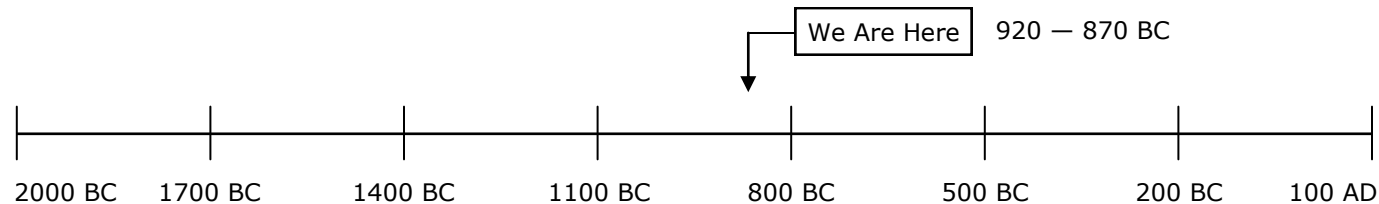


Keeping Your Focus

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Week 23: June 4-10 — *1 Kings 11-19; Eccles.; Song of Solomon* 43.8% Complete — 204 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Kings & Prophets (p.71), Map of Divided Kingdoms (p.109), Overview of Bible History (p.37)

Making Sense of It All

- On the Side

Due to the theme of this review and the brevity of our time, we will neither discuss *Ecclesiastes* nor *Song of Solomon* in detail. Instead, here is a brief synopsis of these two books:

Song of Solomon is a poetic love song, which recaps memories of Solomon's courtship, engagement, wedding, and marriage (probably to his first wife). He included many wonderful insights into aspects of the marriage relationship. The song exalts the divine intent for romance and sex, both of which are to be kept within God's expressed boundaries (*Heb. 13:4*).

The book of ***Ecclesiastes*** was Solomon's attempt to answer life's most difficult questions. The summary of those questions rests on his hunt for a satisfying life apart from God, which he discovered cannot be obtained. In his investigation, Solomon learned some valuable lessons, such as nothing in this world will satisfy man for long, and all that is done apart from the Lord is a meaningless waste of time. His conclusion was to fear the Lord and obey His commands.

- The Big Picture

To say that we read about a variety of topics this week would be an understatement; we learned about everything from marriage (*Song of Solomon*) to the meaning of life (*Ecclesiastes*) to the biographies of at least half a dozen kings (*Kings* and *Chronicles*). It seems that we have covered the ends of the spectrum and everything in between; so then, how are we to make sense of all that we've read? The bottom line is that God's people, Israel, lost their focus then lost their purpose; they strayed from God and ultimately abandoned Him.

How did this happen? Since we started the week with Solomon, let's begin with him. We all know that he was (and still is) the wisest man to ever live; however, in his arrogance and neglect, Solomon not only allowed but invited the worship of false gods into the holy city. Though he was wise, he was not perfect; he made mistakes, foolish mistakes. As a result of his polygamy (which was a perversion of God's intent for marriage) and his intermarriage (which was in direct disobedience to God statutes, *Deut. 17:17*), Solomon was wooed to worship the foreign deities of his wives. Even after divine warning, he chose to ignore the Lord and practice idolatry (*1 Kings 11:9-13*). Idolatry was a sin which God could not endure for long; thus, He unleashed His judgment, which came in the form of a split in the country.

Simply put, *Solomon lost focus*; his attention was divided among his many gods. Therefore, God divided his kingdom. Ten tribes were given to his servant, Jeroboam, and two tribes were given to his son, Rehoboam. Two nations emerged – Israel in the north (under Jeroboam) and Judah in the south (under Rehoboam). There were generations of kings on both sides, some of which were good, most of which were bad. The glory days of King David were gone; the power and respect that the Jews once possessed were now undermined by their wicked ways and unrepentant hearts. Though there would be pockets of faithfulness, as a whole God’s people had turned their backs on the Lord. As Cotton Mather (the Puritan preacher) once said, “Religion begat prosperity, but the daughter devoured the mother.”

- Personal Application

1. **Covenant-keepers win and covenant-breakers lose.** Even after dividing the country, God’s grace was evident; He gave both nations a fresh start. If they obeyed Him, He would bless them. We watched obedient kings find favor; we saw evil kings find wrath.
2. **Intermarriage with the world causes us to stray from God.** Intermarriage compromised Israel’s covenant with God. To appease a foreign wife, a man must appease her gods. When Christians “intermarry” with the world, we compromise our walk with God.
3. **Idolatry causes God much grief and warrants severe punishment.** God desires and deserves to be our first priority in life. When someone or something else takes His place, we commit idolatry (spiritual adultery), and we forfeit the Lord’s best in our lives.
4. **We bear the name of God, so we must not shame the name of God.** The Israelites brought shame upon God’s name; they were poor examples of what it meant to be set apart for the Lord. As Christians, we must be careful to honor God in all that we do.
5. **If we lose our focus, we lose our purpose.** If we don’t remember where we started (or why we started), we will lose sight of where we are going, or what we are supposed to do. Not only do we lose focus and purpose, we become ineffective tools in God’s hands. We must constantly look to our beginning so that we may know our end.

- Prophetic Passages

1. **The Split of Israel** (*1 Kings 11:9-13, 34-39*): Here God foretold of His plans to punish Israel for Solomon’s foolish disobedience.
2. **Josiah’s Righteous Reign** (*1 Kings 13:1-3*): The blessed birth of a King who would spark revival and renewal among the people of God.
3. **Israel’s Dispersion** (*1 Kings 13:15,16*): The fate of the nation of Israel, to be uprooted and removed from Canaan and made to be scattered throughout a foreign land.

The Bottom Line

If we lose our *focus*, then we lose our *purpose*.

Questions to Consider

1. How can intermarriage be applied to the Christian life?
2. What are some ways we can keep from losing focus of our origin and purpose?