

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 32

The Divided Monarchy – Civil War Hebrew review *Aleph - Mem*

I recently had an opportunity to read a rather lengthy write up of some lawsuits we handled. The underlying issues had captured the interest of a reporter turned author, and she had written up her assessment having interviewed many of the key players in the litigation. As I read an early version of her work product, I was interested in what others said about the cases.

We had won several of the underlying lawsuits, but had lost one as well. Her focus on the one we lost included some comments by others, including my friends, on why we lost. It was interesting to read what others said about my handling of that case!

Evidently, I am not the only one she gave an advance copy to, because I got an email this week from one of my friendly colleagues. In the email, my friend wrote,

Some quotes don't sound like me...She did have a passage where it sounded like I challenged your handling of the case. Anytime I saw you in the courtroom I thought you did an extraordinary job - my background and training puts me in no position to question your strategy.

My friend was concerned over what my reaction would be when reading his critique of my decisions! I will admit, the criticism stung. I do not like losing, and I really do not like people opining that my failures might be my own fault!

I wrote my friend a reply to reassure him that his criticism had not harmed our friendship. I explained,

Heavens my friend, things like that will not come between us! First off, I am far from perfect and don't always make the right calls... So I can't say "I'm right..." I can only say, "I think I'm right!" But I could be wrong!

I've chewed on that email exchange quite a bit. It interests me how we focus on things. One thing I am striving for in my life is to quit viewing the world through my own lens. It is an amazingly difficult thing to avoid.

The ancients told the story of a 16-year-old boy who was as proud as he was beautiful. While chased by all sorts of people for his attention and affection, he spurned everyone. One spurned person prayed that the 16-year-old boy would

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“himself love, and not gain the thing he loves.” The prayer is answered and the boy finds himself gazing into a still spring where the waters are never disturbed. The boy sees his own reflection and falls in love. As Ovid told the story,

He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks a shadow is substance...
Unwittingly he desires himself.¹

The delusion he sees mocks him even as it allures him. The boy continues to stare into the water, trying to grasp and hold his reflection. Ultimately, he wastes away and dies. The boy’s name was Narcissus. From him, we have adopted the name “narcissism.” This condition references an overweening preoccupation with oneself.

Somewhere deep within all of us lies this tendency to see the world through our own lens. What we see as truth, we think must be the truth. We will see this as we go through the lessons of the divided monarchy and the Israelites’ civil war. We will then return to this idea and consider it further in our points for home.

THE STORY

We last left the monarchy narrative of 1 Kings with the kingdom divided. The northern tribes had rallied around Jeroboam as king while Judah and Benjamin in the south rallied around Solomon’s son Rehoboam. The first reaction of Rehoboam was to gather forces and fight the northern tribes into submission. He backed off when told by a prophet not to do so (1 Kings 12).

Jeroboam ruled over the northern tribes (called “Israel”), but failed to follow God’s instructions. He supplanted the “Old Time Religion” with the foreign glamour of the latest and greatest ideas the people were learning from the local population. As previously discussed, God sent a prophetic word to Jeroboam proclaiming coming judgment for his lack of faithfulness.

Sometime after this encounter, Jeroboam’s son fell sick. Interestingly, the son was named “Abijah,” which means, “Yahweh is my father.” Jeroboam the idolater had at some point given such a pious name to his son, yet that son’s name stands in stark contrast to the decisions and actions of Jeroboam later in life. One can grimace in the texts of this lesson seeing over and over a number of people who have seemingly resolute conviction over the Lord early in life, only to find it fade away or transform as they continue to “grow” and apparently think they have “learned better.”

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book Three (Loeb Classical Library 1977) at 153-155.

Jeroboam had been given two prophetic words from the Lord previously, and both clearly came true. Yet Jeroboam had somehow decided his political and life choices trumped the simple rules that God had given him both through Moses and through prophetic revelation.

The problem for Jeroboam was the only place he felt he might get an answer for his son's illness lay in the hands of the prophet Ahijah who had originally told Jeroboam he would in fact be sitting on the throne. Of course, that prophet might not receive Jeroboam too well since the prophecy came with the promise/warning that Jeroboam would be blessed if he would honor God faithfully, yet be cursed should he fall into idolatry.

In some deluded way, Jeroboam thought he could send his wife incognito to get the information and maybe some help for their son.

And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Arise, and disguise yourself, that it not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Behold, Ahijah the prophet is there, who said of me that I should be king over this people. Take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what shall happen to the child." (1 Kings 14:2-3).

One cannot miss Jeroboam's deluded absurd idea that Ahijah might have insight on the son's condition yet be fooled by the wife's disguise. It is as if Jeroboam arms his camouflaged wife with some gifts, and then sends her off hoping for the best. The prophet is not fooled.

Before Jeroboam's wife even arrives, the word of the Lord comes to Ahijah instructing him about her coming arrival as well as what he should say to her. Ever faithful to the Lord, Ahijah dispenses the prophetic word in five parts:

1. God is not fooled by her disguise or by her husband's evil. Jeroboam is condemned for his idolatry:

When Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged with unbearable news for you. Go, tell Jeroboam, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over my people Israel and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, and yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes, but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back, therefore behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:6-10).

2. All the males of Jeroboam's family tree would die out. Earlier from the lips of this same prophet, God had offered to secure a dynasty for Jeroboam if Jeroboam would remain faithful (1 Kings 11:38). Evidently, God meant more than simply naming his child in honor of Yahweh! That naming seems to come back almost mockingly as the hinge pin for the judgment pronounced on Jeroboam:

I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the LORD has spoken it." (1 Kings 14:10-11).

3. This sick son, Abijah, will not survive long enough for his mother to see him again. God does add through the prophet that there is in the boy, "something pleasing" so the Lord will have this one offspring of Jeroboam properly buried and honored (as opposed to all the other offspring):

Arise therefore, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the LORD, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:12-13).

4. Israel will get a new dynasty rather than one descending from Jeroboam:

Moreover, the LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam today (1 Kings 14:14).

5. Ultimately, Israel will lose their land and be sent into exile:

The LORD will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim [plural of Asherah], provoking the LORD to anger. And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin." (1 Kings 14:15-16).

Some scholars believe that, "the name and worship of Asherah were borrowed from Assyria."² If so, there is a certain irony here. When this prophecy is fulfilled, it is Assyria that conquers and scatters Israel.

² Jung, K. G., "Asherah," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1988), v. 1.

Asherah

Have you come across articles like Discovery News's March 18, 2011 write up entitled:

GOD'S WIFE EDITED OUT OF THE BIBLE – ALMOST

The article follows the recent work of University of Exeter's Francesca Stavrakopoulou who, in lectures and journal papers discusses the "uncomfortable conclusion that God had a wife."³ The article notes that,

Stavrakopoulou bases her theory on ancient texts, amulets and figurines unearthed primarily in the ancient Canaanite coastal city called Ugarit, now modern-day Syria. All of these artifacts reveal that Asherah was a powerful fertility goddess.

She then cites the pottery inscription dated to the 8th century B.C., which asks for a blessing from "Yahweh and his Asherah." Contrary to the assertions of Stavrakopoulou and others (see, e.g., Dever, William, *Did God have a Wife?* (Eerdmans 2005)), this is hardly novel, new, or an "uncomfortable conclusion." God's wife was not "edited out of the Bible." The Bible presents the story that is born out by these findings. This is precisely what the Bible teaches.

The Israelites notoriously worshipped the goddess Asherah likely as God's wife as well as a stand-alone goddess. Over and over in scripture the references are made, including in the passage here in 1 Kings. Scripture also teaches that worship of Asherah was closely linked to trees and poles. Scholars have found many small hand-sized Asherah idols throughout Israelite in dig sites dated to the time of the monarchy. These idols have feminine hair, faces, and breasts, but their legs are rather non-descript, looking rather like a tree trunk. This tree trunk base is consistent with the Biblical association of Asherah with trees.



³ Interview at <http://news.discovery.com/history/god-wife-yahweh-asherah-110318.html#mkcpgn=hknws1>.

The prophecies readily come true exactly as given by Ahijah. Jeroboam's wife returned home only to have her child die as she crossed the threshold. The child was buried and all Israel mourned his death. Jeroboam's full reign was 22 years and, upon his passing, his son Nadab assumed the throne. The saying, "like father, like son" was true in this case. Nadab continued his father's evil ways. Nadab's reign lasted only two years until a man named Baasha killed Nadab in a coup d'état. One of Baasha's first actions as the new king of Israel was killing "all the house of Jeroboam. He left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it" (1 Kings 15:29).

While these events were unfolding north in Israel, the south was not faring much better under the reign of Rehoboam. Rehoboam reigned for 17 years in Jerusalem and under his watch Judah lived in an evil before the Lord. Judah also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim [plural of Asherah] on every high hill and under every green tree, and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land (1 Kings 14:23-24).

In judgment, God sent the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak against Jerusalem. Shishak took away the gold treasures of the temple, the treasures of the king's house,

Shishak King of Egypt

The text in 1 Kings 14:25-26 says, "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything." Most Egyptologists consider Shishak the Hebrew spelling of the Pharaoh known in Egyptian as Shoshenq I who reigned from about 945-924 B.C.

Shoshenq constructed a series of monuments in Egypt to celebrate and memorialize this military action. The temple at Karnak in Thebes records the cities plundered by Shoshenq.

Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of Shoshenq's incursion into both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. The Egyptian dating of Shoshenq's war places it at c.927 or 926 B.C. This ties nicely with the Biblical dating of "year five" in Rehoboam's reign (c. 926 or 925 B.C.).



Shoshenq's monument lists cities in Palestine either "visited" or "conquered" (scholars debate that point) and the list includes a number in Israel and Judah. Jerusalem is not listed, however, which likely indicates that Rehoboam gave up the temple treasures without a fight. While the Bible is silent on whether the treasures included the ark, the idea that the ark was included is the basis for the Indiana Jones movie:

Indiana: "The Hebrews put the broken pieces in the Ark. When they settled in Canaan, they put it in the Temple of Solomon."

Colonel Musgrove: "In Jerusalem."

Indiana: "Where it stayed for many years, until, whoosh, it's gone."

Major Eaton: "Where?"

Indiana: "Nobody knows where or when. An Egyptian Pharaoh, Shishak, invaded Jerusalem about 980 BC, and may have taken the Ark to the city of Tanis and hidden it in a secret chamber called the Well of Souls. About a year after the Pharaoh returned to Egypt, the city of Tanis was consumed by the desert in a year-long sandstorm. Wiped clean by the wrath of God."

Among other things we know Indiana got his dates wrong!

leaving Rehoboam and Judah subject to Egypt.⁴ Rehoboam remade the temple shields out of bronze, replacing the gold shields of Solomon that were sent to Egypt.

In Chronicles, the account adds that Rehoboam and a number of priests humbled themselves before the Lord and that the Lord, therefore, spared Jerusalem (2 Chron. 12:6-7). So Pharaoh got the treasure, but Judah remained a country and Rehoboam remained in power in Jerusalem. Famed Jewish archaeologist Yohanan Aharoni has taken the Egyptian inscription of Shisak's campaign and charted how the listing of cities follows the well-known routes in and out of Judah and Israel. From that list, Aharoni deduces that the negotiations where Jerusalem was spared in return for the treasures, "must have taken place at Gibeon." From there, Pharaoh turned north into Israel rather than south to sack Jerusalem.⁵

⁴ See Kitchen, K. A., *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BC)*, 2d ed. (Warminster 1986)

⁵ Aharoni, Yohanan, *The Land of the Bible, A Historical Geography*, (Westminster 1979), at 325-326.

During the 17 years that Rehoboam reigned, he warred “continually” against Jeroboam. Once Rehoboam died, his son Abijam (called “Abijah” in Chronicles⁶) took the throne in Jerusalem. Abijam “walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God” (1 Kings 15:3). Also like his father, Abijam warred against Jeroboam. Chronicles notes a measure of success Abijam experienced, conquering into the southern part of Israel. This did not last, however.

Once Abijam died, his son Asa ruled in his place. With Asa, we finally see a king who is concerned about the things of God. Asa put away the male cult prostitutes.⁷ Asa stripped his mother of the title and role of “queen mother” because of her insistence on worshipping Asherah. Asa cut down and burned at least one image of Asherah. He never removed all the high places of worship, and idolatry was not removed from the land. Not everyone changed practices simply because a new king did.

When Asa took the throne, Jeroboam was still king in Israel. It was while Asa was on the throne that Jeroboam died and Nadab became king, followed quickly by Baasha. Asa and Baasha continued the civil war, fighting over the trade routes of the Central Benjamin Plateau. Scripture tells us that Baasha, the northern king of Israel, fortified “Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come into Asa king of Judah” (1 Kings 15:17). Ramah was deep into the territory of Benjamin, just five and a half miles north of Jerusalem, maybe a 90-minute walk.⁸

⁶ Scripture does not tell us why both names were used. It is certainly common in that era to have a different name as king. The two names show the contrast between the naming of the man and the life of the man. While Abijah means “Yahweh is my father,” the name Abiyam is pagan meaning “Yam is my father.” Yam was the Canaanite sea god.

⁷ These are called “cult prostitutes” because their actions were deemed actions of worship!

⁸ Aharoni, Yohanan, at 322.



The Benjamin Plateau was important for the mountain city of Jerusalem. From the plateau, the city was linked to the routes that went both to the sea and to the Jordanian valley. James Monson, responsible for the map above, uses modern parlance when talking of this civil war. He recognizes it as the “Battle for Benjamin.”⁹

In his old age, Asa was concerned about Israel’s incursion into his land. With Israel’s army a 90-minute march from Jerusalem, Asa took his silver and gold and sent it to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria. Syria was the power north of Israel. Ben-Hadad accepted the pay-off and broke his covenant with Israel, attacking them in the north. Faced with a two-front war, Israel left Asa and Judah alone, stopped his fortress building at Ramah, and went to secure his northern border.

⁹ Monson, James M., “Regions on the Run,” (Biblical Backgrounds 2009), at 29.

Asa's reign seems to have started strong with good religious fervor. As he grew older, that fervor apparently faded away. Since Asa sought deliverance from Israel by the king of Syria, rather than by the Lord, God sent a prophetic word to Asa. A seer named Hanani went to Asa and chided him for his foolish behavior:

You relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the Lord your God (2 Chron. 16:7).

Asa's actions made good sense from a strategic and political perspective. The issue from the prophet was Asa making the move without first seeking God's guidance. Asa was making the political move, not the God directed move. It is unknown whether or not, if Asa had sought God's direction, God would not have told Asa to do the very thing he did. The key is seeking God's will, not simply acting out of our own agenda and concerns.

Asa did not take the prophet's reprimand with repentance. Instead, it stirred up anger bringing out cruelty in his treatment of the seer and some other people in Judah. Chronicles brings the reign of Asa to a close noting he had a bad medical condition, diseased in his feet. Rather than seek God, Asa again sought human help first, relying on his physicians. That was the wrong course of action, and Asa died!

CONCLUSION

Return to the idea introduced at the start of this lesson. How do we battle our tendency to see the world through our own lens? How do we avoid the problems of Narcissus, so confident and proud in who we are and what we think that we can give to credit no one else?

The older I get, the more I see people who start with religious fervor, but as they age or grow in education or life experiences, they flag in their zeal, pause in their faith, and seem to acknowledge that religion has its place, but its place is limited. It is as if people think they have outgrown the biblical basics of God. In the face of this, the Biblical narratives cry out. They proclaim the truth of God in his revelation. God is a truth that one does not outgrow, does not out think, and does not put in its place.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*Jesus said to him, 'I am...the truth'*" (Jn. 14:6).

Jesus' proclamation, "I am the truth," is important not simply because it gives full credibility to all Jesus is and all he does, but it indicates something more fundamental. No human has a real and full handle on truth. We might have a grasp of Jesus, and in that sense have a grasp of

truth, but truth is outside of us. It is in him. As we hold fast to our beliefs, we hold fast to the one who is the truth. The Shibboleth of our faith is nothing less than Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. We should always be on our guard when we start to “outsmart” God as revealed in Scripture. We are not that smart! Our pride must never take us past what God has revealed to us, for he is truth, and our search for truth is a search for him as he has revealed himself.

2. *“Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another?”* (1 Kings 14:6).

Kings and Chronicles carefully carve out the importance of the prophets and the prophetic word. The power of the prophet is not what a king like Jeroboam suspected or hoped it would be. The prophet does not make history. The prophet proclaims the word of the Lord. The Lord is God of history, past, present, and future. As the word of the Lord goes, so goes history. This again should give us pause. The implications include the importance of understanding the revelation of Scripture, but also implied are deep ramifications of Jesus as God’s final word. Jesus is not simply a priestly and kingly Messiah. He is the ultimate prophet as well. Jesus not only proclaims the word of the Lord, he IS the Word of the Lord. Spend time daily with Jesus.

3. *“You...did not rely on the Lord your God”* (2 Chron. 16:7).

There is, for many, a struggle of faithfulness. Even as life flashes by quickly, the length of days seems to see many outgrow the faith of their youth. Jesus warned of such in his parable of the sower. Some seed falls into good soil and it bears much fruit. Other seed falls into shallow ground, dying soon after sprouting because the roots cannot adequately grow. Other seeds fall into weeds and get choked out.

This is not a fatalistic parable. It is a call to work on your soil! How do we ensure that our soil is fit for the lifetime of growing and bearing fruit? The soil is enriched by spending time before the Lord, by reading and hearing his word, and by walking in the fruit of his Spirit. Let us make our efforts and prayers directed toward this daily.

WANT MORE?

Hebrew review time! Do you know the first half of the alphabet? Can you say it, read it, and write it? Next week, we plan on adding more letters. Make sure you know the ones we have already learned! On the back, practice writing your Hebrew block letters. Then when you’re done, email us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com and let us know how you are doing!