

09-20-15 – All is NOT Lost

2 Kings 6:16

How many of you read the newspaper and watch the news regularly? I really don't do either, but here are some headlines from our local Newsday over the past week...

GET TAINTED DEBRIS OFF LONG ISLAND

DEEP IN AFRICAN CAVE, AN ANCIENT HUMAN RELATIVE

IN SENATE, GOP FAILS TO BLOCK IRAN NUKE DEAL

NEVER FORGET – THE ISLAND, THE CITY, THE NATION HONOR THOSE WHO DIED 9/11

COLLAPSE KILLS 107 IN SAUDI ARABIA

MAN SHOT DEAD IN HOME

TRUMP SOLE OWNER OF MISS UNIVERSE GROUP

FOUR NATIONS NIX EU MIGRANT-QUOTA PLAN

OBAMA WARNS RUSSIA OVER SYRIA

2 LIERS HELD IN RHODE ISLAND HEROIN BUST

CALIF FIRE KILLS 1, BURNS 400 HOMES

WAITING FOR HELP

STATE FEDS WON'T COMMIT

DAVIS WON'T BLOCK MARRIAGE LICENSES

SECURITY TIGHT FOR POPE VISIT

EGYPT MISTAKENLY FIRES ON TOURISTS

EU COUNTRIES TIGHTEN BORDERS

OBAMA AIMS TO SHAPE '16

N. KOREA TO LAUNCH SATELLITES

JAPAN VOLCANO ERUPTS; VISITORS ARE EVACUATED

That's what's in our news on a daily basis. How do these news events affect you and your view of our world? That was just a few days' worth in one newspaper. News media doesn't make money on good news, but rather on bad news, catastrophes, political unrest, murder and the like.

As Christians, how are we to react to these reports? How are we supposed to deal with this news? There must be an underlying attitude, perspective, or hope that we have that is different from the world's view.

2 Kings is a book of bad news reports. As Pastor Jerry mentioned last week, 1 and 2 Kings is really one big book in Hebrew. It is one continuous story of the transition from king to king and how they ruled the kingdom of the world at that time. We transition from one kingdom of Israel under the reign of David and then Solomon, to a division of the kingdom into North (Israel) and South (Judah) and the kings that subsequently ruled and failed the people of God.

Dr. David Jeremiah says this: *"Like a bad news report, 2 Kings 1-17 tells of a discouraging succession of kings, starting with (evil) King Ahab. They describe the events of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Chapters 18-26 deal strictly with Judah. Finally, we see Israel exiled to Assyria, and Judah banished to Babylon."* (Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible, p. 61).

The people of this time period were just as confused and concerned about their political leadership as we are today. We put our faith in the leaders of our world just as they did then. It's only natural.

Here are some possible headlines of the era of the Kings that might appear in their newspapers and news...

WISE KING SOLOMON DIES – 700 WIVES AND 300 CONCUBINES GATHER TO MOURN

I guess he wasn't so wise after all. He did not follow in his father, David's footsteps. He was obsessed with women. He took wives from the surrounding heathen nations that God warned his people not to do. In fact 1 Kings 11:6 tells us, **"Solomon openly defied God."** (The Message). Solomon may have repented at the end, but he was led astray by his passions, lusts, and fleshly desires.

KING JEROBOAM RULES ISRAEL 22 YEARS (1 KN. 11:9)

YOUNG KING REHOBOAM, SON OF SOLOMON, REFUSES THE WISE COUNSEL OF THE ELDERS (1 KN. 12)

He takes council of his young friends rather than the wiser older advisors of Israel. He decides to flex his muscles as king. The people rebel – the kingdom is divided – 10 tribes in the North and 2 in the South. Judah in the South gets the young foolish advisors and Rehoboam as their king. Bad news. Yet God speaks in 1 Kn. 12:24 – **"... for this thing is from Me."**

We start to see that in the midst of chaos and political unrest, God is behind the scenes directing things according to His plan.

KING NEDAB REIGNS IN ISRAEL – WAGES WAR AGAINST ASA – Bad News.

KING ABIJAM REIGNS IN JUDAH – Bad news – evil king.

ASA REIGNS IN JUDAH – Good news – a righteous king (It happens once in a while).

The headlines continue listing one bad king after another. Every king in Israel is bad news. A few good kings reign in Judah, but mostly bad. The people, who have looked to their leadership for hope are finding anything but hope. None of the kings are faithful to God.

We make our way in Israel's history to evil King Ahaz – the worst ever. He was defiant against God.

Enter Elijah ...

God never spoke to His people through a king – only through a prophet (God’s mouthpiece).

Elijah spoke to Israel for God, and he spoke to the kings of Israel and Judah.

1 Kn. 21:20 – **“because you have made Israel to sin...”** Spoken to Israel’s leadership. A message from God. A prophet doesn’t have an easy job. Most of the messages from God were messages of correction with pending judgment. However – it still showed that God was actively involved with His people.

2 Kings – Elisha as Elijah’s understudy shadows Elijah everywhere he goes even if directed to stay back. Elijah asks Elisha what he wants... remember PJ’s message from last week... What Do You Want? Elisha boldly asks for a double portion of Elijah’s Spirit. You have to understand this in context to appreciate what is being asked for.

In this culture, the oldest son would receive a double portion of the inheritance of the father. Elisha was basically asking to be considered Elijah’s son and receive a double portion of the inheritance and responsibility as God’s prophet to Israel. Elijah tells him if he is there when Elijah is taken, he will receive what he asks for. Elisha will not let Elijah out of his sight from then until Elijah is miraculously taken from the Earth.

“As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, ‘My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!’ And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress. Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak, which had fallen when he was taken up.” (2 Kings 2:11-13a – NLT).

Elijah was well known. People would recognize him from a distance just by the cloak he wore. Elisha would have to establish himself in Israel from scratch. When Elijah is taken, only his cloak remained on the scene. Elisha took that cloak and put it on. People would recognize the cloak before they realize that it was not Elijah, but a new person.

That cloak or “mantle,” as it was known, represented the anointing of the Holy Spirit that rested on the prophet. The man wearing the mantle didn’t matter as much as the Holy Spirit’s presence and anointing on the man wearing it. Elisha wore that mantle and carried out twice as many miracles as Elijah during his time of ministry to Israel and Judah.

In these times of evil kings and political chaos, Elisha spoke faithfully for God and demonstrated God’s faithfulness to Israel in their distress. The people of this time were relying on a worldly kingdom and the leadership of kings who failed the people and almost always failed their God. The prophet’s job was to show that God is always faithful and would never fail His people.

Elisha and his servant were on the road and the king of Aram wanted to take him out. He asked for Elisha’s location and sent his armies to surround him and his servant. When the servant saw the circumstances they were in, he panicked. **“Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” Then Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!” The Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.”** (2 Kings 6:16-17 – NLT)

Evil Ahaz was king of Judah at this time...

"If Assyria was the strongest, most respected, most extensive world power, the Assyrian religion must have been the strongest, more respected, most extensive religion. Coming to that conclusion, King Ahaz had his servants copy the dimensions of the Assyrian altar and take the blueprint back to the high priest in Jerusalem in order to make a replica.

The obvious thing Ahaz did was to change his religious loyalty. He pushed aside the traditional worship of the Lord, who had revealed himself in Israel, and replaced it with something more trendy, something that worked, that was practical and applicable, granting power, prestige, and prosperity to its worshipers.

The not-so-obvious thing Ahaz did was to become not less religious by more religious. You see, the Assyrian altar didn't represent atheism; it represented activity. Religious activity. It revealed Ahaz's compulsive desire to have the best religion, the most faith, to be a trendsetter rather than a traditionalist...

What are some of the altars whose dimensions you've copied for your own life? How far away are they from God's altars? How far away are you from those ancient altars?" (Eugene Peterson, The Message Study Bible, p. 539-540).

"History, we have learned, is written by the victors. But this author of 2 Kings gives an awful lot of attention to losers. There are a lot of powerless people who seem to show up in this history. It's as if this author is writing about a different kind of kingdom altogether, almost as though this history describes a parallel universe... This history carefully orients us around what matters: the Spirit of God leading the people of God through the work of faithful servants... Remember that leaders are not determined by who wins but by on whom the Spirit of God rests. And if you're going to live in the world of the kingdom, follow those leaders. There will be hope there." (Kings and Presidents, p. 29, 38).

Are you concerned about the political situation of our country now? Presidential candidates are stacking up for the big election. Who will be our new leader? The Donald threw his hat in the ring, and many thought it was a joke. However, he continues to gain popularity, because he tells it like it is. He is a billionaire who isn't afraid to tell anyone off. He is a fresh voice that the people seem to like. Is he the best candidate? Is he qualified to run our country? Do people just want him to become our next president so he can take office and tell Obama, "You're fired?" What would be the real impact on each of us? We should be informed of the issues and be educated on each of the candidates so we can vote responsibly.

"What if the people of God were so deeply formed by life in the world of the kingdom that they woke up the morning after an election and, no matter what the outcome, were first inclined to offer praise to God for God's faithfulness that has sustained generation after generation and will continue to do so for generations to come?" (Kings and Presidents, p. 41).

"The fall of Judah was tragic at the time, but it was part of God's plan to set the stage for the events leading to the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of God!"

We all hear or read the current news. How do you process it? It may seem like all doom and gloom. The stock market is crashing (again), there's financial disaster in Greece, the Russians are threatening; the world is coming to an end!

Any normal human being would be discouraged about the current events in any time in history. We might be tempted to close the book and sigh, "All is lost!" However, as we read 1&2 Kings we can see that through it all, God has never lost control. His promises are sure and realized later on. Even the defeats are part of God's plan to fulfill Israel's destiny and ours as well. This is a big lesson we need to learn today. God is still in control. ALL IS NOT LOST.

"God repeatedly intervenes in the lives of the kings of Israel in an attempt to reverse the trend of corruption and decay in the kingdom... It is significant that God never spoke to the nation through a king. The king's role was to govern and to administer justice. The life and the character of the kingdom was a reflection of the life and character of the king."

"When God wanted to speak to the nation, to challenge the nation, to call the nation back to its founding principles, He sent a prophet." (Ray Stedman, Adventuring Through the Bible, p. 183).

Elijah was a rugged, tough outdoorsman. He got in the king's face and confronted the issues. He was very bold and faithful, and God protected him. He came in power and brought the thundering of the Law to Israel. Elisha was gentle and brought grace to individuals. These two prophets foreshadow the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus was tough on the nation, bold, and confrontational, yet He brought grace to individuals in mercy and love.

I'd like us to look at another link to Jesus' ministry in these two prophets. Elijah didn't die, but he was taken up alive into heaven in front of Elisha. Jesus ascended into heaven alive in front of his disciples. After Jesus ascended he sent the Holy Spirit to minister grace, mercy and love. After Elijah's ascension into heaven, Elisha was anointed to minister grace, mercy and love to the people.

"We, like Elisha, should live with confidence in chaotic times, for we are protected by the invisible armies of the Lord of Hosts."

"Yes, we need to keep up with current events; but don't let bad news of earth get you down. Focus on the Good News of Jesus Christ. Kings may fail and nations may falter, but God is still on His throne, and His rule will have no end" (David Jeremiah, Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible, p. 62)