

The Fall of Israel - May 2011 - Overview.

2 Samuel 11 v 1 to 17 ; Psalm 51

Introduction

In our journey through the Bible in the 100 readings we begin this fortnight the five readings of the section called "The Fall of Israel"

To Recap, we have seen how God called one man, Abraham, and promised his descendants would be a great nation. Hello we saw how the descendants of Abraham -- the family of Joseph grew in Egypt into the nation of Israel

Then we saw how the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt and brought into the promised land, and how after being ruled by God-sent leaders (the Judges) they asked for a king. We looked at the rise of this kingdom of Israel under Saul and David.

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And now we see that what goes up must come down -- sadly true for Israel.

They had reached glorious heights under the reign of King David. And it looked as if the people God had chosen to be his own had finally made it. They had land, a king, peace and -- Best of all -- the special relationship with the one true God.

But as you see in the next five readings, the Israelites couldn't resist the temptation to disobey God's law and to pursue the worship of idols. As a result, God allowed the Babylonians and the Assyrians to inflict severe punishment on them. The kingdom was destroyed and many of the people taken away into captivity in these countries.

Main subjects of the Readings

1. King David's adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (a subject covered in Leonard Cohen's X factor song "Hallelujah".)

How could someone who was so faithful to God fall so badly? How could the "man after God's own heart", the man who showed so much courage in defeating Goliath, who exhibited such integrity in resisting Saul's paranoid attempts to kill him... how could that same person be so quick to commit adultery, arrange a murder and then abuse his position of power to cover it up?

The answer is the same for David as it is to us today. No matter how strong we may be, all of us have places in our lives that are weak to the pull of sin. That's why it's so important to be part of the Christian community -- one that knows us well enough to hold us accountable.

Another question that emerges with David is why was he forgiven and Saul rejected? After all, both had sinned against the Lord.

The answer comes down to a single word -- repentance. When David was confronted with his sin, by Nathan The prophet, he immediately and genuinely repented. Whereas Saul's response was to rationalise his actions.

2. The story of Solomon -- David's son.

Solomon extended his father's kingdom to even greater limits and built the Great temple in Jerusalem and was counted one of the wisest men on earth.

Yet Solomon opened the door to the worship of idols -- that was to lead Israel away from the true God.

(having 600 wives didn't help -- I would have thought one royal wedding was enough! -- these foreign alliances brought in their foreign gods.)

Often sin doesn't seem so bad at first. But a series of little steps can take us over the cliff as surely as one big leap.

3. The third subject in this set of readings concerns...

Well, imagine a leader who determined to oppress his people so much that they rose up against him and a stalemate ensued in which the country was divided.

No, I'm not talking about Libya but about Solomon's son -- Jereboam severely oppressed his own people -- and Libya style they rose up in revolt.

The 10 northern tribes broke away retaining the name of the kingdom of Israel.

This left Jereboam with the two southern tribes around the capital Jerusalem -- which became the kingdom of Judah.

4. The rest of the story of the downfall of both kingdoms northern Israel and southern Judah, over the following 400 years through many minor kings, most of them bad though some of them good -- is very confusing to read about as it keeps jumping from one kingdom to another and you're not quite sure what's happening. But one thing is clear -- the continued turning away from God of the people of both nations Israel and Judah.

5. However, during this time we have the first of the great prophets appearing -- attempting to warn the two nation's, and persuade them to turn back to God -- so we have the stories of Elijah, and Elisha.

We also have the setting for all the other prophets -- the ones we call the writing prophets because they wrote the books which we find in the Bible -- which we shall read from in the next section.

Well that's the history of this next section -- and it will mark the end of the historical part of the Old Testament.

But before we close let us think about the reasons for the downfall of Israel.

Reasons for The Downfall

Idolatry -- following the religious practices of the very people they had displaced, and of the nations around them -- child sacrifice, temple prostitution. Note -- not always turning away from God but hedging their bets adding these other religions to worship of Yahweh. First Commandment "you shall have no other gods beside me"

Social Injustice -- treatment of the poor and the disadvantaged (the Prophets)

God's people had to learn the hard way that sin eventually brings devastating consequences on both individuals and nations.

That is still true today - sadly, of the nations of the West.

And what about the church itself.

Throughout history, the church has periodically drifted away from God and his priorities.

There are many Christians today who feel that their denomination or church is on such a path.

What can we do?

We have to make sure as individuals and as the church that we are true.

We have to stand and be counted - "for the triumph of evil it is only necessary that good men do nothing"