

Kings and Prophets 13-07-12b

We pick up our study now, we're looking at the career of Ahab in the light of some of the problems that began for Northern Israel during the reign of his father Omri. And one of the things I wanted to mention is that there has been some archaeology done in the area of Samaria. Of course, the Assyrians eventually captured that city in 721 or 722, depending on whose chronology you want to use.

And Hezekiah in the southern kingdom of Judah, of course, is spared being captured and destroyed at that time. But one of the reasons the northern kingdom lasted as long as it did, lasted until 721 BC, was the strength of the capital city Samaria that Omri put together. It lasts from his time all the way down to 721.

And let me read you a little bit here from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Recent excavations in Samaria under the direction of Harvard University throw new light on the ancient capital of Israel. The first results were the uncovering of massive foundation walls of a large building, including a stairway 80 feet wide.

80 feet wide. That's wider than my mobile home was long. That's a big, wide staircase.

This building, which is Roman in architecture, is supposed to have been a temple, the work of Herod. Under this Roman building was recovered a part of a massive Hebrew structure believed to be the palace of Omri and Ahab. In the year 1910, the explorations revealed a building covering one and a half acres of ground.

Four periods of construction were recognized, which on archaeological grounds were tentatively assigned to the reigns of Omri, Ahab, Jehu, and Jeroboam II. During the time of Omri, the Syrians, of course, came in attack. Ben-Hadad's father defeated Omri, and Ben-Hadad I, I think I said Ben-Hadad both times because the first guy is Ben-Hadad I, the second guy is Ben-Hadad II.

But Ben-Hadad I besieged Samaria shortly after it was built. He forced Omri to make streets in the city for the Syrians. It's also likely that Raimuth Gilead was lost to the at this time.

Evidently, Omri was weakened in his foreign policy at the beginning of his reign by the civil conflict with, you remember, Tibni and that whole thing, where the civil war, and while he was busy fighting internal enemies, the Syrians took over on the outside. And of course, there's no blessing from God on them at that time. But he showed strength of character in his dealings with foreign powers, this is Omri, and regained control over the northern part of Moab as we learn from the Moabite stone.

Lines four through eight of the Moabite stone say that Omri was king of Israel and afflicted Moab many days because Chemosh was angry with his land. Of course, Chemosh is the god of the Moabites. But this very famous artifact, the Moabite stone, records the reign of Omri.

And he gave Moab a real hard time. He obtained possession of the land of Medeba and dwelt therein during his days and half the days of his son, 40 years. His son, of course, is Ahab.

Omri was the first king of Israel to pay tribute to the Assyrians under their king, Asher Nasarpal III in 876 BC. This, of course, is roughly 150 years before the demolishing of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 721. This is 876.

From the days of Shalmaneser II in 860 down to the time of Sargon in 722 BC, northern Israel was known to the Assyrians as the land of the house of Omri. All of their inscriptions, the tablets and records that we've dug up from the Assyrians, whenever they're talking about Israel, they talk about the land of Omri, land of the house of Omri. On Shalmaneser's black obelisk, Jehu, who overthrew the dynasty of Omri, is called Ja'u Abol Kumri, Jehu, son of Omri.

Omri entered into an alliance with the Phoenicians by the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. This may have been done as protection against the powers from the east and as such would have seemed to be a wise political move, but was fraught with evil for Israel. So that was Ahab's father.

That's how they got to the point of needing to retake Ramoth Gilead, which is on the east side of the Jordan. It's in what we call Transjordan now. Remember the two tribes that stayed over there in the days of Moses? And this always became a sort of a soft spot, the first places to get attacked and overthrown, more difficult to defend on the other side of the Jordan.

So that's why he recruits Jehoshaphat to come help him. So now we're back in 2 Chronicles 18, 1 Kings chapter 22. And there are details in each of these chapters that complement each other and are not found in the parallel account.

1 Kings 22 tells us three years passed without war between Syria and Israel. Then it came to pass in the third year that Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went down to visit the king of Israel. Went down from Jerusalem, of course, even though it's north.

And the king of Israel said to his servants, do you know that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria. He doesn't want to relinquish it. Because this, of course, is one of the first stepping stones to go back and retake the northern kingdom.

He's just biding his time. Why? Because he wasn't killed like he should have been. Because they have made a treaty with him, which he should not have made.

Point of application. Think carefully before making commitments. Pray and seek God's face before making commitments, especially long-term commitments.

Our word should be our bond. And you can't decide that it was ill-considered, ill-conceived, wasn't well thought out, had unforeseen implications or complications, and just renege. This is what people do with their marriage vows, with their employment contracts, with their oaths that they take to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and not reveal its

secrets to our enemies or to the press.

People take these things lightly. They say, well, I think now that the situation has changed and there's a need for me to do something different. And it doesn't matter what I said yesterday or the day before.

Today is today. And I think these people are untrustworthy. You can't count on them.

They don't keep faith. Someone says, I will not reveal this confidence, this thing you've told me privately. I won't reveal it.

And they say, well, I'm going to reveal it. It's just too juicy a story to not tell. We don't want to be that kind of person.

So, think carefully before you say you will or will not do a thing, because God looks upon it as a binding oath. God doesn't come down to Ahab and say, this cheating, evil, pagan king, you're not bound by the promise you made to him. God says, your hands are tied because you have made this.

You can't go pursue him and kill him now. You've made a promise to him. Remember the earlier oath that was made when people in the land came and dressed up in old clothes and brought moldy bread.

And we've come from a far country. We're not the ones you're supposed to wipe out. And once that covenant is made, it's made and they become hewers of wood and haulers of water, but they're not killed.

God looks upon our pledges, our commitments as made before him. So, stop and think. Just saying yes to someone.

Will you come? Will you do this? Will you be there? Will you do this thing? You are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a child of God. And the commitments that you make are before God.

If you make them, keep them. If you say you're going to do a thing, do it. If you say you're going to be somewhere, be there.

Be on time. Be consistent. Be reliable.

Nobody should be more consistent and more reliable than a child of God. If you cannot keep that commitment, don't make it. Because in God's eyes, it is made before him.

What we do, we do before God. Whether we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord.

Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. We represent him on this earth. Is God consistent? Is

God faithful to keep his promises? Does he change his mind and say, well, I didn't know when I made this commitment to save you that you were going to be such a rascal.

I'm not going to save you. I'm going to put you in the pile that's going to the lake of fire. He never does that.

He never goes back on his word. And we shouldn't either. So the key to that is don't make commitments you can't keep.

Pause and consider. If somebody asks you and you're not sure, say, let me think about that. I'll get back to you.

It's an easy thing. It's polite. It's courteous.

Nobody's going to fault you. Let me give that some thought. Let me give that some prayer.

I'll get back to you. Before I commit to that, let me make sure I don't have a conflict or it's not something I can't keep. Just slow down.

Don't be quick to respond. This guy is flattered because these guys come with the ropes and the garments. And this mighty king that Ahab has been quailing before is suddenly humbled before him.

And he's feeling very generous. He's victorious. And he makes a bad bargain.

And now it comes back to haunt him. And it's going to eventually result in his death, as we will see. Because Ben-Hadad, once the pressure's off, he doesn't have any feeling of commitment before God.

He said he would give the cities back. He's not accountable to the Lord God in heaven. So he says, man, I said I would, but I don't think I will.

So now they've got to go take it by force. So Jehoshaphat said to the king, I am as you are my people, as your people, my horses, as your horses. This is a bad bargain by Jehoshaphat.

He doesn't say, let me consult the Lord. Let me find a prophet before I make this commitment. He's tardy.

He's after the fact. He makes the commitment. Then he calls for a man of God, right? Learn a lesson from watching these kings.

Don't fail to think, to pray, to consider beforehand. Saves us a world of grief. Saves others a world of grief.

If you flip over, I've been reading from 1 Kings 22, flip over to 2 Chronicles chapter 18. This is where we were a couple of weeks ago. Jehoshaphat says in verse four, please inquire for the word of the Lord today.

That would have been a good thing to do before he ever went away from Jerusalem, before he ever allied himself with Ahab. What kind of alliances does Ahab make? Look at his marriage. By the way, remember when it says he allied, that Omri allied himself and Ahab allied himself with these guys up in the north? That was by marrying his son to Athaliah.

That's how that alliance was made. So it doesn't bode well. Ahab's and Jezebel's daughter is going to be a part of this alliance.

So Jehoshaphat says to the king, please inquire for the word of the Lord today. The king of Israel gathered the prophets, 400 men, said to them, shall we go to war against Raimath-Gilead or shall I refrain? They said, go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand. Now, why would they say this? We have a little bit more context now than we had last time we covered it.

Why would they say this? What's Ahab's batting average against the Syrians? Two for two? And they figure, hey, you know, a man of God came and told him he was going to prevail and he did against overwhelmingly uneven odds. So yeah, odds are you're going to prevail. Big army, got an ally.

They're just spitballing here. They're just figuring, well, you've got an ally, you're going to make it. Jehoshaphat says, is there not still a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire him? Why does he ask for a prophet of the Lord? Because there aren't any prophets of the Lord.

Why aren't there any prophets of the Lord? What has Jezebel been doing for the last many years? Hunting them down and exterminating them one by one, bribing people, paying people. She has confederates and spies all through the land. This is the reason Obadiah had to hide these guys in a cave.

And he's real proud of himself for having done so. We'll get back to that later. But the King says, well, there is still one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil.

He is Micaiah, the son of Imla. So Jehoshaphat says, let not the King say such things. So the King of Israel called one of his officers and said, bring Micaiah, the son of Imla quickly.

Now this is interesting because what do we know about this situation? Ahab knows a guy who knows a guy who knows where Micaiah is. Jezebel does not know where Micaiah is. If she did, he'd be dead.

So Ahab doesn't turn this guy into his wife's extermination squads. Why? Deep down in his heart of hearts, he wants to have that last card to play. If I need to know what God actually says, I still know where there's one guy who will tell me.

I don't want to cut that last lifeline. I do want to be a millionaire and I want one more lifeline to phone a friend. I'm going to get God on the line.

If I absolutely am an extremist and have no other option, I've still got this one guy. And this is part of the distance between him and Jezebel is that there's stuff she knows that he doesn't know, stuff he knows that she doesn't know. And this is one of those facts.

So he called an officer and said, bring Micaiah, the son of Imla. So the King and Jehoshaphat clothed in their robes, sat each on his throne. They sat in the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria.

And as I mentioned before, we back up to get the splendor, to get the drama and the glory and how regal and ceremonious this all is. The threshing floor is flat. Everybody can see it.

There's a huge crowd gathered around. It's a pompous, celebratory occasion. They're about to go.

And it kind of reminds you of Ben-Hadad when he got his 32 Kings. They were very regal, but not very military. And so the first battle, they got their helmets handed to them and their advisors went to Ben-Hadad and said, next time you need to take some actual fighting men.

You can't just overwhelm them with your pomp and splendor. Look, I've got 32 Kings bow before me, you know, surrender. And they didn't.

And they got their helmets handed to him. So he went back the next time with generals who could operate in the plains, but they got their helmets handed to them and the wall fell on them and so on. But trying to overhaul them with pomp, well, Ahab doesn't learn the lesson.

What is it that Ahab does not learn? God has demonstrated to him, not once, not twice, not thrice, but four times now that he is God. And having God on your side is a good thing, but God isn't just on your side on a whim. He's got requirements.

You can't disobey and disregard God for long. He is willing to meet him more than halfway, but you've got to come out and meet him. Well, Ahab has no such intention.

This is now his fifth chance, fifth and final chance. And the man of God initially goes along with the pomp and regal splendor of the day and, oh, yes, go up, everything's going to be great. So after these others prophesy in verse 11, go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the king's hand.

The messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him saying, now, listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encouraged the king. We know Micaiah is at some distance and isn't privy to what's been going on because the messenger has to fill him in. And he says, what the Lord tells me to say, that will I speak.

Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain? He says, go and prosper. They shall be delivered into your hand. Now he says, I can only speak what God tells me to speak.

What did God tell him? Yeah, go on up. The king said, how many times shall I make you swear that you will tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? You get the idea that this is not the first encounter between Ahab and Micaiah. He always tells me what I don't want to hear.

Well, what's the problem? Is God just contrary and recalcitrant? Who's got the problem here? And some kind of way Ahab doesn't figure out why don't I just change? How hard would it be to just serve the Lord God of my fathers, the God of the covenant, the God that has anointed me to be king over Israel, allowed me to be king, given me this opportunity, communicates with me when I ask, why don't I just follow him? How nonsensical is this? We can ask ourselves the very same question, can we not? How many different ways, how many different times, in how many different studies and books, in how many different sources has God communicated his presence and his will and his word to us? How interested, how committed, how dedicated are we? And if there's any problem between us and the Lord, and for a lot of us, I think, thankfully we've listened and we've heard and we're doing our best to move forward. But if there's ever a distance that develops, we know it's our fault. And we can get this mindset.

And it's something to watch for and to guard against, to not become complacent, not think, well, I had a victory twice before, so I'm just going to assume that this third time I'll have a victory. And if the man of God says, I won't, I ought to pay attention. And we just don't like to hear what we don't like to hear.

So Micaiah tells him in verse 16, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains as sheep that had no shepherd. Remember the previous battle, what did they look like before the armies of the Syrians? Like two little flocks of goats, but they were flocks. They were gathered, they were together and they prevailed.

Micaiah says this time, I don't see the little flocks prevailing. Now you're like sheep scattered on the hillside and the shepherd's gone. Hmm, what happened to the shepherd? Who is the shepherd in this picture? The Lord said, these have no master.

Let each return to his house in peace. So they're going to be scattered and defeated, but they'll be spared. But the master is gone.

So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, didn't I tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. Micaiah says, therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left.

And the Lord said, who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead. Do you see why the first answer that Micaiah gives is yes, go up. Because if he accepts that he's going to go up and the judgment of God is going to fall.

If he doesn't accept it, he's going to get this prophecy and he's going to go up anyway. So it doesn't matter which word he gets. Isn't this a tragic thing.

Would it be awful that no matter what church you go to, no matter what Bible you read or what interpretation you follow, whether you listen to God or don't listen to God, your life turns out equally badly. Who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead. One spoke in this manner and another spoke in that manner.

They're all volunteering. The spirits of God are volunteering to go deceive Ahab and get him to trip and fall. Why? Because they know it's God's will and they're thinking up ways.

I was talking to my sister earlier this week about my theory, my hypothesis, almost completely lacking in any evidence except the pattern that God involves his creatures in his plan, but that the angels were somehow involved in creation. That God will state a purpose and God's creation, if they love God, if they understand his purpose, want to get involved and want to be a part of fulfilling it. God could evangelize all of us entirely with his Holy Spirit.

He could reveal everything we need to know and the transaction could be completely between us and God. But what does he do? Every single one of us, you think to the time when you got saved, how did you get saved? Some person shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with you. You heard it either from a parent or a friend.

Some human being spoke the truth of the gospel out of the pages of scripture. God involves us in bringing each other to knowledge and faith of a saving kind of the Lord Jesus. We're involved.

God could minister to us. God could answer our prayers. God could bless us.

God could provide for us directly. But how does he do it? He distributes gifts among us and lets us be involved in his blessing. I get blessed because God gave you a gift.

You hopefully get blessed because God gave me a gift. God consciously involves us. And to the extent that we are willing, we have the privilege of participating.

That's what these angels do. It's not like they're malicious, rubbing their hands. Oh, yes, let me have somebody trip and fall.

It's not about Ahab. It's about pleasing God, serving God. God says, I've got a purpose here.

Who will serve it? And one and another says, I'll do it. I'll go. And that ought to be our attitude.

If there's something that needs doing in the plan and purpose of God, I'll do it. I'll go. I could do it this way.

I could do it. They're not only saying they'll do it, but they're saying how they'll do it in this manner or in that manner. They have ideas.

You think about the eternal future when we're all in the glorified state. God says, let there be something. Do you not think that we, like the angels, would step forward and say, Lord, I'd like to be a part of that.

And this is how I think it could be done. And someone else says, well, you know, that's a good idea. But, you know, I think we could add this or we could augment it with that.

Or maybe we could start with this approach and then do that. And God wants us to think, to participate, to bring what he has given us to the equation. So it's a God-given ability to be creative in problem solving, to be creative in serving God.

I think it has happened in the past. I think it happens in the presence of God with his angels now. And I think it will happen in the future with the angels and with us.

Why do we face the tests and challenges that we face? Why do we have to cast about to find the way to go through it or to come out of it? Sometimes we work with each other. We try to help each other find ways through or beyond some test or some challenge. Why do we do that? We have to think creatively, don't we? We have to decide, in this situation, what's the best truth to apply? What's the best approach to take? Should I just convert this from a challenge to an opportunity, from a test to a blessing? Is it in how I look at it? Is it what I say? How active should I be? How energetic should I be in pursuing options that are available to me? Should I just sit and wait for God to drop a solution on me? Or should I go and ask and beat on doors and see which one opens? Why does God have us do that in this life? Think about it.

Because we, I think, will do this in the future. Look at God's servants. When he says, I want something to happen, they come up and say, I will do it.

I will do it. And one speaks in this manner and another in that manner. Why? They're thinking creatively.

They're coming up with solutions based on their past experience, based on their knowledge of what God wants, based on their knowledge of the situation where they have. Well, this is the way. I'll be a voice amongst his false prophets.

I'll come to him in a dream. I think the thing that might impress him the most is if it's Jezebel's idea. I'll plant that thought in her evil mind.

She'll ram it through if anybody will. So one speaks in this manner and another in that. But think about it.

God encourages us to be creative, to be thoughtful, to be analytical. And we practice that now. That's what our tests and our challenges do is give us.

God could send an angel in a dream and say, well, Sam, the answer to your prayer is X. But he doesn't. Why? So that I can think, I can meditate, I can review what I know, I can pray, I can be creative. It's no accident that we're given this heaven.

How did the author of Chronicles know what went on in heaven? Because Micaiah spoke it. How did Micaiah know? Because God told him. Why did God tell him what went on in heaven?

Because we're supposed to know.

Why are we supposed to know? All these things are written for our instruction. It's a reminder. God is going to expect thinking on our part.

So let's get with it. Let's think. So a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him.

The Lord said, in what way? Isn't that great? Just like the Lord Jesus asking questions of the disciples. God doesn't say, let me tell you in my sovereign omniscience how you're going to persuade him. God says, any volunteers? Spirit steps forward and says, I can do it.

I think I know how. God says, how? What's your thought? Is that not great? Does it not excite you to think that in the eternal future, God might come to us and say, I've got a little problem here to solve. And we'll have the knowledge and the experience and we'll say, Lord, I think I can solve that.

And God will say, in what way? That's what he does now. He gives, he sets us a puzzle and we look at it and we say, well, I think maybe I know how I'm supposed to proceed. And we go to the Lord and we say, Lord, I think this is how I'm supposed to proceed.

And God says, well, what are you going to do? It's a conversation. God draws us into thinking, into his thinking, into his truth and into his plan and purpose. I just think it's the most exciting thing that he doesn't just tell us everything.

He asks us and expects us to step up and be mature and complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. And this is a good work. The destruction of the evil king is a good work.

Amazing, isn't it? Reminds me of being in the military, slaughtering the enemy is a good work. So, 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 prevail.

God says, that is a good plan. It'll work. You go do it.

Therefore, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you. So Zedekiah, the son of Canaanah, 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? And it's, again, hard to decipher. And I've managed to run myself out of time tonight.

This is a really great little snide remark, and I'm going to interpret it next time. The guy's name is significant. It doesn't just say one of the prophets.

It gives us his name. There's a reason. This saying, there's a reason.

And it brings to a distilling point everything that's going on in this. Even as the truth of God strikes the ears of these guys, it's just like Jesus speaking to the Pharisees. All they can do is

react, not respond, because they have no heart for God.

They have no desire for the truth. They want to launch a zinger. They want to score a point.

They want to impress the assembled kings in this great pompous environment and occasion. And so he says, well, I've really, the king's going to remember me today because I got off a good one, a bon mot. Well, we'll see how this works out next time.

But think about the patience of God, the grace of God, extending himself time and again in this wicked and perverse generation. But there is a limit to God's patience. There's a limit to his grace.

We say, you know, grace that is greater than all our sin. It is greater than our sin, but it is not available forever. The door of the ark will shut.

The flood will come. This age will end. Our life does end.

Our time of opportunity does pass by, and there are points of no return that we can pass. And when that city goes up, when Jericho is rebuilt, there is an end to the opportunities for Ahab. He's tolerated his wife one day too long.

He's tolerated and encouraged evil in Israel one day too long. We want to learn from this. And you look at Jehoshaphat, who's on the banks, who's on the edge of this, who has come up and associated himself, and he is going to almost lose his life.

He's going to come very, very close. And this is God's warning to him. God is showing him in this close view, you'd better wake up and pay attention to the things you know are right, because here's the judgment that comes.

As we look around and see the judgment of God in our day, it is a reminder. The same God will analyze us, and we do not want to be in line for judgment. We want to learn from these illustrations in the past.

We want to learn from the situation in the present and be on the positive side, be those willing and faithful servants that are thinking about ways to implement the plan and purpose of God, not something else, not some other agenda. Well, we'll pick up here next time, but we'll close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for granting us these wonderful glimpses of things that happened hundreds of years ago, and yet they are so pertinent and so powerful as they illustrate your desire for us, your grace in pleading with us and wooing us to yourself, and yet also illustrating for us that there is a day beyond which that opportunity is not available.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts, help each of us to see the meaningfulness for our own lives. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.