

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 25

The Bible covers approximately six thousand years of history, from the Creation to the return of Yeshua. It contains many themes. These themes are interwoven through more than sixty separate Books, from Genesis to Revelation. God has given us the Bible so that, in fellowship with one another and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we might study all that He has done and all that He intends to do. What was lost at the Fall is being restored and renewed through Yeshua. God separated out one nation, Israel, to teach us His purposes, preparing the way for the Kingdom of Heaven. That is why we studied Matthew's Gospel in the context of the Kingdoms of David and Solomon. Now we will return to 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. After Solomon, the Kingdom declined. At key moments God spoke through the Prophets. Let us, therefore, study the remainder of the history of Israel and Judah before returning to the New Testament again to complete our study of the entire Bible. There were roughly one thousand years between King David's reign and the birth of Yeshua HaMashiach. Let us learn from those years of Israel's history. First, we will read some Psalms to help us regain a perspective of Israel at the time of David and Solomon.

Day 1

Psalms 113 to 118. David established the Kingdom. Solomon built the Temple. This was the centre of worship for the Tribes of Israel just as the Tabernacle had been during the wilderness years. At the three major Feasts of the Lord (Pesach in early Spring, Shavuot in the late Spring/early Summer, and Sukkot in the Autumn) the Tribes would go up to Jerusalem. As they went up to the Temple they would carry their sacrifices and offerings singing the Psalms. Psalms 113 to 118 are called the *Hallel*. They were traditionally sung at Pesach. Yeshua and the disciples sang one of these Psalms at the end of their Passover meal before crossing the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. Let us read these Psalms today and picture the worshipping throngs going up to the Temple.

Day 2

Psalms 120 to 125. These are some of the *Songs of Ascent*. They were sung throughout the year as worshippers went up to the Temple. The Temple was built on Mount Zion, which is in the Moriah range. Hundreds of years before, Abraham took Isaac onto this mountain range to be a burnt offering. Later, a plague ceased here. This was the plague which God sent to Israel when David took an unlawful census. Then, during Solomon's reign, the Temple was built here. Later, the Temple was destroyed at the time of the Babylonian invasion. It was rebuilt at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and later greatly enhanced by Herod. Yeshua was crucified on this same mountain range. Herod's Temple was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. All that remains today is the massive area called Temple Mount where these Temples once stood, and where all these events took place. On Temple Mount today stand a mosque and an Islamic memorial called the Dome on the Rock. The Western Wall of the foundations of the original Temple still stand and Jews congregate there today for prayer, especially at the Sabbath and Feast Days. When we read these Songs of Ascent, let us consider all of this history and imagine the assembled Tribes at the time of Solomon and the later kings of Judah. The Psalms express a heart desire to be in fellowship with God, remembering all that He has done. The Psalms help us picture the days of David and Solomon. They also give us hope for future restoration of relationship between God and His people.

Day 3

1 Kings Chapter 11. Read this chapter again. The glory of Solomon's kingdom came to an end. Despite all that God had done to give Solomon wisdom and understanding, he sinned like every other human being. This puts us in mind of Romans 11:32: *God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all*. This is hard to understand. Paul the Apostle was inspired to write his Epistles so that we might understand the New Covenant in terms of the Old. We will return to this when we read these Epistles more fully. For the time being, let us study Israel's history and set the foundations. It is a painful history from this point on. The glory of Israel was tarnished because of human sin. God did not compromise and could not compromise. He did exactly what He told Solomon He would do. The Kingdom was divided.

It is instructive to pause and consider how God administers justice. We are at peace when we are under God's protection. The Torah of God, rightly applied to our lives, brings protection. Israel was protected when they lived according to God's laws. This protection was like a wall around them. When God brought judgment, He took away His protection and allowed enemies to breach the wall. He took full responsibility for this, by stirring up those who would be His agents of justice. Jeroboam was the means by which the Kingdom was divided. Later in Israel's history, the Assyrians and Babylonians were stirred up as agents of God's judgement. God administered judgment by stirring up Israel's enemies against them. He took their protection away.

The breaching of a physical wall surrounding a city is symbolic of spiritual strongholds. Yeshua taught His disciples to pray, *deliver us from the evil one*. The New Covenant brings the Torah to our heart. Our rest and protection come from God. When we seek to walk a road of holiness according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, He writes the teaching of God on our hearts. See how God speaks to you through the account of God's judgment on Israel. First, we must study the history of Israel and Judah, remembering that God is still working out His Covenant purposes in our day. Then we must learn personal lessons in terms of New Covenant faith. Finally, we must watch and pray concerning our present-day world, because God is dealing with all the nations prior to the return of Yeshua. His judgments are being spoken out across the entire earth. Our protection is found in our abiding place in Yeshua.

The Kingdom of Israel was divided after the death of Solomon. We have much to learn from this.

1 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 10 and 11. Here, then, is the outworking of God's judgment. The Kingdom was divided and bad went to worse. Rehoboam reigned in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The glory of Solomon's Kingdom quickly departed. How quickly a generation can destroy the work of their forefathers when God removes His protection! Contrast 1 Kings 12:11 with Matthew 11:29-30. This leads to contrasting emotions. There is the sadness for Judah that Rehoboam, unlike his father, would oppress the people with heavy burdens. On the other hand, there is the promise that Yeshua will rule in a perfect way, lightening our burden, even better than Solomon. These emotions run deeply as we read the history of Israel.

God promised that Judah would be preserved as a nation despite all. The northern Tribes, under Jeroboam, turned away from God to serve idols in the form of golden calves. Jeroboam was God's choice but he was not a good king. The Tribe of Dan had already strayed from the Lord and now, in the region of Dan, worship of false gods was firmly established. Remnants of the altar at Dan are visible today where modern-day archaeologists have unearthed the city. They are a reminder of what happened there many years ago. A golden calf was also set up at Bethel, where Jacob had met with God on his way to Padan Aram. What a sad day this was for Israel, when judgment began in the household of God!

Day 4

1 Kings 13:1 to 1 Kings 14:20. From this point on, 1 Kings contains accounts of both the kings of Israel and Judah. 2 Chronicles only contains only the account of the kings of Judah.

The twelve Tribes of Israel entered the Promised Land united as one nation. Each Tribe was given its allotted territory in the one nation under God. Now they were divided because Solomon followed false gods. Pause and consider God's sadness when He judged His people in this way. Prior to Solomon, the Tribe of Dan had already gone astray. Now the ten northern Tribes were led more and more astray with altars at Bethel and Dan, high places of worship on the hills of Israel, and priests drawn from any Tribe. In the south God continued to be faithful to His promise and Judah remained an identifiable Tribe worshipping at the Temple. The small Tribe of Benjamin was included in Judah. These were sad days indeed, for the divided nation.

In 1 Kings 13 and 14 we see how God continued to speak to Jeroboam, despite all that he did. Consider the details carefully. Though God had used Jeroboam to divide the Kingdom of Israel, their idol worship was displeasing to Him and so He sent a Prophet to warn them. The Prophet himself was judged for his disobedience as he was returning home.

There was no repentance in Israel and finally Jeroboam's son died and so did Jeroboam. Ahijah was used to proclaim this judgment. The sins of Jeroboam became like a dark cloud over Israel from that time forward. By contrast the hope of all Israel remained in God's promises to Judah.

1 Kings 14:21-31 and 2 Chronicles 12. God was faithful to His promise to Judah, but there was no compromise. Rehoboam led Judah to idol worship and the Southern Kingdom suffered the consequences. God sent the army of Egypt to invade Judah. The glories that remained from Solomon's reign diminished when Shishak took away the treasures of both the Temple and the Palace. Gold was replaced by bronze. How quickly the magnificence of Solomon's Kingdom was removed. The precise details are not given of what Shishak took from the Temple. Later, at the time of Jeremiah, the Temple would fall completely when the Babylonians took Judah to exile. Again, at this later time, items were removed from the Temple and taken to Egypt. Many of us wonder where the Ark of the Covenant was taken, and when this happened. There are many theories but we do not know. Perhaps it went to Egypt. Perhaps it went to Cush (Ethiopia). Perhaps it will never again be found on earth because God took it to Heaven. The presence of the Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's presence among His people. We only have partial understanding of the gradual process whereby God's presence was taken from His people. Gold represents the Kingdom of Heaven and bronze represents a human kingdom: this was a deeply prophetic moment for all Israel.

God declared Himself to be a jealous God when He gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. The spiritual adultery of Judah provoked Him to jealousy. The Prophets speak of God binding Himself to His people as a husband to his wife. We can only imagine the grief of God when both Israel and Judah became idolatrous. Rehoboam was led to repentance and so God turned back the Egyptian

army. Nevertheless, war continued between the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah all the days of Rehoboam.

Revelation 5, 6 and 7. Our reading of the accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah are best done with God's ultimate purposes in mind. His Covenant with Abraham was established and so He kept a remnant of His people in Judah. Judgment on the Tribes of Israel was without compromise: all that God said through His Prophetic Word would come to pass. The suffering of Yeshua on the Cross and His weeping over the City of Jerusalem show us both the depth of the judgment and the firmness of God's promises. Israel's suffering over many centuries is also a painful reminder of this. Leaders of every nation on earth should study the Bible, because God's prophetic Word is not just for Israel. The Book of Revelation shows us graphic details of the pain and suffering coming to the entire world. Those who remain unrepentant have no excuse, because God has shown that He will not compromise His Word even for the chosen people. The suffering of Yeshua on the Cross is the central focus of all history. There is neither compromise to justice nor to the promises of God. We choose to bear our own punishment for sin or we choose to avail ourselves of Yeshua's suffering for us. Through Yeshua, all God's purposes are fulfilled, to the entire earth as well as to the Tribes of Israel. It was a dark day when God's judgment began on the Tribes of Israel, separating them into two Kingdoms. The dark prophetic clouds gathered more deeply as the years went by, but God's promises were never revoked. Here in the Book of Revelation we read about the darkness that will come to the earth in the latter days. We are reminded that God will not compromise with sin. Yet, in the midst of the great tribulation, we will also witness the firmness of God's promise to the Tribes of Israel and those from the Gentile nations who come by faith. Consider this in the context of our reading of the accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah. This helps us to understand that there was a bigger plan in view, which is still relevant today. See what the Holy Spirit says to you as you pray about this.

Day 5

1 Kings 15-16 and 2 Chronicles 13-17. The continuing accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah are found in 1 Kings. We do not have a record of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. There is reference to it, but it is not included in the Bible. 2 Chronicles covers only details of the kings of Judah. The kings of Israel descended from Jeroboam, who sinned greatly. His descendants continued to sin in the same way. Jeroboam's sins are constantly remembered in the records of later kings.

Judah had several good kings. God blessed the Southern Kingdom when they had a good king. Nevertheless, each one fell short of complete restoration of the Kingdom, as we might expect from imperfect human beings. Asa and Jehoshaphat were two reforming kings in Judah. Read the accounts for yourself and note the details. These chapters take us up to King Ahab, of whom the Bible has much to say. Note that Hiel built up Jericho and that his first-born son Abiram died as a consequence. Through this, God reminds us that nothing will be forgotten that has been prophesied. The curse that Joshua pronounced over Jericho (Joshua 6:26) is living and active over all time.

Day 6

2 Chronicles 18. This is a brief account of Ahab, who came to the throne of Israel around 870 BC. It coincided with Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah. Much of the glory of Judah was restored through Jehoshaphat. Perhaps he even considered it possible for him to reunite Israel and Judah by marrying one of Ahab's relatives. The strategy has often been used over the years, whereby kingdoms are united through marriage. Such alliances, however, have been fragile. After the Tower of Babel it was God's intent that the world would be divided into small nations. This was to prevent us from having one united godless empire such as arose at the time of Babel. In the end times there *will* be one united empire again and it will be ruled by the antichrist. Until then God is working out His purposes to spread the Gospel among all nations. Jehoshaphat did not succeed in uniting the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. God had not appointed him to reunite the Tribes of Israel. Blessed as he was through his obedience to God, he was not the Messiah. Both Solomon and Jehoshaphat were shadows of the Messiah. Jehoshaphat reminds us of the messianic hope, but only in Yeshua will the people of God be reunited.

Jehoshaphat visited Ahab in Samaria, which had become the capital city of the northern Kingdom and where Ahab built his palace. The ruins of this palace are still visible today, where archaeologists have been at work, reminding us that the Bible brings an account of people who really existed. It was a time when God gave Prophets to Israel. It was also the time of false prophecy. As is frequently the case when men only want confirmation for what they already have decided, Ahab preferred the counsel of the false prophets. This resulted in his death in battle. Jehoshaphat, by contrast was protected in the same battle, and returned to Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 19 and 20. This is the remainder of the account of Jehoshaphat. He was a blessed king and Judah was victorious and prosperous during his reign. He failed, however, to completely remove the high places. These were shrines to foreign gods, set up on the hillsides. They were a blemish on his reign and a continuing snare to Judah. Psalm 121 comes to mind. Our help does not come from the hills, but from the Lord God who made the hills.

As well as this being a lesson for the Children of Israel it is a lesson for all nations. Anywhere we go in the world today we will find shrines to foreign gods. Not one nation has completely removed from its midst the altars to foreign gods, however powerful or blessed they have been in history. This includes the ancient empires of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, and the modern empires such as Britain, France, Spain, Prussia, Belgium, and also influential countries like America. There may have been blessings from God at some periods of a nation's history, but the compromise to foreign gods will, in the end, bear bad fruit. Our studies of the kings of Israel and Judah are still relevant today. If we are to be a nation under God into the end times we must remove all the High Places and strongholds of satan.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

1 Kings 17 to 19. These chapters contain the well-known account of Elijah confronting the false prophets, the wicked queen Jezebel, and the weak king Ahab. Elijah is among the foremost Prophets of the Bible. He is a type of John the Baptist. He confronted the powers of evil in the nation of Israel and his ministry foreshadowed John, who prepared the way for Yeshua. He also points to the end times which precede the return of Yeshua, when a similar prophetic ministry will arise again. Read what happened during the reign of Ahab and through the ministry of Elijah. See how the Holy Spirit uses this as an inspiration for today, as we, together, are called to prepare the way of the Lord. Do not rush this reading. It is too important for that.

We do not find a formula to follow, so we must be careful not to take on what God has not commissioned. God alone chooses whom He will use as His prophetic mouthpiece. Whatever our ministry call, we learn from Elijah that God will provide for us and guide us through unique circumstances. He fed Elijah in various ways through a time of drought. The Hebrew word for the bird called the *raven* is *orev*. The word refers to its dark hue. Dark skinned Bedouins, were called by a similar name, *arav* (from which we get *Arab*). It is possible that Elijah was fed either by birds or by the local Bedouins. We can trust God to feed us if we are called by Him. God can use the birds, the local people or perform miracles such as occurred with the widow of Zarephath. John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey. Locusts were a type of plant as well as an insect. *Locusts and wild honey*, typify eating the produce of the land. God provided for John in a different way from Elijah. God will provide for his people in various ways in the days ahead. We cannot know the details ahead of time, only that we can trust in Him. The Children of Israel were given Manna in the wilderness. Yeshua multiplied loaves and fishes. God has various ways of providing for His people.

We must not fear the days ahead. Neither must we fear to bring the prophetic word to whomever God sends us. We may be sent to a single person in our town or to the ruler of our nation. We must simply obey when we are called. In every circumstance we will be confronting unseen spiritual powers that have built strongholds in a person or in a nation. Ahab was a weak king because he allowed his demonized wife to rule him. Demonic powers will come through any door that we offer and then there is a spiritual battle to confront them. The church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) was weakened through a dominant and demonized woman likened to Jezebel. Such things can happen when the leadership of our churches or our nations is weak. We must approach this matter with care and not look for formulas for spiritual warfare, but there is much in the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of baal that is relevant for today.
