

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

“The Historical Books Pt. 2”

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM AND JUDAH (1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chron. 10-36)

The kingdom of Israel divided for two reasons. First, because Rehoboam demanded high taxes from the people. Second, it was the result of God’s displeasure with Solomon for turning away from God and allowing idols in the land. The Southern Kingdom is referred to as Judah and lasted 350 years and consisted of just two tribes...Judah and Benjamin. Twenty kings reigned in Judah and the events of their reigns are recorded in 1 & 2 Kings and the ending chapters of 2 Chronicles.

These books are meant to be transformational, God wanted to teach us something not just give facts!

1. Judah: The Divided Kingdom (1 Ki. 12-22, 2 Ki. 8-16, 2 Chron. 10-28)

There were three distinct periods in the division of the kingdom between Israel and Judah.

-The first period was 60 years of war (Rehoboam-Asa). This period was marked by constant conflict.

Key Principle: From the life of King Asa... How do we respond when the enemy is breathing down our neck? Do we turn to God or others? And when we recognize we’ve been wrong, will pride keep us from admitting our mistake and getting right with God so we can be healed? Because Asa didn’t trust God all the good he did was negated.

-The second period was 75 years of Political Alliance (Jehoshaphat-Joash). Jehoshaphat succeeded Asa as King and led the nation into a time of revival and peaceful relations with other nations. This was one of the most spiritual times in Judah’s history.

Key Principle: Making unwise decisions for the sake of political correctness to appease your enemies will come back to haunt you. Jehoshaphat made a peace agreement with the ungodly King Ahab by marrying his son to Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter Athaliah, which undercut his reforms. We can love and be passionate about God, but if we make unwise decisions, that love and passion won’t have the impact it could have in our lives or the lives of others.

-The third period was 75 years of War (Amaziah-Ahaz). Because of the pride of Joash’s son Amaziah, the peaceful relationship that had been built between the two kingdoms was destroyed. While Amaziah was imprisoned in Israel, his son Uzziah took over. He led Judah in a period of restoration that included rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem that were destroyed when Israel attacked Judah’s capitol. With God’s help Uzziah restored Judah to the healthiest it had been since David’s reign. But 2 Chron. 26:16 tells us that “after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.” God struck Uzziah with leprosy and he eventually died. It was in 740BC the year of Uzziah’s death that Isaiah began his prophetic ministry.

2. Judah: The Surviving Kingdom (2 Ki. 18-24, 2 Chron. 29-36).

The history of the kingdom of Israel can be divided into three segments...the United Kingdom, the Divided Kingdom and the Surviving Kingdom. Hezekiah the son of Ahaz led the nation into revival, cleansing the temple and restoring worship.

One of his enduring legacies is that when King Sennacherib of Assyria was threatening to destroy Judah, Hezekiah stood strong believing God would protect them against the powerful Assyrians who had destroyed everyone else...because of his faith, God defeated Sennacherib.

When Hezekiah became ill, he prayed and God added 15 years to his life. 2 Kings 18:5 states that “There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after him.”

Key Principle: God will forgive anyone that repents no matter how bad they have been. Hezekiah's son Manasseh was an evil and wicked king...but after being taken prisoner by the Babylonians he repented and changed his ways.

Josiah was called "the boy King." He was 8 years old when he came to the throne and led the people back to God. During his reign the book of the Law was discovered while they were repairing the temple. He began reading the book publicly to the people and revival broke out. Josiah had three sons that all ruled in Judah, but none was like their father. This led to Judah's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Among those taken to Babylon were Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In 586-582BC Judah was destroyed by Babylon and ceased to exist. All survivors were taken into exile in Babylon.

4. THE POSTEXILIC BOOKS (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)

Ezra: The Rebuilding of the Temple. Most scholars believe that a single author compiled both Ezra and Nehemiah because they're from the same time period and appear to be sequential. The Jewish Bible puts them together as one book called Ezra.

Ezra was a priest and scribe. Temple scribes devoted themselves to copying, preserving, publishing and interpreting the Law of Moses for the Jews. The book of Ezra demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promises and His people. The seven letters in the book show how God used three Persian (Modern day Iran) Kings Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius to help the Jews return and rebuild their homeland.

Little is known about the exiles during their 70 year captivity in Babylon. But to return home they had to travel 900 miles, which took four months. The book describes the return of the first exiles and their struggle to rebuild the temple. The Persians defeated the Babylonians and their King Cyrus decided to let the Jews return home. 50,000 Jews returned home under Zerubbabel to begin rebuilding the temple.

Background Information... Samaritans was the name given to Northern Kingdom Jews that had intermarried with Assyrians. The Samaritans offered to help the exiles rebuild the Temple, but the exiles refused because they didn't want to be contaminated by the Samaritans idol worship. The Samaritans took offense at this and did all they could to hinder the rebuilding and finally the work was stopped after the foundation was laid.

When Darius came to power in Persia, he stopped the interference of the Samaritans. With opposition removed, Haggai and Zechariah urged the people to finish the temple. Within 5 yrs the rebuilding of the Temple was complete. At this point a second wave of Jews returned from Babylon. King Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to lead this group of Jews back to Judah composed of 1,700 men and 5-10,000 women and children. Upon arrival, Ezra saw that many had abandoned their faithfulness and commitment to God by marrying foreigners and worshipping idols. He confronts them and calls them to repentance. The Jews divorced their foreign wives and sent them and the children born to them away. While this seems harsh Ezra didn't want the Jews to become exiles again by displeasing God.

Nehemiah: The Rebuilding of the Walls. Ezra and Nehemiah lived and ministered at the same time as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's writings emphasize the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem that had been broken down.

While Ezra led the second group of Jews back, Nehemiah led the third and last group. Working around the clock, half the people working and half the people guarding them from enemy attack they built the wall in 52 days. One of the most important aspects of Nehemiah's success was his prayer life.

Key Principle: The secret to success is to Pray and Work because both are equally important!

Esther: The Protection of the Nation. While many Jews returned to the land, an estimated 2-3 million stayed behind in Persia. Many like Esther and Mordecai had never even seen Israel. Esther became Queen of Persia in 487 BC. Esther is one of two books in the Bible that do not mention the name of God. The other is Song of Solomon.

The story line is that King Xerxes deposes Queen Vashti because of her rebellion and refusal to obey him. He conducts a search to marry a new Queen and selects Queen Esther who was a Jewish orphan that had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai discovers that two guards are plotting to kill the King and tells Esther who tells the King and saves the King's life. Some time later, a man named Haman becomes second in command and advisor to the King. Haman devised a plan to kill the Jews because they wouldn't bow down to him or Xerxes. Xerxes did not realize that Esther was Jew. But God's plan was to work through Esther to save the Jews. Mordecai persuades Esther to go to the King and plead for mercy for the Jewish people. Esther tells Xerxes she is Jewish reminds him of how his Uncle had saved his life and Xerxes kills Haman.

Famous Quote: "Who knows but that you have come to the kingdom but for such a time as this!"

The theme of this book is God's sovereignty and protection of His people and nation. The book contains a remarkable series of "coincidences" that lead to the Jews deliverance.

Key Principle: God is sovereignly in control of the righteous and unrighteous and all things in our lives and he is at work to save us and put us in positions of influence for His glory.