

The late pastor, author and evangelist C. Jack Miller summed up the book of Hebrews this way:

Your response to all that Christ is ought to be confidence in Him. The very definition of Christianity in Hebrews is confidence in Christ, and I cannot do anything unless I abide in Him.

Our goal this week is to grow in our confidence in Christ – in contrast to the lack of trust in God in Israel of old. May the Lord help us with fresh boldness to access His mercy seat to find just the help we need at just the time we need it. Sadly, the kings of Israel consistently refused to repent and turn to the LORD to help them rule God’s kingdom on earth. Theirs was a distrust of God’s good rule and an ambitious desire to build their kingdom after the manner of sinful man. May we, through God’s grace and timely rescue, avoid the destruction of those who “shrink back” from God’s will and instead build palaces of sinful sand (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Monday: Read 2 Ki. 14:15-16; 2 Ki. 14:23-25; Hebrews 10:19-23

Foundational Integrity, Lacking and Supplied

As we saw in 2 Kings 13, God kept His word to king Joash that Syria would be defeated (2 Kings 13:25). Though the Syrians had been amazingly destructive, the LORD three times showed His Divine power over them just as Elisha said He would (2 Ki. 13:19).

With these victories under his belt, Joash’s obituary (2 Kings 14:15) confirms he was a mighty warrior who also subjugated Jerusalem and took away many precious and holy articles from the temple there (2 Ki. 14:13-14). The same is true of his son, Jeroboam II, who began to reign with his father in about 793 BC. In fact, Jeroboam II went even farther in his military successes, extending the boundaries of the promised land back to the gloriously huge dimensions of the days of king Solomon – up to Hamath in Syria to the North and down to the Dead Sea (Arabah) in the South (2 Ki. 14:25). Compare 1 Kings 8:65 and Joshua 12:3 where both Solomon and Joshua first expanded the land of Israel North to Hamath and South to the Dead Sea. Jeroboam II even captured the capital of Syria (Damascus) in 2 Kings 14:28!

Jeroboam II’s mighty deeds for the good of Israel *economically and militarily* had the sanction of God through His prophet Jonah (2 Kings 14:25). How sad that prosperity did not result in faithfulness and blessing *spiritually*. Jeroboam II did evil, just as his royal forebearers had done in “walking in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (2 Kings 14:24).

This makes for sober reading. But take heart as we conclude today by simply giving thanks that our Savior, Christ, is an eternal king of foundational integrity and truth, able to sprinkle our hearts clean from and evil conscience and wash our bodies with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).

Meditate and Pray: Only One King rules over the church. Jesus Christ is now “over the house of God” (Hebrews 10:21). There will never again be corrupt royal families ruling over the houses of Judah and Israel (that is, the church). Christ’s integrity speaks right into our every situation. He knows what is best and always rules for His Father’s glory and our good. May He now help us to draw near with a true heart of faith as we begin this week.

Tues/Weds: Read 1 Kings 11:6-13 & 11:26-39**Compromise Always Exalts Self**

The rise of violence, unbelief, and idolatry among God's people always has at its root the sinful compromise of her leaders. After his adultery with Bathsheba, David's son Absalom rebelled against him. In the same way, Solomon has rebels rise up against him (1 Kings 11:9-25) and God even declares that the kingdom will be torn from him because of his many foreign wives and idolatry (1 Kings 11:6-11).

Enter Jeroboam. Jeroboam was a man of capability and standing (NIV's translation of 1 Kings 11:28) and so was put in charge of Solomon's forced labor. Here, in fact, is the beginning of Jeroboam's manipulation of disillusioned Israelites who were sick of Solomon's forced labor for his many grand building projects.

The ten northern tribes of the empire were in a rebellious mood. They resented the high taxes which Solomon's lavish kingdom had demanded. They were also disturbed by his practice of forcing all citizens to contribute their labor to his ambitious building projects, most of which were concentrated in the southern part of the empire. Representatives of these ten tribes tried to gain concessions from Solomon's son Rehoboam when he began to reign. When he refused, they seceded to form their own nation about 925 BC (1 Kings 12:1-20).

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And who was there, ready to turn their resentment against Solomon's royal family into power for himself as the first king of Israel? Jeroboam. Thus the house of godly king David lost ten of its tribes and two-thirds of its citizens to Jeroboam. Never again (if Jeroboam's plan succeeded) would Israel worship in Jerusalem. Now they would set up their own calf-gods and worship Jehovah in a confused, man-made hodge podge of calf worship from Egypt and Canaanite worship on Israel's high places.

And so the verdict against Jeroboam is clear. He caused Israel to worship idols and exalted himself rather than the Lord.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that Christ never put His own desires before His Father's. He set up the rule of God's House in submission to His Father's plan. And how gentle His rule is! Sing about Christ's rule in the following Trinity Hymnal # 681:

1 How gentle God's commands,
how kind his precepts are!
Come, cast your burdens on the Lord,
and trust his constant care.

2 While Providence supports,
let saints securely dwell;
that hand, which bears all nature up,
shall guide his children well.

3 Why should this anxious load
press down your weary mind?
Haste to your heav'nly Father's throne,
and sweet communion find.

4 His goodness stands approved,
down to the present day;
I'll drop my burden at his feet,
and bear a song away.

Thursday: Read 1 Kings 11:1-5 & 11:27-43**Worldly Interests Creep In**

Solomon's fall is outlined in 1 Kings 11 in today's scripture reading. But even back in 1 Kings 3:1, we see Solomon's heart hanker for the safety, worldliness and power Egypt offered. Though the LORD through Moses had explicitly warned Israel not to go back to Egypt to buy horses (and by implication to make the alliances which would make horses (and king's daughters) available for Israel's pleasure (see Deuteronomy 17:16-17). Solomon's heart began to be led astray by his hundreds of royal wives and concubines – eventually leading the aged king into idol worship himself (1 Kings 11:1-6).

Well then, are we surprised that one of Solomon's most promising leaders *would himself* rebel against Solomon's corruption and enslavement of his own people? Sin on the part of king Solomon guaranteed there would be ones whom God would raise up to chastise David's royal son. But there's more. Where did Jeroboam flee to when Solomon sought to kill him (1 Kings 11:40)? The Egyptian king offered Jeroboam shelter!

Egypt, a common Old Testament stand-in for worldly values, influencing God's people in many ways. Where did Jeroboam's calf worship originate and his elaborate priesthood to compete against the true priesthood in Jerusalem? Surely, we see Egypt's influence here, as calf worship originated in Egypt. Thus Jeroboam modelled his kingdom on what he had learned under Solomon, with the same half hearted commitment. How tragic.

Meditate and Pray: Please ask the LORD to protect your profession of faith and to guard your heart against turning away from the LORD in your old age. That is what Solomon did.

Give thanks that our Savior "over the house of God" is able to cleanse our hearts and to wash us clean from a guilty conscience (Hebrews 10:22), thereby enabling us to hold fast to our hope in the Gospel (Hebrews 10:23). Our king's every influence over our lives is pure and strong. No misleading us as Solomon and Jeroboam misled their people!

Sing about Christ's leading of your life – always in safe paths – using hymn # 600:

1 He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain: He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful foll'wer I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.

2 Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
by waters calm, o'er troubled sea,
still 'tis his hand that leadeth me. [Refrain]

3 Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see,
since 'tis my God that leadeth me. [Refrain]

4 And when my task on earth is done,
when, by thy grace, the vict'ry's won,
e'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
since God through Jordan leadeth me. [Refrain]

Friday: Read 2 Kings 14:23-27 & Hebrews 9:13-14**The Silt of Sin and Christ's Cleansing**

Fast-forward 150 years and you see that the idolatry founded by Jeroboam's ambition in 1 Kings 12 holds a tight grip over Israel.

An illustration occurs to me from the current heart-ache in Barre. We had flooding again a year to the day from the catastrophic flooding last July. The most difficult part after the flood-waters recede is the silt left behind - a fine layer of mud deposited over everything. That seems to fit the sin of idolatry which Jeroboam introduced. Again and again, every king that followed him fell into his sin, along with all of Israel. As 2 Kings 14:24 says, it was Jeroboam that "caused Israel to sin." Like dusty silt in the air, the flood of sin in Israel must have made it hard for any godly soul to breathe!

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks once again that Christ is able to so thoroughly cleanse us from the silt and sin of this world, and that He is able to guard our profession from collapsing under the weight of idolatry. Such inward cleansing is a continual need in the Christian life and a constant theme in the book of Hebrews.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:13-14

Let us especially give thanks for Christ's sending the Holy Spirit to live within us. He it is who condescends to indwell saved sinners. He it is who cleanses and changes us from the inside out.

Sing about the power of the Holy Spirit to save you from the kind of corrupt heart we see in 1 and 2 Kings, using hymn # 335:

1 Gracious Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would gracious be;
and with words that help and heal
would thy life in mine reveal;
and with actions bold and meek
would for Christ my Savior speak.

2 Truthful Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would truthful be;
and with wisdom kind and clear
let Thy life in mine appear;
and with actions brotherly
speak my Lord's sincerity.

3 Mighty Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would mighty be;
mighty so as to prevail,
where unaided man must fail;
ever by a mighty hope,
pressing on and bearing up.

4 Holy Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would holy be;
separate from sin, I would
choose and cherish all things good,
and whatever I can be
give to him who gave me thee!

Sat/Sun: Read 2 Kings 14:25-27 & Isaiah 63:8-9**Mercy Upon Mercy**

How gracious of God to show such compassion to Israel yet again, even after their 150 years of unrepentant idolatry, detailed in in 2 Kings 14. Notice especially that God's desire to have pity on Israel and to save them from the Syrians was not brought about by anything in them as God's people. *They did not repent; they did not even pray.* They simply suffered exceedingly, and God's heart was drawn out to them "because there was no one to help" (2 Kings 14:26).

Meditate and Pray: Think of how there must have been some in Israel whose hearts were softened by God's unexpected and free mercy. He even sent them His own prophet Jonah (yes, the same one who wrote the book) in order to declare that the LORD had not rejected them and would restore their land to them (verse 25). What a God we have. As the hymn writer says (# 471):

1 'Tis not that I did choose thee,
for, Lord, that could not be;
this heart would still refuse thee,
hadst thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
hast cleansed and set me free;
of old thou hast ordained me,
that I should live to thee.

2 'Twas sov'reign mercy called me
and taught my op'ning mind;
the world had else enthralled me,
to heav'nly glories blind.
My heart owns none before thee,
for thy rich grace I thirst;
this knowing, if I love thee,
thou must have loved me first.

Closing Application: God's amazing patience towards His People for 150 years of idolatry in Israel

Just as Judges 2:15-18 highlights God's sovereign love and His being moved to pity by His people's misery when they first fell into idolatry and its consequences, so 2 Kings 14:26-27 portrays the Lord's amazing pity as unchanged towards His own despite centuries of the same apostasy on Israel's part.

This Divine pity towards sinners in misery should greatly encourage us to quickly return to the Lord when we fall (yet again) into sin:

God, in mere pity to them, heard the cry of their affliction (for no mention is made here of the cry of their prayers), and wrought this deliverance for them by the hand of Jeroboam II. Let those whose case is pitiable take comfort from the divine pity: we read of God's bowels of mercy (Isaiah 63:15) and that He is full of compassion (Psalm 86:15).
Matthew Henry's commentary on 2 Kings 14,