

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 12, Part 1

1 Kings 14-15, Part 1

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It's good to have each of you here.

Let's begin with prayer. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being the God who speaks.

We thank you that though you have no mouth, you nevertheless speak. You've spoken to your people across the centuries, and you speak to us today. Thank you for your word and that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can reveal yourself to us.

And that's our prayer. Help us each to hear your voice in your way for our lives today. In your name, we pray, amen.

We are looking at 1 Kings chapters 14 and 15. And I have titled them beginnings and endings. Beginnings because these chapters deal particularly with Jeroboam and Rehoboam, the two kings who started the divided kingdom.

Rehoboam at Judah in the South and Jeroboam with Israel in the North. But not only do we have the beginnings of the divided kingdom, we've got some touches of where this is going to go, where this is going to end up, especially for the North, but also for the South as well. Our first section is chapter 14, verses one through 20.

Another encounter with Ahijah. Remember that Jeroboam met the prophet Ahijah outside of Jerusalem some years previous to this, and Ahijah, who had a new robe, tore that robe into 12 pieces and gave 10 of them to Jeroboam and said, God is going to give you the 10 Northern tribes. He has torn them out of the hand of Solomon and Solomon's descendants, and he's given them to you.

Now, some years later, there's another encounter. But interestingly, this time, Jeroboam does not want to meet Ahijah face-to-face. His son, presumably his oldest son, the crown prince, is ill, and Jeroboam tells his wife to disguise herself and take the trip down to Shiloh.

Shiloh is about 20 or 25 miles South of the capital that Jeroboam had chosen, Tirzah. Remember that Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle had been before David came to the throne or before it was destroyed by the Philistines during the time of Samuel. So perhaps it still has some aura of sacredness about it and that's why Ahijah is there.

We don't know for certain, but nevertheless, there he is. Now, we ask ourselves, why do you suppose that Jeroboam did not want to meet Ahijah? And I think the answer is pretty clear, isn't it? If you were with us last week, you know that Jeroboam, out of his fears, chose to build two golden bulls, placing one at the Southern edge of his kingdom in Bethel and one at the Northern edge of his kingdom in Dan. He had chosen to make idols.

He had also chosen to change the sacred calendar. So, I think there's no doubt that Jeroboam knew what he was doing, and he knew that Ahijah, the man of God, the man of Yahweh, was not going to be pleased with him. And so, Jeroboam told his wife, what I want you to do is to camouflage yourself I want you to hide your identity and go down and ask Ahijah, the seer, whether our son is going to survive or not.

Now, it's fascinating to me that sin makes you stupid. I mean, if the man is a seer, if the man can see the future, if he can see whether their son is going to die or not, then surely, he can see who this woman is who's coming in to talk with him. But that's what sin does.

Sin made David think that people couldn't count that a full-term baby born six months after David and Bathsheba wedded was going to be a bit of a problem. But no, sin does that to us. It blinds us.

That's what happened here. So, Jeroboam's wife made the journey. Now, not only does Ahijah apparently not recognize the woman, but he's also blind.

So, there are two reasons why supposedly he wouldn't know who this woman was. But one small problem, God. God spoke to Ahijah and said, a woman is going to come visit you.

She is Jeroboam's wife. And I want you, interestingly, to give her such an answer. God says, I'll tell you what to say when the time comes, but just know that this woman who is coming is your king's wife.

Now, this kind of foreknowledge gives veracity then to the message. Since I know who you are, wife of Jeroboam, you can take it for certain that I also know what's going to happen to your child, and your child is going to die. When you get back to Tirzah, when you walk into the city, your son is going to die.

Here is the way in which the Israelite prophets work. God gives them these kinds of confirmations. God gives them signs that indicate, yes, what they say is going to be true because they have this piece of knowledge about this moment.

And so, when she came in, Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, and he said, come in, wife of Jeroboam, why this pretense? Why do you think you can

hide your identity from me when you're asking who or what is going to happen to your son in the future? So, the message that comes then is for Jeroboam. And Ahijah reminds Jeroboam of what had happened. God had given this kingdom to Jeroboam and he had given it to him on the promise, if you walk with me like my servant David walked with me, then I'm going to establish your kingdom for the future.

Now remember, the Bible didn't tell us this, but probably this is their eldest son. This is the crown prince. This is their future, the future of the Jeroboam dynasty.

And Ahijah says, I raised you up from among the people and appointed you ruler over my people, Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David. You didn't keep the requirement that was given to you at the outset.

Now notice what it is that David did. He kept my commands, followed me with all his heart, doing what was right in my eyes. Yes, three things, three things.

Keep my commands. God says this is the way I've made the world. This is how I've made the world to operate.

And so here are the instructions. We've talked about this before, and I'll talk about it again, but the whole idea is that, well, God gives these rules and commands, and he demands that I do these things. What kind of a God is this? But we always have to remember that God's commandments are his instructions.

God says, here's the way life works. If you do these things, your life is going to work. If you don't do these things, your life is not going to work.

David got it, I'll keep his commands. Now again, we always remember, yeah, but what about Bathsheba, and what about Uriah? Yes, those were exceptions to the rule. God doesn't judge us based on exceptions.

He judges us on the character of our lives. And overall, the character of David's life was very clear. He followed God's instructions.

And then he followed me with all his heart. Yes, it wasn't merely a matter of, okay, you say do this, I'll do that. You say, don't do that, I won't do that.

All right, no, it's more than that. God doesn't want us merely to follow the instructions. What God wants is our hearts.

God wants us. And I love that language to follow after. Which way is God going? I want to go that way.

Which way is he turning now? I want to turn that way. Which way is he turning now? I want to turn that way. The devotion of the heart is to follow him, to be where he is, to do what he does, to love what he loves, and to hate what he hates.

And so then he did right in my eyes. He did what I think is right, what I liked, and what I didn't like, he didn't do. So, there it is.

That's what it was to walk like David and Jeroboam has not done this. In fact, you have done more evil than all who lived before you. Oh my goodness.

What are you talking about, God? Is Jeroboam really a nasty man? No, that's not the point. The point is he willingly, intentionally made an idol of Yahweh. No ifs, no ands, or buts.

There's Yahweh, and Yahweh is a golden bull. Yahweh is part of this world, part of this world's abundance, part of this world's power. That's who Yahweh is.

You've done more evil than anybody else. You've led my people to believe that I'm part of this world, and I'm not part of this world. That's the whole point that I've been trying to make to you.

I'm other than the world. How easily, how easily you and I reduce God to those kinds of things. We may not have a little statue of Yahweh somewhere in our house, but we can easily make him part of this world to serve our ends, to take care of us, and to give us what we need.

He's our little blessing producer, and we have turned him into an idol. God says you've done more evil than all those before you. We often misunderstand the nature of evil.

We see gross immorality, and we say yes, that's a terrible evil, but God sees things a bit differently sometimes. To try to make him into my servant can be, in fact, the most evil thing of all as I make myself God, as I center the world on myself and my needs. It's no accident that the historic church has said the deadliest of the deadly sins is pride.

Pride, me, myself and I. I'm the center of everything. You have made other gods and idols made of metal for yourself. You have roused my anger, and again, I love this language.

You have thrust me behind your back. You've pushed me behind you to serve you, your goals, and your purposes, and you haven't asked where I am going. You've said this is where I'm going, and God, you can follow me. So, Jeroboam's behavior has been the reverse mirror image of David's.

The very things David did were the things that Jeroboam did not do, and the very things David did not do were the things Jeroboam did. So, he says, in verse 10, because of this, I'm going to bring disaster to the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in the house in Israel, slave or free.

I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung until it is all gone. Tell us how you feel about this, God. This is a tragedy, a terrible tragedy.

And so, he says, this son of yours, the one who would have succeeded you on the throne, this son is the only one of your sons who is going to get a decent burial. The others that will succeed you they're going to be thrown out on the battlefield, which is exactly what happened. His son, Nadab, who succeeded him, was assassinated, and we're not told anything about his burial.

Quite obviously, his body is simply left out, exposed. So, the irony is that we would say, oh, how tragic, this son of yours has died. And God says, well, he's going to get the one decent burial because none of the others are.

So, in verse 14, the Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. Yes, someone else is coming. Your dynasty that I said would be established forever, in fact, is not going to survive beyond your own one son and it will be gone because God will raise it up.

Now look at verse 15: the Lord will strike Israel so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them beyond the Euphrates River. What? No, we're talking about exile.

The Assyrians had already begun to practice this as they swept across the ancient world from Babylon in the South, across North Syria, and down to Egypt in the Southwest. They had a problem. How do you manage all these differing cultures, all these differing religions, and all these different languages? Well, what you do is you mix them all up together.

You put them in the mix master, and you homogenize them. And so here already in perhaps 9, 10, 190 years before Israel actually went into exile, the prophet says, he will scatter them, he will uproot them from this good land that he gave to their ancestors, scatter them beyond the Euphrates because they aroused the Lord's anger by making Asherah poles. Asherah was the goddess of fertility, the Canaanite goddess of fertility.

She was worshiped evidently, and there's discussion about this, but she was worshiped in groves of poplar trees. And the connection to the male sexual member is pretty obvious. And so, as we have here, they erected Asherah poles.

Fertility, we've got to have fertility. If we don't, we'll all die. That's what you did.

Now, my question here is, well, is it over? I called this section beginnings and endings. Is it over? Is Israel's fate now decided? And the answer is a very firm yes and no. And this is so very typical of the Bible.

Continue in the way you're now continuing, and I can tell you what the end of the story will be. But here's the good news. You don't have to continue in the way you're going.

Continue as you are, it's a done deal. It's over. But you don't have to continue that way.

And if you choose, no, we're not going to go in the way we've been going. We're not going to go in the sins we've been committing. We're not going to go in the pride that we've been living in.

We're going to fall on our knees, repent, and turn around, and we're going to go with God. And God says, goody, it's not going to happen. Paganism says, oh yes, everything is fated.

It's in the stars. It's in the birds. It's in the livers.

The Bible says, oh, there are consequences, predictable consequences. But praise God, there are other consequences. And you can make a choice that will change the future.

That's at the heart of the prophetic ministry in the Old Testament. And that's a word that I would share with you today. Is there a path you're walking in? A path that has predictable consequences? I'm here to tell you that you don't have to stay on that path.

Whatever has been your path, whatever the conditioning, whatever your genes, whatever it is that would say, you don't have a choice. I'm here to say you have a choice. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you can change your path. May it be.