

2nd KINGS

Week 1, chapter 1

The 2 books of Kings (1st and 2nd Kings) were originally 1 book that recorded the history of Israel's monarchy from the last few days of King David's life, through the civil war that split the unified Kingdom of Israel into separate and independent kingdoms (a southern and a northern), then the exile and dispersion of the 10 tribes that formed the northern kingdom to locations throughout the Asian continent, and finally the exile of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon (generally as a cohesive group).

As we have just completed the 1st Book of Kings (roughly halfway through the era when Israel was ruled by monarchs), we have been dealing with the complexity of trying to essentially intertwine the histories of 2 Kingdoms (Judah with Ephraim/Israel), as well as formulating a timeline that synchronizes the reigns of the kings of Judah with the reigns of the kings of the northern kingdom. To put a sharper point on it, David was anointed King of Judah about 1004 B.C and soon thereafter king over all of Israel. But upon the first words of the Book of 2nd Kings we have arrived at about 850 B.C. and now the Hebrews have two different sets of kings ruling over a divided kingdom. The final words of the book of 2nd Kings will leave us at about 560 B.C. with Judah in Babylon and the Hebrews having no king at all. So the Book of 1st Kings covers approximately 150 years and the Book of 2nd Kings covers approximately 190 years.

As a prelude to opening the Book of 2nd Kings, now is a good time to once again climb into our imaginary balloon, float to a high altitude, and get a panoramic view of matters so that we can move forward together in a comfortable and understandable context. And the first thing for us to grasp is that the author or editor of the Book of Kings has a central underlying viewpoint from which he presents his work: it is that the degree of loyalty that the various kings of Israel show to the God of Israel (YHWH as worshipped in Jerusalem) will determine the course of Israel's history. To be clear: the king's behavior mattered, but what mattered most for the fate of Israel was his faithfulness towards God. Thus while King David's behavior was often self-serving, violent and sinful, his steadfastness in holding onto, defending and worshipping Yehoveh God of Israel, and none other, produced the golden age of a united, powerful, wealthy and sovereign Kingdom of Israel that will literally not be equaled or surpassed until the so-called Millennial Kingdom when Messiah reigns in person in Jerusalem.

On the other hand, David's son Solomon began to show tolerance for the worship of other gods to appease his hundreds of wives and his many foreign allies, and so while there were great accomplishments during his reign, Israel also began rotting just under the surface. Upon **Shlomo's** death, in a mere 3 years, a civil war ensued and Israel's historical trajectory

changed radically as it ceased to be a unified kingdom. The resultant 2 kingdoms produced a litany of kings who disobeyed God and led their people into sin and apostasy, albeit to varying degrees and at differing paces. Therefore we see Israel's power and prosperity on a steady decline as a direct consequence of their declining loyalty to Yehoveh their God.

Most Christians would claim that while Israel's history is interesting and divinely transmitted down to us, it remains relevant only to the extent that it affects the Jewish people. And even at that, the more liberal side of Christianity and Judaism sees Israel's history as helping to understand how certain faith traditions and perhaps some doctrines were formed, but as having no actual affect on the present or the future of God's followers. Therefore (they reason) while the **viewpoint** of the author of the Book of Kings is that Israel's historical outcome is based first and foremost on it's loyal and faithful service to Yehoveh, that is not to be taken as reality nor did the outcomes we read about in the Book of Kings (the wars, exiles, and dispersions) actually happen as result of a breech in that loyalty but rather were caused by the natural ebb and flow of geopolitical issues and the empire building desires of powerful men.

So as a means to help connect our study of 2nd Kings with earlier parts of the Bible, and to demonstrate, contrary to the liberal scholarly consensus, just how intimately related and indelibly linked together is Israel's conscious decision to embrace idolatry and sin with their fate of eventually being thrown out of their land inheritance and into the subjugation of the gentile nations, I want to use the work of David Noel Freedman as a platform.

In a new book produced by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. called Recovering the Unity of the Bible, he calls upon Freedman's astute observation that essentially all the Biblical books occurring after Mt. Sinai and leading up to 2nd Kings record Israel's breaking all of the 10 Commandments that are essentially the founding principles that forms the basis for Israel's existence as a Kingdom of God. And that it is this sequential breaking of every one of the commandments given to Moses that gave God the legal standing to exercise such harsh justice upon His people. In fact, I would argue, that had the Lord NOT finally removed His chosen from the land in punishment for their transgressions, after centuries of reproofs, warnings, and extended mercy, then He was **not** a just and holy God. Rather, He would have been more like a modern day parent who willy-nilly makes hollow threats to his misbehaving children but seldom follows through, so that the children learn to close their ears and ignore the warnings and fearlessly do what is right in their own eyes.

Thus Freedman says that the principle goal up to now in the Bible has been to explain how it was that God identified a people set apart as His own, delivered them from oppression in the Land of Egypt, brought them to a designated homeland in Canaan, and in time ejected them from that homeland to be scattered and dispersed among the nations. At the center of this progression was the 10 Commandments, Israel's constitution, a covenant-based agreement between God and Israel that set down the terms of their existence as a kingdom of God. The agreement established blessings for obedience to those terms and consequences (that are

more technically called curses) for violation. The adherence to this Covenant of Moses was deemed by Yehoveh as being of such great importance that it was given to Israel twice: the first time was to the first generation of the Exodus almost immediately upon leaving Egypt; and the second time was to the second generation of the Exodus (those born during the 40-year Wilderness journey) from the mountains of Moab as their entry into the Promised Land was imminent.

Freedman claims that beginning in the book of Exodus, each Bible book that follows centers upon the violation of one specific command among the 10 Commandments. In fact he goes so far as to declare that they are virtually violated in the order that they were given to Moses and recorded on those 2 stone tablets. Perhaps. The problem I have with that claim is that there are variety of different ways used to number the Commandments and he chose to use the one that he says is the consensus view of most scholars. Nonetheless, his premise that Israel's wanton transgression against the 10 Commandments is quite visible, and that these transgressions are sequential, progressive, identifiable, and provide us with the reason for the Lord's judgment of exile against His chosen people, is a valid and (I think) brilliant observation.

So let's take a few minutes to follow this progression. Let me be clear that while on the surface this may seem like some kind of esoteric technical theological theory that only academics could love, it is not difficult. In fact this really (in my opinion) ought to become as fundamental a teaching for all serious Bible students and worshippers of the God of Israel as is the Evangelical Roman's Road that explains the pathway to salvation. And that is because the following of Israel's history in light of their eventual trespass against all 10 of God's commandments will help us to grab hold of God's true nature and of His promise plan.

Freedman says the first breaking of God's commandments was when Aaron made the infamous golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai, at the very moment the commandments were being given to Moses at the summit of that same mountain! In one fell swoop the first 2 commandments were violated: 1) You shall have no other gods before Me, and 2) You shall not make for yourself a graven image (an idol) in the form of anything. Thus the two sins of apostasy and idolatry occurred at one time. And this tragic event set the tone for what would be a further disobedience only a few months later that meant that Israel would wander in the desert wilderness for 40 years as the first generation of the Exodus died off for their rebelliousness against the Lord.

Israel's 3rd trespass was blasphemy. It can be identified in Leviticus 24 when a man who had an Egyptian father but a Hebrew mother got into a fight with another Israelite man and during that fight he blasphemed God's name. He was arrested, eventually hauled outside of the camp of Israel and executed for this sin.

The 4th trespass concerned **Shabbat**, the Sabbath. This happens in Numbers 15 where we

hear about a man who gathered wooden sticks on Shabbat in order to kindle a fire. The Hebrew sages point out that it was neither an emergency nor any kind of necessity that this man built a fire but rather it was an in-your's-face kind of defiance. It is a fascinating reality that the two most difficult commandments to remain obedient to (for the Israelites) seemed to be refraining from idolatry and committing to observe the Sabbath without fail. Both of these commandments were direct human to God offenses, as opposed to human to human offenses such as stealing or murder. I think it is fascinating (and further validates the value of noticing the never-ending, never-changing God-patterns that emerge in the Bible) that in our modern times it remains the twin issues of idolatry and refusal to observe Sabbath that weakens and defiles the Church. And just like in the ancient times when the Hebrews denied that they were trespassing against these commandments, so do current era Christians deny that we commit idolatry as we seek to redefine God in our own image, or that we even have any obligation to observe Sabbath. We are rather schizophrenic on the issue: on the one hand we proudly post the 10 Commandments in our homes and in our sanctuaries, and on the other hand we deny that we have any actual duty to obey them. The Prophets of old regularly spoke out regarding the lack of proper Shabbat observance and the consequences that would come from this lack of regard.

The 5th trespass concerned honoring one's parents. The incident given in the Bible where this commandment was violated is in Deuteronomy 21. It concerned a son who was disrespectful of his father, was a no-account who shamed his family, refused to acknowledge parental authority and would not accept any kind of discipline. I believe that while real, this was also a metaphor of Israel as a whole. That is, Israel behaved as a son, who was disrespectful of their father Yehoveh, brought shame on the holy name of God, refused to accept the Lord's authority on their lives, and generally didn't respond to divine discipline that was designed to correct their bad behavior. This son was removed from the camp of Israel (the land of Israel) and stoned to death.

The next violation was of the commandment not to steal and it is dealt with in Joshua chapter 7. It concerns a fellow named **Achan** at the time that Israel attacked and decimated Jericho. It seems that **Achan** took some of the spoils of war for himself. Normally the sin of stealing is a human on human misbehavior; however in this particular instance the property that was stolen was God's private property and so the sin was especially egregious. The Law of Herem, the Law of the Ban, was in effect; and this meant that when Israel was led by God in Holy War (as they were against the stronghold of Jericho) then upon victory the usual spoils of war that might go the victorious soldiers instead went to God (often in the form of the spoils being destroyed by fire, that in a loose way somewhat mimicked a sacrificial altar fire). So **Achan** effectively stole God's holy property and the result was his death.

The breaking of a 7th commandment occurs in Judges 19-21 and it regards the sin of murder. This is the story of a Levite man and his concubine who traveled to a city in the territory of Benjamin. She was gang raped and abused to the point of death, and then left to die on the porch of the home where her Levite husband was cowering inside, hiding from the thugs. But

the appalling nature of the event doesn't end there; the widower proceeds to cut up her corpse (thus defiling it by denying her a proper burial), and sent pieces of her to the other tribes asking them to come and severely punish these Benjamites who did this terrible thing. The end result was a war of all the other Israelite tribes against the tribe of Benjamin that came perilously close to making Benjamin extinct.

In the Book of 1st Samuel chapters 11-12 the crime of adultery, the 8th in the series of violations of the 10 commandments, is perpetrated. It involved King David's sexual desire for Bathsheba the beautiful young wife of his loyal military officer, **Uriah**. As Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. points out, this was a turning point in the history of Israel just as it was for King David's personal life. From here on David's line digressed and was a constant source of trouble, and of course in a short time David's son Solomon would take the throne, allow idols and pagan worship to go on openly in the land, and then shortly after his death the unified kingdom of Israel disintegrated.

And finally, at the end of the book we have only recently concluded (1st Kings), the 9th and 10th commandments are violated in but a single event. The unbelievably wicked King **Achav** and his foreign wife Jezebel decide to steal the land belonging to a common citizen of Israel, a man named **Navot**. The two commandments that were broken were the prohibition against coveting, and the prohibition against bearing false witness (in a court of law). In this incident **Navot** is in the unfortunate position of owning a lovely vineyard adjacent to the country palace of the King and Queen of Israel. The King decides he'd like to have it for a personal garden. But when **Navot** refuses to sell it to the King, because it is against the Torah Law for a person to sell their ancestral tribal land holding, his fate is sealed. The King covets this man's land so much that he goes into a deep depression. His wife Jezebel fearing that the King's countenance will reflect badly on the monarchy leaps into action; she organizes a kangaroo court, devises a false accusation of blasphemy against **Navot**, and he is subsequently stoned to death by the liars she has hired. Immediately King **Achav** claims the deceased **Navot's** land as his own.

The cycle of all of the 10 Commandments being broken by God's people is now complete as we get ready to open the Book of 2nd Kings. Nothing is left except for God to finally bring the just curse of righteous judgment upon His people, and that is what we'll see happening in the ensuing chapters.

So, with that, open your Bibles to 2nd Kings chapter 1.

READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 1 all

It is a mystery to me as to why the editor of the Book of Kings decided that this was the best

point to separate 1st and 2nd Kings; it seems as though the context has been cut in half. I think it would have been more appropriate if it had included the last few verses of 1st Kings 22 so that the opening of 2nd Kings would have read like this:

52 Achazyah the son of Ach'av began his reign over Isra'el in Shomron in the seventeenth year of Y'hoshafat king of Y'hudah, and he ruled two years over Isra'el.

53 He did what was evil from ADONAI's perspective, living in the manner of his father, his mother and Yarov'am the son of N'vat, by which he led Isra'el into sin.

54 He also served Ba'al and worshipped him; and he made ADONAI the God of Isra'el angry, in keeping with everything his father had done.

After Ach'av's death Mo'av rebelled against Isra'el.

The important point that is being made is that a critical event happened immediately upon **Achav's** death; Moab rebelled against Israel. Moab had been under Israel's control as a vassal state since the time of King David, some 150 years. But apparently **Achazyah** was a rather weak king and when he took over from his father the ruler of Mo'av found the perfect moment to try to regain independence. In fact, the ancient Hebrew sages say that **Achazyah** was a sickly man and simply didn't have the strength to rule. Losing Moab was a severe blow to Israel, but was also indicative of the downward spiral that Israel was in. God's hand of blessing had been retracted due to Israel having violated all the 10 Commandments, and without this blessing all manner of unexpected consequences (curses) would now take place.

Verse 2 tells us that **Achav's** son **Achazyah** accidentally fell from the 2nd floor of his abode and was left in critical condition. He would soon die of his injuries. We are told in 1st Kings 21 that after Jezebel arranged for **Navot** to be falsely accused of blasphemy and then wrongly executed all due to her husband's coveting of **Navot's** land, that Elijah showed up to tell the King that his family would be annihilated as a consequence of these violating 2 (if not 3) of the 10 Commandments (coveting, false witness, and murder). And yet because Ahab showed some degree of remorse and repentance (though very shallow, it seems) the Lord allowed some of the penalty to be moved to the following generation of Ahab's family. Well, now the time has come, and **Achazyah** will bear the penalty originally intended for his father.

Lest we feel sorry for **Achazyah**, however, we only have to read a few more words of this account of his injury and death as he does what was quite customary for that era: he sends some messengers to a god to find out what the outcome of his injuries might be. The idea is of divination of the future. However in a display of his thoroughly corrupted nature, we find **Achazyah** did not seek the God of Israel but rather sought the guidance of Ba'al **Z'vuv** (Ba'al

Zebub), the Lord of the Flies. **Z'vuv** was the Fly God, whose likeness indeed was that of a fly, and this was a god who was honored in the northernmost of the 5 cities of the Philistines, Ekron.

For future reference it is helpful to know that the term Ba'al was the Canaanite and Phoenician name of their chief god but it was also a term that meant lord; so we can find a number of different gods called Ba'al such and such. The same name is pronounced in Aramean as Be'el, and in the Babylonian and Assyrian languages as Bel and works the same way. Most Bibles will use all 3 of these names and it is often confused as meaning 3 different gods; that is not the case.

The Kings of Israel had moved rather rapidly since the division of the kingdom from adding a few idols to their worship of Yehoveh, to creating a golden calf that was meant to represent Yehoveh, to a syncretism that rolled the worship of a number of gods (of which Yehoveh was but one) into a kind of one-size-fits-all religion. But then finally we see Yehoveh utterly renounced and it is never so blatant as we read here with **Achazyah** as he shuns seeking God for word on his injured condition and instead seeks the Philistine god Ba'al **Z'vuv** for answers.

One must understand that this outright rejection of Yehoveh by **Achazyah** was not only personal but was also was national, as he was the supreme leader who represented all Israel before God. And we have studied in the past how well the Bible reveals that a nation is dependent upon its leader's status before God as the determiner of that nation's fate. What we see regarding King **Achazyah** and his nation of Israel is very much like we see happening in many parts of the Western world today, including America, as the biblical pattern repeats.

In 2009 while visiting the Muslim nation of Turkey, President Obama boldly stated that America is no longer a Christian nation, but rather we are secular. In simple terms this means that we hereby officially reject God as our spiritual national leader and as the ultimate lawgiver who has set down our moral and ethical principles in the 10 Commandments. And instead we now look to our own human intellect and goodness to fashion our own values, to establish our own path, and to accept no power higher than ourselves that we must answer to. This follows on the heels of his predecessor, President George Bush, who told all the world as he stood in a Mosque following 911, that the God of Israel, the Christian God, and Allah god of the Muslims are the same god. This is the epitome of syncretism, and we've seen this all before in the history of Israel.

Our current President's statement regarding his intent to lead our country in a purely secular fashion is nothing less than an official renunciation of God as the true leader of our nation. While few even took notice of it, this was a historical turning point (a downward turn) in our nation and I have little doubt that this was our President's intention. However just as **Achazyah** thought that he would achieve better results for himself and his nation by turning his

back on Yehoveh and adopting other gods, but instead the results were catastrophic, why would we think that the outcome of America's chosen leader turning his back on God and leading his nation that way would be any better?

In verse 3 the Lord decides to intervene and speaks to **Eliyahu**, and tells him to go and intercept the messengers sent by **Achazyah** to divine if he'll live or not, and to give these messengers a message from Yehoveh. Interestingly we once again encounter this Angel of the Lord, a mysterious manifestation of God. And as we have learned, a proper interpretation of the Hebrew renders this name the Angel of Yehoveh (**Malach YHWH**). Briefly, this is God; it is NOT an angel of some sort that is a lesser spiritual creature who is God's servant. This is precisely the same term used in the Torah to describe God's manifestation in the burning bush. So it is God Himself who speaks to Elijah and says to take this oracle NOT to the King but to the messengers of the king. And the message consists of two parts: 1) a rhetorical or perhaps even sarcastic question that asks if the king and his messengers are going to Ba'al **Z'vuv** because they think that Israel has no god of its own? And 2) because of the king's renunciation of Yehoveh, the king will not recover from his fall and shall die.

The messengers knew that they must immediately report this to their king; so they broke off their journey to Ekron and told their king what this prophet had told them. Interestingly the king's response was to ask them what this prophet looked like. They said that he was a hairy man who wore a leather belt. Instantly **Achazyah** knew who this was: it was Elijah! After all, Elijah was an old family nemesis who, according to **Achazyah's** father, never had anything even remotely resembling good news or blessing for him. So **Achazyah** reacted exactly as his father had: he became furious and wanted this prophet of doom and trouble brought to him immediately! Remember, the ancient superstition was that a prophet could decide for himself what was to be and then get the gods to make it happen. So **Achazyah** fully intended on forcing Elijah to retract his prophecy of the king's death, so that it wouldn't happen.

By the way: saying that Elijah was hairy didn't mean that he was matted with extreme body hair. Rather it means that he was wearing hairy clothing, like of camel's hide. This kind of clothing was sort of a recognized uniform for prophets of God. It was as uncomfortable as it was odd, but we see that this custom continued on for centuries as the New Testament's famous John the Baptist also wore hairy clothes that made his vocation quite apparent to one and all.

Next week we'll finish chapter 1, and then move in to chapter 2 to one of the strangest and most befuddling happenings in the entire Bible: the translation of Elijah into the heavens in the presence of Elisha.