

Kings and Prophets 13-06-28b

We pick up our study now in 2nd Chronicles chapter 17, verse 11. We're reviewing the initial part of Jehoshaphat's reign. We've seen that in the third year of his reign.

By the way, that's a helpful detail to note. Jehoshaphat didn't come in immediately after the death of his father and just start wreaking all kinds of change. He took some time to observe, to figure out what was possible, what was helpful.

And I think it's not without significance that it says in the third year of his reign. This gives him a chance, even though he's probably grown up in the palace, it gives him a chance to know exactly what he is doing, how he's going to do it, with whom he is going to do it. I get the idea that these names in verse 7 and 8 are not happenstance.

I think he took time to get to know the priests and the Levites and those who would be qualified teachers and selected them carefully. It is wise to do a recon before you start swinging sticks and cats and everything else making changes. Look around.

Be patient. Learn. Listen.

Observe. Analyze. Evaluate.

Then, in measured steps, make your changes. This is classic good leadership, good management on Jehoshaphat's part. It's in the third year of his reign that he sends these leaders.

Notice it says, his leaders. Because in those first two years, he has looked around and found he probably had to do a little bit of easing out. His father wasn't really on his best game in the closing years of his reign.

Asa got to where he didn't consult the Lord on some things. Probably had people that needed to be eased out and retired out of their jobs. Fresh guys brought in to be leaders.

But after two years, Jehoshaphat has his leaders in place. Now he can move with confidence. Now he's got a good staff.

He's got good delegated authority types that will implement these policies in ways that he can have confidence in. So they taught in Judah, verse 9, they had the book of the law of the Lord with them. They didn't have somebody's resource.

They didn't write a book about the book about the book. It's the law of the Lord. It's a copy of the scriptures.

They teach from the scriptures. Taught the people. The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah.

Why do you suppose this is? The way this is presented, it's pretty much cause and effect, isn't it? God puts fear into the surrounding kingdoms, puts hesitancy and reticence in the hearts of those around them. God creates that wall of fire around the kingdom of Judah because people are responding. People are interested.

There is a resurgence of faith, obedience, attention to the word of God. And God honors his word above his name. Point of application.

If you make a priority, not just out of hearing the word of God, but of thinking about it and living in its light, setting it as a priority, God will do the same for us. God will do the same for us. Verse 11.

Also, some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and silver as tribute. Do you remember the problem that the Philistines were in the days of King Saul? All you have to do is put the time and the kingdom and the reign of Saul on one side of the paper, put the time and the king and the reign of Jehoshaphat on the other, and look at the difference. Saul had no end of problem with the Philistines.

It wasn't until David came along and needed a dowry that the Philistines really started getting pushed out of the way. God will create an environment of blessing when we put him first. The Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents.

The last time I remember Philistines sending presents is when they put the golden tumors in the ark and sent it back on the cart. Remember that? Rats and tumors. The Arabians brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats.

Again, you've got the LF issue there. We won't dwell on it, but these could be seven groups of 700 rams, seven groups of. But the fact remains that whether you look to the west or whether you look to the south and east, this is sort of the 5 o'clock, 10 o'clock areas surrounding Judah, whether it's to their east or to their west, God puts fear in their hearts, and these people are bringing presents.

They want to pacify. They want to keep the peace. So Jehoshaphat, verse 12, became increasingly powerful and he built fortresses and storage cities in Judah.

He had much property in the cities of Judah and the men of war, mighty men of valor in Jerusalem. These are their numbers according to their father's houses. Of Judah, the captains of thousands, Adna the captain, and with him 300,000 mighty men of valor.

Next to him was Jehohanan, the captain, and with him 280,000. Next to him was Amasiah, the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to the Lord, and with him 200,000 mighty men of valor. Every time you see 1,000 there, just put units.

These are companies that these guys command. There's not, in my opinion, literally 1,000 guys in each group. These numbers are impossibly large.

There's not enough room in Judah for these people to even stand upright. These are units. These are captains of companies.

In other words, they're battalion commanders, so to speak, or they're regimental commanders. And so Adna is basically a regimental commander and he's got 300 units of mighty men. He's got, whether these, you know, in the ancient world it's organized differently.

These might, I'm saying regimental commander, but that's just because of the number of units. These units might have been platoon size, company size, probably not much larger than that. It just becomes unwieldy.

You know, General Bradley in World War II didn't have as many troops. General MacArthur didn't have as many troops from the whole United States as are listed here when you add them all up. So these are units.

But what this tells you is that the result of this inculcation and this response to the word of God is that people are proud to serve. These are sort of militia units. They're kind of like National Guard.

They're not constantly marching and trooping. These are reserves, if you will. They've got families.

They've got property. They've got flocks and herds. They've got businesses, but they also serve.

Jehohanan has 280 units. Next to him, Amasiah, the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to the Lord. This is a special dedication.

You have to think of something like the Nazirite vow, a special level of dedication and commitment. With him, 200 units of mighty men of valor. In Benjamin, Eliadah, a mighty man of valor.

And with him, 200 units of men armed with bow and shield. Next to him was Jehozabod. With him, 180 units prepared for war.

These serve the king. Besides those, the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah. So these guys are closer to the professional army model.

They're going to be spending more time in uniform, as it were, than your average citizen soldier. They serve the king. Chapter 18, Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance, and by marriage, he allied himself with Ahab.

Now, here's trouble on a cracker. Ahab is the Ahab of I am married to Jezebel fame. This is the king of the northern tribes.

And remember, in verse 1 of chapter 17, Jehoshaphat strengthened himself against Israel, meaning he prepared his defenses in case they got the notion to attack. Now, he's got wealth

and abundance, but he has chosen to ally himself by marriage with Ahab. This is sort of a political, personal stratagem.

The guy wouldn't march against an in-law idea. After some years, he went down to visit Ahab in Samaria. When you look at a map, let's say this thing behind me is a map.

It's not, but let's say it is. Jerusalem is down here near Jericho and the northern end of the Dead Sea and so on. You've got the Jordan River going up to the Sea of Galilee.

Where's northern Israel? On the map, is it up or down? It's up, right? We just constantly think north is up, at least I do. Why does it say he went down? Any place from Jerusalem is down. You always go up to Jerusalem.

If you leave Jerusalem, you always go down. And that's not accidental. It isn't just because Jerusalem is located on the slopes of Mount Zion.

It is because figuratively and spiritually, when you leave the presence of God, the temple of God, the capital, as the king, if you're going out to war, David made a mistake staying in Jerusalem when he should have been out fighting with Joab in the days when he got tangled up with Bathsheba, murdered Uriah and so on. There's a time for kings to go forth to war and there's a time for them to come back. But there are other times when you should not go down from Jerusalem.

The whole 17th chapter showed us Jehoshaphat ascended, Jehoshaphat up, Jehoshaphat ruling and reigning in Jerusalem and doing these wonderful things. And don't miss the significance. After some years, he went down.

See where it says visit? Scratch out visit. That's in italics. He went down to Ahab.

He was in Jerusalem and he went down to Israel. And this is not quite a double entendre, but it's suggestive. He went down to Ahab in Samaria and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him and persuaded him to go up to Ramoth Gilead.

So Ahab, king of Israel, said to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, will you go with me? Notice against is in italics, Ramoth Gilead. And he answered him, I am as you are and my people as your people. We will be with you in the war.

He basically says at your service. Not only has he gone down, now he has placed himself under, at least in these words. Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, please inquire for the word of the Lord today.

Why does he say this? Because this has been his practice. He doesn't feel comfortable proceeding without this step. Please inquire for the word of the Lord today.

Point of application. Once a week is not enough to inquire for the word of the Lord. Inquire for the word of the Lord today.

It is a daily inquiry. It is a daily quest. It is a daily pursuit to be in the will of God.

This should be daily. And we say, well, that's great. It should be.

Ask yourself the question. Has there been a period of time recently where I didn't do this? Where I didn't go to the Lord every day? I didn't wake up in the morning dedicating the upcoming day. Every day when you wake up, it's just like a resurrection, isn't it? You've been gone.

You've been away from the world. You've been unconscious. If you didn't wake up, you never know you didn't wake up.

It would be all the same if you died in your sleep. But when you wake up, it's like a resurrection. You're given a life for that day.

We'll go to sleep tonight, Lord willing. Wake up in the morning. And we've been given another day.

Each day is like a lifetime. You're born in the morning and you die, at least I do, when I go to sleep. I'm gone.

I'm out of it. I am sensible of nothing. Don't hear anything.

Don't see anything. Don't think anything. Too deep asleep to even dream most of the time.

And then suddenly I emerge in a day. And the only reason everything around me makes sense is God has graciously given us these days sequentially. So the next one starts like the last one left off.

Unless something absurd happens overnight, you generally kind of pick up where you left off. And this is why we're able to make sense of life. But basically, each day is a life.

You come into the world in the morning. You leave the world at night. One of these days, you don't get any more lives.

You don't get any more chances. But we woke up this morning. We have this day.

We'll go to bed tonight. God will give us another day. Please inquire for the Word of the Lord today.

We look and say somebody that has no relationship with God and lives 60, 70 years has basically wasted their life, wasted their time on earth. Hear me when I tell you from the Word of God, spending a day without inquiring for the Word of the Lord is equally fruitless. It is equally tragic.

You've taken that lifetime and given it away. It is wasted. It is unfruitful.

If we do not begin and continue through the day inquiring for the Word of the Lord, not somebody quote me a verse, somebody read me a passage. What is God's will? What is God's purpose? How can I serve? How can I exercise stewardship over the things God has given me? How can I best invest this life, this day on behalf of the Lord God? How can I be a good and faithful servant? And if we don't spend the day that way, that is a life wasted and we never get it back. Have to try again the next day.

Please inquire for the Word of the Lord today. Circle it. It is today.

Now is the appointed hour. Now is the day of salvation. Hebrews, today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts.

Today. So the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, 400 men, and said to them, Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain? They said, Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand. Now, this is northern Israel.

This is Ahab married to Jezebel. He's got 400 yes men. He's already persuaded Jehoshaphat to go with him to Ramoth Gilead.

It's already clearly the intent of the king to go attack this city. He's already recruited the southern kingdom with its troops to go with him. So any prophet who wants to keep his job with Ahab, what's he going to say when Ahab says, We're going to Ramoth Gilead to attack it.

Should I do it or not? What are they going to say? Oh, king, great idea. Love it. Love how that looks on you.

That's perfect. Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat isn't buying it.

He's, for many years, been dealing with genuine prophets of the Lord, genuine teachers of the word, actual faithful priests and Levites. He has spent some years cultivating these guys and sending them out into the land, listening himself to their teaching and their exhortations. So he knows a clinker when he hears it.

And he says, This smells like fish. Jehoshaphat says, Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of him? What kind of prophets are these? They're prophets. Prophets of what? Point of application.

Just because somebody says they're a pastor, just because somebody says they've got a church of a certain denomination, what are they a prophet of? Who do they serve? Whose message do they communicate? Jehoshaphat said, Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here? These are prophets, but they're not prophets of the Lord. Important qualifier. So the king of Israel said, Jehoshaphat, there is still one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesied good concerning me.

I hate him. You know this from your past excursions through the word of God, especially the

law of Moses. What is the one requirement, the absolute requirement of a prophet of the Lord, a true prophet of God? What do you know about it? He's never wrong.

God says, If a guy says he's a prophet and says there's a word for me and it doesn't come to pass, he is not a prophet of me and you better get well away from him because his time on earth is going to be short. So this guy never prophesied good about Ahab and guess what? It always comes true. He's accurate.

Don't bother me with the facts. Don't give me the truth. Don't tell me what's really going to happen.

Leave me in my dream. Row, row, row your boat. Life is but a dream.

I hate him because he never prophesied good concerning me, always evil. He is Micaiah, the son of Imlah. Micaiah, the son of Imlah.

So Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say such things. So the king of Israel called one of his officers and said, Now notice, it is too late for Jehoshaphat to be protesting about Ahab's attitudes, words, and mode of operation. This would have been a good thing to think of before he allied himself by marriage with Ahab and agreed to go with him and place himself at Ahab's disposal, troop-wise.

He's committed. If they decide to go, regardless of what the prophet says, he's already told Ahab, I'm with you, man. You are as me.

My troops are as yours. All for one, one for all. Clink the swords, three musketeers, here we go.

So Jehoshaphat says, Let not the king say such things. Well, it's a little late for that. The king of Israel called one of his officers and said, Bring Micaiah, the son of Imlah, quickly.

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, clothed in their robes, sat each on his throne, and they sat at a threshing floor at the entrance of the Gate of Samaria, and all the prophets prophesied before them. You've got to imagine the moment, the pageantry, the spectacle, all of this regality on display, twin thrones. It's almost the Beatles reunion.

It's almost John, Paul, George, and Ringo getting back together. You've got the northern and southern kingdom on the same side. Isn't this great because the enemy of my enemy is my friend? And so it's almost like a reunification, dreams of them getting back together.

You have to have lived in the 60s and 70s to appreciate the Beatles reference, but people just agonized for decades about the Beatles getting back together. There were other people that said good riddance, but there were those that said, oh, and then John got shot and Harrison died, and now if they're going to reunite, it'll be in the hot place. But the idea here is that the two kings seated side by side, it's almost the united kingdom.

And people say, oh, isn't that encouraging? Maybe it'll happen. It'll be like a dual kingship.

That's why you have this sort of step back.

We're waiting for Micaiah, and to build tension in the story, the author gives us this backdrop. He says, keep in mind, this is how it looks. Why does he do this? Because we're building some anticipation for when Micaiah comes, and this is context.

It's situational context. They're all sitting there, and all these prophets, it's kind of like Mount Carmel later with Elijah and all the prophets and their histrionics and their mumbo-jumbo and their incantations, and they huddle and they come together and they say, we've determined the augers are good. We tore a bird apart and its gut spelled victory or something.

They had all these different ways of determining the future. It was just a bunch of mumbo-jumbo to fool the public. They gave the politically correct answer.

So Zedekiah, the son of Canaanah, had made horns of iron for himself. And he said, he's got a Viking hat. He's got a real impressive hat that he's wearing.

I assume this is where the horns go on the head. He didn't grow them, so he's wearing this big, heavy hat. Remember at the time, even at this relatively late date, iron is a relatively new technology.

You've been in the Bronze Age all the way down to the time of Saul. Jonathan and Saul had the only iron things. But the Philistines had the monopoly on iron.

And when Israel defeated the Philistines, they got the iron industry. And now this is in Samaria, so he's got these big iron horns. It's the strongest thing in the world.

Nothing's stronger than iron. I have to wonder if they're rusty. They hadn't invented steel yet, but they knew how to make iron.

So he's got this big, rusty, heavy hat on. And he's the most impressive of these 400 prophets. Thus says the Lord, with these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.

And he's running around like El Toro with the matador. Maybe another prophet's waving a cape. This is what you're going to do.

You're going to gore the Syrians until they are destroyed. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the king's hand. Now, keep in mind, they already gave this answer.

And Jehoshaphat says, you know, let's please get the prophet. They reluctantly go send for him. While they're waiting for him to appear, all of this demonstration is going on.

They're reinforcing and reemphasizing what they already said. They're acting it out. They're finding ways to dramatize it, to try to... And why would they do this? Why are they overdoing their prediction? Because every other time they've consulted Micaiah, he's been right.

And they've been wrong. And so they're just trying to make such a spectacle that nobody will pay attention when Micaiah shows up. Well, the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king.

Wherefore, please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement. Be positive. Don't rock the boat.

Don't make waves. Don't be a, you know, rain on the parade. Don't, you know, create a bummer.

Don't bring everybody down. Spoil the mood. Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that will I speak.

Point of application. This should be our personal policy. Don't back down.

Don't dissemble. Don't water down. Don't compromise.

If God has spoken on a thing, I said I introduced our class tonight talking about the need for balance and for judgment when it comes to being dogmatic. You know, be careful about being adamant and immovable and inflexible and insensible about things that are basically matters of application and interpretation for others. But when God has spoken and when you are asked, be ready always to give an answer to anyone that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

And, As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak. Being asked is permission to give the answer. Don't water it down.

Don't be politically correct. Don't soften the blow. You know, if God's word is a hammer that's going to break a rock, are you going to really try to hold the hammer back so that it just taps, makes a gentle little nudge? It's a hammer.

If the time comes to speak the word of the Lord, speak it. Be firm, be accurate, be knowledgeable, be prepared and don't hold back. It's not the time to save somebody's feelings when the word and the will of God are the issue.

So he came to the king. The king said, And he said, Go and prosper and they shall be delivered into your hand. But something about the way he said it was not convincing.

Ahab didn't say, Great, he finally gave me a good word. All right, pack up. You know, wagons ho.

He didn't say that. The king said to him, Which king is speaking here? Micah has got a long history with Ahab, doesn't he? And Ahab has berated him for giving him bad news. And so Micah has come in and sort of mockingly giving him good news.

And Ahab has made him tell the truth in the past. This is an old tired routine between them. They know each other well.

And Ahab knows he's lying and he's obviously making a point of lying. So the king says, How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? So he said, What is the setting? Why did the author back up? You've got two kings sitting in majesty and ornate august glory presiding over the great threshing floor plain with all of this overheated rhetoric on the part of the prophets. Micah says, The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I told you he would not prophesy good concerning me but evil.

Micah said, standing on his right hand and his left. Micah is standing there in front of two thrones, two kings with their retinue and their cabinet and their advisors and their regal splendor. And he says, You guys don't impress me.

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, all the hosts of heaven standing on his right hand and his left. And the Lord said, One spoke in this manner and another spoke in that manner. They're vying for the privilege.

Oh Lord, let me go. I'll make sure he goes up there and takes the blight away from northern Israel. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him.

The Lord said to him, In what way? He said, I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all of his prophets. The Lord said, You shall persuade him and also prevail. Go out and do so.

Therefore look, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these prophets of yours and the Lord has declared disaster against you. Then Zedekiah, the son of Kenaanah, remember him? What do we know about him? He's the guy with the big rusty hat with the horns. He's been out there exercising, you know, playing the bull with these horns.

Zedekiah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you? Micaiah said, Indeed, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide. This loses a lot in translation. We'll talk about this next time because this is the point where we're going to have to stop.

But there is physical rebuke. There is an insult that is delivered here by this guy with the iron hat. He knows that he's got the king and 399 other prophets on his side, so he's very bold.

Micaiah is standing there virtually unsupported. You don't hear Jehoshaphat speaking up at all. Why? He's already compromised himself.

He shouldn't be up there. He shouldn't have allied himself. He shouldn't be sitting there showing solidarity with this wicked king of northern Israel, but he does.

And what does it do? It renders him ineffectual. It renders him inconsequential. This whole exchange, you start way back here in verse 10 after picturing Jehoshaphat sitting on the plain, and you go through verse 11 and verse 12 and verse 13 and verse 14 and verse 15 and verse 16 and verse 17.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell you? But Jehoshaphat says nothing. Then you've got verse 18 and verse 19 and verse 20 and verse 21 and verse 22 and verse 23 and verse 24 and verse 25 and verse 26 and verse 27. Where is Jehoshaphat? In verse 28, he goes with Ahab.

You cannot rest on past victory, past faithfulness, past service, past good decisions. If you build momentum, great. You've got to maintain it.

You've got to keep it up. You can't say, Well, you know, I've done a lot in the past. Look at him.

He's ineffectual. He's passive. He is tongue-tied.

And he becomes a part of something silly after all of this wonderful work that he's done. Reminds you what Paul says in the New Testament, when he says, You began well. You were running well.

Who hindered you? Who tripped you? Who stopped you from moving forward? Well, we'll pick up this campaign against Raimund Gilead next time. But we see the good and bad sides of these kings. Follow the good.

Eschew the evil. Learn from the errors. If we're going to make errors, let's invent brave new ones that nobody's ever thought of before.

There's no point in repeating these that are recorded in Scripture for our instruction. It is a daily inquiry. What is the word of the Lord today? If we can just remember to ask ourselves that question every morning and revisit it during the day, each of these lives of a day that God gives us can count, can be invested, can redeem the time, even though the days are evil.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. And thank you for these examples that are powerful, that are compelling, that illustrate clearly for us what our priorities should be, what our function should be, what the exercise of our opportunities should be day by day. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.