

God Hears the Righteous

Reading: Psalm 34:16-17 “*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous....*”¹

Introduction:

Romans 15:4 tells us that “...*whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*”. In other words, even though we live in New Testament times, we can learn and be assured of certain spiritual truths because of what is written in the Old Testament (see also **1 Corinthians 10:11**). In fact, verse **16** of the above reading is actually quoted in **1 Peter 3:12** in order to support what Peter teaches about living righteously.

Psalm 34 is a psalm of King David, a man who seemed to be surrounded by enemies who were out to kill him (*e.g.* **Psalm 31:11-13**). It is a psalm about God listening to and protecting those who fear and trust Him, while at the same time, rejecting those who disobey Him.

This lesson will consider how the principles found in **Psalm 34** were applied to two kings who ruled over Israel and Judah during Old Testament times. Both of these kings were faced with problems, and both made appeals or enquiries to the Lord. However, the outcome in each case was very different – there was a relationship between the outcome, and how they had been living their lives. After considering these two cases, we will then look at the application for us today.

LESSON

1) The disobedient King - Jeroboam

a) Prophecy of Jeroboam becoming King

Towards the end of the reign of King Solomon², we read of a young man called Jeroboam. He is described in **1 Kings 11:28** as being “...*a mighty man of valour...(and)...industrious....*”. Therefore, Solomon put him in charge of “...*all the labour force of the house of Joseph..*”.

One day when he was coming out of Jerusalem, a prophet named Ahijah met him (verse **29**). This prophet showed Jeroboam that the Lord was going to “*tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you (Jeroboam)..*” (verses **30-31**). The reason for this was because Solomon had allowed his wives to turn his heart away from fully serving the Lord, and had instead turned his heart to serving idols (**1 Kings 11:4-13; 33**).

Solomon heard about this prophecy, and sought to have Jeroboam killed. However, Jeroboam fled to Egypt, and remained there until after the death of Solomon (**1 Kings 11:40**).

¹ All quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

² Solomon reigned after his father, David (**1 Kings 2:10-12**)

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b) Jeroboam becomes King

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam sat on the throne (**1 Kings 11:43**). When the people of Israel had gathered at Shechem³ to make him (Rehoboam) king, they also called for Jeroboam to come up from Egypt. Then, Jeroboam and the people aired their grievances to Rehoboam about the high level of taxation that his father Solomon had imposed on them – they asked for some relief (**1 Kings 12:1-4**). After taking counsel from both “*the elders who stood before his father*”, and the younger men of his own generation, Rehoboam chose the advice of the latter and increased the taxes rather than reduce them (**1 Kings 12:6-14**). The people of the northern tribes weren’t very happy about this, and so the nation of Israel became split into two separate kingdoms (**1 Kings 12:16-17**);

- ten tribes formed the northern kingdom, called Israel.
- the rest became the southern kingdom of Judah.

The men from the northern tribes made Jeroboam their king (**1 Kings 12:20**), while Rehoboam continued his rule, but now over just the southern kingdom, Judah (**1 Kings 12:17**).

All of this fulfilled what God had spoken earlier through the prophet, Ahijah (**1 Kings 12:30-37**)

c) Jeroboam disobeys the Lord

Before he became King, God had made certain promises to Jeroboam. In **1 Kings 11:38**, we read; “*Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you.*”

In other words, if Jeroboam was faithful to God, then God would bless him, and his lineage and dynasty would remain, just like David’s. God was handing him an enduring kingdom “*on a plate*”.

But Jeroboam lacked faith and trust in God. In spite of the promises that God had made to him, he was worried that the people in the northern kingdom might want to re-unite with the southern kingdom (**1 Kings 12:26**). He was concerned that if they continued to go to Jerusalem to worship, then their hearts would turn back to the Lord – they would kill him, and then go back to be under the rule of Rehoboam (**1 Kings 12:27**).

So Jeroboam set up his own religious system He set up idols⁴ in Bethel⁵ and Dan⁶, shrines in the high places, established a priesthood of people from every tribe, and instituted new holy days and feasts (**1 Kings 12:28-33**). In doing this, he not only sinned himself, but he also caused the people to sin through their participation in these new religious practices (**1 Kings 14:16; 15:30**).

³ Located about 50 kms north of Jerusalem

⁴ Golden calves (**1 Kings 12:28-29**)

⁵ Located at the southern end of the northern kingdom.

⁶ Located at the northern end of the northern kingdom.

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The Lord sent a man of God to rebuke Jeroboam (**1 Kings 13:1-10**), but it seems that there was no lasting repentance from Jeroboam – he continued to do evil (**1 Kings 13:33**).

d) The Lord rejects Jeroboam

Sometime later, Jeroboam's son became sick (**1 Kings 14:1**). Like any parent, Jeroboam was concerned about his son's welfare, so Jeroboam sent his wife to Ahijah the prophet to find out from God what would happen to the child (**1 Kings 14:2-3**).

- Jeroboam may have hoped to be able to entreat God to heal his son.

But the news from Ahijah was not good. Because he had not trusted in the Lord; because he had done evil, disaster would fall on the house of Jeroboam. The child would die, but not only that, the lineage of Jeroboam would be short-lived. The Lord would raise up a new king who would cut off the house of Jeroboam⁷ (**1 Kings 14:6-14**).

And so, true to the Word of God, the child died. He was buried, and Israel mourned over him (**1 Kings 14:12-13; 17-18**). When you consider what happened to the rest of Jeroboam's household after Jeroboam's death, the son was probably fortunate in leaving this life in that manner – consider **1 Kings 14:12-13** and **15:25-30**.

Point: Jeroboam could have had an enduring kingdom in the same manner that David had – God had promised this to him. But Jeroboam did not trust in the Lord and was unfaithful – he did evil to provoke the Lord. As a result, it cost him his young son's life, it cost his household the kingdom, and it cost his descendants their lives as well.

2) The righteous King - Hezekiah

a) Hezekiah broke with “tradition” and followed the Lord

Hezekiah was king of Judah about 300 years after the reign of King David. His father, Ahaz (**2 Kings 18:1**), had been unfaithful to the Lord. He had descended to the spiritual depths of the nations that God had driven out of Canaan – he had made one of his sons “*pass through the fire*” (**2 Kings 16:1-3**) – a term that meant human sacrifice. In fact, there had been other kings in Judah who did not walk in the ways of the Lord⁸. And even the good kings of Judah had not completely removed all of the idols and “high places” that had been set up throughout the land over the years (**1 Kings 14:22-24; 15:14; 22:43b; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:35**).

But Hezekiah chose to break with the “status quo” that existed in Judah at the time, and “*did ...what was right in the sight of the Lord*” (**2 Kings 18:3, 5-6**). In the very first month of his reign, he started to get things back to the way they should be (**2 Chronicles 29:3**). He “*...removed the high places*

⁷ Jeroboam's son, Nadab, only ruled for two years after the death of his father. He and the rest of Jeroboam's house were killed by Israel's next king, Basha (**1 Kings 15:25-30**).

⁸ For example, Abijam (**1 Kings 15:1-3**), Jehoram (**2 Kings 8:16-18**), Ahaziah (**2 Kings 9:25-27**).

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and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image⁹, and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for.... the children of Israel burned incense on it...” (2 Kings 18:4). He repaired the Temple; he restored true worship, and he led the people back to God (2 Chronicles 29-31).

b) Hezekiah turns to God for help in times of trouble

Hezekiah’s faithfulness did not mean that he had a life free from troubles. In the fourteenth year of his reign, Judah was attacked by Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Hezekiah initially gave the Assyrians gold and silver to stay away (2 Kings 18:13-16), but it was only a short-term reprieve. The Assyrians then came to Jerusalem to besiege it. They tried all sorts of intimidation to try and break the will of the people in the city (2 Kings 18:19-35). However, Hezekiah put his trust in God (2 Chronicles 32:6-8), and prayed to Him for help (2 Kings 19:14-19).

c) The Lord hears Hezekiah

The Lord heard Hezekiah’s prayer (2 Kings 19:20b), and through the prophet Isaiah, declares concerning Sennacherib, “...I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came...” (2 Kings 19:28b). In other words, the Lord was going to force Sennacherib back to his homeland. God also assured Hezekiah that the Assyrians would not enter the city, but rather, the Lord would protect it (2 Kings 19:32-34). On one particular night, the angel of the Lord came and killed 185,000 of the Assyrians. As a result, those who were left (including Sennacherib) returned to their homeland (2 Kings 19:35-36). Jerusalem was saved.

Point: Hezekiah lived a faithful life to the Lord. When faced with troubles, he “laid his case before the Lord”, and the Lord heard him¹⁰.

Application:

So what can we learn from all this? One obvious lesson is that “...the face of the Lord is against those who do evil...” (Psalm 34:16a) – e.g. the example from Jeroboam, and that when “...the righteous cry out, ...the Lord hears...” (Psalm 34:17a) – e.g. the example of Hezekiah.

But I would like us to consider the principle of “God hearing the righteous” in the context of our prayer life.

Living a life faithful to the Lord does not mean that we will never face problems. In fact, some troubles may come because of our faithfulness (2 Corinthians 11:22-28; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7). However, the Lord does care about the concerns and anxieties that we experience here on earth. He wants us to bring them to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6). But how God responds to those prayers can depend on what we are asking for; it can

⁹ The Asherah, a Canaanite goddess

¹⁰ Another occasion where Hezekiah appealed to God for help, and God heard him, is found in 2 Kings 20:1-11.

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depend on our motives; and it can depend on how we live our lives. For example;

- When it comes to what we are asking for, and our motives:
When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, He was obviously aware of the pain and suffering that He was about to endure. Like any of us with a human body, that pain was very much something that He would have liked to avoid if at all possible. But notice the qualifier to His request – “...*nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done...*” (**Luke 22:42**). Whatever we ask for needs to be in accordance with His Will (**1 John 5:14**). Selfish requests do not fall into this category. In **James 4:3** we read; “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures*”. When you look at the context of this verse, you can see that (some of) the brethren being written to are very worldly in their attitudes. The lives are characterised with fights, lusts, murder (“*murder*” - consider **Matthew 5:21-22**), spiritual adultery, friendship with the world (**James 4:1-4**).

- When it comes to how we live our lives:
In **1 Peter 3:7** we read; “*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them (i.e. wives) with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*” In other words, the way that God responds to a husband’s prayer life can depend on how the husband views and treats his wife.
In **James 1:5-8** we can see that prayers need to be prayed in faith, with no doubting. If our faith is “wishy-washy”; if we are “...*double-minded, unstable in all...(our) ways...*”, then we should not “...*suppose that ... (we) will receive anything from the Lord.*”
(Other passages such as **Matthew 6:14-15; 7:2** also show us that there is a relationship between how we treat other and how God treat us.)

There is a relationship between how God hears us, and how we live our lives. That is one of the points that Peter is making in **1 Peter 3:8-12**, where he quoted from **Psalms 34:12-16**. God may not always answer our prayers in the way that we would like – e.g. Paul and his “*thorn in the flesh*” **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**¹¹. But one thing that we can be sure of is this: His answers will be what is best for us.

“Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Romans 8:27-28

“Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...” **James 4:7-8a**

¹¹ Another example is when David prayed for the child that had been conceived in adultery with, and born to, Bathsheba (Uriah’s wife) – **2 Samuel 12:15-20**