

God's Message to Us in 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 25

Halifax, NS

1 April 2018, 2:00 PM

Introduction

Today in our sermon series on God's message to us in every book of the Bible, we are continuing in the Books of Kings.

- Originally, First and Second Kings were not divided into two books.
 - The division is in a rather random place.
 - Last week, I wanted to focus on Solomon as a type of Christ as the King of Glory or the King of peace, so I focused on the first 12 chapters of First Kings.
 - We saw pictures of Christ's ultimate reign when He puts all His enemies under His feet.
 - We also touched looked a bit beyond chapter 12 to look the consequences of Solomon's unfaithfulness.
- Today, I want to basically cover from 1 Kings 12 all the way to the end of Second Kings—2 Kings 25.
 - We will look at three general things the Lord shows us in these chapters...
 - He shows us the importance of proper worship.
 - He shows us how He speaks through His prophets.
 - He shows us His zeal to preserve the gospel.

I. In 1 & 2 Kings, the Lord shows us the importance of proper worship

- It is striking when you read Kings to see how God evaluated the faithfulness of each and every king (all 41 who are mentioned in this book) regarding worship.
 - They fall into four categories of faithfulness.
- A. First, there were those who fully followed the Lord.
 1. Actually, there are only two kings that fall into this category—Hezekiah and Josiah.
 - a. Take a look at the Lord's evaluation of Hezekiah...
 - **2 Kings 18:3-6: And he did *what was right* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. ⁵ He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. ⁶ For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.**
 - Notice the emphasis—he simply did what God commanded Moses.
 - He did not allow the worship of God to be adulterated with human innovations at the high places.
 - What are the high places?
 - The high places were places on hills or in groves of trees where the Canaanites had worshipped their gods.
 - They were thought to be special because of their height or their foliage.

- In Deuteronomy 12, God had expressly commanded His people that they were not to worship at the high places.
 - He told them that they were only to offer sacrifices at the place He appointed (which was the temple at Jerusalem in the time of the kings).
 - b. For a period of 450 years, there were kings in Judah, and for 250 years there were also kings in Israel,
 - And out of them all, there were only two that fully followed the Lord in this—only two in 650 years of reigning monarchs between the two kingdoms.
 - And it is an such an important matter to our LORD that He comments about it with reference to each king.
1. There is something for us to learn here.
- a. God’s covenant people have a tendency to do their own thing in worship.
 - They always have.
 - Today you have everything from clerics in priestly garb burning incense; to worship teams singing a chorus someone wrote last year to the beat of drums; to someone bowing before an image of a crucifix, or a saint while chanting prayers.
 - b. If we are going to limit our worship only to what God commands, we are going to be in a small minority.
 - Just because most of the church is fine with the traditions and innovations of men does not make it right for us to practice them.
 - We are talking only two kings out of all of the kings of Israel and Judah!
 - Do not expect to win any popularity contests, but the LORD thinks it is important enough to tell us what every king did.
- The second category that kings fall into is this:
- B. Second, there were those who followed Him, but allowed worship at the high places.
1. This is the category into which most of the kings of Judah fell.
- a. They were men that had a heart for God.
 - They worshipped Him at the temple and led the people to do so, but tolerated (and in some cases practiced) worship at the high places.
 - b. God refers to them as faithful men who loved him, but He notes this exception in their faithfulness...
 - Asa is a great example.
 - We are told about him in 1 Kings 15:11-14: **Asa did *what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as *did* his father David.*** ¹² **And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.** ¹³ **Also he removed Maachah his grandmother from *being* queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned *it* by the Brook Kidron.** ¹⁴ **But the high places were not removed. Nevertheless Asa’s heart was loyal to the LORD all his days.**

2. From this we learn that we have many faithful brothers and sisters who add to the worship of God that which he has not authorised.
 - This is wrong and God is displeased with it, but we should still receive them as our brothers because He accepts them.
 - Truly, this is a great reminder that our acceptance with God is not based on perfection—if it were, Hezekiah and Josiah would have been cut off too!
 - Even if we follow the LORD outwardly, as they did, our worship is not nearly all that it should be... for God sees our sluggish hearts.
 - There is never enough awe of Him, enough love for Him, enough gratitude for His salvation.
 - But in Christ, we are accepted... and the truth is that there are those like Asa who outstrip those who follow fully in form.
 - That is not to say it doesn't matter—again, the LORD finds it important enough that He comments about it.
 - But let us labour for full reformation (like Hezekiah and Josiah did) while continuing to give thanks to God for our believing brothers and sisters whose worship is not reformed.

TRANS> And now let's look at the third category that the Lord identifies...

C. Third, there were those who did evil by **only** worshipping at the high places.

1. By that, I mean that instead of worshipping at Jerusalem as God appointed,
 - these kings only worshipped the LORD at the high places.
 - It was still the LORD that they worshipped, but not in the way He appointed.
 - They not only added some extra things to His worship, but they substituted their own way of worship for His way.
 2. This is what *all* of the kings of Israel did.
 - a. Remember (as we saw last week) that because of Solomon's sin,
 - the ten tribes of Israel were taken away from Solomon's son when he became king, leaving only Judah (and Benjamin) under the house of David's line.
 - b. Jeroboam was the man God chose to be king over the ten tribes of Israel when they first broke away.
 - And King Jeroboam has the nefarious distinction of being forever described as the one who caused Israel to sin.
- 1) And how did he cause Israel to sin?
 - You can read about it in 1 Kings 12:25-33.
 - When the kingdom was divided from Judah, Jeroboam was afraid that the people might turn back to follow the house of David if they continued to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.
 - So he built high places at Bethel and Dan and appointed priests who were not Levites.
 - He was still worshipping the LORD who brought them out of Egypt, but he was worshipping in an unauthorised way.

- 2) Needless to say, God was highly displeased with this.
- In chapter 13, He sends a prophet to denounce this worship, but Jeroboam does not repent...
 - And in chapter 14, Jeroboam's dynasty is cursed and he is told that all Israel will be wiped out because of his sin...
 - In 1 Kings 14:15-16, it says: **For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the LORD to anger. ¹⁶ And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.**
- c. All the kings of Israel who come after Jeroboam are denounced—every one of them—for doing evil because they continued in the sin of Jeroboam.
- And over and over again Jeroboam's sin is described as the sin that caused Israel to sin—at least 16 times.
 - There is a typical example with Jeroboam's son Nadab who is described in 1 Kings 15:26 like this: **And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin.**
 - This sin of Jeroboam is so significant that over two centuries later, after each king of Israel has been named and said to have continued in the sin of Jeroboam, Israel falls to Assyria and the reason given is this:
 - **2 Kings 17:20-23: And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. ²¹ For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin. ²² For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, ²³ until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.**
 - His error led them to a false distorted gospel.
 - Where there some in Israel who were saved?
 - Absolutely—Elijah and Elisha were both of Israel, and Elijah was told that even in their lowest time, there were still 7000 who had not turned to Baal.
 - Many of the faithful in Israel actually went to Judah over the years, but there were also faithful ones that remained.
 - Nevertheless, the sin of Jeroboam was a great sin that led to the overthrow of the kingdom.

TRANS> But there is a fourth category of those that were even worse—went a step beyond Jeroboam.

D. Fourth, there were those who worshipped other gods.

1. The sin of Jeroboam and his house seems to be primarily in rejecting the worship God appointed and instituting alternative worship...
 - There is some indication that he may have worshipped other gods as well, but the calves he set up seem to be thrones for Jehovah.
 - The idolatrous nations would put an image of their god on calves as a throne for them, but Jeroboam left it empty...
 - And for the most part, he and his household worshipped Jehovah, but worshipped Him falsely.

2. But the house of Omri was another story.
 - After Jeroboam's house fell, there were a couple of kings and then Omri was made king and his dynasty lasted for four generations.
 - His son Ahab is given the most extensive treatment in Kings—
 - The description of his reign in 1 Kings 16:30-33 is characteristic of this fourth category of wickedness in worship: **Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. ³¹ And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. ³² Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. ³³ And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.**

3. Once a nation begins to worship the LORD the way the gods of the nations are worshipped, it is not long until the LORD, in their minds, is indistinguishable from the gods of the nations.
 - a. Worship determines how we look at God—and once we lose sight of Him as the God who can only be approached through Jesus Christ, He is like any other god... and soon we will be content to worship other gods.
 - You see, the only true God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom He reveals Him.
 - You can only know the true God through Christ.
 - b. So Ahab not only followed the sins of Jeroboam, but went far beyond that and started worshipping Baal.
 - God is so displeased with this that he raises up Jehu to wipe out the house of Omri including all of Ahab's sons and his wicked wife Jezebel.
 - Jehu is to replace him as king, but sadly Jehu, while putting an end to the worship of Baal, continues in the sin of Jeroboam...as all the kings of Israel did.
 - c. And I might mention here as well that there were kings in Judah that also worshipped other gods...
 - There was Ahaz, and then his grandson, Manasseh.
 - The sin of Manasseh was the last straw and led to the exile of Judah.
 - In 2 Kings 23:26-27, it says: **Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against**

Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. ²⁷ And the LORD said, “I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’”

TRANS> So you see what a great emphasis is placed on the worship of God.

- We need to learn from this that how we approach God matters!
 - The most important thing of all for us is that we can only come to Him through Jesus Christ.
 - The heart of New Testament worship is not ceremonies, but the faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ...
 - We declare that He is the Son of God who came in our flesh and died to atone for our sins and was raised for our justification.
 - We proclaim that salvation is through faith in Him, and we rejoice before Him as His people, worshipping Him in simplicity.
 - His work is done, and our worship centres around the declaration of that.
 - We must beware of replacing worship with manmade ceremonies.
- Now let's move on to look at a second lesson the is brought to us in the books of the Kings

II. In 1 & 2 Kings, God shows us how He speaks through His prophets.

- They have a wonderful role to play in revealing the Lord to us.
- A. They are, in every period of history God's voice of pleading with His people.
1. This is brought out in 2 Kings 17:13-14...
 - It is a wonderful summary of God's gracious intention with the prophets:
 - **2 Kings 17:13:14: Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments *and* My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.” ¹⁴ Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.**
 - Today, God continues to speak to us through the writing of the prophets in the Holy Scripture.
 - We have it best of all because now we have the whole counsel of God revealed to us in the completed Bible.
 - We have the things in the Old Covenant that, as I have emphasised in this series, were written for our comfort and admonition...
 - And we have the full revelation of Christ and His work.
 - And not only that, but God has given ministers of the gospel to preach the scriptures in the power of His Holy Spirit to the church in this age!
 - Give thanks and pray for the ministry of the word in the church today.
 - God continues to plead with us through His own oracles, spoken by His servants—He Himself pleads with us through their ministry.
 - When you go to church, it is the Word of God that is preached, not infallibly, but by His own authority as the scriptures are proclaimed.

2. There is a powerful lesson about the importance of the simple ministry of the word that we find when Elijah the prophet is discouraged.
 - a. This dear faithful prophet continued to proclaim the word of God even though his life was in constant danger when wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel reigned in Judah.
 - Elijah yearned for Israel to repent and was thrilled when God called him to meet with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel who were supported by Jezebel.
 - In this powerful account, the 450 prophets of Baal agree to Elijah's challenge:
 - **1 Kings 18:22-24: Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. ²³ Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."**
 - The LORD is the one who answers by fire.
 - How thrilled Elijah must have been, for in v. 39 it says: **Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.**
 - b. Now surely Israel will follow the LORD...but they do not!
 - Instead, Jezebel sends a threat that she is going to execute Elijah.
 - He is very discouraged and goes away to pout.
 - In 1 Kings 19:10-12, we read what happens when God meets with him. Elijah begins: **1 Kings 19:10: "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."**
 - Then in verse 11 the LORD responds: **Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.**
 - Elijah does not understand at first, but the point is that God is not going to do anything great at this time.
 - Instead, His revelation will be by a still small voice.
 - Elijah is to go and speak for him—that is how the Lord wishes to be revealed at this time.
 - And I tell you, that to this day God is still speaking to His people, mostly in this way.
 - It is not through great signs and wonders in the heaven, but through steady preaching of His word.

- B. God uses the prophets to point out that He alone is LORD.
- Let's look at some examples...
 - 1. In 1 Kings 13, there is a prophet called "the man of God" who goes to Bethel and denounces Jeroboam for his calf altar...
 - showing him and them and us how displeased the LORD is with false worship.
 - 2. Then, in 1 Kings 17, there the prophecy to Ahab by Elijah that because of his worship of Baal, the god who was supposed to send rain, there will be no rain.
 - In 1 Kings 17:1, it says: **And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."**
 - And that is exactly what happens for three years.
 - By this, God makes it clear that He is the LORD who sends rain!
 - Baal has no authority.
 - 3. After this, there is that great showdown at Mt. Carmel that I already told you about where God sends fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice and everyone testifies that "The LORD, He is God!"
 - And by the way, after the prophets of Baal are executed, God sends rain, but not without Elijah first announcing it to King Ahab!
 - Now that Baal's prophets are gone, God will send rain.
 - He alone is Lord.
 - 4. Time would fail me to tell of the many other great accounts...
 - But the prophets again and again tell what God is going to do, who will be king, what battles will be won or lost, what will become of kings...
 - Over and over declaring to the people that the LORD is in control of it all.
 - You need to read this book so you can see the authority of the LORD and be secure that He is on His throne...
 - There is that great story in 2 Kings 18 where the great King of Assyria comes against Jerusalem and 185,000 of his men are dead in the morning without a shot being fired.

TRANS> The prophets show us that the LORD is on His throne, and we need not be afraid.

- And not only that He is on His throne, but also that He is merciful to His people.
- C. He uses the prophets to show how eager He is to show mercy.
- All through Kings, as soon as one of the kings repents and turns to God, God is very quick to respond in mercy.
 - 1. When the man of God denounces Jeroboam, Jeroboam stretches out his hand to call for the prophet to be arrested, but as soon as he does, his hand becomes paralysed (1 Kings 13:4)...
 - He pleads for mercy, and the prophet prays for him and his hand is restored—he doesn't repent—but God shows His willingness to respond.
 - 2. Even wicked Ahab, when Elijah pronounced judgment on him for killing Naboth for his vineyard, is shown mercy when he pleads for it.
 - In 1 Kings 21:29, the Lord says to Elijah: **"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the**

calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

- Learn from this how ready the LORD is to show mercy when we humble ourselves and seek Him!
3. And there are the reformations that occurred under the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah in 2 Kings.
- Both times, prophets declared that God’s judgment would not fall as long as they reigned—and it was—in very remarkable ways!
 - Josiah even invited the people of Israel to come to the Passover and some of them did.
 - God is always ready to show mercy.
 - This was a clear testimony to the kings who came after them that if they would seek the LORD, He would hold off His judgment for them also...
 - And it is a testimony for all the governors of the world in our day.
 - God has not changed—He delights to show mercy to those who call upon Him.
 - The prophets in First and Second Kings show us this.

TRANS> Indeed, even when His people are unfaithful, the LORD will never forget His covenant promise of salvation.

- And that brings us to the third lesson I want to present to you from 1 and 2 Kings...
- But, given our time—I want to spend a little more time developing this—I think we’ll have a third sermon on the book of Kings, and we’ll look at this next time: God’s zeal in preserving David’s house through these years.