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Starting Well and Finishing Well (2 Kings 13—14)

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BIBLE STUDY

Location:

123 CAP

Times:

TUESDAYS

7:15AM and NOON

2 Kings 13—14

“Starting Well and Finishing Well”

Introduction

In this study of the kings of Israel and Judah, we can witness the work of God in the nations of this world. By chapters 13—14, the Book of First Kings is progressing toward the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom in 2 Kings 17. Second Kings will close with the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom.

The important thing to remember in this study is that God is active in the affairs of mankind and He is absolutely sovereign to accomplish His eternal decrees. It is apparent in the Old Testament that the people of God have always struggled with living holy and godly lives in the midst of a very perverse and wicked world. God’s eternal decree has always been to call a people—holy and separate—unto Himself from the world, and that this elect group would be saints (“unique ones”) as they live their earthly lives—holy and separate—unto God.

‘NOW THEN, IF YOU WILL INDEED OBEY MY VOICE AND KEEP MY COVENANT, THEN YOU SHALL BE MY OWN POSSESSION AMONG ALL THE PEOPLES, FOR ALL THE EARTH IS MINE; AND YOU SHALL BE TO ME A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS AND A HOLY NATION’ (EXOD 19:5-6)

Leviticus is a book that is solely concerned with the holiness of God’s people (cf. Lev 19:1-2). God’s standard is that His people are to be holy because He is holy (Lev 19:37; 20:7, 8; 22:31, 32). Nevertheless, God’s people have continually struggled with living holy and godly lives in an ungodly world. Oftentimes in the Old Testament, there was not an outright rejection of God’s standards, but there was a corrupted mixture by those who claimed to be His people. Sometimes they did outright reject God but the majority of the time there was a corrupted mixture in their worship. The exhortation to us in studying the

kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms is to beware of deterioration in our spirituality (cf. 1 Pet 1:13-19).

THEREFORE, PREPARE YOUR MINDS FOR ACTION, KEEP SOBER IN SPIRIT, FIX YOUR HOPE COMPLETELY ON THE GRACE TO BE BROUGHT TO YOU AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST . . . “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY” . . . YOU WERE NOT REDEEMED WITH PERISHABLE THINGS . . . BUT WITH PRECIOUS BLOOD. . .

SECOND KINGS 13

Chapter 13 addresses two kings (Jehoahaz and Jehoash [Joash]) of the Northern Kingdom (the Book of Kings vacillates between attention upon the Northern and Southern Kingdoms). Second Kings 13 is important not solely because of the two kings mentioned here, but because it records the death of Elisha the prophet, and the end of a prophetic ministry that lasted perhaps sixty years.

Verse 1 provides the window of opportunity for Jehoahaz: “seventeen years.” Sadly, verse 2 records that “he did evil in the sight of the LORD.” The sins of Jeroboam were calf worship (the rival religious system in the north) that was established and began the divided kingdom, after the reign of Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 12:25-33). Saul, David, and Solomon were the kings of the united kingdom.

According to 1 Kings 12:25-33, Jeroboam understood that the one unifying belief of Israel was the worship of God and the Abrahamic Covenant. He feared that if his subjects continued to make pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem there would be a revived sense of loyalty to Jerusalem and the Davidic monarchy, and he would no longer be necessary (1 Kgs 12:28-32), so he made golden calves for worship (1 Kgs 12:28—13:4).

Various peoples of the ancient Near East believed that their gods would sit or stand enthroned upon the back of an animal. Perhaps the Israelites thought God was invisibly enthroned upon the back of the golden calf that Jeroboam made. Once corrupted worship enters, it is next to impossible to purge the corrupted mixture because the people of God lose their discernment and accept the corrupted worship as acceptable. As punishment, God used Hazael, king of Syria (841-01 BC), who ruled from Aram. The disobedience of Israel to the Mosaic Covenant brought divine judgment, as God allowed the Arameans to dominate the nation (2 Kgs 13:3).

God’s permission is a form of ordination (causation). Certainly, God could have prevented the dominance of the Arameans, but He chose not to prevent it, and so it would be correct to say that He ordained it to occur. God does allow evil to occur, but for His own good purposes,

which are not always revealed in Scripture. However, affliction of God's people and wickedness occur with some reluctance on the part of God, as His nature is a perfect and holy hatred of rebellion.

In response to God's anger, Jehoahaz asked for mercy (2 Kgs 13:4). God, in grace, provided a "deliverer" in spite of the king's unfaithfulness (2 Kgs 13:5). Sadly, repentance was not the response (2 Kgs 13:6). The people persisted in calf worship, which is why there is the record of devastation in verse 7. God disciplined the nation by reducing the military forces through casualties. The summary of Jehoahaz's death and succession by his son is given in verses 8-9. The account continues with the record of another godless king (vv. 10-13).

In verse 14, we are reintroduced to Elisha. Elisha was last mentioned in chapter 9, where it was recorded that he sent a prophet to anoint Jehu as king over Israel (that was 50 years ago). Elisha's ministry would not be successful from a temporal perspective, in that there were many godless kings, but God recognized his faithfulness. *Sometimes (especially in America), we measure success by results rather than evaluating our lives in faithfulness to God's Word. It is not that success and results are antithetical, but there is a danger in trusting more of results than in the sovereignty of God in relation to the faithful service of His people.*

Verse 14 also records the affection and respect of Joash (Jehoash) for Elisha. In verses 15-19, we learn that Elisha prophesied with regard to Israel's deliverance because Joash humbled himself before God. The king's act of striking the ground symbolized the deliverance. The king's actions, however, demonstrated that he admired and respected God's spokesperson, but did not trust God entirely (even though he understood the promise of victory according to the prophet's instruction). The account of Elisha's death is recorded in verses 20-21. The record of verse 21 further emphasizes the omnipotence of God (since Elisha was dead and had no power in himself) in bringing blessing (in this case: life) to others through His faithful servants. It may also symbolize that as God revived a corpse, he would revive the nation against their enemies. Verses 22-25 indicate God's graciousness with Israel, as Jehoash defeated the Arameans three times; however, they were not completely destroyed (cf. v. 19). It is clear that the graciousness of God was not on the basis of the nation, but rather God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gen 12:1-3).

SECOND KINGS 14

Second Kings 14 focuses attention upon the Southern Kingdom. Verses 1-2 record (with significance) how many start young in their career. According to verse 3, David sets a standard for obedience (e.g. Ps 32; 51). David's sins are glaring faults upon an otherwise faithful servant. When the prophet Nathan rebuked David, he repented and lived his life pleasing before God, as he understood the blessedness of forgiveness and trust in the Lord. *The standard of King David is not perfection, but sin that is confessed, and when it is, there is repentance and wrong is made right.*

Verse 4 indicates a pattern of toleration evident in the existence of the high places, which were centers or locations that were formerly

sites of pagan worship. As opposed to destroying these sites, the Jews would seize them and use them for their worship. The practice was acceptable among Israel but not before God (cf. Deut 12:2-5, 13, 14). Verses 5-6 record the inconsistencies in obedience (cf. Ezek Deut 24:16; 18:1-4). Verses 7-14 record the same battle described in 2 Chronicles 25. Verses 15-16 address the death of Jehoash (Joash) who defeated Amaziah.

Amaziah is another example of someone who started well but did not finish well (2 Kgs 14:18-22). He was obedient to God's Word, experienced divine blessing, and then became arrogant regarding his alleged might, rather than recognizing that *his blessing was the result of God's grace*. The chapter closes with a summary of the reign of Jeroboam II, which was an exceptionally long reign of forty-one years. Even though Jeroboam experienced a lengthy reign that was politically impressive, the spirituality of the kingdom as characterized by faithlessness and selfishness, was appalling, which can be seen in the books of Hosea and Amos. For these reasons, God brought affliction upon Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. Israel's spiritual declension parallels exactly with the military and political strength of Assyria: specifically the Omride dynasty (i.e. Omri, king of Israel) of the ninth century BC and the growth of Assyria after the reign of Jeroboam II. So there is an historical parallel between Israel's spiritual declension and the period of Assyria's rise to power. Consequently, after the death of Jeroboam, the northern kingdom of Israel would progress toward the Assyrian Captivity.

God is so gracious but people will continue to sin against grace. People take the grace of God and view it as an opportunity to sin. When doing so, they fail to understand the grace of God thinking that grace becomes an excuse to sin, not understanding that persistent disobedience displaces the longsuffering of God (cf. Rom 6:1-4; 1 Pet 4:17). It is this background of the graciousness of God, and the constant pursuit of Israel in sin, during this time of major relief under Jeroboam II (which was given by the sovereignty of God) that there were major denunciations of the nation by the prophets Amos and Isaiah.

The goal and aim in life should be to persist in the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:10-14). Christians are not perfect, but let us pray that when we are aware of our sin we would repent and finish well the race that God has set before us. *Thank you for allowing me the honor to provide ongoing Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk with me, or contact me by email or phone. I am praying for you personally throughout the day and week (1 Tim 2:1-4).*

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