophet of Israel during the ninth century BC, Elisha's name means "My God is salvation." Elisha succeeded Elijah by taking up the mantle of his ministry and receiving his spirit (2 Kings 2:13-15). Elisha prophesied from the reign of King Ahab (approx. 850 BC) to King Joash (798 BC). His ministry of miracles included raising the dead (2 Kings 4), feeding multitudes (4:42-44), purifying and multiplying water (2:21; 3:17), causing entire armies to be blinded (6:18), and more.²

borrow jars to fill with the little olive oil she had. The olive oil miraculously filled every jar, and she paid off the debt and sold the rest.

- Second, a well-to-do lady of Shunem had blessed Elisha with hospitality, so God in His mercy miraculously resurrected her hopes of ever having a son because of her husband's old age. Within a year of Elisha's promise being made, the woman gave birth to her son (4:8-17).
- Third, the Shunammite woman's son suddenly died, which will be the subject of our study in this session (4:18-37).
- Finally, one of the "sons of the prophets" (prophets in training) put a wild gourd into the pot of stew that ended up being poisonous, and with a miracle, Elisha turned "death in the pot" into edible stew (4:38-41).

These stories reiterate that God is the author of life and death (Deut. 32:39); He alone can give life and preserve it.

The Lord Gave the Shunammite Woman a Son

Going deeper in the second narrative summarized above, Elisha's friendship with the Shunammite woman began when she showed hospitality to him while he was in Shunem, located at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel in the land of Israel. She was a prominent woman, and she asked permission of her husband to set up Elisha in a room in their house so he could rest securely while he was in the region (2 Kings 4:10).

The text states that she had no son (4:14). Her husband was old, and the prospects of him siring a son

were remote. Beyond that, despite her wealth and status in the community, barrenness was considered a judgment by God, and the stigma of being barren would have been something she had experienced firsthand.¹ Given that she did not ask Elisha to work a miracle and bless her with a son probably means she had given up hope of ever having one.

As a reward for the woman's hospitality, and after conferring with Gehazi, his attendant, on her behalf, Elisha told her that within the year she would hold her own son. Elisha used words amazingly similar to the promise the angel gave to Abraham and Sarah of having a son within the year. For Abraham and Sarah, the promise was accompanied by the query, "Is anything impossible for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). Of course not, and the Lord of life gave the Shunammite woman a son, just as she was promised (2 Kings 4:14-17).

Several years later, the child, now a young boy, was sent out into the fields with his father and the reapers. A deadly condition overcame the boy, and he complained, "My head! My head!" The father told his servant to carry the boy back to his mother at the house. The mother held her son on her lap, only for the boy to die shortly after. The gracious gift from God had been taken away.

How would you react if you lost what was most precious to you?

Believing that God could do the impossible, the woman immediately took the boy's body upstairs to Elisha's room and laid him on the bed of "the man of God" (v. 21). Having laid the boy on Elisha's bed and shut the door, she hurried to find Elisha. If anyone could help her, it would be Elisha. This "man of God,"

THEOLOGY Connection

RESURRECTION:

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. (cont.)

God's servant, had direct access to Almighty God, who has the power over life and death. The woman in her faith knew where to turn for help, believing that God could do the impossible and bring life back into her boy's body.

Nothing is said in the text about the woman informing anyone that the boy had died. She simply called to her husband to get one of the servants and a donkey so she could make a quick trip to see Elisha. When her husband asked why she needed to see him on a non-feast day, she replied, "It's all right" (v. 23). She may have wanted to prevent her husband from grieving prematurely because she believed that Elisha could do something to heal her son.³ The woman had the servant drive the donkey quickly without slowing down (v. 24) as they went to find Elisha on Mount Carmel, some twenty miles away. When her son died, the women reasoned that only the man of God could turn her tragedy around, and she was determined to reach him as quickly as she could. But ultimately her hope was in the One who had called and empowered Elisha to be His prophet—her hope was in the Lord.

What does it mean to put your hope in the Lord?

Elisha recognized the Shunammite woman from a distance and sent his servant, Gehazi, to greet the woman and find out the reason for her urgency (vv. 25-26). Once again, she simply stated that all was well. She sidestepped Gehazi and brought her petition to the man of God himself.⁴

God's servants must recognize the fact that even though people may not know it, when people come for help, they are actually coming to the source of all help, the Lord Himself. We dare not believe that any

power resides within ourselves; instead, any power we may demonstrate comes from heaven itself. Few things will instill pride and arrogance in God's people quicker than a little success in ministry.

Jesus's disciples learned this lesson the hard way. Jesus was coming down from the mount of transfiguration, where Peter, James, and John had caught a glimpse of His glory, along with a sighting of the prophets Moses and Elijah (Mark 9:2-13). As they got to the bottom of the mountain, they found a large crowd of people surrounding the rest of the disciples, who at this time were locked in a theological squabble with some religious leaders (v. 14). A man had brought his demon-possessed son to be healed, but the disciples were powerless to cast out the demon (vv. 17-18). The father of the boy said, "I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't" (v. 18). So Jesus Himself healed the boy (vv. 25-27). Later on in private, the disciples asked Jesus why they were unable to heal him, to which Jesus answered, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer" (vv. 28-29). In other words, the disciples needed to remember where their power and authority came from—God alone.

Our hope rests in the resurrection power of God (2 Kings 4:28-37).

²⁸ Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say, 'Do not lie to me?'" ²⁹ So Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your mantle under your belt, take my staff with you, and go. If you meet anyone, don't stop to greet him, and if a man greets you, don't answer him. Then place my staff on the boy's face." ³⁰ The boy's mother said to Elisha, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.



not leave you.” So he got up and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went ahead of them and placed the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or sign of life, so he went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy didn’t wake up.” ³² When Elisha got to the house, he discovered the boy lying dead on his bed. ³³ So he went in, closed the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he went up and lay on the boy: he put mouth to mouth, eye to eye, hand to hand. While he bent down over him, the boy’s flesh became warm. ³⁵ Elisha got up, went into the house, and paced back and forth. Then he went up and bent down over him again. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. ³⁶ Elisha called Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite woman.” He called her and she came. Then Elisha said, “Pick up your son.” ³⁷ She came, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; she picked up her son and left.

The Woman Trusted in the Lord

The woman had said twice, “It’s all right” (vv. 23,26), but when she reached Elisha, she allowed her true emotions to be seen as she clung to his feet “in severe anguish” (v. 27). Filled with sorrow and bitterness, the woman leveled an accusation at Elisha with a couple of rhetorical questions: “Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn’t I say, ‘Do not lie to me?’” (v. 28). The woman had not asked for a son; in fact, it was Elisha who promised her one as a reward for her kind hospitality toward him (vv. 8-17). Was God’s gracious gift to her now to be snatched away from her, leaving her in an even worse state than she was before? The pain would be far less if she had never even had a son.

Throughout the book of Psalms, we can find psalms expressing extreme emotions, intense bitterness,

extraordinary pain, and even vehement anger regarding the sins of others, and these psalms, called laments, are directed toward God. In a lament, the psalmist recognizes that life is not how it is supposed to be. It is out of sorts and needs to be “fixed.” The point of a lament is to pour out honestly the pain that is felt in one’s heart. For example, David, and Jesus, prayed the following: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning?” (Ps. 22:1; see Matt. 27:46). Laments are expressions of pain and protest brought to God, who is either responsible for the pain or can rectify the situation. These psalms are invitations to come to God with our pain, not to blame Him for any wrongdoing but to express our faith, however weak, that He, the Judge of all the earth, will do what is just and right (see Gen. 18:25).

Even the prophets used laments in their prayer lives. In Jeremiah’s prayer closet, we observe his struggles with God over his role as a prophet, cries for vindication, and even hurling defiance at God:

You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived. You seized me and prevailed. I am a laughingstock all the time; everyone ridicules me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I proclaim, “Violence and destruction!” so the word of the LORD has become my constant disgrace and derision. (Jer. 20:7-8)

In Jeremiah’s prayers we see elements of a faith tinged with doubt, rebellion, self-pity, and despair, yet through it all, he remained faithful and never let go of God. A few verses later, Jeremiah even sang the praises of the Lord for His faithfulness to rescue the needy (Jer. 20:13).

God can handle our bitterness and pain. Sometimes after a tragedy, the sufferer will give up on God, put the Bible on the shelf, stay away from God's people, and refuse to pray. Sometimes they bottle up all the negative emotions, as if by hiding them they will go away. But not the prophets, not the psalmists, and certainly not the Shunammite woman. God invites His people into His presence to pour out our whole hearts—the good, the bad, and the ugly. It is far better to work these extreme feelings out in one's prayer closet than to inflict them on others. God can handle it. This is one of the privileges of being His child.

The woman received no word of rebuke from Elisha for her expression of pain. Instead, Elisha sent Gehazi quickly to the boy with Elisha's staff. Nothing was to delay him in the journey because the task was too urgent. Much like Moses's staff (a different Hebrew word), Gehazi was to bring the staff of the prophet to the boy and lay it on his face.⁵ At the very least, Gehazi's presence and Elisha's staff demonstrated to anyone present and in the know that the story was not over and they should not yet bury the boy.

Gehazi ran ahead, but the woman said to Elisha, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you" (2 Kings 4:30). Elisha had heard these words before; in fact, Elisha had uttered them to his mentor, Elijah, pleading to follow him (2:2,4,6). The woman did not trust the staff to bring her dead son back to life, she needed the prophet in person. So Elisha acquiesced and traveled with the woman to her home in Shunem.

Gehazi was obedient to Elisha's commands, but upon laying the staff on the boy's face, to his disappointment "there was no sound or sign of life" (4:31).

Gehazi then returned to Elisha, who was on the way to Shunem, and reported the bad news.

God Alone Holds Power over Death

When he arrived, Elisha entered the room, shut the door, and prayed to the Lord (vv. 32-33). When Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son, his prayer was recorded (1 Kings 17:20-21), but Elisha's prayer in this moment was not. Elisha then performed a symbolic act much like what Elijah had done: Elisha stretched himself out over the boy's lifeless body, mouth, eyes, and hands (2 Kings 4:34; cf. 1 Kings 17:21). In Elisha's case, the boy's body became warm once more, but the boy was still unconscious.

After some time of praying and walking around in the house, Elisha returned and laid his body on the boy's once more. Then the lad sneezed seven times and woke up (2 Kings 4:35). Elisha then instructed Gehazi to call for the mother, and when she saw that her son was alive once more, she fell to the ground before Elisha, bowing in grateful reverence. She then took her son into their house (vv. 36-37).

What role does persistence play in our prayers and hope?

Only two miles from Shunem, on the other side of the hill, lies the town of Nain. Centuries later, as Jesus and His disciples entered the city, they saw a funeral procession carrying the body of a young man, the only son of a widow. In His compassion for the grieving woman, Jesus said to her, "Don't weep." Then He spoke to dead son, "Young man, I tell you, get up!" and the widow's son came back to life (Luke 7:11-17). Elisha could only pray, but Jesus spoke from His own

Notes

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"God breathed the breath of life by which the man became a living soul; Elisha breathed a breath that was neither sentient nor living but symbolic and intended to signify something else. Moreover, the prophet did not cause the boy to come back to life by giving him a soul; rather, because he loved him, he got God to do this."⁶
—Augustine of Hippo
(c. 354–430)

GOSPEL Connection

Because God has the power to bring the dead to life, He was able to give His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice, knowing He would be resurrected to defeat sin and death for the salvation of all who believe in Him.

authority to the young man and raised him up. Probably no one missed the connection or the significance of the event. God had done His miracle again. With God in the picture, death is not the end of the story.

Other than Jesus, only four people raised a dead person back to life: Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37), Peter (Acts 9:36-42), and Paul (Acts 20:7-12). But technically speaking, the “resurrection” stories of the Bible (with the exception of Jesus’s) were “resuscitations.” The person raised gained new life only to die once more. Still, these resurrection stories, such as this one featuring Elisha, point to a greater reality in the future. One day all believers in Christ, even though they may die physically, will live once more, never to die again.

Death is a fate we all must face if the Lord tarries. However, for believers in Christ, death has been conquered with Christ’s resurrection; thus, death has lost its “sting” (1 Cor. 15:55).

Old Testament saints looked with hope to the day when death would be conquered and life for all eternity would be in God’s blessed presence. On Easter Sunday, that hope became a reality. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Yes, we will die physically, but one day we will be raised to immortality, never to die again (1 Cor. 15:52-55). Our Lord has the power over death: “I am . . . the Living One. I was dead, but look—I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17-18).

How does faith in Jesus’s resurrection and hope for the future resurrection impact your life?



HEAD

What role does the hope of resurrection have in your understanding of salvation?



HEART

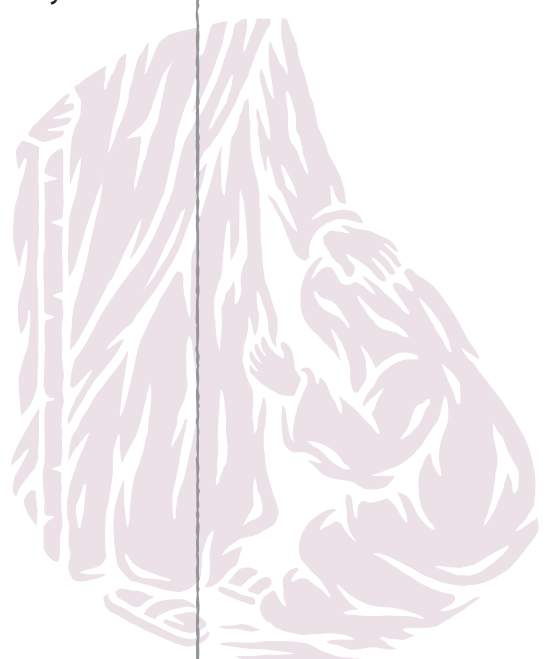
In what areas of your life do you need to repent of resisting the joy, peace, and hope God provides?



HANDS

How will the hope of the resurrection motivate you to action this week?

Notes



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REPENTANCE

CORE PASSAGE: JONAH 3:4-10; 4:1-2,6-11

Context: Jonah, a contemporary of Amos and Hosea, was a prophet of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who did evil in the Lord's eyes. Yet the Lord spoke graciously to Israel through Jonah in order to help them (2 Kings 14:25-27). God also commanded Jonah to go and proclaim judgment against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. But Jonah fled in the opposite direction. Through a series of circumstances orchestrated by God, Jonah found himself in the belly of a large fish and then back on dry land. God gave Jonah a second chance, and this time Jonah obeyed, going to Nineveh to preach the message the Lord gave to him.

Key Concept: God is merciful to forgive when people repent, and He desires His people to be merciful as well.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Jonah 1–2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Amos 3–6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Jonah 3–4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Amos 7–9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Amos 1–2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 85 |

God relents from administering judgment when He sees repentance (Jonah 3:4-10).

⁴ Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, “In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!” ⁵ Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least. ⁶ When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ Then he issued a decree in Nineveh: By order of the king and his nobles: No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. ⁸ Furthermore, both people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish. ¹⁰ God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

Jonah Disobeyed the Lord

Jonah had experienced a lot by this point in the story. He had received God’s call to go preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, because of its wickedness (1:2). But Jonah fled on a boat in the opposite direction, heading toward Tarshish in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea. God caused a storm that threatened to sink the ship, and the pagan sailors tried their best to save the ship by crying out to their various gods for mercy (vv. 4-6). They cast lots to determine who was at fault to cause the storm, and the lot fell on



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to see the timeline of the Assyrian Empire and its biblical connections.

Jonah (v. 7). Jonah stated that he was a Hebrew who worshiped “the LORD, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9), though at this point we might question the sincerity of his profession. Instead of repenting before the Lord, Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard and the storm would stop (v. 12). The men tried to row harder, not wanting to be punished by the Lord for killing one of His prophets, but they quickly decided they had no choice if they wanted to survive. Shockingly, as soon as they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, the storm stopped immediately. The sailors had found the right God and started worshiping Him (vv. 13-16).

Instead of letting Jonah drown, however, God appointed “a great fish” to swallow him (v. 17). The Lord had gotten His prophet’s attention, and Jonah prayed for three days and nights from the belly of the fish (2:1-9). Jonah promised to worship God faithfully and to fulfill all of his commitments to the Lord. After all, “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (v. 9).

God then gave Jonah a second chance to be obedient to his call to preach to Nineveh (3:1-2). The second chance was in itself a tremendous act of God’s grace. This time, Jonah went to Nineveh, armed with the message from the Lord (v. 3).

Nineveh for a period was the capital of the ancient empire of Assyria, whose people were noted as the most vicious and cruel butchers of people in the ancient world. They were extremely wicked people and were well-deserving of God’s judgment. Proud of their military exploits, the Assyrians recorded in graphic detail how they treated their conquered enemies.¹ They annihilated their foes in battle, making a point to display their power and warning the next

enemy to submit or to suffer the same fate. It is quite possible that friends, family, or acquaintances of Jonah had suffered such a fate. There is no doubt that the Ninevites were very wicked people who indeed deserved God's judgment.

You would think that Jonah, who hated the Assyrians, would have been eager to pronounce their doom, which was the subject of the Lord's message to Nineveh. But curiously, it wasn't until he had spent three days and nights in the belly of a fish that he resolved to do what God commanded.

The Ninevites Repented

Jonah went into the city of Nineveh armed only with God's message of impending doom. The message Jonah delivered was one of complete destruction, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!" (v. 4). The term "demolished" in the Old Testament frequently describes turning the tables or overturning a city in judgment, such as Ai (Josh. 8:20). The verb was used in Genesis 19:21,25 in reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two related nouns meaning "overthrow" are used almost exclusively of the destruction of those cities (Gen. 19:29; Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; Amos 4:11).

Some think that the term Jonah used carried a double meaning, that Nineveh would be turned upside down, as in a change for the better. However, the similar references to Sodom and Gomorrah, the intense fear of the Ninevites, and Jonah's desire to watch the city being destroyed (4:1-5) would make this interpretation doubtful. Jonah may have hoped that his message was a prediction of God's certain judgment, but a merciful God meant it as a warning.²

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"We have Jesus Christ and His resurrection; Nineveh only had Jonah. What a huge difference! Yet, Nineveh repented while many who have our advantages do not. Great is the hardness of the heart that can reject the light we have."³

—John G. Butler
(1935–2019)

This passage stresses how seriously God takes sin. He recognizes and condemns what is unholy and unjust. This passage also stresses the certainty of God's judgment for sin, but it also portrays beautifully God's concern for those who are outside of His will and His plan. God will go to great lengths to use His people to bring sinners into salvation.

What role might the announcement of judgment for sin play in the sharing of the gospel?

God's message brought an immediate response. As soon as Jonah started preaching, the people started responding, and revival broke out. Jonah's heart wasn't even in the right place when he delivered the message, but God's Word has the power all on its own. It has the power to make itself be received, inspiring faith in its hearers (Rom. 10:17). This means that God's Word does not need our defense as much as it needs our proclamation.

The people "believed God" (Jonah 3:5), that is, they believed the message Jonah brought from God was true. The God of Jonah would be true to His word, bringing destruction upon them for their sinful behavior. How much they knew of the God of Israel, we do not know. But we do know that their belief and resulting actions were sufficient to stay God's judgment, at least for the time being. They fasted and put on sackcloth, the clothing of mourning and grief. They grieved over their sinful actions and over God's promised judgment.

Jonah's message "reached the king" (v. 6), causing him to exchange his royal robe for sackcloth and ashes to mourn along with his people. He proclaimed a fast of food and water and a time of mourning for both people and animals. Since the entire community was

threatened with destruction, including the animals, the animals needed to join in with the appeal to God. By combining the cries of contrition from the people with the bleating of the animals, perhaps God might take more notice of their petitions for salvation.

Their pleas for help were joined with outward acts of repentance. “Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing” (v. 8). The king was not satisfied with only an outward show of repentance because a positive change in moral behavior was needed. Their lives needed to match their prayers. Each person was individually responsible for their own actions and spiritual state, yet the whole community took part corporately.

How might you evaluate your own response of repentance to conviction from God’s Word?

God desires that His people show mercy and forgiveness to others (Jonah 4:1-2,6-11).

¹ Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. ² He prayed to the LORD, “Please, LORD, isn’t this what I said while I was still in my own country? That’s why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.” . . . ⁶ Then the LORD God appointed a plant, and it grew over Jonah to provide shade for his head to rescue him from his trouble. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant. ⁷ When dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered. ⁸ As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah’s

THEOLOGY Connection

REPENTANCE: Repentance is a response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one’s sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one’s sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God’s work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

head so much that he almost fainted, and he wanted to die. He said, “It’s better for me to die than to live.”⁹ Then God asked Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “Yes, it’s right!” he replied. “I’m angry enough to die!”¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night.”¹¹ So may I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?”

God Relented

God had compassion on the Ninevites. The term “repent” applied to people implies a change, modifying one’s attitude and direction, that is, conversion. However, a different English term is used concerning God. The word “relent” indicates an inner discomfort that what one had planned to do previously is no longer appropriate. The repentance of the people prompted God—who delights in showing mercy (Mic. 7:18-19)—to rescind His pronouncement of judgment. God responded to the earnest sorrow of the people. God’s withholding judgment was an act of free grace and was by no means an automatic or deserved response to Nineveh’s repentance. Grace is never deserved; it can only be freely received.

David understood this. When he sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan pronounced that the king’s son would die as part of his punishment. Yet David fasted and prayed in hopes that God would show mercy instead, which He justly chose not to do (2 Sam. 12:22-23). When David conducted an unauthorized census, he was given his choice of punishment. David wisely

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Judgment is [God’s] strange work; he does that with his left hand, but his right-handed acts are those of mercy and of love.”⁴

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

stated: “Please, let us fall into the LORD’s hands because his mercies are great, but don’t let me fall into human hands” (24:14). That time the Lord did relent in preservation of Jerusalem and the people (24:15-25).

In Jeremiah’s time, some false prophets told the people that nothing bad would happen to Jerusalem or God’s people. But God gave Jeremiah, His true prophet, a message so they would be certain of His intentions:

At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, if that nation about which I have made the announcement turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the disaster I had planned to do to it. At another time I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it. However, if it does what is evil in my sight by not listening to me, I will relent concerning the good I had said I would do to it. (Jer. 18:7-10)

Perhaps surprising to Jonah—but not to God Almighty, of course—the people of Nineveh repented of their wickedness and God relented of their destruction.

God Revealed His Mercy

Jonah, the prophet of God, was out of sync with God’s character. God’s forgiveness toward Nineveh angered Jonah, and his anger displayed itself like a child throwing a temper tantrum (Jonah 4:1).

“He prayed to the LORD” (v. 2). This was Jonah’s second prayer recorded in the book (see 2:1-9). Using the same word for “prayed” as in 2:1, the writer invites the reader to compare this prayer with Jonah’s previous prayer. In the first prayer, Jonah expressed his

heartfelt thanksgiving for God’s salvation toward himself. But in this second prayer, Jonah was intensely self-centered. The English first-person pronouns “I,” “me,” or “my” occurs eight times in two verses. The attitude was very much like that of the prodigal son’s older brother, unwilling to forgive and consumed with his own self-interest (Luke 15:29-30). Jonah missed the joy of rejoicing in God’s work of salvation for others because he was so self-consumed.

The crux of the matter was that Jonah knew the character of God: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster” (Jonah 4:2). Jonah did not make this up. This wording is quoted and alluded to many times in the Old Testament (Num. 14:18; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nah. 1:3), all based on God’s own self-revelation of His glorious character in Exodus 34:6-7. This accounting of God’s character is important because God can never be less than who He is. He is always true to His character; He is always merciful.

What are some ways you find yourself at odds with God’s character?

In reality, Jonah wished that the Lord would suppress His character of showing mercy wherever possible—He wished that God would not act like God! He couldn’t stand the idea that the God who forgave His people when they sinned (including himself) would be the same God who would forgive the sinful Ninevites. Nineveh, he thought, should not receive the same grace and mercy Jonah and all Israel had received.

**Voices from
CHURCH HISTORY**

*“There is more
mercy in Christ
than sin in us.”⁵*

—Richard Sibbes
(c. 1577–1635)

Having praised God's mercy in chapter 2, Jonah now deplored God's same mercy in chapter 4. He was like the servant who had received mercy yet refused to extend it to others (Matt. 18:23-35). But since God is a God of grace and mercy, He desires that His people show His mercy and forgiveness to others. So God would help Jonah understand His heart.

Throughout the book, God "appointed" things. God appointed the great fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17), and in this chapter God appoints a plant (4:6), a worm (v. 7), and a hot wind (v. 8). All of these things do God's bidding. Jonah had built a shelter from the sun—to watch and see if the city of Nineveh would burn (v. 5). The Lord caused a plant to grow up overnight next to Jonah to help provide shade for him, and "Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant" (v. 6). This is the only time in the story that Jonah is happy. He didn't express this kind of emotion over his own deliverance from death or the mass repentance he saw in Nineveh. The plant made him happy because it made him comfortable.

But early the next day, God "appointed" a worm to kill the plant (v. 7) and a hot scorching east wind to add to the sun beating down on Jonah's head (v. 8). The sun was so oppressive that Jonah wanted to die. This is the third time Jonah wished to die in the narrative (1:12; 4:3,8).

God had questioned the rightness of Jonah's anger over God's mercy for the Ninevites (v. 4), and now He questioned the rightness of Jonah's anger over the destruction of the plant, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah threw this question back at God in anger, "Yes, it's right! . . . I'm angry enough to die!" (v. 9). The plant was extremely important to



GOSPEL Connection

God is compassionate and will forgive when people repent. All who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sin will be saved.

Jonah. He loved it. It brought him great joy, and now that it was dead, Jonah was furious. Interestingly, the only thing in the book that was destroyed was a plant. Jonah was so angry that he would rather die than live in a world where innocent plants die through no fault of their own.

God's reply to Jonah compared what Jonah "cared about" and what God could "care about." God said, "You cared about the plant" (v. 10), something that Jonah was by no means responsible for in how it came about. It simply came up overnight and died overnight, "while God's deep concern was expressed on behalf of his highest creation, human beings. Jonah apparently had grown completely indifferent to the fate of God's creation beyond the bounds of Israel."⁶

Jonah's concern over the plant was dictated by self-interest, not by genuine love. Comparatively, God's concern was for a city full of people created in God's image, notwithstanding the animals that God created and cared for as well (v. 11).

Surprisingly, we do not hear Jonah's response to God's final question, just as we do not hear the response of the elder brother to the father's final statement in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:32). Despite the object lesson the Lord gave Jonah with the plant, we do not know if the prophet repented of his anger. So the question then becomes ours. As believers, should we not extend mercy to others as the Lord has extended mercy to us?

How are you showing others God's heart of care, mercy, and forgiveness?



HEAD

What are some potential results of showing mercy to those who don't seem to deserve it?



HEART

What are some ways you struggle to reflect God's merciful heart, for which you need to repent?



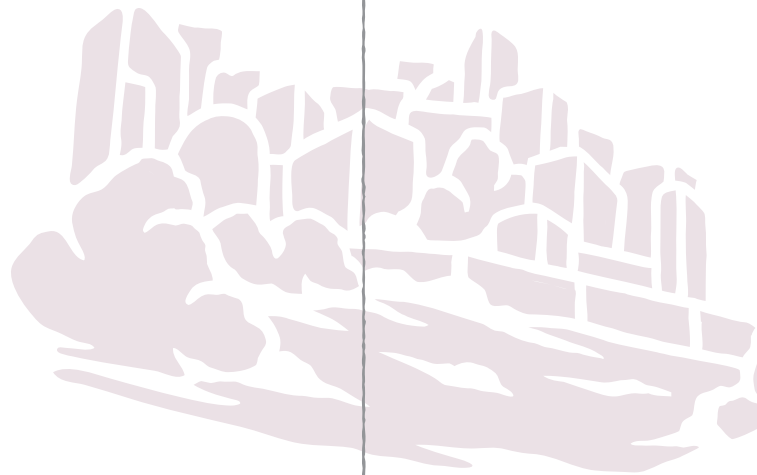
HANDS

What are three ways you can show mercy or forgiveness to those around you in the coming week?

Notes

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RECONCILIATION

CORE PASSAGE: HOSEA 1:2-3; 2:19-20,23; 3:1-5; 14:1-4

Context: Though he is often listed as a minor prophet in the Bible based on the length of his book, Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah for many decades. Through Hosea's life and message, God presented His case against Israel, stating, "There is no truth, no faithful love, and no knowledge of God in the land! Cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery are rampant; one act of bloodshed follows another" (Hos. 4:1-2). God used Hosea's family as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to Himself, comparing their relationship with that of a husband and an unfaithful wife.

Key Concept: God in His grace reconciles with His sinful people.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Hosea 1–3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Hosea 8–10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Hosea 4–5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Hosea 11–14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Hosea 6–7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 89 |

God's love is based purely on His compassion and character (Hosea 1:2-3; 2:19-20,23).

² When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, he said this to him: Go and marry a woman of promiscuity and have children of promiscuity, for the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD. ³ So he went and married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

.....

¹⁹ I will take you to be my wife forever. I will take you to be my wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. ²⁰ I will take you to be my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD. . . . ²³ I will sow her in the land for myself, and I will have compassion on Lo-ruhamah; I will say to Lo-ammi: You are my people, and he will say, "You are my God."

Love the Unlovable

Some lessons are best learned through personal experience rather than reading or hearing about them. Hosea heard God's voice through a word, but even more so, he understood God's heart through his own tragic life. In other words, Hosea learned of the broken heart of God through his own broken heart.

The Lord told Hosea, "Go and marry a woman of promiscuity, and have children of promiscuity" (v. 2). The term "promiscuity" used throughout the book of Hosea is a general term for sexual promiscuity, which includes prostitution. It refers to a wife who is unfaithful to her husband, analogous to how Israel had treated the Lord. The Lord told Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman because "the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD."



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

Interpreters have understood God's command to Hosea in various ways.¹ The first view is that the story is a parable, a fictional story to show the God/Israel relationship. The second view sees Gomer's promiscuity as "spiritual prostitution," that is, worshiping other gods. The third considers the wives of chapters 1 and 3 to be two different women, one named and the other unnamed. A fourth and probably the most common view holds that Gomer was already immoral when God commanded Hosea to marry her and that Hosea was to marry her with the intent of reclaiming her. The final view is called the "proleptic view" where the story is told in hindsight. God told Hosea to marry this woman and have children, with Gomer being innocent at marriage but drifting into an immoral lifestyle.

With each of these differing views being held by conservative, dedicated Bible scholars, it is unwise to become overly dogmatic on a specific interpretation. However, for our purposes, let's consider the story as told in hindsight with Gomer being innocent when she married. Hosea's eventual heartbreak was unexpected but somehow used in God's plan. Hosea's experience with an unfaithful wife increased his understanding of how Israel had forsaken God. As our Scottish friends say, "Some lessons are better felt than telt."

So, Hosea married a woman named Gomer, and from that union she conceived and bore him a son (v. 3). Significant to the story is what God told Hosea to name this child and the two that followed. Their names described both what was happening in Hosea's marriage and spoke a message of Israel's blatant sins before God.

The first son was named "Jezreel," which means "God sows" or "God scatters" (v. 4). Jezreel was a site

of great bloodshed, specifically at the hand of Jehu (2 Kings 9–10). This would be like naming a son “Gettysburg” with all the horrific associations of that name.

The second child Gomer bore was a daughter named “Lo-ruhamah” (“No motherly compassion” or “No mercy”). Lo-ruhamah’s birth is not described like Jezreel’s because Gomer simply “gave birth” to a daughter, but she “bore [Hosea] a son.” Lo-ruhamah possibly was sired by another man. Any doubt that Gomer was unfaithful was settled with the birth of the third child, a son named “Lo-ammi” (“Not my people”). With this name, God was telling Hosea that this second son was not his own. Gomer was an adulterous wife.

What has been the hardest thing the Lord has called you to do?

One can only imagine the heartbreak Hosea felt. But the tragedy of Hosea’s marriage illustrated the greater tragedy of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Israel had fallen in love with other gods, forsaking her covenant with the Lord. The first commandment, “Do not have other gods besides me” (Ex. 20:3), speaks of sole loyalty. The Israelites were to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5), being totally devoted to the Lord with no room for any other gods.

We think of sin typically as breaking God’s law. But God’s message through Hosea described sin in different terms, that of breaking God’s heart. The Lord’s heart was broken by how His beloved people had mistreated their covenant relationship.

So God’s message to Israel laid out accusations of Israel’s unfaithfulness, describing their sin much like

THEOLOGY Connection

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION:

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. (cont.)

a prosecutor bringing charges against a defendant in a court of law (2:2-13). He described the stark reality of Israel's guilt of breaking His covenant and the remedial punishments that were intended to mend the relationship before it was irrevocably broken. If the "wife" would have a change of heart and turn back to her "husband," the "marriage" might still be saved. God still loved His people and wanted to heal the relationship.

The first charge was that Israel pursued other lovers—other gods—so the Lord would build a wall around her to frustrate any efforts to pursue others in the hopes that she would return to Him (vv. 2-7). Second, Israel considered God's good gifts to be from the hands of her pagan gods and refused to acknowledge the Lord as the giver of those blessings (v. 8). Therefore, He would remove her blessings and expose her shame (vv. 9-12). The third charge was that Israel "forgot" the Lord in chasing after the Baals (v. 13).

Forgive the Unforgivable

Adultery in the law of Moses was a crime punishable by death. Instead of dire punishment, however, amazingly the Lord showed His compassion for Israel, declaring He would "persuade her" and "speak tenderly" to her with the hope that the marriage would be restored as it was at first (vv. 14-17). God pointed toward a bright future for the relationship with His people, a day of new beginnings. When Israel responded positively to the Lord's love for her by putting away their false gods, His people would be restored to Him and live in peace and faithfulness (v. 18).

Then the Lord stated, "I will take you to be my wife forever" (v. 19). This new covenant with Israel would

be an unconditional one based upon God's righteousness, justice, love, compassion, and faithfulness—all unchanging attributes of God (Ex. 34:6-7). Because of God's enduring character, this new covenant carries a renewed hope (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:16-38). No act of human goodness could establish or maintain such a covenant. Therefore, this new covenant relationship would be initiated and made possible by God and God alone. The relationship with His people would be simply a gift of God's grace and founded on God's unchanging character.

The dowry, or bridal price, that God would pay for His wife-to-be, even though she had been and was adulterous, would be bestowing His character traits on her.² His righteousness would make people stand in a right relationship with Him. God's justice would pay the penalty for Israel's unfaithfulness, in this case, paid for by God Himself, ensuring that truth and equity would be restored. Steadfast love is an enduring commitment to the relationship, being devoted to one's partner forever. Compassion, coming from the term "womb," is the kind of tender compassion that a mother has for her child. God's faithfulness would guarantee that the relationship would be consistent and reliable forever.

The new relationship is described in verses 19-20, and the result of being in this new relationship with the Lord was that "you will know the LORD" (v. 20). God lamented, "There is no truth, no faithful love, and no knowledge of God in the land!" (4:1) and "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6). Knowledge in these verses was not about information but being in an intimate relationship with the Lord. Jeremiah prophesied this of God's new covenant:

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).



BIBLICAL Connection

GOD'S PEOPLE:

The apostle Peter called the church, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession”

(1 Pet. 2:9). And echoing the words of Hosea, Peter added, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (v. 10).

God has adopted His people—the church—from every nation, tribe, people, and language for the glory of King Jesus (Rev. 7:9).

I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them. (Jer. 31:33-34)

A result of being in this new, lasting, and enduring covenant with the Lord would be intimacy with Him based upon personal experience, the way spouses “know” one another or a mother “knows” her child. This new covenant was established by Jesus through His death and resurrection (Luke 22:20). Through it the Lord would take away their “heart of stone” and give them “a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26), and He would write His law upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33).

Jesus described the essence of a relationship with Him in terms of this “knowledge.” He spoke of those who called Him “Lord ” and prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and worked many miracles in His name, but Jesus would say to them: “I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!” (Matt. 7:21-23). Despite their outward actions of piety, an internal, personal relationship with the Lord had never been established.

In Hosea’s context, the Lord either changed the meaning or changed the name of Gomer’s children. When the relationship with Israel is restored, Jezreel, a place of bloodshed, will have the positive meaning of “God sows,” for “I will sow her in the land for myself” (Hos. 2:23). Lo-ruhamah (“No motherly compassion”) will be given the promise, “I will have compassion,” and of Lo-ammi (“Not my people”), it will be said, “You are my people, and he will say, ‘You are my God.’” The

terms “My people/your God” often establish what is called the “covenant formula” (Ex. 6:7).

Why is it important that God’s love for Israel was rooted in His character and not Israel’s faithfulness?

God is ready to heal and save His people when they are ready to turn toward Him
(Hosea 3:1-5; 14:1-4).

¹ Then the LORD said to me, “Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and nine bushels of barley. ³ I said to her, “You are to live with me many days. You must not be promiscuous or belong to any man, and I will act the same way toward you.” ⁴ For the Israelites must live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. ⁵ Afterward, the people of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the last days.

.....

¹ Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. ² Take words of repentance with you and return to the LORD. Say to him, “Forgive all our iniquity and accept what is good, so that we may repay you with praise from our lips. ³ Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses, and we will no longer proclaim, ‘Our gods!’ to the work of our hands. For the fatherless receives compassion in you.” ⁴ I will heal their apostasy; I will freely love them, for my anger will have turned from him.

Redeem the Unredeemable

It seems that by chapter 3, Gomer had left Hosea. This prophet of God probably suffered ridicule and shame. We can imagine his life now filled with fatherly, and motherly, duties, all the time wondering where Gomer was and why she could have done such a thing. In one of those pensive thoughts about Gomer, it likely hit Hosea what God meant by all this: “It hurts, doesn’t it, Hosea? Now you can understand how I feel when My people prostitute themselves with the things of this world. Like an adulterous wife, My people have been unfaithful to Me.”

In what ways have you, like Israel, been unfaithful to the Lord?

Beginning in 3:1, Hosea speaks for himself about what he heard from God: “Then the LORD said to me, ‘Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress.’” We can imagine Hosea trying to guard what was left of his bleeding heart, possibly putting up a protest. Perhaps he thought: *Why should I go back and ask for all that heartache and pain? She abandoned me; she was unfaithful! She left me with these children, even ones who are not mine!*

Then the Lord continued, “Go again; show love . . . just as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes” (v. 1). Raisin cakes were a sweet delicacy reserved for joyous occasions, possibly referenced by Jeremiah as being offered to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar (Jer. 44:19).

Part of Hosea’s showing love to Gomer this time was that he had to redeem her, or buy her back from slavery (Hos. 3:2). Despite thinking that her lovers had given

her oil and lavish gifts (2:12), Gomer apparently was in debt, and Hosea had to settle her debts.³ When she left home, she may have sold herself to make a living, either as a prostitute or in some other line of work. Regardless, Hosea bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and nine bushels of barley. This may have been everything Hosea had to buy his wife back.⁴ Yet he willingly bought her back because of his love for her.

The price God had to pay for our forgiveness was the life of His beloved Son (John 3:16). Jesus came to give His life as “a ransom” for our sins (Mark 10:45). Jesus could forgive the sins of people because He knew one day He would die for the sins of the world. Forgiveness always costs something.

Reconcile the Irreconcilable

Hosea brought Gomer home, where she would live with him “many days” (Hos. 3:3). He set some vital conditions on the new relationship: She would no longer have immoral relationships with other men, and Hosea would be her husband. Gomer was to be faithful, but so also would Hosea be toward her, waiting for her affection for as long as it took. He would not claim his conjugal rights as her husband, but instead, he would wait for her personal response to his love. He seemed to be saying: “Gomer, I bought you, but I cannot force you to love me. So I’ll wait until you desire to make a new commitment of yourself to me.”

This is the same way the Lord would restore Israel (vv. 4-5). God made no mention of punishment but instead presented active steps toward restoration. Israel’s wicked leadership would be removed and items used in idolatrous worship would be taken away. As Hosea cut off Gomer from other men who led her into

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Does God love like that? Yes, God loves like that! God steps into the marketplace of sin and buys us out of sin’s bondage by the death of Christ. . . . When we see Hosea standing in the marketplace under orders from God to purchase his wife, who had become an adulteress and a slave, we recognize that this is the measure of God’s love.”⁵

—James M. Boice
(1938–2000)

GOSPEL Connection

Though Gomer was unfaithful, God commanded Hosea to take her back in love and compassion, symbolizing God's own love and forgiveness for His people, Israel. One day, Israel will return and seek after the messianic King, Jesus (Rom. 11). Through faith in Jesus, all who believe are forgiven and reconciled with God because of God's grace and mercy.

adultery, so also God would take away the influences that would lead Israel astray. God would discipline them and wait for them to “return and seek the LORD” on their own accord. One day Israel would seek to serve God and be willing to follow their messianic King.

Hosea extended God's call to Israel once more in chapter 14: “Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity” (14:1). God is always ready to heal and save His people when they are ready to repent and turn toward Him. The relationship could only be restored when His people were ready to repent. If the people would “return” to Him, God would “turn” His anger from them (v. 4).

Forgiveness is not reconciliation, but forgiveness is necessary to make reconciliation possible. Two parties are only reconciled when there is movement from both sides. No restoration with God is possible without repentance on our part.

What does repentance look like? First, acknowledging one's own personal guilt (v. 1). Next, confessing one's guilt before God, accompanying that confession with praise for God's goodness (v. 2). Then, return to the Lord, turning away completely from previous sins (v. 3). As a result, God will forgive. He will respond personally to penitential prayers—“I will heal their apostasy” and “freely love them” (v. 4).

The book of Hosea ends with a call from God to His people for their repentance, along with the offer of reconciliation to His people. He loves them and is willing to restore the relationship when they respond positively to His love. How did sinful Israel respond to God's call of love? In the book of Hosea, we don't know. The question is left hanging, and we are left wondering—just as we are left wondering if Hosea and

Gomer ever experienced their own version of happy ever after. But the book was written for Israel and us. It is a call for the audience to respond. What will you do? God awaits your response.

How have you experienced healing from your sin when you turn to God in repentance?



HEAD

What are some specific ways you have broken God's law and need reconciliation?



HEART

How does the anticipation of full reconciliation with God for eternity strengthen or comfort you today?

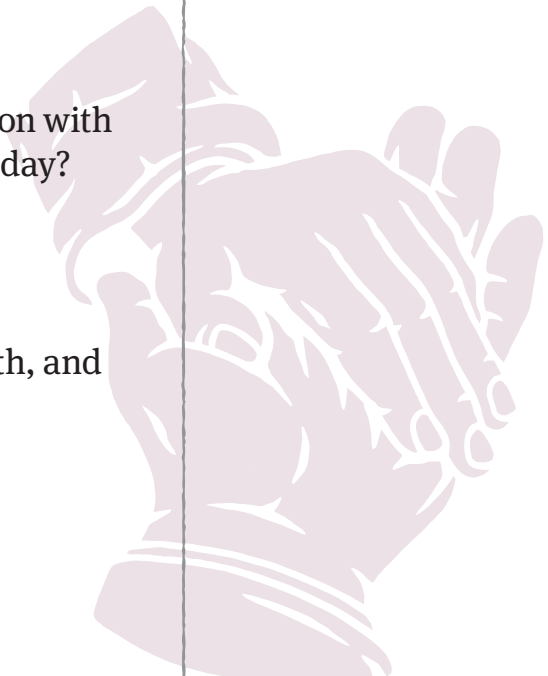


HANDS

Who do you need to forgive and reconcile with, and what steps will you take to do so?

References

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2. Trent C. Butler, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 19, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2005), 22.
3. Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Ho 3:2.
4. Butler, 24.
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RETRIBUTION

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 17:6-15,18-20

Context: The books of 1 and 2 Kings record the history of the kings of Israel over approximately four hundred years. Beginning with the death of King David and the start of Solomon's reign, through the split of the kingdom into Israel and Judah, and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem, the author documented each king in both the north and the south in light of their faithfulness to the Lord. While Judah enjoyed a few faithful kings, Israel's kings consistently followed a path away from the Lord, in spite of the warnings from the Lord's prophets. This led to their destruction and exile at the hands of the Assyrians.

Key Concept: Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 2 Kings 15–17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Isaiah 13–24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 2 Chronicles 26–28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Isaiah 25–35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Isaiah 1–12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 12 |

When we worship other gods, disaster happens (2 Kings 17:6-12).

⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, along the Habor (Gozan's river), and in the cities of the Medes. ⁷ This disaster happened because the people of Israel sinned against the LORD their God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt and because they worshiped other gods. ⁸ They lived according to the customs of the nations that the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites and according to what the kings of Israel did. ⁹ The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. They built high places in all their towns from watchtower to fortified city. ¹⁰ They set up for themselves sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree. ¹¹ They burned incense there on all the high places just like the nations that the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did evil things, angering the LORD. ¹² They served idols, although the LORD had told them, "You must not do this."

Israel Sinned in Public and in Private

The writer of the books of 1 and 2 Kings recorded the history of Israel from David's death to Jerusalem's destruction to a few years into Judah's exile, when Israel had no more land, temple, king, or freedom. The story was told answering one question: "Why did we lose all these blessings from God?" or in other words, "What happened?"

The capture of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 2 Kings 17 fits well with this picture. The ten northern



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

tribes were slaughtered, exiled, and their land was taken by the Assyrians, events all witnessed by their brothers in the south. If the lessons displayed by the example of God's judgment on the people in the north were properly discerned, then God's people in the south might repent of their wicked ways and be spared God's judgment. Like an autopsy of a dead body to determine the cause of death, the most positive outcome is that such a death might be prevented in the future. Second Kings 17 is that autopsy, told in gruesome and disturbing detail.

The last king of the Northern Kingdom was Hoshea (732–722 BC), who reigned from Samaria. Early in Hoshea's reign, the Assyrian emperor Shalmaneser V imposed his rule over Israel, and Israel became a vassal state of Assyria (17:1-3). Later, Hoshea reneged on the agreement with Assyria and appealed to the king of Egypt for help in wresting itself of Assyria's dominance. Shalmaneser caught wind of Hoshea's "treachery," invaded Israel, besieged Samaria, and took Hoshea captive (vv. 4-5). At the end of the three-year siege, Samaria was captured, and Israel's people were taken into exile (v. 6).

God's prophets had foretold that this would happen to the Northern Kingdom. Shortly after united Israel was divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Israel fell heavily into idol worship under the leadership of Jeroboam I. From its founding, the Northern Kingdom was immersed in idolatry. Some two hundred years before it was destroyed, the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh announced:

The LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who will wipe out the house of Jeroboam.

This is the day, yes, even today! For the LORD will strike Israel so that they will shake as a reed shakes in water. He will uproot Israel from this good soil that he gave to their ancestors. He will scatter them beyond the Euphrates because they made their Asherah poles, angering the LORD. He will give up Israel because of Jeroboam's sins that he committed and caused Israel to commit. (1 Kings 14:14-16)

The Northern Kingdom was doomed to fall because of its idolatry, and her history reveals this landslide into depravity, from bad to worse. The only question was when that destruction would happen. In Israel's history, there was no true repentance, no mass turning to the Lord, and no godly kings to lead the nation to faithful loyalty to God. Of God's prophets calling them back to faithfulness to Him, none were truly heeded. The "king over Israel" that God raised up, as prophesied by Ahijah, was indeed the king of Assyria. In 722 BC, the monarchy in Israel became no more, and the people of Israel were scattered all over the Assyrian Empire. The Israelites learned the hard way that while the Lord is "slow to anger," there will come a time when "he will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:6-7).

The foundational law for Israel begins with "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). Before God gave His covenant law, He reminded the Israelites of His amazing grace in saving them. In fact, every expectation God gave His people Israel was couched in the context of His saving grace, just as every command we receive as Christians is grounded in the saving work of Jesus on our behalf.

THEOLOGY Connection

SIN AS REBELLION:

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“There are outward sins which are marked by infamy; but ingratitude, neglect, and enmity to God, and the idolatry or impiety which proceed therefrom, are far more malignant. Without turning from every evil way, and keeping God’s statutes, there can be no true godliness; but this must spring from belief of his testimony concerning wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, and concerning his mercy in Christ Jesus.”¹
 –Matthew Henry (1662–1714)

Right after the statement of God’s grace to Israel, the first two commandments are “Do not have other gods besides me” and “Do not make an idol for yourself” (Ex. 20:3-4). Israel was to have only one God—the Lord alone (Deut. 6:4). When Israel started worshiping other gods, they were rejecting their covenant with God. They chose to participate in the pagan practices of their neighbors and tried to become like Canaanites rather than God’s holy people. The Canaanites were driven out of the promised land because of their wicked practices (Lev. 18:24-27), and Israel was warned that they would suffer the same fate by practicing the same (v. 28). Led in the ways of idolatry by Jeroboam and every king who followed him, the people acted wickedly toward the Lord. The people were as guilty as their leadership was.

The writer then cataloged the blatant sins committed by the people, piling them on top of each other (vv. 9-18). Jeroboam’s two golden calves were quite public and likely were an attempt to represent the Lord, but recalling the commandments, this was rebellion against God. And this tip of the iceberg revealed the presence of a much more sinister rebellion going on in private—the Israelites “secretly did things against the LORD” (v. 9). Everywhere they could think of, the Israelites began to set up worship to false gods. But however secret they thought they were being, they couldn’t hide from the all-knowing God of the universe.

Why do we sometimes think and act as though the Lord cannot see us?

Israel’s private rebellion naturally became public as they became thoroughly pagan. In “all” their towns, on “every” high hill, under “every” green tree,

and on “all” the high places (vv. 9-11), they carried out the same perverted practices and worship of the very neighbors who had been driven out of the land. So Israel was set to suffer the same fate because “they served idols” rather than the Lord (v. 12).

How would you explain sin to someone who has no Bible background?

God warns of the danger of disobedience, allowing us to choose (2 Kings 17:13-15,18-20).

¹³ Still, the LORD warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands and statutes according to the whole law I commanded your ancestors and sent to you through my servants the prophets.” ¹⁴ But they would not listen. Instead they became obstinate like their ancestors who did not believe the LORD their God. ¹⁵ They rejected his statutes and his covenant he had made with their ancestors and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves, following the surrounding nations the LORD had commanded them not to imitate. . . . ¹⁸ Therefore, the LORD was very angry with Israel, and he removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained. ¹⁹ Even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God but lived according to the customs Israel had practiced. ²⁰ So the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, punished them, and handed them over to plunderers until he had banished them from his presence.

The Lord Warned the People

The prophet Amos said, “The LORD God does nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Time and time again, the Lord sent His prophets to warn the people of upcoming judgment and to call the people to repentance. False prophets told lies about Israel’s or Judah’s situation, but the true prophets of God would follow the model of Moses and be a truthful mouthpiece declaring God’s word to the people (Deut. 18:18). These servants of God—such as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea in Israel—were dispensers of God’s truth, revealing God’s character, His ways, and His will for His people. God did not want His people to be uninformed but clearly revealed the truth about life from His sovereign and eternal perspective.

God revealed His will and His warning to the people with a steady stream of prophets, “but they would not listen” (2 Kings 17:14). They turned their backs on God’s word and “became obstinate” against His authority in their lives. All the way from Egypt to Sinai to Canaan, Israel had stiffened their necks (Ex. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6,13; 10:16). They “commanded the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy’” (Amos 2:12) and then rejected the message when they did hear it.

What are some ways the Lord warns His children today to turn from evil and to keep His commands?

The Hebrew term translated “worthless idols” (2 Kings 17:15) is commonly translated as “vanity.” It is the term for a vapor or a mist, like one’s breath on a frosty morning. It is a mirage with no substance to it, offering something it cannot and will not deliver.² In

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“The sinner mocks and scorns, When offered the love of God. This will be his undoing, For God will not be deceived.”³

–George Blaurock
(c. 1492–1529)

following such “nothings,” Israel too became “nothing.” We become like what we worship.

A person’s character is the result of a series of choices made, not one single instance. The example of Israel should be a warning to all about whom or what one worships. An idol may not be a carved image or one covered with molten metal. In the New Testament, the way Jesus spoke of wealth was the same way the Old Testament prophets spoke of idols:

No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matt. 6:24)

If money can become an idol, then what else might be idols that people worship? The writer of Hebrews basically described an idol as anything that distracts us from Jesus:

Let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:1-2)

Like a runner stripping down to the bare necessities, wanting nothing to slow them down, believers should “lay aside” anything that hinders our best race. “The sin that so easily ensnares us” are sins clearly spelled out in God’s Word. “Every hindrance” are things that may not be spelled out as sinful but that the Holy Spirit reveals to us that may hinder our faithfulness.

What idols might you be choosing today instead of listening to the Lord?



Israel's unfaithfulness toward the Lord stirred up His anger toward them (2 Kings 17:18). Before Moses died, he told of the many "blessings" from God the Israelites would experience if they remained faithful to Him, obeying His commands (Deut. 28:1-14). He also warned them of many "curses" if they turned from the Lord and worshiped other gods (vv. 15-68). Among these curses, Moses warned:

Just as the LORD was glad to cause you to prosper and to multiply you, so he will also be glad to cause you to perish and to destroy you. You will be ripped out of the land you are entering to possess. Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you will worship other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. (Deut. 28:63-64)

These curses were inevitable unless the people repented before God and changed their ways.

Sin Comes with Consequences

Sadly, Israel refused to repent; therefore, they faced God's judgment in the ways He had promised: "He removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained" (2 Kings 17:18). Israel was driven out from the promised land just as the Canaanites had been. Because of God's covenant with David (2 Sam. 7), and because of a few good kings, Judah would be given a while longer before they too would be exiled, this time to Babylon. Judah would be given the chance to learn the lesson from their brothers to the north (Jer. 7:15), if they would only listen.

But for the most part, Judah too refused to learn the lessons and come back in faithfulness to the Lord, so they fared no better than Israel: “Even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God but lived according to the customs Israel had practiced” (2 Kings 17:19). In less than two centuries (586 BC), Judah would be destroyed by Babylon and driven from their own end of the promised land.

As a consequence for centuries of idolatry and hardheartedness, “the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, punished them, and handed them over to plunderers until he had banished them from his presence” (v. 20). The “plunderers” He sent to Israel were from the nation of Assyria, and with the destruction of Samaria, the kingdom of Israel was no more.

Israel’s apostasy was not a recent development; it was there from their very founding as the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12). They had become thoroughly rotten, thoroughly pagan, and the fabric of their society was decayed and fraying. Examples of God’s judgment in the Old Testament, such as the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues of Egypt, displayed God’s holiness in action. A holy God will judge sin. Israel knew of God’s holiness as well as His love. Yet they spurned His love and rejected His holiness by choosing to worship other gods. They refused to repent and surrender to their God.

Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). Jesus did not come to judge the world but to save it. Those who refuse to believe are “already condemned” because they have refused to place their faith in the Savior whom God sent (John 3:18).

The apostle Paul said that the stories from the Old Testament were “written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). In God’s Word we receive stories of good examples to follow and bad examples to avoid. We see pictures of God’s gracious salvation and pictures of God’s righteous judgment. We see what God was willing to do to His own people after repeated warnings to repent. It seems that everyone is pleased to have a loving God, but not everyone is pleased to have a holy God. The God of the Bible is both loving and holy. He is always both at the same time—“loving holiness,” or “holy love.”

Despite the exile, mercifully God did not leave His people without hope. Both the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel prophesied that one day the Lord would gather all the scattered remnants of Israel and bring them together. Isaiah stated:

On that day the Lord will extend his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people who survive—from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coasts and islands of the west. He will lift up a banner for the nations and gather the dispersed of Israel; he will collect the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isa. 11:11-12)

The Messiah—Jesus Christ—would bring a message of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, not just for the people of Israel but for the Samaritans and Gentiles as well. This time, the new covenant He would make with them all would be paid with His own blood, and His Spirit would never leave them ever again.

GOSPEL Connection

Sin leads to disaster and death. Trusting and following God is necessary for life. Trusting and following Him leads to a fulfilled life here and in eternity.

Key Concept: Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.



HEAD

What “sin cycles” have you seen emerge in your own life?



HEART

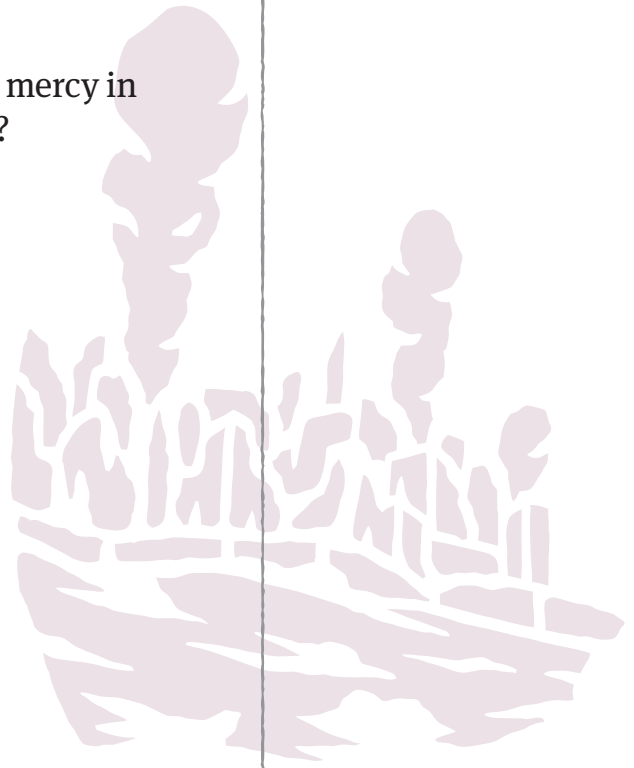
How do you need to reevaluate your perspective and feelings toward God’s holiness and discipline?



HANDS

How will you reflect God’s holiness and mercy in your interactions with others this week?

Notes



References

1. Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *A Commentary upon the Holy Bible: Joshua to Esther* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1834), 322.
2. T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, vol. 13, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1985), 234.
3. George Blaurock, “Anabaptist hymn,” in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel Liechty (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 47.

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 15 DECLINE



2 KINGS; 2 CHRONICLES; PROPHETS



MEMORY VERSES

“Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity
and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his
inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger
forever because he delights in faithful love.

He will again have compassion on us;
he will vanquish our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins into
the depths of the sea.”

—Micah 7:18-19



GOD'S PEOPLE WORSHIPED

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 18:1-6; 22:1-2; 23:1-3

Context: Throughout most of the history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's people did not follow His ways. Often they chose to worship the idols of the nations around them. In His mercy, the Lord sent prophets to call His people to repentance, but God's message often fell on deaf ears. As a result, God sent the Assyrians to attack, conquer, and exile the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians also threatened the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but the Lord rescued them through a much-needed, God-fearing leader. In the declining years of Judah, the Lord gave them two faithful kings who worshiped the Lord alone.

Key Concept: Worship of God includes following Him and His Word.

DAILY READINGS

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 2 Kings 18:1–20:21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 2 Kings 21:1–23:30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Isaiah 36:1–39:8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 2 Chronicles 33:1–35:27 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 19 |

Worshipping God includes removing other things we are tempted to worship
(2 Kings 18:1-6).



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

¹ In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah. ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. ³ He did what was right in the LORD's sight just as his ancestor David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for until then the Israelites were burning incense to it. It was called Nehushtan. ⁵ Hezekiah relied on the LORD God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. ⁶ He remained faithful to the LORD and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the LORD had commanded Moses.

Notes

Worship Requires Removal

Hezekiah's reign started at a deficit in many ways. First, he was only 25 years old. In today's world, such an age would be absurdly young for a nation's leader. At that time in Israel's history, he was hardly the youngest king who reigned in Israel. There were at least eight other kings younger than him when they began their reign, including Joash, who took the throne at the age of seven (2 Chron. 24). Even though Hezekiah wasn't the youngest king, he was nonetheless inexperienced.

Hezekiah also faced a massive challenge. Assyria loomed large on the horizon with an ever-present threat of invasion under King Sennacherib. Under his leadership, Assyria consistently attacked cities

in Judah and kept Israel on high alert against further invasion. Today, we have some sense of the disconcerting reality of such oppression when we consider international conflict and war strewn across our newsfeeds each day. Imagine waking up as a 25-year-old king and knowing that on your doorstep loomed an enemy who could destroy the nation you loved. Not only was the threat real, but Hezekiah knew that the Lord had allowed other pagan nations to ravage Israel, so the threat posed by Assyria was legitimate.

Hezekiah's immaturity and the threat of invasion paled in comparison to his greatest challenge—the spiritual condition of the people. God's commentary on the spiritual malaise of the nation just one chapter prior provides an apt summary of the situation:

But they would not listen. Instead they became obstinate like their ancestors who did not believe the LORD their God. They rejected his statutes and his covenant he had made with their ancestors and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves, following the surrounding nations the LORD had commanded them not to imitate. (2 Kings 17:14-15)

The nation was crumbling due to the idolatry of the people. Their foolish hearts led them to do just what the Lord warned them against—they worshiped the pagan gods of the nations. The fact that Assyria threatened to invade was less about national politics and more about the sovereign act of God bringing judgment to His people. He'd warned them over and over again that they would be kicked out of the land if they profaned His name by worshiping false gods. These warnings went all the way back to Moses (Deut. 28:49,64;

29:28). God would not allow His people to dishonor His name by worshiping false gods. One way He vindicated His honor was through other nations whom He raised up to destroy His people and remove them from the promised land.

Remarkably, Hezekiah honored the Lord in the face of all these obstacles. We are told that he did what was right in the eyes of God (2 Kings 18:3). Throughout the Old Testament, this phrase was used in reference to godly kings, whereas ungodly kings were those who “did not do what was right in the LORD’s sight” (2 Chron. 28:1). Since “the eyes of the LORD roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him” (2 Chron. 16:9), He must act in judgment when His people turn to idols.

The narrator also says that Hezekiah acted “just as his ancestor David had done” (2 Kings 18:3). David was used as the standard by which other kings were compared since David was one who was known as “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). In Judah, some kings were like David, and many were not. Obviously, this does not mean that these “good” kings were sinless, since even David sinned. What set these good kings apart was genuine repentance and love for the Lord. They did not worship and serve false gods like the people often did.

Since Hezekiah was the king, he could do more than merely avoid worshiping false gods; he could make it difficult for the people to do so as well by destroying their sites of false worship. This is exactly what he did (2 Kings 18:4). He tore down the high places where they worshiped false gods and shattered the pillars and poles they raised in adoration.



Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“It is unlawful for a Christian to set up any such image for God in a temple; much more nefarious is it, [therefore], to set it up in the heart, in which truly is the temple of God, provided it be purged of earthly lust and error.”¹

–Augustine
of Hippo
(c. 354–430)

The people even used a symbol of God’s mercy as a basis for false worship. In Numbers 21, God punished the wilderness generation for their constant complaining by sending venomous snakes to kill the people. But He also provided a way of escape. God instructed Moses to fashion a bronze snake and place it on a pole. Any who were bitten could look to the snake on the pole for healing. This method obviously foreshadowed the far greater means of escape provided through a sinless Savior who would be raised on a cross so that any under the tyranny of sin could look to Christ and be saved (see John 3:10-21). Sometime after Israel arrived in the promised land, they began to worship that bronze snake as if it were a god, so Hezekiah destroyed it and removed all objects of false worship.

The act of removal is at the heart of Christian worship. In worship we direct our hearts toward God and we direct them away from false gods that we are tempted to worship in His place. The apostle Paul made this point in Colossians 3:8-10:

But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.

Obedience to God demands that we remove sinful worship, whether it’s directed to an Asherah pole to a false god or to any of the things people worship today.

What idols do you need to remove from your own life so that you may walk with the Lord more faithfully?

Worship Requires Reliance

In verses 5-6 we are provided with Hezekiah's track record as king. We are told in verse 2 that he reigned for 29 years, so it could be easy to assume that the work he did in removing false worship was merely something that took place at the beginning of his reign. After all, most of us are prone to start things that we don't finish. Think of all the diet plans and exercise regimes that have fallen prey to a lack of perseverance. But this doesn't seem to be the case with Hezekiah. This king relied on the Lord, which implies an ongoing posture of reliance and not merely a one-time action. Even more, verse 6 says that he remained faithful to the Lord and he did not turn to worship other gods. He continued to remove false worship—both from his society and from his own heart—and he worshiped the one true God. This ongoing obedience commended Hezekiah as a faithful king, distinct from all the other kings of Judah who came before and after him (v. 5).

Taken together, the acts of *reliance* (v. 5) and *remaining* (v. 6) lie at the heart of Christian worship. In fact, one is likely a catalyst for the other. In John 15, Jesus exhorted His disciples to “remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me” (v. 4). He went on to say that by remaining in Him—the vine—disciples of Jesus could produce much fruit and that apart from remaining in Him we can do nothing (v. 5). As we live connected to God through Christ, we produce worshipful obedience.

As we remain in Christ, we are empowered to rely on the Lord as Hezekiah did. The word *reliance* has built-in imagery. To rely on something is to trust it to

**GOSPEL
Connection**

God's Word teaches us all we need to know and obey the Lord. Scripture compels us to stay faithful to God because God has always been faithful to us through His covenant, especially the new covenant through Jesus Christ. Jesus's death and resurrection is our salvation.

do what it says. We rely on a chair when we sit in it. We rely on the pilot when we get into an airplane. We rely on our GPS when we follow it to get to our destination. The same is true of our relationship with God. Hezekiah relied on the Lord in order to remove false worship and to follow faithfully God's path for the kingdom. This does not mean that every action Hezekiah did in those three decades was perfect but that the general disposition of his reign was marked by ongoing dependence on the Lord.

The opposite of relying on God is self-reliance. The writer of Proverbs made this point clearly: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). This passage implies that it's either one or the other—you either rely on God or you rely on your own strength and understanding. Relying on God is simply a far better way to live. While it may be easier or more natural to depend on ourselves, we know that we lack the power and wisdom that God has, so self-reliance will always come up short. We will depend on ourselves only to find that we don't possess the omnipotence or omniscience of God, so it is far better to rely on the One who sees all, knows all, and can do all.

Hezekiah made the right choice. Are you? Are you relying on yourself or God?

Who has been a faithful, godly leader in your life, and how has their leadership blessed you and others?

Worshipping God includes knowing His Word that we may follow it (2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:1-3).

Notes

¹ Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. ² He did what was right in the LORD's sight and walked in all the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn to the right or the left.

.....

¹ So the king sent messengers, and they gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. ² Then the king went to the LORD's temple with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the priests and the prophets—all the people from the youngest to the oldest. He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the LORD's temple. ³ Next, the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant in the LORD's presence to follow the LORD and to keep his commands, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul in order to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book; all the people agreed to the covenant.

Worship Is Fueled by God's Word

Josiah had an even greater age disadvantage than Hezekiah. He inherited the throne at age eight, and he continued to reign for three decades (v. 1). Much to our surprise based on what we know about human nature and 8-year-old immaturity, verse 2 says that Josiah was faithful to God and did what was right. As was often the case, the author used the imagery of someone walking with the Lord in order to portray someone who remained reliant and faithful to God. This image

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“‘Repentance,’ my dear friends, is the gift of God. It is one of those spiritual favours which ensure eternal life. It is the marvel of divine mercy that it not only provides the way of salvation, that it not only invites men to receive grace, but that it positively makes men willing to be saved.”²

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

hearkens back to Genesis 3:8, where God was said to walk in the garden of Eden, presumably with Adam and Eve prior to the fall. Using this imagery, the author described Josiah as focused on the path ahead, not deviating from it to the right or the left. Imagine the focus of someone running a race, especially a sprint. The eyes are fixated on the finish line and the runner stains toward that goal without deviating even an inch to the right or the left.

The rest of chapter 22 outlines the secret to Josiah’s faithfulness. Apparently the Word of God was being completely ignored during this time. Not only did the people not obey God, they couldn’t even find the written record of God’s Word in the temple (2 Kings 22:8). The Word of God was missing in the house of God. No wonder the people were giving themselves in worship to false gods time and again.

Once the Word of God was recovered, Josiah clearly heard God’s intentions for His people, and he knew he was reigning over a kingdom that had not been faithful to God’s Word. Josiah tore his robe as a sign of repentance on behalf of his people, and then he sought to change the ways of his people (vv. 11-13). Under Josiah’s leadership, the people would commit to obedience to the Word they knew, had, and understood.

The Word of God is the basis for walking faithfully with the Lord. The psalmist used the imagery of light to speak of God’s Word (Ps. 119:105). This Word provided guidance for David and Josiah, and it continues to light the path for faithful Christians to this day.

What is the relationship between the Word of God and our obedience to and worship of the Lord?

Worship Renews Faithfulness

Josiah did more than merely recover the Word of God and move on with business as usual. His actions at the start of 2 Kings 23 show that he was concerned about the people failing the covenant again. So he rallied the messengers and gathered the elders, who would instruct all of the people in God's Word.

This is a reminder of two realities. First, leaders are important. Numerous types of leaders are mentioned here—the king, messengers, elders, priests, and prophets. We are not told what each of them did, but the king used each of them in order to rally the people around Scripture and challenge them to obedience. The same is true today of leaders in the church. God uses pastors to lead His people to hear and obey God's Word (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). A pastor is meant to be a man who is able to teach God's Word akin to the leaders in Josiah's day (1 Tim. 3:2). Whether in the Old Testament or the New, God raised up leaders to point His people to know and follow Him.

Second, all of God's people matter. The leaders in Josiah's day gathered "all the people from the youngest to the oldest" (2 Kings 23:2). It was important to Josiah that everyone heard the reading of the scroll. The older members of the community obviously had much for which to repent. The fact that they had lost the Word of God was an indication that they had neglected God's Word in their heart. These older Israelites would set the example for others to follow.

The youngest also were called to listen to and heed God's words. Obviously these young members were more likely to have years to hear and obey God. They would also be tempted to do just what the previous

THEOLOGY
Connection

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

generation had done in neglecting the covenant and losing the Scriptures.

Josiah intentionally stood by a pillar of the temple, which was the site for holy worship. He reiterated the covenant promises Israel had made with God. This was not the first time Israel pledged to obey the Lord.

Moses took half the blood and set it in basins; the other half of the blood he splattered on the altar. He then took the covenant scroll and read it aloud to the people. They responded, "We will do and obey all that the LORD has commanded." (Ex. 24:6-7)

God made His covenant with the people, and they responded to His activity by committing to obey God wholeheartedly (Ex. 24; Josh. 24). The same happened again under Josiah's leadership. They made a covenant promise to God that they would again keep His law. Not only would they obey, but they would do so wholeheartedly (2 Kings 23:3). This is what happens when people engage with God's Word. Scripture enlivens people's hearts to worship, and when the heart is compelled to worship God, the heart overflows in faithfulness to obey His Word.

Obviously the Israelites did not uphold their covenant promises. They eventually returned to rebellion and disobeyed God's law again. So God made a declaration and a promise through the prophet Ezekiel that He would need to give the people a new heart and put a new spirit within them in order for them to uphold their end of the covenant (Ezek. 36:26-30). God fulfilled this promise when He sent His Son and His Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers God's people to obey Jesus's instructions: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"

and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40). Just as in Josiah’s day, God’s people worship Him by doing more than keeping rules. The heart of worship overflows into a life of faithful obedience.

What areas of your life require a renewed commitment to the covenant God has created with us in Jesus?



HEAD

How can the knowledge and study of God’s Word inform your worship?



HEART

Of what sins do you need to repent, and how will you combat the idolatry present in your life and seek the Lord first?

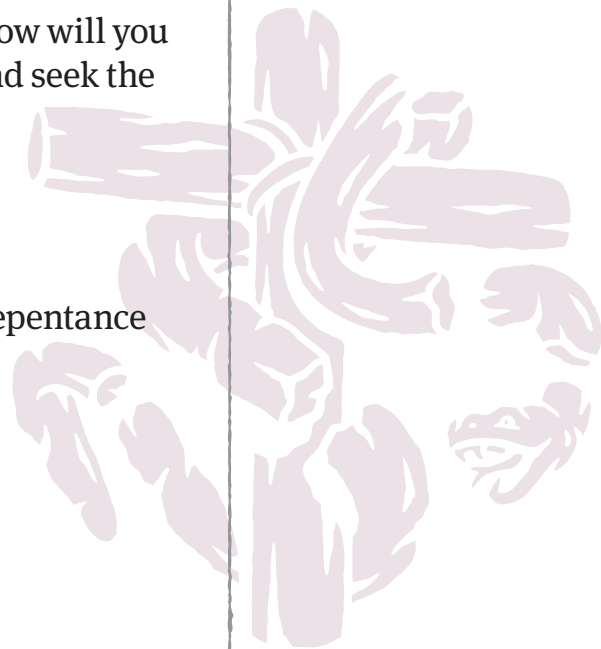


HANDS

How can you model the beautiful gift of repentance and obedience to people in your life?

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2. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Repentance unto Life,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 337.



GOD'S PROPHETS WARNED

CORE PASSAGE: MICAH 5:1-5; 6:6-8; 7:8-9,18-20

Context: During the reigns of Judah's kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, God sent the prophet Micah with a message for both Israel and Judah. Micah spoke the word of the Lord and foretold the judgment, destruction, and exile that was coming for both Israel and Judah. Both kingdoms had failed to keep the Lord's covenant and would continue to do so, with a few exceptions from Judah's kings, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. But Micah also had a message for the future, a message of hope and restoration. Micah prophesied that the Messiah-King would come to shepherd God's people in righteousness forever.

Key Concept: Though there is a future judgment, there is also a future hope.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Micah 1–7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Nahum 1–3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Isaiah 40–54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Zephaniah 1–3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Isaiah 55–66 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 73 |

Amid judgment, there is a future hope of the One who will bring peace (Micah 5:1-6; 6:6-8).

¹ Now, daughter who is under attack, you slash yourself in grief; a siege is set against us! They are striking the judge of Israel on the cheek with a rod. ² Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times. ³ Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler's brothers will return to the people of Israel. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. ⁵ He will be their peace. When Assyria invades our land, when it marches against our fortresses, we will raise against it seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men. ⁶ They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with a drawn blade. So he will rescue us from Assyria when it invades our land, when it marches against our territory.

.....
⁶ What should I bring before the LORD when I come to bow before God on high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? ⁷ Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring of my body for my own sin? ⁸ Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

God's Grace Triumphs over Judgment

The prophet Micah captured the horror of God's judgment. While many modern readers have never lived in a war-torn country, we have an intuitive sense of how terrible this reality must be. Verse 1 pictures the dire situation of Israel as akin to a young woman cutting herself in an attempt to dull the pain. She's so desperate for an escape that the pain of her own blood distracts her from the pain she anticipated and witnessed all around her. She's stricken with grief. Many people have experienced a great loss, such as the death of a beloved spouse, parent, or child. The loss is so great that the grief-stricken man or woman cries out in physical torment. Micah pictured Israel's future exile as both excruciating and humiliating, like a rod striking someone on the cheek (v. 1).

Yet this note of judgment was quickly followed by a promise of grace. In verse 2, Micah uttered a promise to the people that is both specific and beautiful. He first made it clear that the deliverance for the people would come from a person. They would not be rescued by some moral code or secret formula. God would send someone who would deliver the people.

This person would come from a specific place. He would come through the clan of Bethlehem Ephraim, a distinct, small people living in an obscure place in Judah. No one would expect the promised One to come from there. Long before, Israel was told to anticipate from the tribe of Judah a king who would rule and reign over God's people with perfect justice and righteousness (Gen. 49:10), though most assumed this promised King would come through a prominent clan at the center of the nation. Much like the great

King David, many overlooked Bethlehem Ephrathah, but God chose to send His promised Savior through an unexpected place to unsuspecting people.

Micah also pointed out that the origin of this Savior was from ancient times (Mic. 5:2). In other words, people may have thought that God devised a new plan since Israel persisted in their waywardness. But God wanted to make clear through the prophet that this was His plan all along. In fact, not only was this always God's plan, but the Messiah Himself existed before the foundation of the world (see John 1:1-18).

In Exodus 3, when God revealed Himself to Moses, He called Himself "I AM WHO I AM" (3:14). Though this idea is somewhat puzzling, God said that He is the God who just is—He has always existed and He always will exist. In John 8:56-58, Jesus applied this title to Himself, saying that Abraham had longed to see His day. When the Jews pushed back, saying He had not been alive in Abraham's day, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58), which caused the Jews to want to stone Him for blasphemy (v. 59). Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus stated: "*I am* the bread of life" (6:35); "*I am* the light of the world" (8:12); "*I am* the gate for the sheep" (10:7); "*I am* the good shepherd" (10:11); "*I am* the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "*I am* the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6); and "*I am* the true vine" (15:1). While Jesus was born at a certain time and place, as the Second Person of the Trinity, He has always existed.

Micah 5:3 uses the image of a woman in labor. At the time of Micah's prophecy, the Messiah had not yet come, or to use the birth imagery, the woman had not given birth to the Messiah (see Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14). The judgment Israel endured was the birth pangs

CHRIST Connection

Micah tells of the One who would come from Bethlehem to shepherd the people and be their peace. This is one of the prophecies about Jesus, who came to be the Good Shepherd and the Prince of Peace.



that were a precursor to the Messiah's birth. Like the pain of labor, the exile was difficult, but Israel could have hope because they knew the birth of the Messiah would soon take place. Then Jesus would re-gather His people—both Jew and Gentile—through His life, death, and resurrection, and the exile would end.

This Messiah will protect those He saves from a far greater exile—being cast out of the presence of God. Like a faithful shepherd, He would protect His sheep from destruction (Mic. 5:4; cf. John 10:1-18). The Messiah would do what the kings of this earth could not do; He would provide lasting peace and security.

It's unclear what Micah 5:5 means exactly. The imagery of seven shepherds likely denotes a sense of perfection. Even when "Assyria" marches against the people, they would find perfect security through the promised Messiah.

How has Jesus, the Messiah, brought peace into your life?

God Shows Grace in Spite of Our Rebellion

The people of Israel and Judah knew they had blown it. Not only could they read or hear God's law and feel a sense of their sin, but the threatened and coming exile was unmistakable proof that God was greatly displeased with their persistent rebellion.

Israel was trained to understand what to do with their sin by virtue of God's gift of the law. In Leviticus 1–7, God prescribed five types of sacrifices so the people could receive atonement for their sin and once again enjoy fellowship with the Lord. It wasn't enough to say they were sorry. Something had to die for their sin in their place.

By the time of Micah's writing, the people had offered such sacrifices for generations. They knew exactly what to do and when. So why did Micah pose the litany of questions he did in Micah 6:6-7? It may be helpful to think of parenting. Children are instructed to clean their room, for example. When children don't clean their room or leave a mess in other rooms of the house, the parents might discipline their child. What do they need to do to make it right? Likely they simply need to clean their room. However, consider what would happen if the child caused a real disaster, such as leaving the water on and flooding the downstairs or accidentally starting a fire that destroyed a part of the house. What could the child do then to make amends? The damage would be so great that it would be hard to imagine a way to make up for the mistake. Surely Israel felt this way. They didn't merely sin in small ways. They literally destroyed the nation and renounced their right to the land. Their destruction at the hands of the Assyrian army was far worse than a house flood or fire. There was no sacrifice they could offer to make up for the damage they'd done.

God made the point more simply through verse 8. It's not as if the Lord's expectations were somehow too great or too detailed for the people to follow. He actually wasn't after all of these sacrifices in the first place, since the sacrifices themselves were a sign of the sin of the people. He simply wanted the people to obey—"to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God" (v. 8). Again, it's akin to a child weeping in the lap of a parent after ongoing disobedience and the parent simply saying: "I didn't want you to have to go through this heartache. All I wanted was for you to obey."

THEOLOGY Connection

THE GOSPEL:

The gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place in history, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, it is also the story of redemption that God planned “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture and culminates in a restored and redeemed creation— (cont.)

What might it look like for you to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with God?

Evil would be judged, but God would also provide a way of salvation (Micah 7:8-9, 18-20).

⁸ Do not rejoice over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will stand up; though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I must endure the LORD’s fury until he champions my cause and establishes justice for me. He will bring me into the light; I will see his salvation. . . . ¹⁸ Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham, as you swore to our ancestors from days long ago.

We Can Face Our Sin Because of Grace

The Assyrians thought they were a superior people. Not only had they won a military victory, but they crushed the Lord’s people. They had every reason to gloat in their supremacy. But Micah warned them to avoid such a celebration. It appeared as if Israel were destroyed forever, but the prophet knew they would rise again through the coming Savior. They were in darkness at that time, but the Lord would be their light.

John opened his Gospel account by describing Jesus as the light of the Lord: “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it”

(John 1:4-5). The prophet Isaiah also spoke of the promised Messiah—Jesus—as being light in a dark world: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness” (Isa. 9:2; cf. Matt. 4:12-17). And again in John’s Gospel, Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Those who repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for salvation live in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-7).

In verse 9, speaking for God’s exiled people, Micah did what true Christians throughout history do. First, he owned their sin, taking responsibility for their wrongdoing and admitting that God’s judgment was the just result of their sin. He knew that God is a God of justice who must judge sin. The Lord will not turn a blind eye or pretend that sin is no big deal. But Micah also looked forward with hope. Judgment would not be the end of the story. Though the situation was bleak, he knew God would save His people (v. 9).

The same is true for Christians today. We cannot make light of our sin or erroneously believe that God will not judge. After listing the deeds of wickedness in Romans 1, the apostle Paul wrote that “God’s judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth” (Rom. 2:2). In other words, God is right to judge sin. In light of this reality, Christians agree with God by admitting their sin. And to our hope for salvation, the apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God is able to cleanse us through the work of His Messiah, Jesus Christ.

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God’s people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict with one another but together inspire us to a life of devotion and mission.

How have you experienced God's promise of restoration for His people?

God Delights in Mercy

Were we to step back from the flow of the biblical narrative and approach Micah's situation as we might a normal story in our day, we might be tempted to think God would respond like we do when we are offended. If someone doesn't treat us well, we might write them off, distance ourselves from the relationship, or even talk bad about them behind their back. We might even try to get even by hurting them back.

Not God.

God isn't like us (Mic. 7:18). He is distinct because He is able and willing to forgive great offenses against Him. God put this attribute of His character on display to Moses in the wilderness as well. The Lord had given the Israelites His law and pledged His love (Ex. 19–20), but then the people fashioned a false god of gold to worship (Ex. 32). Still, in spite of their rebellion, God reiterated His love by revealing His character to Moses:

The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation. (Ex. 34:6-7)

This is who God is. It's who He has always been and who He will always be. God wanted the people to know His character because they had just rebelled against Him by fashioning a false god. Over and over again,

even in Micah's day, Israel worshiped false gods, and they were judged as a result. So God reminded them that He still delights to show faithful love. The idea of "faithful love" shows up over two hundred and fifty times in the Old Testament. It is translated using different words in various places, but the point is that God keeps the covenant promises He made to Israel. He has promised to love the people and not abandon them, and He reminded them that He will do just that, even though they were judged and exiled. Micah also said that God "delights" to show faithful love (Mic. 7:18). This isn't something He does begrudgingly. He doesn't have to love the people, but He delights to love them, the way a husband delights to love His bride.

The combination of ideas in Micah 7:19 are linked. God has compassion on the people by forgiving their sin when they repent. And He will do more than merely stop the exile or bring them back to the land. He will deal with the root issue—their sin. Micah said that God would "vanquish" their sin. The word *vanquished* means to overcome or overthrow, like what a winning army does to those they defeat. Paul said this was the very thing that Jesus's death accomplished, but the foe was far more significant: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor. 15:54-57). Christ vanquished Satan, sin, and death through His resurrection, by which He shows faithful love to God's people.

Micah also said that God would cast all of the people's sins into the sea (Mic. 7:19). The Lord does not hold on to forgiven sins and bring them up again in

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“There is no greater state than to get up from your knees knowing that in God’s sight you are clean, that He has forgiven every sin you’ve ever committed.”¹

–R. C. Sproul
(1939–2017)

the future. He is active and intentional in removing the sins of the people. Often the parallel phrase “sea of forgetfulness” is used to describe this idea. As an illustration, God does not just forget sin, He intentionally hurls sin into the depths of the sea where it cannot be found again. Isaiah made a similar promise as God said: “I am the one, I sweep away your transgressions for my own sake and remember your sins no more” (Isa. 43:25).

We often tell people who have been wronged to “forgive and forget,” but this is impossible for people. We can’t forget the deep pain others have caused us. But God is not like us. He can actively choose to “forget” our sins by not holding them against us or dealing with us as our sins deserve ever again. The prophet Jeremiah anchored this activity in the new covenant promises the Lord would inaugurate. Through the Messiah, God would “forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin” (Jer. 31:34). The author of Hebrews says Jesus’s once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of His people is the means by which God forgives wrongdoing and will never again remember our sin against us (Heb. 7–10).

Christians find great comfort in this. We know our track record and the evil things we have done. We remember our sins and feel shame over iniquities. We certainly remember the sins of others and often move through life dealing with the fallout. We’re tempted to think that God does the same. Shame and guilt result when we fail to embrace the reality that God has forgiven and forgotten our sin. Paul reminded the church that “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, we are mercifully and graciously declared

free from the condemnation we rightly deserve for our sin. God's faithful love is seen most fully in Christ!

How should you address your struggles with sin in light of God's faithfulness and forgiveness?

 **HEAD**

What are some reasons we fail to deal with our sin as we should?

 **HEART**

How do you need the Lord to be your light, your champion, your justice, and your salvation today?

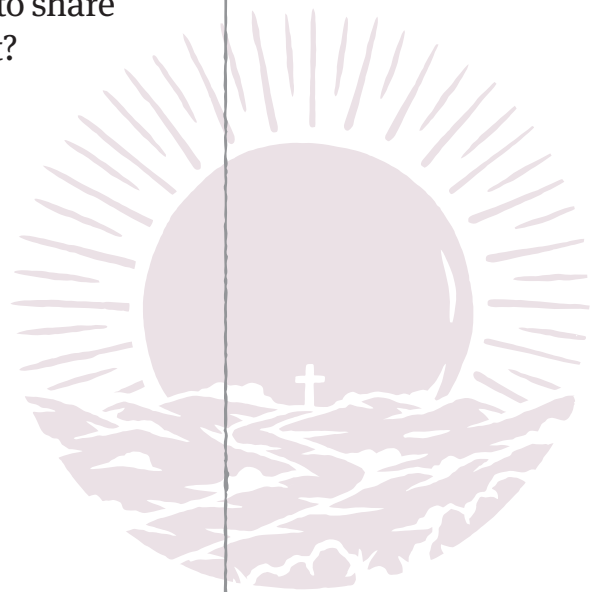
 **HANDS**

How can you use opportunities to forgive to share the gospel and point others to Jesus Christ?

Notes

References

1. R. C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 85.



GOD'S COVENANT RENEWED

CORE PASSAGE: JEREMIAH 17:5-8; 31:31-37

Context: Jeremiah was called to speak for the Lord in the waning days of the kingdom of Judah. Most of his messages warned of the coming judgment, which he witnessed with his own eyes, but a few promised hope for a ruined people. For a time, Judah was looking to put their trust in Egypt to fight the Babylonians, but Jeremiah's warning was to put their trust in God alone. In Jeremiah 17:5-8, which sounds like a psalm or proverb, the prophet addressed Judah's misplaced trust. And in Jeremiah 31:31-37, the prophet foretold the new covenant that God would make with His people to deal with their sin and ours once and for all.

Key Concept: A new covenant will establish followers of Jesus.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Jeremiah 1–10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Jeremiah 30–38 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Jeremiah 11–20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Habakkuk 1–3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Jeremiah 21–29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 92 |

**Those who trust in humankind are cursed;
those who trust in God are blessed**
(Jeremiah 17:5-8).

⁵ This is what the LORD says: Cursed is the person who trusts in mankind. He makes human flesh his strength, and his heart turns from the LORD. ⁶ He will be like a juniper in the Arabah; he cannot see when good comes but dwells in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land where no one lives. ⁷ The person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence indeed is the LORD, is blessed. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted by water: it sends its roots out toward a stream, it doesn't fear when heat comes, and its foliage remains green. It will not worry in a year of drought or cease producing fruit.

Foolish People Trust in People, Not God

Jeremiah contrasted two types of people—those who trust in other people and those who trust in God. The end of verse 5 captures what it means to trust in humankind. Those who do this find their strength in other people and turn away from the Lord. In other words, they rely on people to do what only God can do.

Jeremiah had strong language for those who trust in people. They are “cursed” (v. 5). Verse 6 illustrates what being cursed is like. The Arabah was a desert, and the juniper was a little shrub that grew in that parched land. Due to the lack of water, its growth was stunted and limited, and it possessed little value. Such a shrub is quite the contrast to the picture found in Psalm 1. There, the one who obeys God and delights in His law is “like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Ps. 1:3). Jeremiah



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Notes

continued his illustration by saying that the person who trusts in people ends up isolating himself from others. In other words, trust in humanity backfires—it isolates people from God and from other people. The emphasis here isn't so much that God cursed the people, though that could be true as well, but that the people cursed themselves through their actions. By choosing to trust in themselves rather than trust in God, they experienced the just result of their rebellion—they were cursed.

The writer of Proverbs said that one of the fundamental ways people trust in humankind is by trusting in themselves: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6). Since people generally know that other people will let them down, they end up trusting in themselves, thinking that they are capable of discerning the good and right way to live, but such self-reliance is the height of folly. Not only is this point made clear in the Bible, but we've likely seen it play out in our lives as well. Since we think we know ourselves, it often seems like a better bet to trust ourselves than to trust in a God whom we can't see and who may seem distant. But likely we've also seen that when we put our trust in ourselves, we experience curses as well. Like all the rest of humankind, we let ourselves down or have limited insight and understanding, so we lead ourselves astray. It's always a bad plan to put our full faith and trust in the people of humanity.

What does godly trust in others look like compared to a cursed trust in others?

Wise People Trust in God, Not People

Next, Jeremiah described the person who trusts in the Lord. There's a clear synonym used here for trust. Trust means to place "confidence" in someone (Jer. 17:7). Modern readers understand what it means to place confidence in someone else. When we get married, we place confidence in our spouse that they will love us and not give their hearts to another. When we empower an employee to tackle a task or manage a big account, we trust that person to do the job with excellence and make money for the company. When we send a child away to summer camp, we place confidence in the child to act wisely outside of our eyesight. To have confidence in the Lord means that we believe He will do what He says, that we think He will keep His promises. It means we believe God can be trusted.

Don't miss a critical emphasis here. Jeremiah 17:5-8 speaks of those who trust in other people and those who trust in God. A natural implication of this comparison is that there are only two types of people. All people trust someone—either God or humanity. This same idea is found throughout the Bible: those who walk the wide path that leads to destruction or those who follow the narrow path to life (Matt. 7:13-14); or the goats who are cast out of God's presence and the sheep who are granted eternal life (Matt. 25:31-46).

Compared to the juniper in the dry Arabah, Jeremiah illustrated the person who trusts in the Lord with "a tree planted by water" (Jer. 17:8). The image of such a tree was used in Psalm 1 to speak of the outcome of godly lives. Jesus used the same tree metaphor to speak of the lives of His followers: "Every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces

Voices from THE CHURCH

"To live like a tree is to live close to Christ. He is the water of life. In Jesus Christ there is water during times of drought for thirsty souls. In Jesus Christ there is water for cleansing from sin. Every tree planted close to Christ will have green leaves and rich fruit, and everyone who drinks from his fountain will never die."¹

—Philip G. Ryken

THEOLOGY Connection

UNION WITH CHRIST: At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

bad fruit. . . . So you'll recognize them by their fruit" (Matt. 7:17,20). The mangy juniper shrub in the desert can only bloom tiny white flowers. In contrast, a tree planted by a vibrant spring of water can produce abundant fruit.

Jeremiah 17:8 reveals a critical point. The tree planted by streams of water sends its roots deep into the ground and toward the flow of water. These roots of the tree likely are hidden from the human eye, but beneath the ground, a massive web of tangled roots support, protect, and nourish the tree. Therefore, the tree has nothing to fear when heat comes because its health and fruit production do not depend on what's above ground but what's beneath. It can remain green and keep producing fruit even in lean times.

Here we find a secret to human flourishing. We need deep roots grounded in the truth of God and nourished by His Spirit. We cannot manufacture fruit through the outward appearance of righteous living. If we do, in time, when the heat and the drought come, we will no longer find it worthwhile to continue the charade. It will become evident that we lack the roots that connect us to the Lord, and all our "godly living" will be shown to be a trust in ourselves only.

It takes time to develop spiritually healthy roots. We need to train ourselves to pursue the Lord, to learn to love Him and depend on Him, and to seek to abide in Christ daily (John 15:1-8). As we do, when the difficult circumstances of life inevitably come, we can continue to produce fruit for the glory of God.

How can you pursue the Lord now so that when trouble comes, you will be unwavering and strong amid trials?

The new covenant brings hope and forgiveness for God's people
(Jeremiah 31:31-37).

Notes

³¹ “Look, the days are coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—my covenant that they broke even though I am their master”—the LORD’s declaration. ³³ “Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days”—the LORD’s declaration. “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them”—this is the LORD’s declaration. “For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin. ³⁵ This is what the LORD says: The one who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar—the LORD of Armies is his name: ³⁶ If this fixed order departs from before me—this is the LORD’s declaration—only then will Israel’s descendants cease to be a nation before me forever. ³⁷ This is what the LORD says: Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will I reject all of Israel’s descendants because of all they have done—this is the LORD’s declaration.”

God Moves to Save His People

It would be tempting to read the contrast in Jeremiah 17 as a choose-your-own-adventure novel with a foregone conclusion. People are presented with two options—



trust in people or trust in God. But throughout history, people have always chosen poorly. They have chosen to trust people instead of our Creator. We've also seen in our own hearts that we never consistently trust in God, even when we know the opposite is a foolish choice with deadly consequences. We're doomed, or so it appears.

That's what makes Jeremiah 31 so amazing. In the face of human rebellion, God acted. He always has. This pattern goes back all the way to Genesis 3, when God moved toward Adam and Eve in their sin rather than simply giving them consequences for their rebellion and leaving the relationship forever. Throughout the Bible, God always moved toward sinners—in the garden, in the wilderness, and again in the exile. God is not like us. He can perfectly show justice by judging sin and perfectly show grace by pursuing sinners.

God's movement toward sinners took two forms in Jeremiah 31. First, He moved toward them by declaring His Word—"the LORD's declaration"—through Jeremiah, though sadly they didn't listen at the time. The book of Jeremiah was written around six hundred years before the time of Jesus, so long before the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words in this passage, God wanted to assure the people that He was still working. God does the same for His people today. We live in a time of challenge and suffering. It would be easy to assume that God has forgotten us or given up on His promises. But He's given us His Word, so we know that He will return and will fully and finally save His people. Like the people in Jeremiah's day, we should find comfort and hope in God's revealed Word that shows us that God has not forgotten us and that He will soon make all things right.

Second, God did more than just speak, He also foretold a new covenant with the people. These covenant promises would not be ratified until Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, but God made a promise to do something new. God making a covenant with His people was not new because God is a covenant-making God. In verse 32, God reminded the people that He had pledged His love and faithfulness to the people at Sinai, and they promised to obey and follow Him. But the Lord put an exclamation mark on the outcome of these old covenant promises—the people kept breaking the covenant. Even though God had led the Israelites out of slavery and even though He had chosen them to be His special possession, they broke their promises to God, over and over again. Even in the time of the kings and prophets, they did not trust and worship Him alone.

We should find hope and encouragement when we read of God's movement toward the people in Jeremiah 31. He had every right to give up on them, but He didn't. He kept pursuing. The book of Hosea captures this reality, as the prophet Hosea was instructed by God to take a prostitute as his wife. And when she left, the Lord told Hosea to pursue her and take her back (Hos. 3:1), revealing His continuing love and pursuit of Israel, who continually turned to other gods just as Hosea's wife continually turned to other men. But God did not give up. He continued to love them and pursue them, ultimately and perfectly by sending His Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin.

How does the state of our heart impact our obedience to the Lord?

God Made a Better Covenant

The phrase “those days” in Jeremiah 31:33 likely referred to the coming exile, the suffering that the people would experience in real time. After this time of great trial and suffering, the Lord promised to make His new covenant. He made this promise by proclaiming “the LORD’s declaration” (v. 33). This introduction is meant to have some weight. It is not some vague word about what might happen in the future. It is a formal declaration that comes from the Lord God Himself.

What was significant about this new covenant was the location of its impact. It would not be external but internal. God would do something that placed His law in the hearts of His people so that they would not merely have to obey God but they would want to. Simply put, God would change their hearts. People would not have to instruct and urge others to conform to God’s standard (Jer. 31:34), since the law would then be on their hearts and they would desire to honor God’s law. This work was not going to happen because one generation would come that was sinless and perfect, but God Himself would forgive their sins and change their hearts. The prophet Micah also made this same point (Mic. 7:18-20). God’s new covenant would provide a lasting answer to the sin of the people and allow a just God, who must punish sin, to also forgive the sinner.

God then wanted to make it clear who was speaking. The new covenant promises He made through Jeremiah likely seemed impossible for the people. How could something happen that would cause them to love and follow God? How could God forgive their sins that would lead to their exile? In Jeremiah 31:35,

God said He can do all of this because He is God. He is the One who spoke all things into existence in the first place. Not only did He make the sun to light the day, but He continues to cause the sun to rise each morning to supply light to the world. As God made clear to Job, the Lord controls the entire world and can, and does, do whatever He wants (see Job 38–42). This is why the passage refers to Him as “the LORD of Armies.” He’s in charge of all things, including the natural world and even all of the heavenly armies of angels. He’s supreme. So when He says He’s going to do something, He actually has the power to do what He says.

Jeremiah 31:36–37 provides two if/then type statements. In both cases, the outcome described was that God would abandon His promises and not do what He had said. So if either of the “if” portions of the statements could happen, then God would be unfaithful. First, if the world could stop having a fixed order to its creation, then God’s promises would fail. In other words, if the fixed patterns of life—the ordered path of the planets, moons, and stars—could cease, then it would prove that God could not keep His covenant. Second, in verse 37, if the people could measure all of the heavens and all of the foundations of the earth, then God would reject His people.

Such a feat is unheard of. Even today, with all the marvels of modern technology, no one has been capable of perfectly measuring the universe or having much more than a theoretical sense of the depths of the earth. God was clearly saying that nothing could prevent Him from being true to His covenant. The exiled people of Israel could take great confidence from the fact that God’s plan and purposes cannot be thwarted.

Voices from THE CHURCH

“This beautiful poem . . . describes the permanence of the new covenant as being as fixed as the order of creation, as regular as the cycles of nature, and as immense as the universe. A new-covenant believer cannot read these words without thinking about the power of God to keep eternally all those who are in Christ.”²

—Steven Smith

GOSPEL Connection

The new covenant was established through Jesus, the Son of God, who was a substitute for the penalty of our sin. He fulfilled the law completely and writes the law on our hearts, and we are adopted as children of God. Through the new covenant, all who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior are saved as a free gift because of God's grace and mercy.

Obviously, the full outworking of these new covenant promises would await the coming of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection transforms the hearts of those who trust in Him through faith through the power and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's why the Bible speaks of conversion as being "born again" (John 3:3-8,14-17). Through the new birth, God grants Christians the Holy Spirit, who spurs our hearts to know, follow, and worship God. The Lord also pledges His faithful love to His people and grants them eternal life in His kingdom, where they will be free from the power and presence of sin forever (Rom. 6:22-23).

Can anything stop these promises from coming to pass? Paul wrote:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39)

Because of Jesus, Christians are more than conquerors. Since the power of Satan, sin, and death has been defeated, nothing can stop us. Paul mentioned a number of facets of life that we might think could defeat a Christian, stop God's promises, or separate them from His love. In each case, he said, "No!" Paul's words echoed Jeremiah 31:36-37. Nothing can stop God from doing what He says He will do because He has the power to always keep His promises.

How has God proven to you that He will uphold His covenant with you?



HEAD

Why is it important not just to memorize Scripture but meditate on the words?



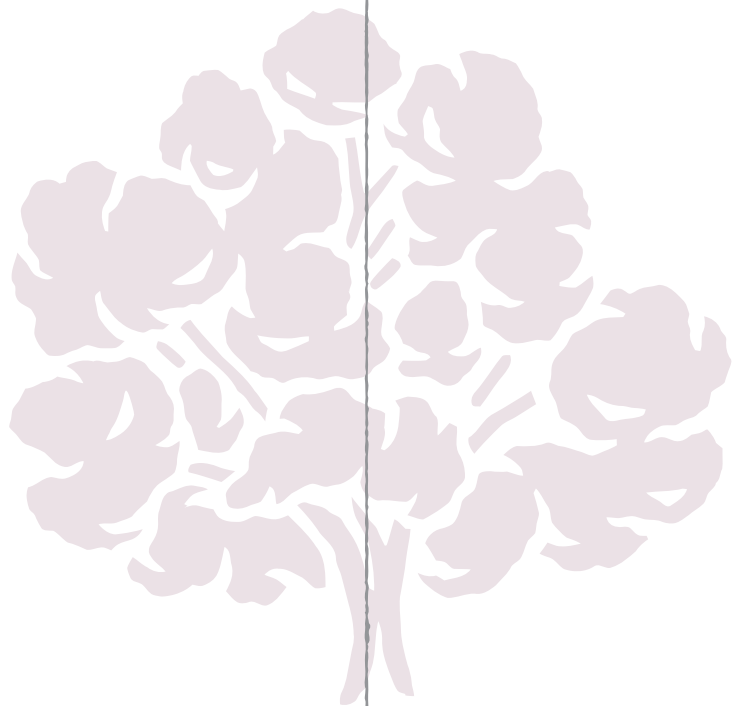
HEART

How should we respond to our sin in light of God's unbreakable new covenant?



HANDS

How will you approach your good works and obedience in light of the new covenant Jesus fulfilled for you?



References

1. Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 278.
2. Steven Smith, *Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 201.

GOD'S NATION FELL

CORE PASSAGE: 2 CHRONICLES 36:11-21

Context: Josiah was a good king over Judah who followed in the ways of his ancestor David, and he obeyed the Lord in almost all that he did. Josiah's faithfulness brought restoration to God's people. But after Josiah's death, his successors—three sons and a grandson—did not follow in his faithful footsteps. Each one did what was evil in the Lord's eyes. They did not obey God but pursued wickedness and rebelled against His ways and His punishments. Their continual disobedience brought about God's judgment that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and exile from the promised land for God's people.

Key Concept: God warns people with compassion but will also judge evil.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 23:31–25:26
- ☐ **Day 2:** 2 Chronicles 36:1-21
- ☐ **Day 3:** Jeremiah 39:1–44:30
- ☐ **Day 4:** Jeremiah 45:1–52:30
- ☐ **Day 5:** Lamentations 1:1–5:22
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 79

**Though God waits patiently for repentance,
He will judge evil** (2 Chronicles 36:11-16).

¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah at the LORD's command. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. He became obstinate and hardened his heart against returning to the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁴ All the leaders of the priests and the people multiplied their unfaithful deeds, imitating all the detestable practices of the nations, and they defiled the LORD's temple that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. ¹⁵ But the LORD, the God of their ancestors sent word against them by the hand of his messengers, sending them time and time again, for he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they kept ridiculing God's messengers, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the LORD's wrath was so stirred up against his people that there was no remedy.

Pride Comes Before Destruction

Both Hezekiah and Josiah were godly kings (2 Kings 18:1-6; 22:1-2). Not Zedekiah. He was among the many kings who turned away from God and worshiped idols. In fact, after the division of the kingdom, there were only eight kings of Judah—Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah—who walked faithfully with God, with varying degrees of obedience. Most of the kings were like Zedekiah and were unfaithful to God. The larger percentage of ungodly kings provides some



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sense of the devolving nature of the kingdom as a whole. Not only had it split in two following Solomon's reign, but the leaders of the two kingdoms were increasingly prone to ungodliness, as were the people.

Jeremiah warned the nation of the foolishness of sin, as we saw in the previous session, but it didn't work. The people paid no attention, especially not King Zedekiah (see Jer. 34). You'd think that he would be the first person to listen since it was his nation the prophet warned was about to be judged. If he did not turn from sin and turn to the Lord, Judah and Jerusalem would be destroyed. Zedekiah would have blood on his hands if this happened since he was the king. However, 2 Chronicles 36:12 shows that Zedekiah was unwilling to humble himself and heed Jeremiah's warning. He just kept walking away from the Lord.

Not only did Zedekiah refuse to follow God, but he also did not uphold his promise to King Nebuchadnezzar, who had appointed him king in Judah. Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah swear fealty in God's name (v. 13). To make a promise in God's name and uphold it would have signified that Zedekiah revered God's name and would submit to His authority, which is certainly not what Zedekiah's life demonstrated. He was not submissive to God nor to Nebuchadnezzar, God's chosen instrument of judgment.

God's evaluation was severe: Zedekiah was obstinate and hardened his heart so he would not repent and return to the Lord. The most prominent place in the Bible this language is found is regarding Pharaoh at the time of the exodus (see Ex. 9:12). Even though the Lord spoke through Moses, as He did through Jeremiah to Zedekiah, Pharaoh would not listen. He hardened his heart. A soft heart is a picture of someone

who is receptive to God's words and is willing to repent when confronted with sin. In contrast, people with a hard heart will not listen or turn from their ways. Both Pharaoh and Zedekiah hardened their hearts against the Lord and were judged as a result.

Second Chronicles 36:12 gives insight into what shows whether a person has a hard heart or a soft heart—humility or pride. Pride is a mark of a hard heart, humility of a soft heart. The writer of Proverbs warned against the result of Zedekiah's chosen path: "Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Zedekiah was doomed.

We should learn from Zedekiah's example and pursue a soft heart by rejecting pride and delighting in humility. Especially when the Lord brings our attention to a matter of sin, we should heed the warning and humble ourselves lest we incur God's judgment.

What are some ways we can grow in humility to listen to and accept godly rebuke and correction?

God Provides Sufficient Warning

The issue was not just with Zedekiah. "All the leaders of the priests and the people" followed Zedekiah into sin (2 Chron. 36:14). This reality likely went two ways. The people saw the waywardness of their king and modeled their lives off of those in leadership. Also, Zedekiah likely saw the sin of the people and placated them by indulging in their folly. The king, the leaders, and the people sinned in three ways: (1) they multiplied their wicked deeds; (2) they copied the pagan worship of the nations around them; and (3) they defiled God's holy temple.

WORD STUDY

HUMBLE: The word *kana* means "to humble," "to subdue," or "to bring low."¹ It often refers to the act of yielding to authority or recognizing one's position before God. The use of *kana* in this passage highlights the relational dynamic between humanity and God. God's authority requires submission, and refusal to humble oneself results in judgment.

THEOLOGY Connection

GOD IS JUST:

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be unjust if God did not uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. (cont.)

The people's third offense—the desecration of the temple—was the lowest of lows. When the Babylonians invaded and ransacked Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar took the temple's treasures and burned down the temple (vv. 18-19). But the people of Judah already had perpetrated a much greater offense—they worshiped idols and sinned to their heart's content without any thought for the Lord who dwelled in their midst in His temple. And though He had called them to be holy in His presence, the people offered their sacrifices without any concern for holiness or even a hint of shame for their sin. Therefore, the very temple where God had chosen to put His name forever (1 Kings 9:3) would now become a picture of His wrath against the sin of His people (2 Chron. 36:18-19; cf. 1 Kings 9:8-9).

This did not have to happen, at least from a human perspective. The writer of Chronicles made it clear that God provided plenty of opportunities for repentance. Not only did He send messengers to warn them, but He did this “time and time again” (2 Chron. 36:15). Over and over, messengers such as Jeremiah came to warn the people and the king of what would happen if they continued to follow pagan gods and reject the true God. The Lord's motive was clear—He had compassion on the people and on His temple. He wanted them to turn from sin and avoid the coming judgment.

Paul made this same point about the ungodly in his day. The Jews put their faith in their heritage and traditions, whereas the Gentiles worshiped false gods instead of the true God. God had been patient to expose their sin and call them to repentance. He warned: “Do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

(Rom. 2:4). God's kindness in sending prophets and giving them time was meant to stir repentance. Paul continued: "Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed" (v. 5). Sinners in Paul's day hardened their hearts just like Zedekiah did at the time of the exile. So God must judge.

Chronicles goes one step further in describing the hardness of the people's hearts. They did not simply avoid listening to the messengers, but they also mocked them, hated their words, and scoffed at their warnings (2 Chron. 36:16). Their responses were outward evidences of a hardened heart. Jesus said that the same process continued in His day when He lamented over the sin of Jerusalem:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"! (Matt. 23:37-39)

No generation was immune to closing their ears, hardening their hearts, and persisting in their rebellion. No generation could blame God—He provided sufficient warning through the prophets. And no generation or people today can claim ignorance or justification for their own willful rebellion against the Lord.

How have you been treated as you have shared the gospel with others?

Notes



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to review God's message through the prophets concerning the Babylonian exile.

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

No one can escape God's righteous judgment apart from repentance (2 Chronicles 36:17-21).

¹⁷ So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their fit young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no pity on young men or young women, elderly or aged; he handed them all over to him. ¹⁸ He took everything to Babylon—all the articles of God's temple, large and small, the treasures of the LORD's temple, and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ Then the Chaldeans burned God's temple. They tore down Jerusalem's wall, burned all its palaces, and destroyed all its valuable articles. ²⁰ He deported those who escaped from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and his sons until the rise of the Persian kingdom. ²¹ This fulfilled the word of the LORD through Jeremiah, and the land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy years were fulfilled.

Even the Mighty Can Fall

God handed Judah over to judgment because of her incessant sin. Again there's a parallel here to the message of Paul to the church at Rome. Describing the idolatry of the people of his day, Paul said that "God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts" (Rom. 1:24) and that He "delivered them over to disgraceful passions" (v. 26). Other translations say that God "gave them over" to their sinful passions. In other words, since the people did not care to do God's will, He let them wallow in their sin until their depraved desires ran their natural course and destroyed them.

Second Chronicles 36:17 says the same about Judah. In this passage, God gave the people over to the

king of the Chaldeans. In other words, the entire exile was judgment from God for the sin of the people. He gave them time. He sent them messengers. He pursued them in love. Now they experienced His wrath. Just as Josiah gathered all of the people, from young to old, to commit themselves to obey God's law (2 Kings 23:1-3), now all of the people, from young to old, were judged.

In the immediate context, it is clear that Judah did not think they could be destroyed in this way. Zedekiah was prideful (2 Chron. 36:12). He heard God's warning from Jeremiah but did nothing to change. Who wants their children killed or taken away as slaves? Who wants their cities destroyed or the prized temple of the Lord decimated? No one! Surely if he and the people had genuinely believed that God meant what He said, then he would have repented.

The fact that God is true to His promises isn't merely in the positive aspects for His people. He is also true in the promises He makes regarding the consequences of sin and the reality of judgment. Since God can be trusted, all people should heed His warnings and turn from their sin. Sometimes it seems that people, like nations, assume they are too big, too important to face God's judgment. But God can bring down nations, and He can judge the rich, powerful, and strong in our day as well.

Paul made this point to the church in Rome. He warned that people can do the wrong thing and dabble with sin with the time they've been given. They can erroneously think that God is just letting them get away with their folly, that He doesn't care, or that He will never judge wickedness (Rom. 2:1-3). Instead, Paul wrote that people should recognize God's kindness and forbearance. God isn't just letting people get

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“God’s wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil.”²

–J. I. Packer
(1926–2020)

away with sin; He is giving them time to turn from their sin and repent (v. 4). But if they do not turn, they are storing up wrath for themselves “in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed” (v. 5). Persisting in sin is like damming up water. You can build a massive dam that restrains the flow of water for a time, but in time, either the dam will break or someone will open the valves, and then the force of the water will be unleashed. If the opening of the dam isn’t planned and supervised, the water can destroy people or entire cities. The same is true of our sin. The longer we persist in it, the more we store up the force of God’s wrath that is rightly due our rebellion.

God doesn’t always judge our sin through the invasion of foreign armies or by exiling us off of land as He did at the time of Zedekiah. But He does allow us to face the outcome of our sinful choices. Often people describe this as “hitting rock bottom.” They get so low in their rebellion that they have to face their need for a way out like the prodigal son did when he found himself eating with the pigs (Luke 15:15-16). God also sends us messengers, be it pastors, church members, parents, or friends. People come to us and lovingly call us to repent. All along the way, God is giving us time. Time to repent. Time to come to our senses. Wise people take advantage of this time and turn.

How might you communicate with others the remedy for God’s wrath that God has provided in Jesus Christ?

God Fulfills His Plans

Second Chronicles 36:21 confirms that these circumstances were not happenstance. It was no accident

that the Chaldeans exiled the people and destroyed the temple. All of it fulfilled God's purposes. God is meticulously active in the events of human history to accomplish His foreordained will. In verse 21, God said that He was doing exactly what Jeremiah warned the people He would do.

The idea of fulfillment shows up repeatedly in the New Testament as well. Jesus repeatedly rooted His teaching or activity in a message spoken long ago (Matt. 8:17; 12:17; 13:35). In each case, Jesus fulfilled what was spoken by the prophets, such as Jeremiah. His emphasis was the same as the writer of Chronicles. Jesus wanted people to understand that what He did—even His death and resurrection—was God's plan, spoken of long ago, so when people witnessed Jesus's teaching and actions, they would be encouraged to trust in God, who had been working to bring it to pass.

Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet,” told the people exactly what would happen in the exile. The judgment of God for the sin of the people left him in anguish. He told the people they would be in captivity for seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). This prophecy was intentionally specific. The Lord made it clear that He orchestrated everything, down to the number of years they'd be away. And the number itself was no accident. In the law of Moses, the land was supposed to lie fallow every seven years to give it time to recover before a crop was planted again (Lev. 25:4). This pattern—six years of planting and one year of rest—was modeled after the days of creation, six days of work and one day of rest (Gen. 2:1-3). Jeremiah spoke of the exile as a consequential Sabbath of sorts. The land would have rest from its people and their sin for ten periods of seven years.

GOSPEL
Connection

Because of God's compassion, Jesus came to make a way of salvation for those who will believe in Him and repent of their sins. But there will come a time when all who harden their hearts against the Lord will be judged.

Of course, God did end the exile and bring His people back. Under leaders such as Nehemiah and Ezra, the people returned and began work to rebuild the temple. But it would not be until the time of Jesus when the nation of Israel would truly be gathered together once again. Jesus spoke of His mission to care for the scattered sheep of the house of Israel (John 10:1-18), though He wept over the fact that they did not desire His care (Matt. 23:37-39).

What's astounding about Jesus's mission is that He did not come merely for the scattered people of Israel but for the entire world (John 3:16). Israelites and Gentiles alike suffer under all sorts of consequences for their rebellion, and Jesus came to draw them back to God through faith in His death and resurrection (Eph. 2:11-22). The exile in Jeremiah's day would only truly end when Jesus saved sinners.

This end to the exile that only Jesus brings is not limited to a land, however. Something far better would come through the person and work of Jesus Christ. John captured the essence of this future work in His vision found in the book of Revelation: "He then carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, arrayed with God's glory" (Rev. 21:10-11). When Jesus returns, He will establish His people in a new and perfect city. This New Jerusalem will not contain a temple "because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (v. 22). Until that day, all the people of God will be scattered among the nations awaiting their heavenly home.

How does this passage challenge your perspective on the seriousness of sin in your own life?

Notes



HEAD

What would God have us believe and do in response to Judah's destruction?



HEART

How has God shown love and mercy toward you?
How have you extended that love and mercy to others?

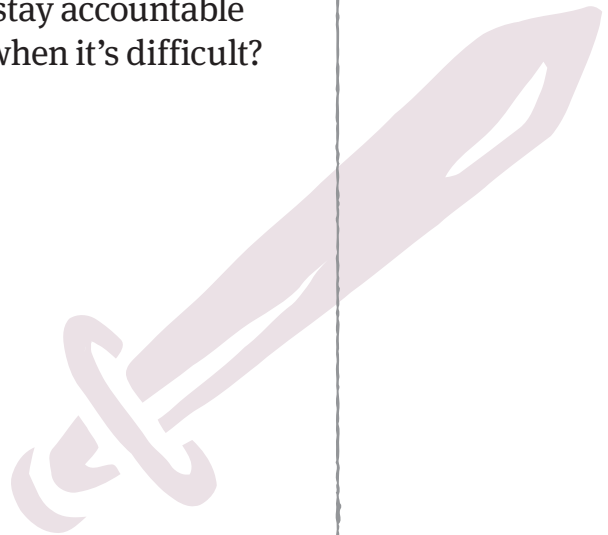


HANDS

How will you encourage others to stay accountable and obedient to God's Word even when it's difficult?

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1. Stephen D. Renn, ed., "Humble," in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 502.
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GOD'S REVIVAL PROMISED

CORE PASSAGE: EZEKIEL 37:1-14

Context: Ezekiel was brought up to be a priest in Jerusalem, but he was carried away to Babylon during the first wave of the Babylonian exile. Yet even there, the Lord's hand was on him, and he was called by the Lord as a prophet. Ezekiel prophesied to the people who remained in Judah that their hardheartedness and sin would result in the Lord's abandonment of the temple and the total destruction of Jerusalem. When God's judgment came to pass, the people understandably lost all hope. They had earned their punishment. But God still had a plan for His people, and Ezekiel prophesied their revival and spiritual new birth.

Key Concept: God revives His people when hope seems lost.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Ezekiel 1–11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Ezekiel 25–32 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Ezekiel 12–17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Ezekiel 33–39 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Ezekiel 18–24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 80 |

When hope seems lost, we rely on God's power to revive us (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

¹ The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry. ³ Then he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I replied, “Lord GOD, only you know.” ⁴ He said to me, “Prophecy concerning these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Lord GOD says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live. ⁶ I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” ⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ As I looked, tendons appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man. Say to it: This is what the Lord GOD says: Breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me; the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army.

God Calls Out to the Lifeless

Books like Ezekiel are filled with vivid imagery that is sometimes difficult to understand. Much of the book is debated, but Ezekiel 37 is not one of those chapters. It's a clear and compelling picture filled with hope for God's people in spite of their sin and exile.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

Ezekiel ministered during the Babylonian exile, a time when the people were facing the harsh consequences for their rebellion. Many of the Israelites were killed, while others were displaced or separated from their loved ones. Jerusalem was decimated, and the temple destroyed. Everything was a picture of death.

God gave Ezekiel a vision that He knew would resonate with people who were discouraged and disheartened. The vision was of a valley filled with dead bones. Death, destruction, and “very dry” bones everywhere (v. 2). This was a place you wouldn’t want to visit for any length of time. For the exiles, the valley of bones would have been a clear depiction of how they felt: “God’s people have been utterly destroyed for their sin. The covenant curses have been executed and the corpses of the slain left unburied. No life remains in the bones. End of story.”¹

God then asked Ezekiel a penetrating question: “Can these bones live?” (v. 3). This was a question of faith. God asked Ezekiel if he believed there was any hope for these dead people. From a human perspective, there would be no way to make dead bones come to life again. Maybe you’ve had the painful experience of standing over the body of a loved one just after their death. In your agony, you long for the dead person to come to life. You want the dead to live, but you know there’s no way short of a miracle to bring them back to life.

In an even more dead-end situation, in a valley of dry bones, Ezekiel spoke a word of faith. He didn’t say he was confident that the bones could live, but he affirmed that only the Lord would know and only the Lord would have the power to make it happen. He acknowledged that the Lord could do anything.

God then did the unthinkable. He told Ezekiel to speak to the dry bones and tell them to live. There are two points worth noting. First, God spoke. He's been doing this since the dawn of creation. Everything in the universe came to be because God spoke it into existence (see Gen. 1). The valley of dry bones was bleak, but the world before God created light was surely more desolate.

Second, God chose to speak through a person. He didn't make some sort of public, heavenly announcement over the valley. Rather, He told Ezekiel to speak to the dry bones. God works in the world and speaks to His creation through people. For example, when God was ready to rescue His people enslaved in Egypt, He raised up Moses and told him to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let God's people go. Obviously, God could have freed the Israelites any way He wanted—a fact that is clearly seen in the plagues that followed. God did not need to get Pharaoh's attention through Moses, but He did. God works in the world through people who speak. The very activity of the prophets indicates this reality. The prophets spoke to Israel on God's behalf and brought words of judgment and hope.

This reality parallels the work of Christians today who speak on God's behalf through their work in evangelism and missions. Paul described the task of Christians this way: "We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God.'" (2 Cor. 5:20). God speaks through Christians to people who are dead in their sins and offers them new life found only in Christ.

Voices from THE CHURCH

*"We may feel that we are preaching the gospel to congregations of dry, dead bones, like those Ezekiel spoke to, and have little hope of them coming to life. But when Ezekiel spoke in obedience to Yahweh, the Spirit came and the impossible happened. When we obey and preach the gospel, Yahweh makes dead people come to life."*²

—Eliya Mohol

God Makes the Dead Alive

Ezekiel 37:5 is a direct parallel to Genesis 2: “Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). God breathed life into the first man and gave him life. In Ezekiel, God said He would do this to the entire valley of dry bones. He would take these dead bones and make them live by breathing life into them.

The Lord then went into detail describing how He would rebuild the bones into fully functioning people. They would get tendons and flesh and skin and finally breath. In the garden of Eden, God made man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils; in Ezekiel 37:5, God said to the bones, “I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live.”

And then it happened. Ezekiel emphasized that “while I was prophesying,” the bones came together. This was surely an astounding sight to behold. Ezekiel may have had the faith that God could bring life, but with God’s power, his faith became sight. The bones came together. Tendons grew. Flesh and skin covered the bodies. But they still had no breath in them. There was no life, yet.

God wasn’t finished. Through the words of Ezekiel, the Lord commanded breath from the four winds to give life to the people (v. 9). The four winds likely represent the four corners of the earth—north, south, east, and west. Certainly this was something only God could do. Since He controls all of the wind (Ps. 107:29; Matt. 8:27; Mark 4:39), He could command the wind to breathe life into these bones.

Verse 10 describes these resurrected bones as “a vast army,” emphasizing that God was not intent on giving life merely to one person but to many people. The contrast in this vision from the beginning to this point is stunning—the passage opened with a collection of dead bones and ended with a vast army of once-dead, now alive people.

What areas in your life feel spiritually “dry” or lifeless? How can the Lord bring renewal and restoration?

Jesus worked these kinds of miracles in His earthly ministry. In Luke’s Gospel, Jairus’s daughter experienced one such miracle (Luke 8:40-56). The 12-year-old girl was dead. Jesus, seemingly unfazed, told Jairus that if he believed, the girl would be saved. Luke recorded the scene this way:


So he took her by the hand and called out, “Child, get up!” Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he gave orders that she be given something to eat. Her parents were astounded, but he instructed them to tell no one what had happened. (vv. 54-56)

Only God can bring the dead to life again. He did this with Jairus’s daughter, and He also raised Lazarus (John 11:1-44). Jesus does things that only God can do—He gives physical life as a precursor to the spiritual life that His death and resurrection will provide for His people.

How does this passage challenge your faith in God’s power to work in hopeless situations?

**GOSPEL
Connection**

Though sin, guilt, and shame may have a hold on us, God’s resurrection power brings renewed life to those who trust in His Son, Jesus, who conquered sin and death through His resurrection.

God will revive us with His Spirit so that we will know Him (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Look how they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off.’
¹² Therefore, prophesy and say to them, ‘This is what the Lord GOD says: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them, my people, and lead you into the land of Israel. ¹³ You will know that I am the LORD, my people, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it. This is the declaration of the LORD.’”

God’s People Felt Hopeless

God referred to Ezekiel as a “son of man” because he was a representative of the people of Israel. By referring to him as a son of man, God highlighted that Ezekiel experienced all the human frailty, the trials of human sin, and the consequences of judgment, and as a result, he was uniquely positioned to speak God’s words to the people.

God made explicit the point of this whole vision. The bones represented the house of Israel, the descendants of Abraham who had been displaced because of their breaking covenant. When Israel looked at the destruction of their land and their temple, they felt like dead bones. David expressed after his sin with Bathsheba: “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice” (Ps. 51:8). Proverbs warned: “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22). In ancient Hebrew culture:

Individuals refer to their bones when describing the deepest aspects of their lives, the core of their being, their very selves. The sensation of pain in the bones is used to express the depth of anguish (e.g. Job 30:17; Ps. 6:2) and is linked with unforgiven sin and divine judgment (e.g. Ps. 32:3; 38:3; 51:8; Lam. 1:13; 3:4).³

For the exiles, they felt like their hope was dead because they were cut off from the land and the temple.

What is God's role in our understanding of His Word, and how should we submit to that?

Hopelessness is a grave danger. It can be argued that the human life runs on hope. Hope is the gasoline that powers us through life. We need something to look forward to. We need to believe that our sin, our mistakes, our past will not have the final word. If we lose hope, we have no reason to move into the next day. At minimum, hopelessness makes us feel depressed or despondent. For some, hopelessness can lead to suicidal thoughts or actions. If we lose hope, we have no purpose or reason to live. Hopelessness is like the body of some aging adults. The bones are brittle and break easily. They can't get out of bed, can't move freely, are unmotivated, and do not believe that anything can change. Many times senior adults die emotionally before their bodies die. Sometimes people who are much younger do too.

This was how Israel felt. They weren't living in exile with the goal of mustering their energy and strength to put the pieces back together to retake the land and rebuild the temple. They were hopeless. We often feel this way with our sin as well. We consider



“the sin that so easily ensnares us” (Heb. 12:1) and we lose hope. The term *ensnare* is a vivid description. We are stuck the way an animal is lured and caught in a trap. Try as we might, we can’t free ourselves. So we give up; we lose hope. Ezekiel’s vision, coupled with the whole story of the Bible, reminds us that when we feel hopeless, we should turn to God for help. Writing in Psalm 42, David grappled with his situation and asked: “Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil?” but he quickly responded: “Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God” (Ps. 42:5). We can have hope, no matter how desperate our situation, because God loves to rescue the hopeless.

God Draws Us Out of Hopelessness

In the New Testament, Paul said that people are “dead in [their] trespasses and sins” and, as a result, they are “by nature children under wrath” (Eph. 2:1,3). The dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision and the overall exile of Israel were a picture of human sin. We are born dead in sin, unable to do anything to fix our predicament.

But death is no match for God. In Ezekiel 37:12, God said that He was going to overcome the death of the people. He was going to open the graves, raise the people up, and lead them into the land. Not only would God raise them up and lead them into the land, He would also put His Spirit in the people (v. 14). This promise mirrors the one found in Jeremiah 31, where God made new covenant promises with the nation and said: “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jer. 31:33). Since only God can overcome death, the people would know that this was God’s

work when these promises were fulfilled (Ezek. 37:13). The two-fold repetition of this idea makes it clear that God's primary intention was for the people to know that He is the Lord (vv. 13-14). He wanted them to know that He is not like the false gods of other nations. He is the only true God.

How can we rely on the Holy Spirit to live out God's purposes for our lives?

We've already seen how Jesus is the fulfillment of the new covenant promises. He is the means by which God forgives sin and gives His Spirit to His people. He is the Savior (2 Pet. 1:11). His work provides the power to overcome spiritual death. Paul's famous section in Ephesians 2:1-10 emphasizes this idea when he wrote, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses" (Eph. 2:4-5). God, through Jesus, makes dead people live, just as God made dry bones live in Ezekiel's vision. Those He brings to life are united into the church, the vast army of those God has saved.

If we doubt the reality of this claim, we need to look no further than the death of Jesus Christ. Some have suggested that Jesus did not really die on the cross but fainted or only appeared to be dead. However, the Gospel writers were clear—Jesus really died (Matt. 27:45-54). Paul established that this matter was of first importance—Jesus really died, and He really was buried (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Like the valley of dry bones, the situation following Jesus's death seemed to be hopeless. His followers were dejected and despairing (Luke 24:13-17).

Notes

**THEOLOGY
Connection**

REGENERATION: Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

But the resurrection of Jesus is proof that death is no match for the power of God. The Bible does not record exactly how Jesus came to life; the mechanics of the resurrection are not important. What is important is the fact that Jesus was raised bodily (Matt. 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12). Jesus overcame death!

Paul took the argument one step further. Christians also will be raised from the dead at Christ's return. He knew that some denied Jesus's resurrection, so he wrote: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, 'There is no resurrection of the dead'? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (1 Cor. 15:12-13). However, Paul was convinced that Jesus did, in fact, rise, so he continued:

But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:20-22)

The point is clear. Because Jesus has been raised, Christians will experience two resurrections. First, we go from death to life when our sins are forgiven and we are given new, spiritual life through faith. We once were dead in trespasses and sins, but through Jesus, we are made alive. Second, we will experience a resurrection after our bodies physically die. Like Jesus, we will experience a real death. Our flesh and blood will fail, and we will die. But like Jesus, we will rise again with a new physical body in which we will be with God forever (2 Tim. 2:11-13; Rev. 21:1-7; 22:5). Jesus was the first fruits of a rich harvest of souls that God will

reap when Jesus returns. In this way, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a picture of spiritual birth and eternal birth. In both cases, the dead will live by the power of God.



HEAD

How does our understanding and faith in God impact our obedience to Him and our proclamation of His gospel?



HEART

In what areas of your life are you lacking hope and feeling cut off from God? How does this passage encourage you?

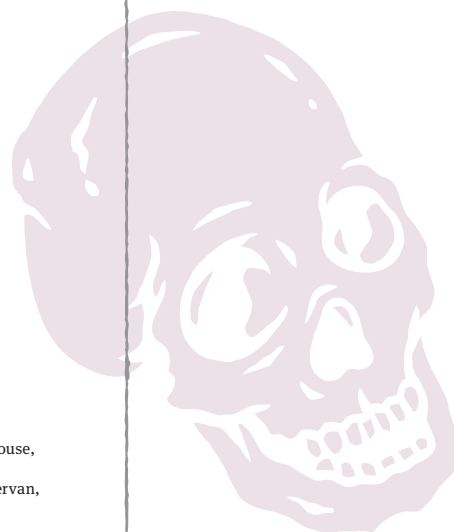


HANDS

How will you pray and prepare for sharing the gospel of Jesus with those who are spiritually dead in their sins?

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DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

After Solomon's reign over a united people, because of his sin of idolatry, the kingdom split. To varying degrees, the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah often followed that same idolatrous path, with a few exceptions. Thus, God sent prophets to call them to repentance and to warn the people of His judgment. Because they did not humble themselves and listen, their enemies overtook them and they were sent into captivity. But even as the prophets warned of judgment, they also prophesied a future day of hope—a day when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come to establish His kingdom and a new covenant to forgive sin and provide eternal hope for God's people.

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