

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 24

I KINGS – Part Two Chapters 12-12 – Part One

I. BACKGROUND

For background to I Kings, please see Lesson 23.

II. THE STORY

OVERVIEW

Throughout the reigns of Israel's first three Kings (Saul, David, and Solomon), Israel saw nearly 120 years of a strong government, expanding borders, and unity within the nation. This was not to last, however. Prior to Solomon's death, the prophet Ahijah prophesied that after Solomon's death, God would split the country into two.

As I Kings 12-22 recounts the division of the country into a Northern and Southern Kingdom, the narrative alternates between the events within each kingdom. (This alternating chronology is continued into II Kings as well).

The Northern Kingdom (called "Israel") lasted for almost 250 years before it is obliterated by foreign invaders. The Southern Kingdom (called "Judah") survived for about 385 years before it fell to foreign invaders.

Unlike the United States, in Israel, the Northern Kingdom seceded from the Southern Kingdom. The purpose of the secession was to reform and correct what was considered excessive in the reign of King Solomon. The excesses, however, were never corrected. Instead, the northern kings continued the abuses of Solomon, piling offensive paganism on top of the social inequities. The kings eliminated worship of Yahweh and replaced it with idolatry. There are 19 Northern Kings; all of them were deemed evil in the eyes of God. Of those 19 Kings, 8 saw their reign end through suicide or murder.

We will walk through a basic outline of the narrative noting the key points. Greater focus will be put on the key characters of the prophet Elijah and King Ahab/Queen Jezebel.

CIVIL WAR

We pick up the story in I Kings, chapter 11. King Solomon put a fellow named Jeroboam in charge of a certain labor force. As Jeroboam was leaving work one day, he met a prophet named Ahijah. At the meeting, Ahijah rips his own cloak into twelve pieces. Ahijah gives ten of these pieces to Jeroboam, keeping two for himself. Ahijah explains to Jeroboam that because of the idolatry and sin of King Solomon, God will rip the Nation of Israel apart giving ten tribes to Jeroboam and leaving two tribes for Solomon. This will happen after the death of Solomon. Ahijah also says that if Jeroboam does right in the eyes of God, Jeroboam will have an enduring dynasty as God had promised to David.

The scripture is unclear on how Solomon found out about this, but Solomon did and tried to thwart God's prophecy by killing Jeroboam. Jeroboam fled to Egypt and stayed there until Solomon died. Solomon died after reigning 40 years.

After Solomon's death, Solomon's son, Rehoboam became king. After Jeroboam heard of Solomon's death, Jeroboam returned to Israel.

Jeroboam and the elders of the Nation of Israel went to Rehoboam and requested that Rehoboam lighten the labor requirements and taxation yoke which Rehoboam's father Solomon had placed on the people. Rehoboam said, "Let me think about it for three days."

Rehoboam used the three days to consult with his father's counselors. The elders urged Rehoboam to follow the people's requests. Rehoboam rejected this counsel and then sought the counsel of the young men he had grown up with. Those young men had a different response. They suggested that Rehoboam tell the people, "My little finger is thicker than my father's waist." (12:10). Rehoboam follows this counsel adding that he would make the people's yoke heavier, not lighter. Rehoboam's approach was, "If Solomon had whipped the people with whips, I will whip them with scorpions."

This was a bad move. Israel rebelled and made Jeroboam king. As prophesied by Ahijah, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom succeeded and formed their own Nation of Israel. This left the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the southern part of the kingdom. Rehoboam ruled over these two tribes (called Judah), from the town of Jerusalem.

NORTHERN KINGDOM JEROBOAM

Although he had been warned by Ahijah about the need to follow God as king, Jeroboam chose not to. Jeroboam was worried about keeping allegiance of the ten tribes. His concern was prompted by a recognition that the ten tribes went to Jerusalem regularly to worship at the Temple. Jeroboam believed he needed to keep the people at home. So Jeroboam's response to this was to substitute idolatry for true worship. Jeroboam made two golden calves and built shrines on high places, appointing non-Levite Priests to administer his religious cult.

An unnamed man of God from Judah went to Bethel and told Jeroboam that the idolatrous altar he built would be split by God and would also be the place of death for the Priests that Jeroboam put together. Jeroboam was upset by this prophecy and reached out to seize the prophet. When Jeroboam did so, his hand shriveled. Jeroboam then cried for help from the prophet and the hand was healed. At this point, Jeroboam asked the prophet, "Do you want to eat lunch?" The prophet said, "No I am on my way home. God told me not to eat until I got back."

The prophet headed back, but in the process was beguiled into eating by another prophet. It was a mistake to disobey God, and a lion killed the unnamed prophet. Jeroboam, meanwhile, made absolutely no changes whatsoever, in spite of the prophet's pleas.

Jeroboam had a son named Abijah who had gotten sick. Jeroboam wanted a prognosis from a prophet for the son. Jeroboam also knew that Jeroboam was not well received by the prophets because of Jeroboam's ways of ruling. For this reason, Jeroboam suggested that his wife put a disguise on herself and go to a prophet named Ahijah for the wanted information. Ahijah was old and blind.

When Jeroboam's wife arrived in her wonderful disguise to get a prognosis on her son, Ahijah was not fooled. Ahijah called out her true identity and asked why she tried to hide who she was. It shows the warped logic of Jeroboam and his wife that they this man could see with the eyes of God, but would not see through her disguise. It makes one wonder how often we approach God for "favors" with a disguise on, figuring he will not see our sin or true selves.

Ahijah did not give the woman the prognosis she wanted. He explained in the words of God, "You have provoked me [God] to anger and thrust me

behind your back.” Ahijah said the boy would die. The son was, however, to get a decent burial, but only he was the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom God had found any good. History bore out the prophet’s words. Jeroboam himself died after reigning 22 years.

SOUTHERN KINGDOM REHOBOAM

Meanwhile, back in Judah, Solomon’s son Rehoboam began his reign at the age of 41. He reigned over Judah 17 years. He had trouble with the Pharaoh of Egypt, Shishack. This was the same Pharaoh who had provided Jeroboam protection during the later years of Solomon’s reign.

In Rehoboam’s 5th year, Shishack attacked and carted off much of Solomon’s treasures stored in the Temple. The booty taken by the Pharaoh included all of Solomon’s gold shields. Rehoboam replaced them with bronze shields. It does not take an Olympian medalist to recognize that Rehoboam’s kingship was down several notches from Solomon’s as his shields went from gold to bronze. The Bible notes that Rehoboam did evil as a King of Judah. He died and his son Abijah became King for 3 years.

ABIJAH

Abijah reigned for 3 years and died. He was followed by his son, Asa.

ASA

Asa reigned for 41 years. Asa was the first King since Solomon that actually followed the Lord. It seemed to go with his long reign. During the reign of Asa there was war with Israel. Asa died, and the Bible notes he did so with diseased feet. Asa was followed by his son, Jehoshaphat.

NORTHERN KINGDOM NADAB, et al.

Meanwhile, back in the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam died and his son, Nadab became King. Nadab was King for only 2 years. He was an evil King who was struck down and killed by Baasha. Baasha ruled for 24 years doing his own variety of evil.

God was not happy with Baasha and when Baasha died his son, Elah becomes King for 2 years. Elah was not a good King either and while Elah

was drunk, he was killed by Zimri. Zimri lasted as King for 7 days. After Zimri, the people chose as their King, Omri, the commander of the army.

In secular eyes, Omri was a very successful King for Israel. Omri bought a hill on which he built up the town of Samaria and reigned for 12 years. Non-biblical texts reference Israel as “Omriland” because of his fame and work. He gets very little attention in scripture, however, because he did very little for the Lord. In fact, there is no indication that he does anything for the Lord.

AHAB AND ELIJAH

Omri’s scriptural claim to fame is as the father of Ahab. Ahab reigned for 22 years as the worst King that Israel ever saw. Ahab married Jezebel, the worst Queen Israel ever saw. Ahab not only put the worship of Baal into Israel, but set out to destroy the worship and worshipers of Yahweh

During Ahab’s reign, Elijah entered the scene with God’s voice and power. Elijah came out of nowhere and declared that there would be no rain in Israel until Elijah declared so. With that, Elijah went into hiding in a ravine, and the drought began. Elijah hid in the ravine for some period of time as God used ravens to provide him with food. At one point, Elijah went to Zarephath where he received food from a widow who had only minimal amounts, not even enough to keep herself and her son alive. Out of faith, she made food for Elijah whereupon Elijah performed God’s miracle of keeping the flour and oil from ever running out for the widow.

During the time that Elijah was with the widow, the widow’s son got sick and died. Elijah took the son to the “upper room.” These were rooms which were built on the rooftops of a number of homes at this time. The roofs themselves were typically built on wood beams with cross beams for support. Hay, grass and mud were put on top of those wood beams and frequently, especially during the dry season, grass matted walls were built up on top of the roof for sleeping outside. Elijah took the boy to this upper room and cried out to God. God then brought the son back to life.

There is an interesting note here. The biggest miracle workers in the Bible are Moses, Elijah and Jesus himself. We will see these 3 meet together on a mountain of transfiguration when we reach the gospels. It is noteworthy to recognize how Elijah worked for God.

Elijah was a wanted man. He declared a drought, but then fled and could not be found. The drought would not end until Elijah declared that it is over, so every day he was gone was noticed!

After several years, Elijah bumped into a God-fearing man named Obadiah. Elijah told Obadiah to fetch Ahab. Obadiah said “This is not good. If I go get Ahab and bring him here, you will probably be gone. This would result in me getting killed.” Elijah said “Don’t worry I’ll stay here” and off Obadiah went.

Ahab came to Elijah and Elijah proposed a big meeting. He told Ahab to bring his prophets of Baal and Asherah to Mount Carmel. A large number of Israelites also came and a showdown occurred which is better than we have seen in any movie.

MOUNT CARMEL

This scene: Elijah vs. 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah started the day promising that “Israel will know this day who is the Lord.”

The background: Ahab and his wife had killed all of the prophets of Yahweh they could find. In place of Yahweh, they instituted worship of Baal and Asherah throughout the country.

The showdown: Elijah first had the prophets of Baal and Asherah prepare their sacrifices. The altar was built; the bull was killed, and the prophets of Baal and Asherah called upon their god to consume the sacrifice. The catch to Elijah’s challenge was that nobody was allowed to use any matches. There was not to be any fire set by man. The gods had to set the fire.

Elijah goes before all the people and says, “How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the Lord is God follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him.” (18:21). the people gather to watch the contest. The prophets of Baal called on the name of Baal from morning until noon. Baal did not answer. The prophets danced around the altar slashed themselves with swords and spears in devotion as they shouted louder and louder, trying to invoke Baal to send fire for the sacrifice.

Elijah taunted the prophets ratcheting up the tension of the confrontation. Elijah’s taunts were pretty good. He said, “Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is

sleeping and must be awakened.” Needless to say Baal still did not respond.

At some point Elijah said, “Okay, enough of this. Now it is Yahweh’s turn.” Elijah took his own bull and prepared it on his altar. Not being satisfied with that, Elijah has the people bring jar after jar of water. Four large jars of water were poured on top of the offering and the wood. This was done a second time. It was then done a third time for a total of twelve jars of water. The water at this point was running down around the altar and filling the trench around the altar.

Elijah offered a simple prayer that the people heard. Elijah invoked Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Elijah asked that God let it be known that God is God in Israel and that God will turn the people’s hearts back again. Interesting that Elijah used Jacob’s name “Israel” rather than Jacob. He was, after all, making a point to the nation that called itself “Israel.”

There was no dancing, no shouting, and no slashing himself with a sword. A simple prayer was offered, and the fire of the Lord fell burning up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and all the water from the trench.

When the people saw this they fell flat on the ground proclaiming that, “Yahweh is god, Yahweh is god.”

Elijah commanded the people to seize the false prophets of Baal and not let anyone get away. The people seized them and slaughtered them. Elijah then told Ahab to go eat and drink because rain was coming.

What followed makes an interesting statement about life “after a mountain top experience.” The rain did indeed come, and Elijah should have been standing incredibly tall and confident in the power of God, but he wasn’t. While Elijah had stood up to all the prophets of Baal with complete faith in God for performing miracles, Elijah followed the largest victory of his career with a cowardly fear of Queen Jezebel.

FEAR

Elijah fled and sat under a broom tree praying to die. In fairness, Queen Jezebel was a fearsome woman, known to kill people who got in her way. She did not take kindly to the fact that Elijah had destroyed the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

As Elijah sat under his tree praying to die, God awakened him, fed him, and then allowed him to hide for 40 days and nights. After 40 days, Elijah was hiding on the Mount Horeb, sleeping in a cave. God then said to Elijah, “Wake up and come outside because I am going to be passing by.”

It is an interesting scene because an incredible wind came which shook everything. But God was not in the wind. The wind was followed by an earthquake that shook the foundations of the mountain, but God was not found in the earthquake. A fire that was all consuming then issued forth, but God was not found in the fire. Following the dramatic and loud wind storm, earthquake, and fire, God came to Elijah in a soft whisper. A gentle voice was used by God to communicate to Elijah that Elijah had no reason to fear. God said, “I have seven thousand people who have never bowed a knee to Baal in Israel.” God then told Elijah to go anoint Jehu as King over Israel and Hazael as King over Aram. He also told Elijah to appoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. Elijah did as God commanded.

Meanwhile, Ahab did manage to have some good results warring against Ben Hadad of Samaria. But Ahab also had some rough times (tongue-in-cheek here), however, because there was a vineyard belonging to a fellow named Naboth that Ahab wanted but could not get. Ahab tried to buy the vineyard, but Naboth would not sell. The scripture reads that Ahab became “sullen and angry” and started sulking and not eating. In comes Jezebel to the rescue. Jezebel said, “I’ll get the vineyard for you.” Jezebel does so by getting Naboth killed. Once Naboth is dead, Ahab was able to buy the vineyard. After this wretched display of power, Elijah prophesized that dogs would lick Ahab’s blood off the streets. Ahab humbled himself to God out of fear of this curse so God declared the curse would after Ahab died.

JEHOSHAPHAT

In I Kings 22, Judah’s King Jehoshaphat traveled north to see Ahab, the King of Israel. The story has some interesting implications. Both Jehoshaphat and Ahab agreed that Israel and Judah should join forces to retake a city from the King of Aram. Unlike Ahab, Jehoshaphat would not go to battle before getting the counsel of the LORD (“Yahweh”).

Jehoshaphat asked Ahab to get some prophets to ask for Yahweh’s counsel on the war. Unknown to Jehoshaphat, Ahab did not have any prophets of Yahweh because Ahab spent a lifetime killing them! He only had prophets of Baal. Ahab’s Baal prophets came and said the “Lord” (“Adonai”) would give the city to Israel and Judah. Jehoshaphat then asked Ahab, “Don’t you

have any prophets of the LORD (Yahweh)?" Ahab responded, "Yes, I have a prophet of Yahweh, but I hate him because he never says anything good."

Jehoshaphat required that Ahab get counsel from the prophet of Yahweh. So Ahab sent some folks to get the prophet named Micaiah. The folks who went to Micaiah voiced to him a warning. They told Micaiah to be sure and say that the battle results would be good.

Micaiah came to Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Ahab asks whether or not Yahweh would bless the battle. Micaiah sarcastically said, "Oh sure he will." Ahab then said, "Cur the sarcasm. You're supposed to be telling me the truth." Micaiah then was truthful and told Ahab that Ahab would die in the process of the battle. Ahab looked to Jehoshaphat and said, "I told you he never says anything good."

Ahab ignored the counsel of Micaiah and joined Jehoshaphat battle. In the process of the battle King Ahab was killed and his blood drained onto his chariot. When the chariot was subsequently washed, an earlier prophecy was fulfilled as dogs licked up the blood of Ahab.

The scripture is clear that Jehoshaphat did right before the Lord and reigned for 25 years in Judah. Upon the death of Jehoshaphat, his son, Jehoram followed him.

AHAZIAH

Upon the death of Ahab, his son, Ahaziah followed him. Ahaziah ruled for 2 years and was as evil a man as his father was. When Ahaziah was wounded, falling through the lattice of an upper room, he sent messengers to "Baal Zebub." "Baal Zebub" means literally Lord of the flies, a fact not lost on William Golding. An angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to go up and meet the king's messengers on their way to Baal Zebub. Elijah did so and proceeded to prophecy that King Ahaziah would die on the bed in which he was lying. When the King got the message, he was upset. He wanted to know who had given the message.

The people identified the prophet as "a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." From that description, the King recognized the prophet as Elijah, and sent men to fetch Elijah. Both the first and second captain with the 50 men they each brought to fetch Elijah managed to get consumed by fire without accomplishing their mission. A third captain with 50 men was then sent to fetch Elijah. Unlike the first captains,

this third did not demand Elijah come down, but rather begged for his life and the life of his 50 men. Elijah then didn't call fire down to destroy those men, but rather went down to Ahaziah himself. Ahaziah was then told that he would die. Ahaziah did in fact die, and having had no son, was succeeded by Joram.

This basically concludes the ministry of Elijah. We see his replacement with Elisha coming in II Kings Chapter 2. That is where we will begin next week.

III. POINTS TO TAKE HOME.

1. There is wisdom in taking counsel from wise men.
2. There is foolishness in taking counsel of fools.
3. Do not provoke God to anger and thrust him behind your back.
4. Being sullen and angry leads to nothing good.
5. Live your life around the LORD. Don't live your life around other things you make Lord.
6. Worship the God of the universe, not the Lord of the flies.