

2 Kings Sermons

Learning from the Good and the Bad

1-2 Kings; 1-2 Chronicles

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A young businessman had just started his own firm and so he rented a beautiful office and furnished it with valuable antiques. As he was sitting behind his magnificent mahogany desk, he saw a man come into the outer office. Wanting to appear busy, he picked up the phone and pretended to be working on a big deal. He threw huge figures around and negotiated an enormous contract, making sure he was just loud enough for the guy in the other room to hear. Finally he hung up the phone and asked: "Can I help you?" To which the man replied, "Sure, I've come to connect the phone."

As we continue in our study of the Old Testament kings, we'll see that many of these leaders were not connected to the King of Kings. They appeared powerful on the outside but they were really pretending on the inside. Thankfully there were a handful of kings who were connected and were used greatly by God to accomplish some amazing things.

Let me explain where we're headed in the next couple months. Dr. Ray Pritchard will be speaking next Sunday on "Ballistic Christianity." We'll have a luncheon reception immediately after the second service. If you'd like to come, simply bring a salad or a dessert. The following week is Palm Sunday and our topic will be "Finding Christ in the Old Testament." On Easter Sunday at the PTHS auditorium, our focus will be on the question, "What Are You Waiting For?" Then, the week after Easter, we'll launch a very practical four-part series called, "Facing Your Giants" where we'll pick up the Old Testament books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

This morning we're going to combine some teaching with some preaching. While I see a distinction between the two, it's been said that the only difference between teachin' and preachin' is how loud the pastor speaks. I see preaching as the passionate proclamation of Scripture with the aim of urging listeners to put it into practice. Teaching involves instruction and the explanation of truth in a way that is understandable. We could say teaching is instructional and appeals to the head while preaching is motivational and appeals to the heart and the will. Actually, I try to do some of both in every message. The Apostle Paul said it best in Acts 28:31: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." Today I want to begin with some teaching because this section of Scripture contains some keys that will literally unlock your understanding of the Old Testament.

Let's hit the pause button while I walk over here to this easel for a teaching time. Are you ready, class? I'll try to keep it simple because I have a simple mind.

- > As you think back in your mind to the time of Jacob (also known as Israel), you'll recall that he had 12 sons. These sons make up the twelve tribes of Israel.
- > When the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, each tribe had a specific assigned area.
- > The first kings (Saul, David and Solomon) ruled over this "United Kingdom."
- > After Solomon's death the kingdom was divided into two parts – the north and the south. There were ten northern tribes, also known as Israel and two southern tribes, also known as Judah (Judah and Benjamin).
- > The northern kingdom had 19 kings, all of whom were "bad." The southern kingdom had 20 kings, some of whom were "good."
- > Due to blatant sin and outright apostasy, the northern kingdom was destroyed in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians and the Israelites were scattered. These tribes are known as the "lost tribes of Israel." Incidentally, the Samaritans of Jesus' day are believed to be descendants of these tribes, the result of intermarriage with heathen people. That explains why they were so hated.
- > The southern kingdom should have learned by watching what happened to the north but they didn't. They were invaded by the Babylonians and deported in 586 B.C.

- > When reading the prophetic books, it's important to keep in mind what country the prophet is ministering to. For instance, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea are written to Israel. Likewise, the prophets Elijah and Elisha minister primarily to the northern kingdom.
- > In the southern kingdom (Judah), we come across Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Daniel.
- > Judah was exiled to Babylon and eventually was allowed to return some 70 years later. The books of Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah deal with this time period.
- > 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles are very similar and cover much of the same material. In general, Kings reads like history in all its harshness, whereas Chronicles contains more positive details and personal information.

Let's go back and review what Samuel declared to the people when they demanded a king in 1 Samuel 8:19. After warning them about all the hardships he said: "When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day. But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us.'" The first king was Saul. He had a hollow relationship with God and ended bad. King David, a mixture of good and bad, was known for having a heart relationship with the Lord. And last week we learned that Solomon had a head relationship and would lose his kingdom because of his sinful disregard for the Lord as stated in 1 Kings 11:11-12: "...I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son."

I was surprised this week to learn that there are over 2300 references to the word "king" in the Bible. Since we don't have time to learn about the 39 kings that come after Solomon, for our purposes this morning we're going to look at just four.

- > Rehoboam. He started bad :(and ended bad :(.
- > Hezekiah. He started good :) and ended bad :(.
- > Manasseh. He started bad :(and ended good ;).
- > Josiah. He started good :) and ended good ;).

1. Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1-20; 14:21-31).

This past week the staff went out for lunch to celebrate a couple birthdays. I'm not big on having a bash for my birthday but I went along for the fun. Pastor Dick's birthday is also in March and so I started calling him "birthday boy" to take the attention off of me – when I realized he didn't like this phrase I used it even more. As we were leaving the restaurant I stopped at each table and told everyone that it was his birthday. I think it was the first time I've seen Pastor Dick blush. I was having a good time, that is, until he received a certificate for a free meal since it was his birthday. I thought about telling the manager that I had just had a birthday too but realized that it was too late for that. Let's just say Pastor Dick had the last laugh...this time. He told me later in the day that he had a fleeting thought to give the certificate to me...but then he said it was so fleeting that he just forgot about it!

I had disqualified myself from the prize because of my behavior. Likewise, Rehoboam was entitled to a gift but because of his belligerent behavior, the kingdom ruptured. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings 12. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, assumes the throne after his dad's death. All the people are gathered together and they're hoping to hear some words of comfort from the new king. They make an appeal to Rehoboam in verse 4: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." The king does the right thing and asks for some time to think about this request.

He then consults two groups of people. First, he goes to the elders for advice and they tell him in verse 7: "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants." Unfortunately, Rehoboam rejects this godly advice and turns instead to his buddies in verse 11 who tell him to say these words: "My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

Here are some life lessons for us:

- > Be careful who you listen to. It's easy to get people to say what you want to hear, especially if they're your friends. Make sure you get the godly counsel of older men and women and once you get it, listen to it and live accordingly. Proverbs 15:22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."
- > Be careful how you treat people. Verse 13 indicates that Rehoboam talked to the people "harshly." What a contrast to what is said about King Jesus in Matthew 21:5: "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Rehoboam's harshness caused them to rebel, and then fulfilling prophecy, the ten northern tribes broke away under the leadership of Jeroboam. If you have a harsh tongue,

like I do sometimes, put Proverbs 15:1 into practice: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Never forget that there are people all around us carrying heavy loads. Let's be gentle, not judgmental; compassionate, not critical; and helpful, not harsh.

> Be careful how you lead. Rehoboam had a bad influence on his people according to 1 Kings 14:21: "Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done." If you're a parent, or any kind of leader, your commitment to Christ will determine what kind of influence you are having on others. 1 Corinthians 15:33: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Rehoboam started bad and ended bad. Don't follow in his steps.

2. Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20).

King Hezekiah, on the other hand, started good and ended up bad. I see four keys to his life.

> He was proactive, not passive. Two things stand out in this regard. First, he overcame some bad family patterns because his father Ahaz was very wicked. He dealt with the dysfunction and the cycle of sin according to 2 Kings 18:3: "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord..." Look also at verses 5-6: "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah...he held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow Him..." Second, he demonstrated courage and conviction by getting rid of those things that were causing people to sin. We see this in verse 4: "He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it."

> He was a man of prayer. When faced with trouble, he went to God first. He humbled himself and then he prayed. Notice 2 Kings 19:14-16, 19: "Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: 'O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God... Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.'" The basis of Hezekiah's prayer was the glory of God. In verse 35 we read that Hezekiah went to bed and while he slept God swept 185,000 Assyrians away.

He also prayed to defeat death. In 1 Kings 20, the prophet Isaiah told him to put his house in order because his disease was going to lead to death. When Hezekiah heard this news, he prayed in verse 3: "Remember, O Lord, how I walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes. And Hezekiah wept bitterly." God hears his prayer for healing and adds 15 years to his life.

> He was a man of purpose. Have you ever been scared about losing your life and then been spared? What would you do if you were given 15 more years to live? Would you live it the same way you have been, or would you grab hold of each day and live wholeheartedly and unreservedly? Psalm 90:12: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Hezekiah used his time wisely. We know that his sons were born during these bonus years and Proverbs 25:1 introduces us to the "men of Hezekiah" who copied Solomon's proverbs. These scribes were enlisted by Hezekiah to meticulously write down God's holy Word. He lived with purpose because he knew his life was extended on purpose so that he could accomplish God's purposes.

> Pride took him down. Turn over to 2 Chronicles 32:25: "But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem." Verse 31 is a scary verse and before I read it to you, let me assure you that if you're a born-again Christian, this will not happen to you because once you are saved, you are always saved and Jesus promises to "never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). With that said, listen to these frightening words: "...God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart." When God departed, Hezekiah came face-to-face with his own depravity. Without God he was hopeless and helpless.

Rehoboam started bad and stayed bad; Hezekiah had a good start and went bad at the end. Let's look now at Manasseh. He started bad and ended up good.

3. Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20).

A painter named Jack would often thin his paint so it would go further. Putting in a low bid to paint a church building, he got the job

and went to work. As always, when no one was looking, he thinned his paint with some turpentine. He smiled to himself, thinking about all the money he was saving on paint. One day he was up on the scaffolding, just about finished with the project, when suddenly the skies opened with a tremendous thunderstorm, and the downpour washed all the thinned paint off the church, knocking Jack to the ground. As he lay in a puddle of thinned and worthless paint, Jack knew that this was a warning from God. So he dropped to his knees and cried out, "Oh, God, please forgive me. What should I do?" He heard a mighty voice thunder from heaven, "REPAINT! REPAINT! AND THIN NO MORE!"

Manasseh was a king who did more than cut some corners—he did some significant damage to God's reputation and to God's people. Fortunately, he did repent at the end of his life. Though he was the son of Hezekiah, he did not walk with God like his dad did for most of his life. The longest ruling king, he held on to the throne for 55 years. His life can be summed up in three different segments.

> **Corruption.** In 2 Kings 21:2 we read how corrupt he was: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." He rebuilt evil altars that his dad had demolished, bowed down to the stars, erected altars in the temple of the Lord, sacrificed his own son, and practiced sorcery. Tradition tells us that he was the king responsible for sawing the prophet Isaiah in two (see Hebrews 11:37). He was tired of hearing God's truth, so he murdered God's mouthpiece.

> **Captivity.** Because of what he had done God told him in 2 Kings 21:12-13 that he would bring "such a disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle...I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes out a dish." The armies of Assyria captured him and held him captive. 2 Chronicles 33:11 says that they "put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon." When we spurn God's commands, we too become captives according to Romans 6:16: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

> **Conversion.** God gets through to some people with a whisper; with others he uses a two-by-four. Has that ever happened to you? I love how God's grace and mercy and forgiveness is on display in 2 Chronicles 33:12-13: "In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God." We see some fruit of his repentance as he rebuilt the outer walls to keep the evil influences out (something we need to do as well), he got rid of the foreign gods and he restored the altar of the Lord.

Friend, there is hope for the worst of sinners. No matter what you have done, or how long you've been doing it, you can be forgiven and cleansed. Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle. When you repent, the Lord can help you sin no more. Some people start out bad and stay bad. Some start good and end up bad. Others begin bad and end up good. Still others start out good and stay good, like Josiah.

4. Josiah (2 Chronicles 34-35).

Turn to the opening verses of 2 Chronicles 34: "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." Did you catch how young Josiah was when he was made king? Friends, let's never underestimate what God can do through a child. A couple weeks ago I had the privilege of attending Promiseland, our ministry to children on Sunday mornings. I was so impressed with the energetic and spirit-led leadership of our staff. We appreciate those of you who serve our children in this way. I understand that we are looking for a four-year-old teacher during the second hour. Perhaps God is tugging at you to plug into this key ministry role.

Let's make sure we don't look down on kids. We certainly don't want to be rebuked like the disciples were when they tried to keep people from Jesus, do we? The Bible says that He was indignant with them. I love what Jesus said about the value of children in Mark 10:14: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Josiah started out spiritually strong and only seemed to get stronger the older he got. May that be said of those of you who are raised in a Christian home! Here are some highlights:

> He sought God. When he was a teenager it seems that he determined to really get to know God. Look at verse 3: "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David."

> He purged the bad stuff. When he was twenty, he purged the things that were causing the nation to sin. We see this in verses 4-7.

- > He restored worship. In his mid-twenties he worked to rebuild the worship center in Jerusalem. Here's a good principle to keep in mind. When you get rid of the bad stuff, make sure you replace it with good stuff.
- > He was humbled by the Word of God. When the Temple was being cleaned up, the Book of the Law was found and when Josiah asked for it to be read, verse 19 tells us that he tore his robes. This was a sign of deep mourning. Josiah was horrified by what he heard because his people had not been heeding the Word of God. God then tells Josiah that because of his humility and his tears, he would be spared the coming disaster.
- > He had the Word read to all the people. Josiah just didn't keep it to himself; he wanted to make sure that everyone heard what God expected of them. That's why we give such a priority to preaching and teaching the Bible at PBC.
- > He reinstated Passover. Josiah made some reforms in the nation as well, making sure that his people observed the Passover once again.

Friend, if you are walking with God, determine right now to not ever coast in your commitment. Seek God with all you have. Get rid of those things that will trip you up. Restore that which will keep your worship fresh by reinstating those things that keep your relationship vibrant. If it's been awhile since you've read the Scriptures, get back into them now. Hear the Word and then respond with humility, doing what God tells you to do. We who own the Book must be owned by the Book. Let me also add that what we really need is not reformation; we need transformation. May God send us revival as Psalm 85:6 says: "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?"

Which King represents you this morning?

- > **Rehoboam. He started bad :(and ended bad :(.**
- > **Hezekiah. He started good :) and ended bad :(.**
- > **Manasseh. He started bad :(and ended good :).**
- > **Josiah. He started good :) and ended good :).**

Here are some summary statements that can help us learn from the good and the bad.

- > **Intimacy determines impact.** The standard by which kings are called "good" or "bad" depends entirely on whether or not they had an intimate relationship with God. Those who walked with God influenced the spiritual climate of their kingdom.
- > **God sees who we are.** One of the most repeated phrases in Kings and Chronicles is this: "So and so did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" or "So and so did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord." God knows who we are and what we do.

Make sure that Jesus is your King and that you're serving His kingdom. There are only two kingdoms – the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Which one are you in? Actually, no one is good. We're all bad because we've all broken God's standards. The only way to break this cycle of sin is by putting our faith and trust in the only One who is good, King Jesus. If Jesus is your King, then it's time to serve Him like never before.

Closing Video: "The Kingdom"