

Study 0054

Scripture Text: 2 Kings 17:1-41

In our last study, we saw that a common theme with the children of Israel was the ease with which they forgot God, and entered into idolatry (affection for something or someone more than for God) and apostasy (wilful rejection of God). We saw how a cycle developed among them: years of peace and prosperity, soon gave way to the people forgetting God and turning to the worship of idols, which then brought the nation into captivity and bondage in their own land, following which the people repented and God sent them a deliverer, through whom God gave victory, and the nation again, experienced times of peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, this cycle which occurred in a period of time we called the 'Dark Ages of Israel' did not end with the death of Eli and his sons.

The Old Covenant Era Worship: More Problems with the Worship of God

After the death of Eli and his sons, Samuel, who had been under the tutelage of Eli, was raised up by God as a prophet in Israel (**1 Samuel 3:19; 4:1a**). Samuel tried to bring the nation of Israel back to God, and for as long as he was directly involved in the lives of the people, there was no problem. However, as Samuel grew older, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel, but their corrupt lifestyle, soon got the people asking for a king instead (**1 Samuel 8:1ff**). Thus, began the era of kings. The kings did very little to bring the nation back to God, save David, and a few others including, Jehoshaphat (**2 Chronicles 17:1-6, 7-12**); Hezekiah (**2 Chronicles 29:1—32:33**); and Josiah (**2 Chronicles 34:1—35:27**). These righteous kings tried to bring the people back to God, but their efforts only lasted for as long as they were alive.

King Solomon, the son of David, and the wisest and richest king of all the kings of Israel, built a magnificent temple in the place of the tabernacle where David had kept the Ark of the Covenant (King David had moved the Ark to Jerusalem, while the tabernacle was in Shiloh). Sadly, it was Solomon who was to introduce the nation to strange gods through the many wives he had married (**1 Kings 11:1-14**). After Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel was divided: there were the ten tribes to the North; and the remaining two (Judah and Simeon) in the South. The priests and the Levites moved to the Southern kingdom. The Northern kingdom was called Israel, while the Southern kingdom was called Judah.

The Northern kingdom, or Israel, had Jeroboam as its first king, who, immediately, took the nation into the worst kind of idolatry and apostasy, when he caused two golden calves to be set up for worship, so that the people would not go to Jerusalem to worship God in Solomon's temple. Jeroboam feared that if the people were allowed to go to Jerusalem to worship God, they would again desire to be reunited with the Southern kingdom, and he would lose his kingship and kingdom (**1 Kings 12:1-33**). From the inception of the Northern kingdom therefore, idolatry and apostasy were the order of the day; all because King Jeroboam feared that he would lose his position as king over the people. King Jeroboam was either forgetful or ignorant of the fact that God him the kingship and the Northern kingdom (**1 Kings 11:34-40; 12:21-24**). From the idolatry and apostasy that Jeroboam had led the Northern kingdom, they were never to recover. And even though Elijah and Elisha spoke for God (as His prophets) and performed signs and wonders, causing momentary revivals, the Northern kingdom largely remained idolatrous. Jezebel, the foreign and idolatrous wife of King Ahab was a major negative influence, which further entrenched idolatry and apostasy in Israel (**1 Kings 16:29-33**). Eventually, the Northern kingdom was captured by the Assyrians,

who removed the Israelites (except the very, very poor) from their land (the Promised Land), and scattered abroad, replacing them with people from other lands (**2 Kings 17:1-6, 24**).

The Southern kingdom, Judah, did not fare any better. However, they had ‘bursts of light’ in some of their kings, who brought revival to the land, thus, bringing the people back to God. In the Book of second Chronicles from the tenth chapter on, we read accounts of various kings who reigned in Judah. There were the good kings who, through their righteous leadership, caused God’s prosperity, protection, and blessings to prevail in Judah; and there were the evil kings who, because of their idolatry and apostasy, caused God’s wrath to be kindled against the nation (**Proverbs 14:34**). It is worth noting at this point that Jezebel’s influence permeated Judah because, Jehoshaphat’s son married her daughter, Athaliah, who almost brought Judah into apostasy (**2 Chronicles 22:1-7**). The influence of the righteous kings only lasted for as long as those kings were alive, and eventually, Judah also went into exile (**2 Chronicles 36:11-21**). But 70 years after Judah went into exile, God returned them back to the Promised Land (**2 Chronicles 36:21-23**).

Two kings of Judah deserve special mention, because of the lessons their lives teach us. They are, Uzziah (**2 Chronicles 26:1-23**) and Manasseh (**2 Chronicles 33:1-17**). These kings both enjoyed lengthy reigns (52 and 55 years, respectively); but had different beginnings and endings. King Uzziah began his reign well, being of a right heart before God and seeking after God (but only until the death of the person who was chief priest at the time he began to reign). As long as Uzziah sought after God, God made him to prosper (**2 Chronicles 26:5**)! But when he became strong or powerful, he also became proud, and this led to his destruction, for he took upon himself to go into the temple to burn incense before the altar of incense; and when reprimanded and admonished by the priests, he became furious, and was struck by God with leprosy; a disease he had until his death (**2 Chronicles 26:16-21**). King Manasseh, on the other hand, began his reign with evil deeds before the LORD, engaging in and encouraging the people to worship idols (**2 Chronicles 33:2-7**). Eventually, God judged King Manasseh, and the king of Assyria came and took him into captivity and afflicted him. But when he was in exile, King Manasseh turned to God by humbling himself “*greatly*” and prayed and intreated God, Who heard him, and freed and returned him to Jerusalem and to his throne (**2 Chronicles 33:13-17; 7:12-14**). Upon his return to the throne, King Manasseh restituted his ways, and was involved in the removal of the altars he and the people had set up to worship idols; and he got the people to return to the true worship of God.

There are lessons to learn from the era of kings in the Old Covenant Era, and these are:

1. The worship of God is a personal matter, even though we may all gather together to worship. In corporate worship, you should not look at others but be enraptured in God in worship.
2. There is a very strong influence that leaders have over their people when it comes to the worship or otherwise of God. A leader who himself worships God in spirit and in truth, will engender the worship of God, but one who does not, cannot encourage the true worship of God.
3. The fact that a man was evil does not necessarily mean that his children will be evil. Similarly, the fact a man is righteous does not mean that his children will not be evil (**Ezekiel 18:1-32**). What we need to do is train up our children in the way of God (**Proverbs 22:6, 15; 29:15**).
4. Your spouse can be a major influence on your devotion to God; hence, it is important that you seek God’s face before you get into marriage with anyone, even if the person is in church.

5. Your spouse can turn you away from worshipping God; hence, a believer has no business seeking to marry an unbeliever, no matter how 'good' and 'kind' he or she may seem to be (**2 Corinthians 6:14-16**).
6. A leader's insecurity can make him lead an entire congregation into idolatry. It is therefore incumbent on each person to know that God is indeed speaking through a so-called 'religious leader' before following the leader's injunctions. You should be a student of the bible yourself!
7. God's protection and prosperity is always guaranteed for those who reverently worship Him (**2 Chronicles 15:1-19; 16:1-13**). It is therefore, in the interest of the believer in Christ to ensure that he does not abandon God for any reason whatsoever, but rather, put his trust solely on God (**Psalms 37:3-11; Proverbs 3:5-6**).
8. How well you begin with God will only lead to eternal life, provided you continue, and finish well with God (**Matthew 24:13**).
9. If a person has been in idolatry from the beginning, but turns to God in humility (repentance), even if it is as a result of affliction, God will bring that individual to a place of true prosperity (which is much more than having money, and includes good health, and favour with God and man).
10. The true worship of God cannot be engaged in with a prideful heart.
11. True and acceptable worship before God is one done in humility from the heart.
12. God's warning to a sinful people can go on for as long as He wants (sometimes for as long as ten generations), before eventually bringing His judgment upon His people. Hence, the fact that judgment has not happened does not mean that it will not happen.

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. True worship of God is a personal matter, even in a corporate setting.
2. A person's spouse can influence whether he or she worships God or an idol.
3. Religious leaders exert tremendous influence on whether or not their members worship God truthfully; hence, a person needs to carefully evaluate who they serve God under.
4. There is a very strong correlation between the true worship of God and true prosperity.
5. Every wealthy man is a true worshipper of God.
6. God cannot send his people into captivity. He only warns them to scare them, so that they would not worship idols.
7. An idolatrous father will surely raise an idolatrous child, who will grow up to be an idol worshipper himself.
8. Every God-fearing father brings forth God-fearing children.
9. A person, who has not repented of, and renounced idolatry, can negatively influence his or her spouse, and children, even though he or she is in church.
10. God does not accept worship from a prideful man.