

1. Week 16: The Kingdom Destroyed

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

Daily Reading for Week:

- 2 Kings 12-14, Psalm 104
- 2 Kings 15-17, Psalm 105
- 2 Kings 18-19, Psalm 106
- 2 Kings 20-22, Psalm 107
- 2 Kings 23-25, Psalm 108
- Isaiah 1-4, Psalm 109
- Isaiah 5-8, Psalm 110

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Video: Isaiah 1-39
- Read: 2 Kings 17:5-23; 24-25:1-12; 18-21

3. Focus of time together:

To understand how and why Israel and Judah were both eventually conquered and sent into exile and to reflect further on the role of the prophets.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Ground rule: Be conscious about how much you are or are not speaking during discussion. If you notice that you talk a lot, focus on listening to others speak. If you notice that you tend to be quiet, take a step of courage and offer something to the group during sharing times. Also note: You will end your time together with a corporate unity prayer, so pay careful attention to the intimate emotions expressed during your conversations.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation, 13 minutes):

Share in one minute how you're coming into the room this week. (Are you exhausted from work? Are you in the middle of some relational strife? Are you having a great day?)

6. Opening Prayer:

Take a few minutes to corporately thank God for different aspects of His character that you have seen reading through the Old Testament or experienced in life recently. For example: “Thank you God for your kindness,” or “Thank you God for your honesty.”

7. Intro to Discussion:

Last week, we looked at one of Israel’s most famous prophets, Elijah. As prophets, men spoke with the passion and authority of God, constantly calling Israel and its kings to be faithful to the covenant. By the end of this week, we will have finished 2 Kings and seen the Northern Kingdom’s (Israel’s) destruction at the hands of the Assyrian Empire and the eventual destruction of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. Through hundreds of years of history and scores of kings, the book of Kings points us again and again to Israel’s covenant with YHWH. Kings that were evil rejected the covenant, worshiped other gods, and did not follow the Law God gave Israel. Good kings were faithful to the covenant, destroyed idols, returned Israel to worshiping YHWH, and obeyed the Law. We see a familiar pattern: a bad king rejects God and the covenant and leads the people to worship idols and false gods and a prophet is sent to persuade this king back to covenant faithfulness. Though a few good kings such as Hezekiah heeded the the prophetic warnings (2 Kings 18-20), most ignored them and even persecuted those God sent to help them.

As this cycle of sin, warning, and proud stubbornness repeats over and over for hundreds of years in Israel’s history (the monarchy lasted for about 470 years between Saul’s inauguration in 1050 BC and the fall of Jerusalem in 580 BC), the narrative tension that began in the Torah is building. When Israel was rescued from Egypt and became a nation, God set before them blessing and cursing, life and death, to obey God or to deal with His righteous judgment. They were free to choose their own destiny. So suspense builds with each new generation, and the question lingers, “For how many generations will God’s immense patience and mercy toward His people cause Him to withhold His just judgment?” When we read through the books of the prophets over the next few months, we’ll see two distinct postures toward this question: Much of Israel, especially Jerusalem, believed that as God’s people, they were forever immune to judgment. But prophets like Isaiah, whose ministry became prevalent in this era preceding the exile, came specifically to convince them otherwise. God and His judgment are near indeed. They must repent or perish.

And this is precisely what we see made shockingly clear in 2 Kings as we see the nation’s decline reach the point of total demise. First, the entire northern nation of Israel is conquered by mighty Assyria (2 Kings 17). The story of Judah’s subsequent

near-fatal encounter with Assyria and Isaiah's prophetic exhortation in 2 Kings 19 displayed, however, that God would do mighty deeds to preserve and protect those willing to repent and be faithful to Him and His covenant. And so because Hezekiah heeded Isaiah's words, Judah was protected for a time from the same catastrophe as their kin Israel. But just one generation later, Hezekiah's son Manasseh begins the generational cycle of pride and sin all over again. So the ultimate, unthinkable lesson was finally made clear: Not even Jerusalem, the prized capital city where God's very presence dwelled in the temple atop Mt. Zion, was immune to God's justice and free to live without consequence forever. About 160 years after the Assyrian invasion, Jerusalem falls to the Babylonian Empire and the survivors of Judah are taken into exile (2 Kings 24-25). The entire nation is lost from the Promised Land. Does this mean God's promise itself has failed? Will He give up trying to redeem the world? Is God not faithful to His promises?

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (40 minutes):

Questions for Basic Understanding:

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

Paying attention to 2 Kings 17 and 24-25, what exactly does it mean for Israel to have been sent into exile? What was actually experienced?

Questions for Listening to Scripture:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. Reflect back on your readings in 1 and 2 Kings. What stood out to you most from story after story of kings "doing what was evil in the eyes of the Lord"?
2. As you read through the stories, did you find yourself hoping for God to bring judgment upon Israel and punish them for their sins, or for God to continue to show them patience and mercy?
3. How would it have felt, emotionally and physically, to have been a Jew living *in Jerusalem* during this exile?
4. If you were one of the lucky ones to have survived the downfall and were trying to make sense of things in exile, what kinds of questions or confusion or theological frustrations would this catastrophic turn of events have brought up in you?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. What kind of story do you wish you would have read in the Old Testament so far? If you had a magic wand, what would you have naturally wanted to change about the way the Biblical authors tell Israel's story?
2. How does the way the Bible tells this story reveal God's character?
3. In what ways does it reveal something about humanity?

Questions for Examining Ourselves:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. Take a few minutes to try to "find yourself" in the story of Israel thus far. Through this first journey through Israel's turbulent national history (we'll do it again in 1 & 2 Chronicles), who do you feel you should identify with? In other words, are you and the culture you belong to more like early Israel, a group of poor, marginalized, recently-freed slaves? Or are you more like Egypt or Canaan or Assyria or Babylon, enjoying the temporary benefits of being the dominant cultural power which just happens to have been established through violence and oppression?
2. More personally, as you try to learn wisdom from the story and stories of the Old Testament, which characters should you try to identify as? Do you identify more as a frustrated slave in exile, a wanderer (physically and existentially) such as Abram, the poor foreign widow in Zarephath, one of Israel's kings or prophets, like Bathsheba being taken advantage of and unprotected, or like King David using your power to take advantage of others for your pleasure, etc.?

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

There will be no small group discussion this week.

10. Closing (5 minutes):

Close your time together with the unity prayer exercise, expressing through short one-sentence prayers some of the sentiments and emotions you've heard shared by others in the group during discussion. Have one person begin the time by praying, "Lord, hear our _____ (gratitude, for example)." Then, one at a time, take turns sharing similarly formatted prayers.