

Monday - Week Twenty-three

Lesson Sixty-six: The Beginnings of Idolatry

Read: 1 Kings 12:25 - 14:16

Summary: After Solomon's time the Promised Land was split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In these next lessons we will trace the history of the northern kingdom until its destruction.

Background and Comments

- God promised Jeroboam that He would establish his family on throne in Israel just as He had with David's in the south. This would happen if Jeroboam walked in the Lord's ways (1 Kings 11:38). Jeroboam immediately broke God's law by setting up new worship areas for the Israelites (God had commanded that all sacrifices be made at the temple in Jerusalem). Jeroboam reasoned that if the people continued to travel to Jerusalem (in Judah) they would want to return to Judah's control.
- God's judgment against Jeroboam seems harsh; his little son died because of his father's sin. Read 1 Kings 14:13 again carefully. This little boy went to heaven (he was the only one whom the Lord found anything good); God took him home to heaven before his father had a chance to corrupt him. God's judgment against Jeroboam was also an show of mercy to his son.

Lessons for Today

- Even more surprising than Jeroboam's sinful command to disobey God is the people's willingness to follow him! This shows us that the spiritual condition of the north was not good at all. The people even listened to Jeroboam after his hand shriveled up and the sinful altar split apart. How many of the sins in your life are this "stupid"?
- God told the prophet from Judah not to eat with anyone from the north. This was to be an announcement of God's judgment against them. This prophet had no business listening to the older prophet ... even though the old prophet said that he had a message from God. There are quite a few religious authors, TV and radio preachers who claim to speak for God. Just because someone says that God has sent them does not mean that He has.

Read: Psalm 111; Luke 3.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, make my life one of obedience. Guard me from idolatry. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday - Week Twenty-three

Lesson sixty-seven: Ahab's Idolatry

Read: 1 Kings 16:29-17:24

Summary: Ahab and Jezebel took wickedness to new levels (or depths as the case may be). God used the prophet Elijah to judge them.

Background and Comments

- Ahab's first mistake was to marry Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal. Ethbaal means "Baal is with him"; obviously Jezebel's father was a fanatical Baal worshiper. Jezebel showed that she was just like her father when she sent out 450 prophets of Baal into Israel and killed the prophets of the Lord. Imagine, sending Baal's "missionaries" into the middle of God's people. The Bible says that Ahab and Jezebel "provoked" God.
- Elijah burst on the scene with the force of a bomb. This bold prophet announced to powerful Ahab that it wouldn't rain because of his sin.
- God sent Elijah to a widow in a foreign country. Certainly there were many places in Israel God could have sent His prophet. No doubt God's choice reflected His concern for Elijah (Ahab would have a hard time hurting Elijah in a foreign country) as well as a judgment against all of Israel.

Lessons for Today

- Do you have opportunities to imitate Elijah's boldness? Has God put you in any "spiritually challenging" situations? One key to Christian boldness is to remember that you have a message from God to deliver to people (His law and His Gospel).
- God was especially gracious to the widow at Zarephath. He supplied her with food through the famine and even raised her son back to life. Taking Elijah into her home was one of the best things that ever happened to her. Getting to know (and supporting) strong Christians is always a good idea - they have a way of drawing you closer to the Lord.
- After Elijah's prayer we read that "the Lord heard Elijah's cry". This is what makes your prayers powerful: the Lord listens to you!

Read: Psalm 112; Luke 4.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You gave Elijah incredible courage to stand before a wicked, powerful king. Give me the same courage so that I can stand up for You and Your Word today. I ask this in Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week twenty-three

Catechism Review

Read Questions 172-176

1. In three lines prove from the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God.

2. We sometimes don't fully appreciate the fact that Jesus was a true human being. What comfort can you draw from Jesus' humanity?

3. Some churches teach that Mary was not a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. [They say that Jesus had a human father just like everyone else ... and then they says that it makes no difference to our faith.] How would you respond?

4. Explain Jesus' active and passive obedience.

5. We need to remember that Jesus is a "real" Person (God and man), not just a Biblical truth we believe in. Jesus can be your friend, your confidant. How can you work on this friendship?

Read: Psalm 113; Luke 5.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, lead me closer to my best Friend. Amen.

Thursday - Week Twenty-three

Lesson Sixty-eight: Jehovah or Baal?

Read: 1 Kings 18

Summary: This dramatic account shows us how much God hates evil. He ordered that all the prophets of Baal be executed.

Background and Comments

- God could not bear the evil that was going on in Israel so He took the offensive by sending Elijah back to Ahab and by arranging for a confrontation with the prophets of Baal.
- Things had gotten bad for the believers in Israel. Ahab and Jezebel had killed most of the believers during the three years of drought. Little did they know that in one day God would turn the tables on the prophets of Baal and Queen Jezebel.
- What a dramatic picture it must have been: Elijah running ahead of Ahab's chariot with the thunderstorm close behind both of them!

Lessons for Today

- The prophets of Baal make us smile with their attempts to get Baal's attention. Elijah's sarcastic advise ("Perhaps he's busy, or traveling, or sleeping!") is enough to make us laugh! It's true to say that God always has the last laugh (you can't mock God). How can you use that truth when you encounter people who seem to pull the wool over God's eyes?
- Elijah's trust in God's power is amazing. How many of us would dare to pour water on a sacrifice that was supposed to be burned up? Elijah had more trust in God's power than he did in the fact that water doesn't burn. What are some "facts" that stand in the way of your trusting God more?
- Elijah had more authority than ever before when God burned up his sacrifice. The people listened to him when he gave the command to kill the prophets of Baal. When people see that God is using someone in powerful ways they stand in line to follow.

Read: Psalm 114, Luke 6.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You gave Elijah a great victory over the prophets of Baal. Elijah's childlike faith trusted in You more than anyone or anything else. Lord, please give me a faith like that. I want to love you with all my heart; I want to serve You with my whole life. In the name of Jesus; Amen.

Friday - Week Twenty-three

Life Questions

Topic/Question: Pastors keep telling me to read the Bible. When I read it I don't understand it - or I don't find it relevant to my life. What are some tips on reading the Word of God?

Bible References and Considerations

- Peter wrote: *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation* (1 Peter 2:2), When we think about the Bible we need to remember that:
 1. We depend on the Bible as much as a baby needs milk to live. When you pick up the Bible pray, "Lord, thank You for this book. It tells me about my Savior. This means everything to me."
 2. The Bible allows us to "grow up" in our faith. When you pick up the Bible pray, "Lord, send me the Holy Spirit as I read. Let me grow in my faith."
- When you have questions about something that you have read in God's Word:
 1. Ask God for the answer. Keep searching the Bible.
 2. Use Bible tools like concordances, Bible dictionaries, etc.
 3. Consult a commentary. Our Synod's "People's Bible" series is excellent.
 4. Call your pastor. He loves to answer questions about the Bible!

Practically Speaking

- One mistake people sometimes make is reading too much too fast. Reading the Bible is not a race, there is no law that says you have to read a certain number of chapters a week, etc. Slow down! After each section (the NIV breaks things down under headings) ask yourself, "Why did God put this in the Bible for me today?"
- Prayer and Bible reading belong together. Too often we separate the two. When you read a portion of the Bible pause every few verses and think about what you just read. Talk to God (out loud if necessary) about what you read. Ask Him questions. If something from your life pops into your head think about how the passage applies to you.

Read: Psalm 115; Luke 7.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me Your Word. I depend on it for this world and the next. Make me faithful in using Your Word. Amen.