

Kings and Prophets 13-05-31b

We resume our study now. We're looking at the southern kingdom of Judah, the reign of its second king, in terms of being the southern kingdom, Abijah. And in spite of his foolishness and in spite of his misinterpretations and misrepresentations, God delivers him from a potential disaster where his entire army could have been wiped out.

In verse 15, it says, although they were surrounded, they cried out to the Lord, the priests sounded the trumpets, then the men of Judah gave a shout. So three things happened. They cried out to the Lord, the priests blew the trumpet, and then they gave a shout.

It kind of reminds you of what's predicted to happen when we are called to be united with the Lord Jesus. There is a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Those three sounds are associated with our deliverance, almost in spite of ourselves.

It happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah and God delivered them into their hand. Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter.

So 500,000 choice men of Israel fell slain. Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time. And the children of Judah prevailed because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers.

Now, I mentioned in the first study tonight that we have to be careful about drawing conclusions from circumstances. If we didn't have the rest of this chapter, we could have drawn a faulty conclusion and thought, well, that Abijah, all of those things he said was true. And when Jeroboam tried to surround him, God delivered him.

Look closely at these last verses that I have just read. One of several reasons why this deliverance was provided for Judah in spite of Abijah is because there's more than just Abijah up there. Who is following orders? Who has assembled and has responded obediently, even if privately disagreeing with this campaign of the king? The faithful people of Judah were just a couple of generations down from the days of David when they stuck with David and they stuck with Solomon and they stuck with Rehoboam, who was a foolish king.

But there is still a spiritual heartwood in Judah that persists and survives. And many of those men are in this army. Abijah is an extremely foolish and spiritually insensate king.

And he goes up and makes a foolhardy challenge, gets himself surrounded. But there is deliverance. Why? Because it's not just about Abijah.

Notice from the point of the surrounding, Abijah is never mentioned alone. The men of Judah gave a shout. The men of Judah shouted it happened that God struck Jeroboam.

It doesn't say Abijah shouted. It doesn't say Abijah prayed. Abijah is probably in nervous extremis at this point.

The children of Israel fled before Judah. God delivered them into their hand. Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter.

Abijah is riding on the coattails of his people at this point. He's a fool and he's a pervericating, spiritually destitute fool at that. But the men of Judah are granted this victory.

Struck them with a great slaughter, 500,000 choice men fell. The children of Israel were subdued at that time. And the children of Judah prevailed.

There is no credit given to Abijah here. He nearly got them all wiped out. The children of Judah prevailed because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers.

Point of application. If you serve under bad authority, if you serve under authority that is foolish, misguided, spiritually bereft, logically bereft, functionally bereft, common sense is an uncommon virtue with this authority, rely on the Lord God of your fathers. Trust God.

Remember the order that we quoted from the New Testament. Fear God, honor the King. Fear God, honor the King.

If the King is screwed up, your fear of God will be the basis for your deliverance. Who's going to win out, the King or God? Whose plan and purpose is going to be accomplished, the King or God? It's always God. For those who are the called according to his purpose, all things work together for good.

All things. The foolishness of the King works together for good. The satanically inspired attacks on the people of God work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.

This is an overriding supernatural principle. People who operate in the natural world cannot understand it. It doesn't make sense.

Why would you follow a foolish leader? Why would you support and honor a crazy King? Because we fear God first. And it is only at the point that you receive a horribly illegal order. I always think back, it's before some of y'all's time, but Lieutenant William Calley in Vietnam got in big trouble because he wiped out a village and claimed he was doing it under orders.

Well, I'm sorry, but there is a point where even when the King, if the King says, do not preach the gospel, I mean, there is a point where there is a line that is crossed, but this is military strategy. This is national policy. This is something that's within the purview of the King.

There's nothing illegal about the order that he gives to go and attack. It's immoral. It's unspiritual.

It is contrary to the guidance that God has given to the King. But these soldiers obey their orders and because they are obedient and because they cry out to the God of their fathers, God delivers them in spite of their leader. And their leader is probably going to claim that this is a

wonderful victory.

And he's going to take credit when he has nothing to do with it. 19, Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him, Bethel with its villages, Yeshanna with its villages, and Ephron with its villages. So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah and the Lord struck him and he died.

The Lord dealt with Jeroboam. If God wanted the Northern Kingdom reunited with the South, God would do it. You don't have any indication that Abijah consulted the prophet or the priest or that he had any divine prerogative for going up and trying to reunite the Kingdom.

It seemed like a good idea at the time to him, but it's contrary to the will of God. Abijah grew mighty, married 14 wives, and begot 22 sons and 16 daughters. Now, if you only had this account, Abijah grew mighty, married 14 wives, begot 22 sons and 16 daughters.

How long would you think he was king? Based on verse 21. How long does it take to marry 14 wives, begot 22 sons and 16 daughters? 22 and 16 is 38, so this is at least two kids for every wife, right? And some of them might or might not have had children, but you would think, well, unless this was a big bunch of whirlwind courtships, this is a summary of the man's life as a whole. Many of these women he no doubt married long before he came to the throne.

His father was on the throne 18 years. He could have been a young man at the time that his father came to the throne, probably assembled much of this family as the crown prince, so to speak. And this is just a summary of where he ended up.

He didn't do all of this in three years, I don't think. Talk about one of the miracles of the Bible. The rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways and his sayings are written in the annals of the prophet Iddo.

This is one of the reasons the annals of the prophet Iddo have not survived, because the sayings of Abijah are largely worthless based on the sample we have here. So Iddo the seer, you know, for whatever reason wrote this stuff down, and so God destroyed his book. We don't have the book of Iddo the seer.

Now, I want to back up and address something that I have skimmed over in recounting this set of episodes. Look at verse 3 of chapter 13. Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors.

How many? Four hundred thousand choice men. I am here to tell you that given the size of Judah, it is impossible to field an army of 400,000 men in this day. Jeroboam drew up in battle formation against him with 800,000 choice men.

This brings us back to something we talked about many, many years ago, a few years ago. Fewer many, depending on your point of view. It's kind of the theme of this particular subject, which is the word *eleph* in Hebrew, translated thousand.

Eleph, E-L-E-P-H. If you Google this, you're going to get pages and pages about elephants. I know because I tried it.

Google has no knowledge of Hebrew, apparently, and so it figures, well, you just get tired and couldn't put ant on the end, and so it's eleph ant. Eleph ant gets much bigger than the ant. So eleph, E-L-E-P-H, translated thousand, here and elsewhere.

When we first did this study, I brought together a bunch of evidence and gave it to you. Since that time, other people have assembled similar evidence, and if you know how to manipulate Google to your own devious ends, you can, in fact, find some online references dealing with this subject. My suggestion is to include in your search the word Hebrew along with eleph and put a minus elephant.

You know if you want to eliminate results that have a particular word, you put a minus in front of it. A little free Google lesson here. If you're trying to get Joan of Arc and you keep getting Noah's Ark, put minus Noah and all the Noah results will go away, and you can do this repeatedly.

Filter your results. Every time you see stuff you don't want. I do this, by the way, it works as well on eBay if I'm checking for Dr. Criswell.

If I just type in Criswell, I'm going to get Millie Criswell, who's an author. I'm going to get Criswell's Guide to Tractors. I'm going to get Criswell's Confederate Money Guide.

So I can put minus confederate, minus Millie, minus anything else I want to filter, and you can get to what you want. So a little free text support there. Eleph, E-L-E-P-H, translated thousand.

What is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet all together? Aleph. If you have a consonantal text that lacks any vowels, what is the difference in Aleph and Eleph? Nothing. Aleph originated in the old Hebrew script, which became and was a reference and was both referenced and was referenced by other scripts, including ancient Sumerian and so on.

But the letter A, what does it look like today? A little side of a swing set, right? You got an upside down V with a cross piece, right? If you turn that on one side, just tip it over so it's laying on one of its flat sides, it is a cow's head, pointed nose, two horns, a cow's head. That is the origin of the letter A, the letter Aleph. The alphabet, or in Hebrew, the Alephbeit, begins with the head letter, Aleph.

Eleph is derived from that concept and inherent in it is the idea of chief, chief. We in the modern Western world are obsessed with precision, numbers. We want to know exactly when a tornado goes through Oklahoma, everybody's question, well, how many were killed? Bomb goes off in Boston, how many casualties? Any kind of a disaster, earthquake, anything else, what does the West want to do? What's the question the reporters are always asking every single time at a press conference? How many? How many were evacuated? How many taken? How many, how many, how many? This is a modern Western goofy idea that we have.

In the ancient Near East, people were not numerically oriented, they were concept oriented, they were group oriented, they were clan and family oriented. So when you say that there is an Aleph involved, think in ancient Near Eastern terms. In many cases, this is talking about chiefs.

In other cases, it is talking about clans. There is a good paper on this, which has been turned into a book, or is part of a book called Old Testament Warfare. The book is Old Testament Warfare published last year by Kregel by Dr. Boyd Severs, S-E-E-V-E-R-S.

I'm not saying get the book, I'm just saying this is where this comes from. It's a convenient summary. Most of what is in this paper I gave you in our last study of Aleph, but I'm going to reference his paper because it's all in one place and I don't have to go dig through my notes.

Large numbers are a problem in the Old Testament, and if you don't think it's a problem, think again. It's a problem. Two million Hebrews leaving Egypt is a problem.

People say it's a miracle. No, it's a problem. That's more Israelites than there were Egyptians at the time.

Well, yeah, of course, that's why they were so worried about it. No, trust me, it's a problem. You can't get that many people to fit.

You cannot get that many people across any gap in the Red Sea in one night. You can't organize and encamp people. I mentioned this when we were in Exodus talking about the camp of the Israelites.

If there were upwards of two million people, to physically put them in the camp, that cross-shaped camp that we talked about, if you're a Levite and you've got to go to the edge of the camp to use the bathroom, you've got to walk two and a half miles. The poor Levites outside the camp, right, can't have anything that defiles inside the camp, so, oh, sure wish I hadn't drank all that good water out of the rock, because now I've got to hike three miles to relieve myself. It becomes really not feasible, and it's unnecessary.

It results from a misunderstanding over the centuries of the ancient Hebrew text. So, Samson, did he kill 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass? Have you ever seen 1,000 people in one place? I know many of you have. Have you been to a concert or a large gathering, football game, whatever? I measure everything, as I've told you many times, by the assembled brigade of midshipmen, which was 4,300 people all in one place.

Go to Halsey Fieldhouse or wherever. The entire brigade is all assembled. I know what 4,000 people looks like, and I'm telling you that this had to be some kind of a titanium jawbone if Samson killed 1,000 people with it.

1,000? Do you not think that number 943 would say, you mean I've got to climb over this heap of 942 guys to go get myself killed by this guy with the jawbone? I mean, you would think after several hundred, they would say there's no future in this, but they apparently just lined up, you

know, 950, 951, 952, 953, whack, whack, whack, 1,000 guys with the jawbone of an ass. Now, could God have performed this miracle? Yes. Did God perform this miracle? No, he did not.

It is a misunderstanding of the word LF. Remember Joshua and I or AI after Jericho? Remember there was an ambush, and when we talked about this one, we went through the book of Joshua. Did 30,000 troops of Joshua's hide in ambush behind a hill outside of I? There weren't 30,000 people in the town.

Can 30,000 people hide behind anything remotely resembling a hill? I could not hide a fraction of that number behind anything that could respectfully be called a hill. 30,000 is what it says in Joshua 8. Well, God could, of course, have done these things, but that doesn't mean that he did. There is a way to understand this more reasonably and more accurately in my view.

Other examples of this, and let me just give you one example to turn to. Go to 1 Samuel chapter 11. We looked at this when we did our series, 1 Samuel.

It's just a few pages back from where we are. 1 Samuel chapter 11. The Ammonites are attacking Jabesh Gilead.

Nahash, the Ammonite, came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead. All the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, make a covenant with us and we will serve you. Nahash, the Ammonite, said, on this condition I will make a covenant that I may put out your right eye and bring reproach on all Israel.

So the elders of Jabesh said, hold off for seven days that we may send messengers, and if there's no one to save us, we'll come out to you. So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, told the news in the hearing of the people. People lifted up their voices and wept.

Now there was Saul coming behind the herd from the field. Saul said, what troubles the people that they weep? They told him the words of the men of Jabesh. The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused.

So he took a yoke of oxen, cut them in pieces, sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen. The fear of the Lord fell on the people. They came out with one consent.

When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah, thirty thousand. Three hundred thousand in the days of Saul. David later on is going to take a census in 2 Samuel chapter 24.

Remember the famous census? Didn't pay the tax. Plague hits. I'd rather be in the hands of God than in the hands of man, and so on.

One million, three hundred thousand men. One million, three hundred thousand fighting men,

which implies families. If you say each guy's got four to six to ten to twelve people associated with him, parents not of fighting age, grandfather and father not of fighting age, wives, children, hangers-on, servants.

This is just the fighting men. The land cannot physically sustain that many people. They would have like five square yards of space standing there, this many people.

It's just physically not possible. So by comparison, we've got records. The Egyptians and Hittites met at the Battle of Kadesh in 1275 BC, which is 1275.

That's the time of the judges, right? And the Egyptians and Hittites armies, the total of the two armies was 40,000. We get this off the tomb carvings and whatnot. We know from these secular archaeological records that there were about 20,000 troops on each side.

20,000. This is the entire Hittite empire, the entire Egyptian army, 20,000. So the tiny patch of Israel is going to have these millions.

It's just not feasible. So what has happened is because of this, people have said, well, it's fantastical, it's mythological. The Bible is just a big myth because of these impossibilities, which is really unfair as an argument.

It stems from a misunderstanding. These are not exaggerations. They're not mythological numbers.

They are misunderstood numbers. So we're back to the word eleph, which is used in all of these passages. And it can mean thousand.

It can also mean other things. It can mean clan. We have a case of this in Gideon when the angel comes to him and says, hail, mighty one, when he's huddled in there trying to thrash.

You remember that? It's a real comical scene. Hail, mighty one. And he's in there hiding, trying to thrash indoors.

And he's all covered in nasty husks and things. But he says, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family. Well, clan there is eleph.

My eleph is the weakest in Manasseh. And Manasseh is a small tribe and I'm the least in my family. So it doesn't always mean thousand.

That's in Judges 6, by the way, 6.15 of Judges. Saul looked for David when he was on the run and cave of Adullam and so on, among all the clans of Judah in 1 Samuel 23.23. And the word is eleph, plural of eleph. Well, and as I've already pointed out, aleph and eleph are closely related.

So in many cases, what we have mistakenly done is translated thousand when it should be translated as chief or as unit, unit of indeterminate size. Again, they weren't obsessed with numbers in the old days. And so if you had a fit, what they recognized was reputation.

You're from the house of so-and-so. You're from the house of Jesse. You're from the house of David.

You're from the house of Manasseh or the house of Gideon or whoever. So if you showed up with some guys, that was an eleph. That was a clan representation.

And it could be five or 10 guys. It could be, I would say on average, probably up to 100. What this does effectively is cut these numbers by a factor of 10 in most cases.

And in some cases, much more. In cases where you have an addition, where it says there were 300 elephs and 500. Well, that's 300 chiefs and 500 mighty men.

Or there were 120,000 and 500. Well, that's 120 chiefs and 500 mighty warriors. And in a nutshell, without going to all of the passages, this helps us scale things properly.

Samson killed an entire Philistine unit with a jawbone. The Philistines sent a platoon, an eleph, a single military unit, and he wiped them out. This could have been 36.

I mean, it could have been a sizable number. He could have killed three, four dozen guys, not a thousand, but everybody in the unit was wiped out. Israel leaving Egypt at the time of the Exodus, there wouldn't be 600,000 troops plus their families, which gets you up to the 2 million mark.

They would have had 5,550 troops with their families. So for example, when it gives the roster of Reuben mustering 46,500 troops, when you look at it in Hebrew, it's 46 elephs and 500 troops. 46,500 is how it's rendered in your English.

This is 500 troops with 46 chiefs. Each chief has got a band of 10 to 12 guys. See how this works? So if you use the same approach in Numbers chapter one for all 12 tribes, you end up with 598 clans, just under 600 clans, and just under 6,000 troops.

These are family guys. These guys are coming out from being slaves, and they've got a band of 10 to 12 in each group. So these are basically squads, if you think of it, squads and squad leaders.

So you end up with 5,550 soldiers in the first census, 5,750 in the second, Numbers chapter 26. So if this number is accurate, how many total Israelites left Egypt? If you assume the same number of adult females as males, you have about 10,000 adults. If the community has the same number of youth as adults, then you have about 20,000 people making the journey from Egypt to Canaan.

20,000 instead of 2 million. This is reduced by a factor of 100 by the time you adjust. Now, 20,000 crossing an opening in a single night, 20,000 subsisting in the wilderness, water from the rock, 20,000 camping in a cross-shaped camp, much more feasible, much more in keeping with what archeology has determined was the population of Egypt at the time of the Exodus,

what the land can sustain, what can cross the Jordan.

Remember when they said God told Israel, there are seven nations in Canaan mightier than you? If each of these seven nations is mightier than the 2 million people that left Egypt, seven nations, each of which is mightier than you, well, that's 14 million in that little land of Canaan. It's just, it's impossible. There could not have been that many Canaanites.

It's impossible. There's not enough water, not enough land, not enough arable soil, nothing can sustain that many people in that small an area. The thing is what, the size of Rhode Island or something? I mean, it's tiny.

13 miles across and 20-something miles, I mean, 14 millions of people, not possible. No archaeological evidence that that many people have ever lived in the land until the modern day. And this would have made it like the population density of New York City all over Palestine.

It just isn't possible. So we have misunderstood this in some way. And I think this explains it.

This is much smaller than the dramatic 2 to 3 million that have often been said to have left. But keeping 20,000 people alive and organized for 40 years, Dr. Seaver says, would still represent an enormous challenge that required divinely orchestrated miracles. So it doesn't diminish anything but the inordinately large number.

An exodus and invasion force of roughly 20,000 better matches the number of early Israelites as estimated from archaeological records. These estimates put the number of Israelites at about 21,000 for the time of the judges, 55,000 during the early monarchy, 150,000 for the later Old Testament. So again, back to our passage, these are not accurate numbers in our English text.

They were much smaller groups. The proportion is valid. The confrontation is no less important.

But beware of drawing conclusions from these numbers. We have misunderstood the word eleph in much the same way that I think we may have misunderstood the word day in Genesis chapter 1. Maybe, maybe not. There are other cases where eleph does mean 1,000.

There are cases where yom absolutely means a 24-hour day. The trick is determining which is which. Moses' statement that the land contains seven nations more numerous, as I mentioned, is resolved by this.

Clans have different numbers of soldiers, perhaps as few as five, numbers 123, you know, five to ten in a clan. Well, these are armed men who can fight. And out of our clan, that's all we've got.

We've got grandpas, we've got disabled guys, we've got youngsters, servants, and so on. This is how many guys can actually, this is your militia, your National Guard guys. That's how many we can field, we can spare, and so on.

So that's, it comes up because we have this in our passage. But there is a valid way of understanding these. You have to take it passage by passage, look at it carefully.

But the Bible is reasonable. The Bible in its original text is accurate. But as I've often quoted when Paul says we have this treasure in earthen vessels, our English translation is an earthen vessel in which the truth of God's Word is conveyed and contained.

And we've got a few psychoceramics, we've got a few cracked pots here in our conveyance. Most of us have some ceramic ware, some pottery, and a lot of times it's cracked or chipped. We use it anyway, despite the flaw, because we love it and we love what we can put in it.

But it's hard to keep pottery perfect, as anybody who is associated with pottery knows. And in the same way, we're two steps removed in many cases in our English text. But God has, where God has not preserved the text intact, He has preserved the evidence to reconstruct it.

So the application of this is, do not pin a theological persuasion on a single passage. We have seen tonight that we've got to spend time studying, analyzing, comparing Scripture with Scripture, using our God-given common sense and reasonable information from God's natural world to inform our conclusions and to help us be susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit in arriving at the truth. Don't let anybody attack your faith by saying that the Bible's numbers are mythological.

There is a better explanation than mythology for these large numbers. Do not let anyone sell you a false theology by proof texting and giving partial testimony from Scripture. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and Scripture taken together.

This is why we spend time in the Old Testament and in the New, why we go from book to book and passage to passage and we compare Scripture with Scripture in your personal meditations, in your reflections, in your prayers, in your walk with God. Try to encompass everything you know. Don't walk up there like a bija and say, well, we've got the real priest, so we're in the right in anything we do, God's going to bless.

No, and the fact that God goes ahead and blesses doesn't mean you were right. It's sort of a comedy of errors, and he probably came away thinking he was the greatest king and greatest general that ever lived, and he's utterly, completely wrong. God did what he did for entirely different reasons.

We reflect on this and it improves us. It enables us to live a life that is more closely conformed to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a mind in us that is more like his mind.

It is humility. It is pursuit of the truth. It is seeking the road that leads through the straight gate to life.

Jesus said, I've come that they might have life and have it abundantly. It depends on our hearts, not our numbers. It depends on our pursuit of God, our love for God, not the details of our

theology.

So I hope this survey of the reign of a bija, brief though it was, has helped to reflect and reinforce those points. We'll pick up in our study with Good King Asa next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for its persuasive and compelling power in our hearts and in our souls. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will sensitize us and keep us malleable and teachable for these truths so that we can mend our errors, we can improve on our strengths, and we can walk and live in a way that is pleasing to you and glorifying to the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name.

Amen.