

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

## *Lesson 44*

### The Divided Monarchy: Judah

Our son Will learned to read unusually early, which made for some really interesting discussions. One time, I remember driving down Hwy. 290 with Will in the backseat. Without me knowing it, he had picked up a book I had been reading and was working his way through it. The book was entitled *Don't Know Much About History*, and it was targeted toward filling in the gaps of the typical person's historical knowledge.

I became aware Will was reading it when he started asking me some questions. His first question would have sufficed for a history exam question!

“Dad, since the Germans lost World War I, how did they get powerful enough to take on the world in World War II just twenty years later?”

After I muddled through my best efforts to answer that question, he asked his second one, which was a bit easier!

“Why were German submarines called ‘U-boats’ rather than submarines?”

I explained that our prefix “sub” means “under.” The German word for “under” is “*unter*.” So in German, the sub is a U-boat.

Then came the final question:

“Dad, why isn't there a ‘t’ in Nazi?”

Ahhh...the things we think of when we study history!

Historical writing and documentation can take on different forms, depending upon its purpose. It can inspire questions, it can document relationships and activities, it can comment upon events and their causes and results, and it can simply provide interesting and engaging stories. Historical writings need not be resigned to only one category or purpose. Oftentimes, people write with multiple goals in mind.

In this lesson, our goal is to work through a time of Israel's history with a focus on the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We will take the historical writings of Kings in the Bible, and integrate it with other historical data we have in our analysis. As we do so, we are doing a second level historical analysis. We term this a second level, because the writer/editor(s) of Kings have already done one layer of analysis. We want to not only analyze the history, but also the presentation of the author. In other words, Kings was written through a lens with a greater purpose than simply recording historical facts. V. Philips Long speaks of the Bible

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presenting history as a “portrait” rather than simply a photograph.<sup>1</sup> The Bible does recount real people and real events, but its presentation goes beyond simply a video with transcription of what occurred. The video has been to the editing room to organize and select the cuts to make points desired by the editor! This is not a rewrite of history, but rather a selection of history that make certain points. Our plan is to study the history presented, and also to study the purposes of the text preserved for us in Holy Scripture.

We will start this lesson considering this approach in a bit more detail. We will then work through some narrative, adding extra-biblical knowledge where useful, and drawing some conclusions of our own.

### THE APPROACH OF KINGS

When we read I and II Kings, we are not simply reading a dry historical recording of unfolding facts relevant to Israel and God. I and II Kings cover centuries in pages, and decades in verses. We must remember that God interacts with everyone everyday. Not a day goes by that God is not at work in those who know him as well as those who do not! No empire ever existed without his awareness; no king ever ruled without God allowing (Rom. 13:1-2). We must never fail to remember that the events in Kings are an incredibly narrow selection of God’s activities among his people and the nations.

In like fashion, Kings is not a diary of events from the royal palaces. The Israelite kings (north and south) kept records of events, but the writer of Kings *drew from those*, rather than reproducing them. We see references that indicate this throughout the texts:

Now the rest of the acts of Elah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?... Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? (I Ki. 16:14, 20).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Long, V. Philips, *The Art of Biblical History*, (Zondervan 1994), at 105-107 writes,

Divine revelation should be located in both historical events and the interpretative word which mediates these events to us... [Do not] discount the significance of a portrait simply because it is an artistic interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> These references to the “Chronicles” could as easily be translated the “Annals.” They are not to be confused with the Scriptural books of I and II Chronicles. Those books have no information about Elah and Zimri. There are many other references to the Annals/Chronicles of the kings of both Israel and Judah in Kings. See, e.g., I Kings 14:6, 19, 23, 31; 22:39, 45, etc.

Kings gives us a selection of historical events with a commentary and a purpose.

Some scholars call the writer(s) the “Deuteronomistic Historian,” but we choose a different term. The idea behind the term “Deuteronomistic Historian” is that of a writer, or group of writers, that were setting out portions of the Old Testament in line with their views expressed in Deuteronomy.<sup>3</sup> There is a good scholastic dispute over whether Deuteronomy belongs to such later editors and whether it expresses such an agenda, as opposed to being a source book with Mosaic roots. Many of these scholars then dismiss the history as history, considering it no more than an agenda dressed up as history. They trace running concepts from Deuteronomy through Judges, Kings, etc., and place these as all written anywhere from the late-7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (625-400 BC).

Likewise, there is a strong number of scholars who find the Deuteronomist idea to be a recent imagination of scholars with no real basis in history or the Bible’s composition. Unpersuaded by the arguments in favor of a Deuteronomist Historian, we choose instead to term the Kings writer a Prophet Historian. Kings is a prophetic commentary on real historical events. The events are chosen and the commentary runs on the stories as selected and gleaned from history by the prophet. Do these bear a resemblance to Deuteronomy? Of course! So do the writings of Paul (see point for home number 1), yet we would never assume Paul wrote Deuteronomy, or that it was a product of the “Pauline School”! The Prophet Historian had Deuteronomy available, and of course it influenced his perception of events. This did not make his history invalid; it provided perspective on his history! More on this later in the lesson, but we should add that in the Hebrew consideration of the Old Testament, Kings is included in the section of books labeled as prophet writings.<sup>4</sup>

We saw this already in the Kings’ treatment of the events of the Northern Kingdom. The Prophet Historian was more concerned with driving his message

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “Deuteronomist” was coined by Old Testament scholar Martin Noth in the 1940’s and has undergone many permutations since. This view generally assigns the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Kings (and usually Jeremiah as well) as coming from the same “Deuteronomist” source(s).

<sup>4</sup> The Jewish scriptures are divided generally into three groups: the “Law” (*Torah*), which was Genesis through Deuteronomy; the “Prophets” (*Nevi'im*), which was Joshua, Judges, the Samuels, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets; and the “Other Writings” (*Ketuvim*), which were the poetic books, the “five scrolls” (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther), and a few other writings (Daniel, Ezra/Nehemiah, and Chronicles). From the first letters of each of these groups comes the current name for the Hebrew Old Testament, the “*Tenakh*.” In the first century, the writings were also divided simply into two groups, the “Law” and the “Prophets.” We see this in the conversations of Jesus where he repeatedly refers to the Old Testament as “the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 5:17, 7:12, 11:13).

than simply recording key historical events. A lot of time was spent unfolding the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha while relatively minimal information was spent on the rule of Omri, one of history's most significant Northern Kings. This is one of the main logical reasons for what some scholars question as poor historical work by the author who left out major events noted elsewhere in history.

Understanding that Kings is no mere history lesson teaching data, allows us to appreciate the data, but also seeks to understand the prophet's agenda and teaching, as well as the greater scheme of knowledge and use of the work in God's revelation of Scripture to humanity. Prophets understood their role as a communication source connecting God's message to God's people. In Kings, we read the Prophet's comment that even the Law was given through Prophets (which was Moses' title as well):

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." (2 Kings 17:13).

With that in mind, we turn to the narrative itself. Rather than review the history we have covered thus far, largely from the Northern events and perspective, we will simply integrate the northern history into the flow of this study of Judah. This should both provide a brief reminder of things already studied, as well as put the events of Judah into a better framework.

## **THE APPROACH OF CHRONICLES**

In addition to the historical information contained in the books of Kings, there is information in 1 and 2 Chronicles that relates to the same time of Israel's history. While we will save a more thorough discussion of the Chronicler's accounts for a later class, we should note a few factors now.

Hebrew tradition has the post-exilic prophet Ezra as the writer of Chronicles. Whether Ezra wrote it, we cannot know for certain, but it is a safe assumption that Chronicles was written much later than Kings. In fact, of the many sources the Chronicler used in compiling Chronicles, Kings was one of them! The Chronicler seems to have also drawn from Samuel, the Pentateuch, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Zechariah. There are also references in Chronicles to a usage of "the book of the kings of Israel" (1 Chron. 9:1; 2 Chron. 20:34) (not our Biblical book of Kings), "the book of the annals of King David" (1 Chron. 27:24), "the book of the kings of Judah and Israel" (or "Israel and Judah") (2 Chron. 16:11, etc.), the annotations on the book of the kings" (2 Chron. 24:27). The Chronicler also drew from prophetic writings of "Samuel the Seer" (1 Chron.

29:29), “Nathan the prophet” (1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29), “Gad the seer” (1 Chron. 29:29), “Ahijah the Shilonite” (2 Chron. 9:29), “Iddo the seer” (2 Chron. 9:29, etc.), and “Shemiah the prophet” (2 Chron. 12:15).

These writings were used and arranged in such a way as to deliver an important message to the Israelite community returning from exile. We will consider the Chronicler’s account later when we cover that aspect of Israel’s history. In this class, however, it is still important as it gives some fuller history to the points made by the Prophet Historian behind the Kings account.

## THE KINGDOM DIVIDES

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam lost the northern ten tribes of Israel to a rebellion headed by Jeroboam. The Prophet Historian makes the point that Rehoboam failed to listen to the counsel of his elders, which led to this history changer (1 Ki. 12:8). Rehoboam’s initial reaction was war against the rebels, but on this point he listened to the prophetic word and dissolved his invading army (1 Ki. 12:22ff).<sup>5</sup>

As might be expected, Judah did not fare well in the “holiness department” under King Rehoboam. Judah “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” setting up high places for worship as well as establishing a network of male prostitutes in the name of religion (an appeal to the fertility gods).<sup>6</sup> After setting out this historical fact in 1 Kings 14:21-24, the Prophet Historian immediately follows with the invasion of the Egyptian Pharaoh into Judah:

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 all the shields of gold that Solomon had made, and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze (1 Ki. 14:25-26).

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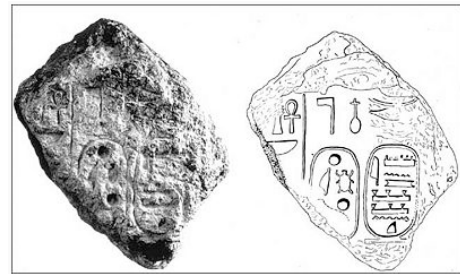
<sup>5</sup> This stopped the major invasion, but Scripture does note that the two nations fought constantly throughout the reign of Rehoboam and later kings (1 Ki. 14:30).

<sup>6</sup> The Prophet Historian seems to relate this failure to the influence of Rehoboam’s mother who was an Ammonite, rather than a Jew. The text reads: “His mother’s name was Naamah the Ammonite. And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel” (1 Ki. 14:21-24). This reinforces the Prophet Historian’s morality point about Solomon’s failure to honor the Law’s warning about marrying foreigners.

The Prophet Historian makes his point of God’s judgment against the people. The worshipped idols did not protect Jerusalem and Judah from the pagan king!<sup>7</sup>

History supplements this story with more data. The ESV’s “Shishak” expresses a Hebrew spelling that famed Egyptologist Ken Kitchen explains corresponds “very precisely” with the Egyptian spelling for the Pharaoh Shoshe(n)q.<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh Shoshenq I founded a new dynasty (the 22<sup>nd</sup>) and was likely the Egyptian king that harbored Jeroboam during the latter years of Solomon.<sup>9</sup> There is substantial evidence that Shoshenq invaded Palestine, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and that he did so during the fifth year of Jeroboam’s reign, exactly as set out in Kings!<sup>10</sup>

Among the artifacts is a huge engraved triumph scene at the temple in Karnak as well as a “business card” left behind from the invasion of the Northern Town Megiddo.<sup>11</sup> The Karnak engravement lists those towns defeated by Shoshenq in his Palestinian romp. Among those towns are a number in both Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Noting that Shoshenq both “chose to cow and loot Rehoboam and Judah,” but also “to bring his former protégé Jeroboam of Israel to heel,” Kitchen then “speculates”



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<sup>7</sup> As the Chronicler tells the events, Shemaiah the prophet declared the word of the Lord to Rehoboam, “Thus says the Lord, ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak!’” (2 Chron. 12:5). Rehoboam humbled himself in response and thus God delivered him, even as it costs him his treasury. The Chronicler used as a source for this account the chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet, records now lost to us (2 Chron. 12:15).

<sup>8</sup> Kitchen, K. A., *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans 2003), at 10. Kitchen also sets out the dating as consistent in both the Hebrew text (fifth year of Rehoboam) and the Egyptian history. He places this in 926/925 B.C. *Ibid.*, at 33.

<sup>9</sup> Among the foreign women married to Solomon was a daughter of Pharaoh. Some might wonder why Solomon’s father-in-law would shelter a fugitive rebellious leader like Jeroboam from Solomon. This historical addition explains rather nicely that the Pharaoh likely holding Jeroboam was of a different lineage than the prior Pharaohs, being a Pharaoh of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty. For a thorough discussion of Egypt during this time see the authoritative Kitchen, K. A., *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt, 1100-650 B.C.*, (Aris & Phillips 1986).

<sup>10</sup> See Kitchen’s thorough timing explanation (“The Egyptian and Hebrew date series are independent of each other...but match very well”), *Op cit.* 8, at 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> Kitchen uses the British term “visiting card” equivalent to the American “business card.” He is referencing the “cartouche” of Shoshenq visible in the photographic reproduction above. The cartouche was an elliptical circle that contained the name of a pharaoh. Many scholars think the circle was deemed to protect the name from evil spirits.

that Shoshenq put a price tag of tribute on his aid to Jeroboam. In return for harboring Jeroboam from Solomon, then helping him to power, Shoshenq would logically have required Jeroboam pay tribute as a vassal (“if you dance with the devil...”). Kitchen then adds, “It would only need Jeroboam to default on his payment to bring the redoubtable pharaoh down upon him, and to lay hands on Judah’s rumored wealth for good measure.”<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars point to the absence of any biblical recounting of the many towns invaded by Shoshenq, especially in the Northern Kingdom, as an indicator of insufficient history by the biblical writers. This is not a biblical shortcoming, nor is it poor history by the Jews. This is the issue of the Prophet Historian. He is writing for his purposes, not the 21<sup>st</sup> century historians! A clear purpose of including Shoshenq’s invasion is to show that just as God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, plundering the Egyptians to make the treasuries of the tabernacle and worship of the Lord, as easily he can oversee the Egyptians plundering the Israelites! The Prophet Historian makes this point that the Israelites behavior had become no different than the pagans they replaced in Canaan.

Rehoboam died, leaving his throne to his son Abijam (also spelled Abijam), while Jeroboam still had a few years in his reign in the Northern Kingdom. The notes of the Prophet Historian on the various reigns of the kings in the north and south are challenging to those in our Western mindset who are looking for exacting chronologies matching up years with kings. If you get out your pencil and begin to construct the histories by adding up the numbers found in the various passages, then you will soon see frustrating results. The passages read like this:

- “The time that Jeroboam reigned was twenty-two years” (1 Ki. 14:20).
- “Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem” (1 Ki. 14:21).
- “Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah” (1 Ki. 15:1).

These typify the passages found throughout Kings for each successive king. Trying to get a consistent picture is difficult at best. Some relegate this difficulty to poor number sense by the author(s). Such an answer is easy, but unfair or uninformed. We are missing critical data that enables us to confirm or deny the lengths of reigns of the kings. If we were to use a mathematic example to demonstrate this we could ask, what is the value of  $x$  in the equation:  $x + y = 10$ ? Some might say the value of  $x$  is 3. Some might say it is 4. Who is right? No one

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, at 33.

can say without more data! We would need to know the value of  $y$ . If  $y$  is 7, then 3 would be the right value for  $x$ . But if  $y$  were 6, then 4 is the right answer for  $x$ .

A number of factors come into play before any assessment can be made in our 21<sup>st</sup> century western mindset and dating. For example, there are certainly time periods of co-regencies. In this situation, there are certainly times where a son begins to reign as co-regent, even as his father still lives and is king. Without full data on such dates, it skews any effort to simply add up the years of reigning and get a grand total time period. A second factor comes from the timing of the “years” given by the Prophet Historian. Certainly, the kings did not end their reigns at the stroke of midnight on the last day of a full year, leaving the next king to begin reigning at 12:01 a.m. of what is considered year one, only to die himself at midnight at the end of  $x$  number of full years as king.

To compute “years,” differing systems were used in the Ancient Near East. Noting that reigning years “cannot be understood by just totting up figures as if this were some modern, ‘Western’ composition,” Kitchen explained the differing systems:

Mesopotamia [used] accession-year dating. When the throne changed hands during the civil year, that whole year was (in effect) credited to the king who had died, the new man treating it simply as his “accession year” (a year zero), and counting his Year 1 from the next New Year’s Day... But in Egypt the classical system was opposite: i.e., nonaccession-year dating. In this case when one king died and another ascended the throne, the whole year was credited to the new man.<sup>13</sup>

Kitchen then gives as good an account as any on how to mesh the years given in Kings with Western chronology.

We conclude that there is plenty of data that can give full answers to any chronological questions raised by the Biblical cynic, but it simply is not given in the text in Western chronology. So key data is assumed, rather than explained or provided in the text.

As we continue in the narrative about the southern kingdom of Judah, the Prophet Historian wrote of the death of Rehoboam followed by his son Abijam. Abijam reigned for three years, but we know little of his rule by the Prophet Historian behind Kings beyond two salient points: “he walked in all the sins that his father did”, and yet, “for David’s sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem” (1 Ki. 15:4). The Prophet Historian wants the reader to see God’s faithfulness even in the midst of man’s

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<sup>13</sup> Kitchen, *Op cit.* 5, at 26ff.



unfaithfulness. Yet, as we read the supplemental information provided in Chronicles, certain shortcomings of Abijam become apparent.

The Chronicler tells of Abijam (spelled Abijah in Chronicles) early in his kingship going forth to challenge Jeroboam and the Northern Kingdom in battle. In an apparent effort to win without fighting, or at least intimidate the opposing army, Abijam stood on a hilltop and called out to the opposing forces of Jeroboam. Abijam asserted that Yahweh, God of Israel gave all of Israel to David and his progeny, reminding the people that Jeroboam was a usurper to his throne. Abijam added that Judah had real priests descended from Aaron leading worship and sacrifices to Yahweh rather than the idols commissioned by Jeroboam.

God was with Judah and the forces and Jeroboam was routed, never recovering before his death soon thereafter. Abijam did not use this success to build on his commitment to God as set out in his hearty, pre-battle speech. Instead, Abijam took fourteen wives, grew mighty, and moved into the sins of his father (2 Chron. 13:1-22).

Upon Abijam's death, his son Asa succeeded him. With Asa, things changed in Judah. Asa "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done" (1 Ki. 15:11). Asa removed the male prostitutes and idols. He also removed his mother (Maacah) from her throne as queen mother because Maacah had made an idol for Asherah. Asa did allow the high places to continue as worship venues, but his heart was "wholly true to the Lord all his days" (1 Ki. 15:14). The Chronicler gives us extra details behind these strong pro-Yahweh moves by Asa. Asa was honoring God, living "good and right" (2 Chron. 14:2). As a result, the Lord gave Asa ten years of peace.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This is a classic place where the scholars use this account to ascribe the narrative to some creation of a Deuteronomist Historian. Because Deuteronomy, especially chapter 28, sets out in clear terms blessings and curses for Israel and the Promised Land based upon obedience and disobedience, and because these blessings and curses are shown to have occurred, these scholars consider the entirety a calculated production. Old Testament scholar, and class reader John Monson received his PhD at Harvard under the wonderful and famous Frank Moore Cross. Cross is one of the scholars who advanced a number of ideas concerning the Deuteronomist(s) and his alleged compositions. Monson emailed in response to this passage that

Deuteronomy chapters 28 to 31 is simply being lived out in the ebb and flow of Israelite and Judean kings.

It does not need to be a conspired creation. Simple history can show the blessings and curses to be real! Suppose I were to write that, "If you put your finger in the fire, you will get burned." Then five hundred years hence, someone were to put his finger in the fire and get burned. Someone who wrote up the finger-burning episode should not also get credit for my original writing! There is no reason to discount the real history or the Mosaic warnings!

After this ten-year peace period, an Ethiopian general Zerah came to fight against Judah. Asa took troops to engage the enemy. Before battling, Asa cried out to the Lord,

"O Lord, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O Lord, you are our God; let not man prevail against you." (2 Chron. 14:11).

The Lord honored this cry for help and the Ethiopians were badly defeated. Asa's reactions were quite different from those of his father Abijam. Whereas Abijam took his victory over Jeroboam and used it to pad his life of ease, Asa's victory grew in him a strong conviction of a need to further serve the Lord. It was then that Asa put away the "detestable idols," "repaired the altar of the Lord," gathered the people from the reaches of Judah to sacrifice to the Lord, and "removed his mother as Queen mother" destroying her personal idols.

Asa had the people all take an oath to God, renewing their covenant with much celebration and praise. Things were magnificent for several decades, until, that is, the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign. In the thirty-sixth year, Baasha, the new king of the Northern Kingdom came up to fight Asa. (Baasha was ruling the Northern Kingdom after his successful coup d'état against Jeroboam's son Nadab.) As we discussed in our Northern Kingdom studies, Baasha was building Ramah to block Jerusalem's access north to the Benjamin Plateau. Asa was Judah's king who sought help from Ben-Hadad,<sup>15</sup> the king of Syria in Damascus. By having Ben-Hadad attack the Northern Kingdom in the north, it caused Baasha to pull out of Ramah. Subsequently, God sent a prophet to scold Asa for relying upon the Syrians for help rather than the Lord. As an old man, Asa lost that reaction of his youth. Rather than seek the Lord for forgiveness, Asa got angry and bitter. Shortly thereafter, Asa got a wasting disease in his feet. Not even going to God for help with his condition, Asa died in the next two years.

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<sup>15</sup> Some cynics question the history of Kings because of the reoccurrence of Ben-Hadad as a ruler of Damascus (1 Ki. 15:18, 20; 20:1ff; 2 Ki. 6:24, etc.). It seems he lived for quite a long time (100 years? Not likely!), or that there was confusion over the proper names of the kings reigning in Damascus. The cynics need not sound an alarm on this point! Ben-Hadad means "son of Hadad," Hadad being the patron God of Damascus (the Syrian Sun-god). It is quite sensible that multiple kings of Damascus might claim that title or name, or that in the least it might be ascribed to them by outsiders! The title would likely take many permutations, i.e., "Hadad-ezer" (Hadad is helper), etc. We know from Assyrian records that a century later at least one king of Damascus was being called "Hadad-idri," an Assyrian equivalent of the Hebrew "Hadad-ezer." Some suggest that Ben-Hadad was a dynastic name, each ruler under the god Hadad bearing the title of his son, hence "Ben [son of] Hadad." See, Boardman, John, Ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Cambridge 1982), Vol. III, Part 1, at 476.

Upon Asa's death, his son Jehoshaphat began to reign. We should first set aside the American phrase "jumpin' Jehoshaphat." It is not found in the Bible!<sup>16</sup> Like his father Asa, Jehoshaphat is remembered in Scripture for his walk with the Lord.

He walked in all the way of Asa his father. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord (1 Ki. 22:43).

While Scripture notes that Jehoshaphat did "right," it certainly does not mean that all his decisions were good ones! For example, during the reign of Jehoshaphat, peace was finally struck with King Ahab and the Northern Kingdom, but apparently at some cost! As a part of this peace, Jehoshaphat married his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of the Northern Kingdom's King Ahab (2 Ki. 8:18). The chronicler uses the term "a marriage alliance" (2 Chron. 18:1). Jehoshaphat was later convinced to joined forces with the wicked Ahab in a fight against the King of Syria, Israel's regular opponent to the Northeast who continued to fight over key valuable property that governed roadways as well as productive land. The battle was a huge loss and blow to the Israelite coalition. It was during a battle at Ramoth-gilead, that Jehoshaphat escaped with his life while Ahab was shot with a bow, dying from blood loss in his chariot.

After Jehoshaphat returned home, Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, chided him:

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asherahs out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God (2 Chron 19:2-3).

The Chronicler in greater detail provides some of the deeds of Jehoshaphat that evidenced his "heart to seek God". When the armies of three nearby nations (the Moabites, Ammonites, and some of the Meunites) threatened Judah, Jehoshaphat, and the people were truly afraid. Jehoshaphat declared a fast for the country and

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<sup>16</sup> We should note that some do theorize that the expression got its genesis from Joel 3:11-12 which in the King James reads:

Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.

While that passage does not mention "jumpin'," it does speak of the heathen (and arguably the dead) being awakened. The oldest references to the American expression of "jumpin' Jehoshaphat" date from the 1800's and originally referred to the ghost of Jehoshaphat. See, e.g., St. John, Percy Bolingbroke, *Paul Peabody, Or, The Apprentice of the World*, (Maxwell & Co. 1865) at 355, "'Look!' said Ogilvy suddenly; 'I see a form; by the shaking jumping ghost of Jehosaphat, it's an Injun!'"

“set his face to seek the Lord” (2 Chron 21:3). Then he assembled people from all over Judah for joint prayer and petitioning. With Jehoshaphat leading the prayer he proclaimed,

O our God, will you not execute judgment on them [the invaders]? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chron. 20:12).

The scene is dramatic. He prayed while all the people were standing before him at the temple, “with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron. 20:13). The Spirit of the Lord then descended upon a prophet who declared,

Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s (2 Chron. 20:15).

Jehoshaphat’s response was solemn:

Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord (2 Chron 20:18).

The next day, the men assembled for battle. Jehoshaphat in faith declared,

Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed (2 Chron. 20:20).

Then, after taking counsel, Jehoshaphat appointed singers to go before the army praising God. “And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the [invading army] and they were routed. The invaders turned against each other and self-destructed without Judah having to fight! The Judahites returned home with great rejoicing!

We are also told that Jehoshaphat tried to make ships that would traverse the sea to Ophir to retrieve gold. Those ships were constructed in a joint scheme with Ahaziah, the king who had succeeded Ahab to the Northern Kingdom throne. The construction took place at Ezion-Geber, a town on the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aqaba. Again, this effort at cooperating with the wicked did not fare well. Because of the joint collaboration, the Lord saw that the ships were destroyed before they ever left the port (2 Chron. 20:37).

One final blow to Jehoshaphat’s efforts came after his death. His successor to the throne, his son Jehoram, was the husband to Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter (the “marriage alliance”). Jehoram was an awful king. He lost territories, he lost his family, he set up worship sites in the high places, and “led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom” (2 Chron. 21:11). In contrast to his father who sent priests and officials throughout the land teaching the Law to the many villages and

towns, Jehoram “made Judah go astray” (2 Chron. 17:7-9; 21:11). Jehoram died after eight years and his tombstone might as well read what the Chronicler wrote:

He departed with no one’s regret (2 Chron. 21:20).

He was not buried with the others in the tombs of the king!

## CONCLUSION

As we make our way through the history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, we see many kings that, while not perfect, were recognized for trying to do right before God with a good heart. We also see kings that had no such compulsion. The Prophet Historian paints a picture that consistently draws the attention to the heart of each king, whether he was seeking and trusting God or whether he was bent on his own purposes. While not every event turned out easy or successful in earthly eyes for the followers of God, those kings and their people were clearly kept within his care.

With that in mind, we offer the following Points for Home.

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes”* (2 Ki. 17:13).

When we read the tragic events that followed bad decisions and sinful leaders, do we think that God reached down and miraculously caused those bad results? The Scripture teaches yes and no to that. The results are the results from actions of the people involved. Yet the Prophetic Historian saw that God was at work, behind the scenes as it were, to see that the tree bore its proper fruit.

This is a principle that is no less valid today. Paul warned his Galatian readers, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7-8).<sup>17</sup> God is the one who will not be mocked, yet the flesh produces the corruption. In other words, God does not necessarily sit with a laser gun ready to fire out at anyone choosing sinful disobedience. Still that sinful disobedience

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<sup>17</sup> No, Paul was not also written by a Deuteronomist Historian! He had the teachings and warnings of Deuteronomy available, just as the Prophet Historian did!

results in bad things. Bad judgments bring bad results. Sin breeds sin. It is as simple as putting one's finger in a fire produces a burn.

For some reason, we often try to avoid this as recipients of God's grace, but grace is God's eternal gift of forgiveness. It is not muting his principles of sin's tragic consequences. "God is not mocked..."

2. *"O Lord, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you."* (2 Chron. 14:11).

I love these stories. I love to read of those who are so beaten down, so desperate, that they have nowhere to turn. People who see only closed doors and no way out. People who have put their trust in God, but find the world stomping out their best hopes and needs.

These cry out to God, they fast and seek him, they know deliverance can come from no other place. Then, God comes in victory.

Where are your areas of challenge? Where do you need divine intervention? Where are you desperate for the help of the Almighty? Cry out to him. Seek him. Put your best praise before your battle scheme and army and watch the God who inhabits praise come to your rescue. If he does not come immediately, then keep your faith and keep seeking him and his will. He will not let you down! Even the martyrs had a vision of God as they left the earth in joy! (Acts 7:55).

3. *"Abijam... Asa..."* (2 Chron. 13-14).

Abijam and Asa, father and son—two men with diametrically opposite reactions to the mercies and grace of God. Both needed God and received his aid in battle. Abijam took the success and let it go to his head. He added a dozen wives and worked to grow personally strong, allowing idolatry and offensive worship. Asa took the success and it renewed his faith and vigor. He cleaned house, destroying all offensive to the Heavenly Father, even removing his mother from her position of power and authority.

As God's blessings come, how do we react? Do we revel in them and soak them up? Or do we see his blessings as our opportunity to bless others? Abijam or Asa? These were real people living real history. They were not VeggieTale characters. They were like you and me. We have their choices in our lives today!

### **WANT MORE?**

Next week we continue our historical study of Israel, focusing on the Southern Kingdom of Judah. As we work our way toward the conquering of Israel, read up on Tiglath-pileser and Sennacherib! Email us your thoughts and questions at [wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com](mailto:wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com).