

On The Way to Jesus

The Decline of the Monarchy and Exile

Happy Mother's Day – WARNING: this is not a 'mother's day' message

Lord Acton is known for a saying about power and corruption...

In 1887, English legislator and Catholic historian, Lord Acton, famously wrote his critique of power..., "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority... There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it." [100] The Game of Gods

Israel and Judah certainly learned that truth the hard way, as we see in the lineage of their kings. Between the two realms there were 39 kings, only 8 good kings – all in Judah.

In the church world, we hear accounts of leadership abuse that don't relate to sexual immorality or money issues. In several cases these accounts resulted in the loss of the pastoral role in their churches. Sadly, another such account in our denomination was reported last week, and that pastor was generally known for a moderate and conciliatory public persona. If reports are true, it was a different reality behind the scenes where he engaged in what he called an "unhealthy leadership style."

What we see with the Degradation of the Monarchy was a very public unhealthy leadership style. There was a clear decline in the spiritual and moral lives of the kings of Israel and Judah.

This week we'll focus on the Degradation or Decline of the Monarchy and the resulting Exile.

Degradation of the Monarchy

After Solomon, the monarchy splits into the Northern Kingdom (10 tribes, "Israel" / "Ephraim," based in Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (2 tribes, "Judah," based in Jerusalem) and spirals into sin.

Israel and Judah in Exile

Due to repeated cycles of sin, the covenant curse of exile found in Deut 4:25-30 is poured out. Assyria defeats the Northern Kingdom Israel (722 BC) while Babylonia defeats the Southern Kingdom / Judah (605-586 BC).

How did we get to this divided kingdom and exile?

WALK THRU BIBLE REVIEW – Set Geography

__JOSHUA_, Jordan, Jericho,
Divide-conquer, __SOUTH - _NORTH__
Divide - settle , 12 __TRIBES_
Judges, __400_ years,

Deborah , _GIDEON_, __SAMSON_
Every man did that which was right in his __IN HIS OWN EYES _
except __RUTH_ and _SAMUEL_
United __KINGDOM_, 120 years
Saul, no _HEART__,
David, __WHOLE_ - heart,
Solomon, __HALF_ - _HEART_

__DIVIDED__ Kingdom, 400 years,
North, __SOUTH_
Israel, _JUDAH_
19, __20_ (number of kings)

0, __8_ (number of good kings)

Prophets speak “ __SHAPE UP_OR SHIP OUT__
Assyria - _ISRAEL_,- Scatter
__BABYLONIA__ - Judah - _EXILE_
70 years,

THE ROAD TO EXILE WAS PAVED WITH IDOLS

As we consider this process, we read of idolatry of the worst sort as Kings and the people fell into the worship of ancient ‘gods’ and practiced all sorts of immorality and even child sacrifice.

The ancient world was more aware of the reality of evil spiritual forces, which Paul referred to as the ‘world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.’

The OT refers to the practice of sacrificing to demons, who represented these forces of darkness. In every age, these forces of darkness manifest themselves overtly or covertly through worldly ideologies and practices.

** (This topic is too big to develop it in this sermon, but it needs to be mentioned)

Deut 32:17- The Song of Moses, just prior to his death, refers to how “**Israel provoked God to jealousy with strange gods; they sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods who they have not known, new gods who came lately whom your fathers did not dread. 18 You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth.**”

Psalms 106:37-39 is similar to Deut 32 in recounting the OT narrative up to the conquest. Again we read of the idolatry of Israel.

They served their idols, which became a trap for them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons. 38 And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood. 39 Thus they became unclean in their practices, and played the harlot in their deeds.

The sinfulness, corruption, and immorality that led to being Exiled was the fruit of idolatry – the worship of evil forces/ spirits, under the names of Baal, Astarte / Ashtoreth, Molech, and Chemosh

Rehoboam, the first king after Solomon departed from God... 2 Chron 12

1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the Lord...

...14 He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

He *established* his kingdom, but he did not *establish* his heart to seek Yahweh. The same word is used in v. 1 and 14. Rehoboam was intent on **establishing** his kingdom but not intent on establishing his heart to seek Yahweh. That is a recipe for disaster.

From the earliest days of entering the land, the presence and worship of other ‘gods’ was always a temptation.

Judges 10:6

They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Let’s be honest. We read that and sort of pass over it because it is talking about a world that seems sooo foreign to us. That was an unsophisticated age. We don’t believe in that sort of superstition in our modern age.

REALLY?

Horoscopes are still run in newspapers or online.

The whole trans-identity movement of our age is evidence of a world cut off from God as mankind seeks to make a name and identity for itself apart from God. It is a movement that has taken on a religious fervor

and commitment to indoctrinate the next generation.

Satan con 2023 April 28-30 was GIVEN a write up in USA TODAY and many other outlets
“SatanCon: World’s Largest gathering of Satanists’ hails diversity, fellowship”

That sounds like it could be a headline in The Atlantic, the Hill, Media Matters, some college campuses, or a slogan in some primary campaigns.

The viral clip from the event has a woman ripping up a bible, while some attendees chanted “Hail Satan.”

- One attendee was part of an "un-baptism" ritual where she expressed her desire to rid herself of her religious past. She said that she gets ‘unbaptized’ every chance she can.”

Why should we care?

We are called to be sober and watchful because our adversary prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith. 1 Pet 5:8

We can’t resist what we won’t admit or can’t identify or if we are spiritually apathetic.

The end of David’s reign was punctuated with dysfunction and danger. One son, Absalom, led a sort of insurrection against David, but he was killed in the internal-fighting for the kingdom.

Things looked better when Solomon became king, and he was blessed with wisdom and wealth, but material and spiritual corruption set in because of his marital and political ties with those of other nations and religious practices. The body politic of Israel did not decline because of bad tax policy or dietary violations. Israel fell because of moral and spiritual decline.

At first, the issue wasn’t as simple as flat-out rejection of Yahweh. It was a more gradual practice of syncretism, i.e. the combination of different forms of belief or practice.

The best spin on this is that in their minds, Israel wasn’t rejecting Yahweh, but they were seeking to worship Him under the symbol of a Golden Calf or some other idol. Yet in many cases, it was just plain worship of false ‘gods’.

IT WAS IDOLATRY and a violation of the First and Second Commandments. It was an offense and an abomination to God.

THE ROAD TO EXILE WAS PAVED WITH IDOLS

Right out of the kingly gate, Solomon set a pattern of idolatry.

1 KINGS 11

1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love. 3 He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. 4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. 5 For Solomon went after **Ashtoreth** the goddess of the Sidonians 6 Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done.

7 Then Solomon built a high place ... for **Molech** the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. 8 Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

9 Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded.

I already mentioned Rehoboam who was the first king after Solomon. He is the model of those who

departed from God... 2 Chron 12

1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD... ...14 He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

This is not spiritual apathy or laziness or bad judgement or poor time management or bad priorities. God says HE DID EVIL BECAUSE he did not set/ prepare/ establish his heart to seek the LORD – Yahweh. He abandoned the law of the Lord.

Ps 119:11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

Forsaking the Law – the Good Instruction of the Lord is a key indicator that we have failed to set our heart to seek the LORD. Note that it doesn't say that Rehoboam 'set' his heart to do evil. He simply failed to set his heart to seek the Lord. He didn't set his heart to forsake the Lord; he simply FAILED TO SET HIS HEART TO SEEK THE LORD.

There is a self-conscious effort to seek the Lord by making use of the means of grace – prayer, the Word, corporate and private worship, giving, fellowship, and service.

EX: Have you ever misplaced your wallet? What did you do? YOU SET YOUR HEART AND HANDS TO SEEKING IT

Have you ever made that conscious decision to seek the Lord? Perhaps you were a seeker at one point, but you've been distracted and thrown off course. MERCY IS AVAILABLE FOR YOU. God wants you to seek Him, and as a believer you have the Holy Spirit who desires God. Walk in the Spirit.

There is an official forsaking the word and a functional forsaking. The first is public and overt, but functionally forsaking the Word of God is often hidden and incremental. It just slowly happens; we slowly drift from scripture because our hearts are NOT SET or PREPARED TO SEEK THE LORD. (perhaps still in church regularly)

Seeking the Lord involves intentionality. No one drifts into seeking God.

Setting our heart to seek the LORD is the opposite of coasting spiritually i.e. settling for the bare minimum of engagement with God and His Word. It is the opposite of being complacent and content with "being more spiritual than him or her". "O God, I thank you like I'm not like _____"

EX: in the woods with others and you encounter a bear. You don't have to be the fastest person in the group. You just have to be faster than at least one of the people.

That's how some treat their spiritual life. "I just have to be better than that guy or gal or THEM."

That is the opposite of how we are to approach our relationship with God.

Religious idolatry is the result of NOT SETTING YOUR HEART TO SEEK THE LORD.

We WILL seek something or someone that will take on the role of 'god' in our life.

*** This begs the question, "What are you seeking?" "What would those who know you best say?"

ASK THEM

Commit to your family to be a man, woman, young person whose heart is set on Seeking the Lord. It's not an issue of perfection, but DIRECTION.

King Solomon, the builder of God's temple in Jerusalem, eventually worshipped **Ishtar** and erected images to the pagan deities, such as **Molech**. Israel's King Ahab constructed a temple for **Baal** and instituted its priesthood, prompting a deadly showdown between the prophets of Baal and God's spokesman, Elijah. Standing before the assembled people Elijah famously asked: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if **Baal**, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

King Manasseh converted God's temple to a pagan worship center. Manasseh also engaged in witchcraft and mediumship, and "made his son pass through the fire" – a reference to the burning-to-death of one's child as a sacrifice to Molech. (2 Chron 33; 2 Kings 21:5ff)

Despite all of that, mercy was still available. Through Jeremiah God called his people back to Himself
JEREMIAH 3:12-13

“Return, backsliding Israel,” says the Lord; “I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,” says the Lord; “I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,” says the Lord.

We may not identify with Baal, Ishtar, and Molech, even in their modern manifestations- unbelief, distorted sexuality, and dangers to children- but we can grasp the description of Rehoboam...

14 He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

NOT SETTING YOUR HEART to seek the Lord will lead to a self-imposed spiritual exile.

REPENTANCE IS THE DOOR OUT OF EXILE

The Puritan Thomas Watson said “repentance is a spiritual medicine made of six ingredients: The sight of sin, sorrow for sin, confession of sin, shame for sin, hatred for sin, turning from sin.”

Perhaps today is the day that you need to open that door of Repentance.

Repentance puts us ON THE WAY TO Jesus....Biblical repentance leads us to the cross.

God sent His son to be THE FAITHFUL KING. His food was to do the will of the Father. He was tempted in every way yet was without sin. He went one on one with Satan and prevailed.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God made a public display of His triumph over the rulers and authorities of this present age. (Col 2) He conquered sin and death for us.

Jesus Himself gave His life as a sacrifice for us and was raised up and seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and dominion and every name that is named. (Eph 1).

Jesus has given us a sacrament so that we won't forget that He is The King of Kings, and that God bought us and transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his glorious light....

COMING TO THE TABLE by faith with spiritual discernment is one way to fight spiritual declension in our own souls. We come to feed on Christ who is true Bread and Living Water for thirsty souls.

Amen

<https://protestia.com/2023/05/08/progressive-pca-pastor-scott-sauls-placed-on-indefinite-leave-of-absence/>

<https://religionnews.com/2023/05/07/scott-sauls-author-and-nashville-pastor-to-take-leave-of-absence/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/05/03/satancon-boston-2023-convention/70168925007/>

<https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/milton-quintanilla/woman-tears-bible-apart-during-satancon-2023.html>

<https://notthebee.com/article/welp-satan-con-is-off-to-a-rip-roaring-start-as-the-opening-ceremony-feature-bible-ripping-and-shredding-of-the-thin-blue-line-flag>

--

11. Degradation of the Monarchy

After Solomon, the monarchy splits into the Northern Kingdom (10 tribes, “Israel” / “Ephraim,” based in

Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (2 tribes, “Judah,” based in Jerusalem) and spirals into sin.

- 1 Kings 11–13 (Kingdom divided)
- 1 Kings 17–22 (Example: Elijah and Ahab)
- 2 Chronicles 33 (Example: Evil under Manasseh)
- Luke 4 (Remembering Elijah’s ministry)*

12. Israel and Judah in Exile

Due to repeated cycles of sin, the covenant curse of exile is poured out. Assyria defeats the Northern Kingdom /

Israel (722 BC) while Babylonia defeats the Southern Kingdom / Judah (605–586 BC).

- 2 Kings 17 (Fall of Israel to Assyria)
- Isaiah 7 (Assyria assails Judah, Immanuel)
- 2 Kings 24–25 (Fall of Judah to Babylonia)
- Micah 1 (Pronouncing judgment of exile)
- Hosea 1–2 (Warnings to “Not-my-people”)
- Zephaniah 1 (Punishment from the Lord)
- Ezekiel 11 (God’s glory leaves the temple)
- Matthew 1:18–25 (Immanuel fulfilled)*
- 1 Peter 2 (Grace to “Not-my-people”)*