

Kings and Prophets 13-07-19a

This is Friday, the 19th of July, 2013. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We'll be picking up in 1 Kings chapter 20.

We'll take just a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer and then we'll begin. Father what a comfort it is to know that it is not by might nor by power. It isn't our natural gifts.

It isn't our native intelligence. It isn't our talent. It isn't our sincerity.

It is your Holy Spirit that enables us to live the life that you have called us to, to perform those tasks and complete those functions that we have been assigned to live the life that is ours in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the passage that is before us this evening. We thank you for the truth that it contains, the power that it imparts to our souls, the guidance that it gives our hearts as we contemplate the circumstances that we face and the decision and actions that are ours to complete and we pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless these things to our hearts as we look at them together.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. Well we have spent the last couple of weeks catching up the kings of Israel so that as we come to this confluence, the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, has come up and joined his alter ego, his parallel king up in the north, King Ahab. There's a lot that we have not covered about Ahab.

We have covered his forebears, but there is quite a bit of detail in his career that we have temporarily skipped over so that we can come to this point because we have arrived here by following the kings of Judah and following King Asa and in the final years of Asa you had Ahab coming to the throne and then Jehoshaphat comes to the throne. Jehoshaphat is a good king. He does many wonderful things.

He is admirable in a number of ways, but in the later years of his reign he makes one strategic error and it is a costly error. It looks beneficial in the short term. It makes sense.

People no doubt applauded it and admired his diplomacy and his foresight and his wisdom. It seems to benefit both the southern and the northern kingdoms and yet it lays the foundation for disaster and the reason is that his decision to unite with and support Ahab is based on just those considerations. Politically it looks like it makes sense.

Economically it looks like it makes sense. Militarily it looks like it makes sense. From a national security standpoint, from every different way you want to turn it in the human realm, it looks like it's a good idea.

The one way that it is not a good idea is looking at the spiritual priorities that he himself has set and followed in Judah versus those that Ahab has set and followed in the north and that one aspect in the invisible realm negates all of the common sense, all of the wonderful approval and

seeming reasonability of these others. So as we come now to chapter 20, once again, Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, gathered all his forces together. Thirty-two kings were with him.

Where does this Ben-Hadad come from? Just by way of completing our background investigation here, what does Ben mean? It's not a friendly mouse that Michael Jackson sings about. Some of you are way too young to understand that. Go back to Chronicles quickly, or actually forward I guess, and let's find out where Ben-Hadad comes from.

Looking back in the days of Solomon, the following events where the kingdom splits, you have the Syrians being defeated and Hadad of Syria has to flee and he goes all the way down to Egypt. This happened well before the days of the divided kingdom and while he is down there, he has a son named something so unpronounceable that from then after he's called Ben-Hadad. It is this individual who comes back out.

I ask myself, why is there such an animosity in the heart of Ben-Hadad toward Israel, toward northern and southern kingdoms both? Well the reason is he is upset because of his family history and this goes back to well before his own time. So when he comes back up, he's very angry and in the interest of time, I'm not going to review all of his youth, but once the kingdoms of Israel weaken, he leaves Egypt, comes back up, rebuilds Syria and now this is retribution mode. So when you come to 1 Kings chapter 20, you find him trying to retake the Transjordan region, refusing to leave it even though he's been defeated in an earlier battle as we saw last time.

So he has gathered all his forces, he's got 32 kings with him, horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and made war against it. He sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, thus says Ben-Hadad, your silver and your gold are mine, your loveliest wives and children are mine. Why does he do this? If he wants territory, if he's sort of an Alexander the Great type and he wants to expand his empire, why the personal insult? Why this sort of in your face attitude? Well, it goes back to the roots of the conflict, it goes back to his father Hadad and it goes back to his sense of injustice.

And the first point we want to note this evening is that there is a danger in righteous indignation. We see it in current events. There are things taking place, for example, in the state of Florida where a guy went on trial and people all across the country who do not seem to have really acquainted themselves with the facts of the case, who don't know really much about it, have drawn a conclusion and have changed their lives or spending their time in various forms of protest or various kinds of commentary and are trying to get laws changed and creating pressure all over the country.

There were riots in Los Angeles about the results of a trial about one guy in Florida. What is the root of this behavior? It is a sense of righteous indignation. I am indignant.

I understand this to be representative of a certain thing that I am against. We as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot afford this luxury of borrowing issues from other places and

spending our time and investing ourselves in things that God has not assigned us. And there is a principle, and I just want to mention briefly before we go forward here, because Ben Hadad represents this.

Let's say, for example, there is a wonderful evangelistic effort going on somewhere in the country. There is a wonderful missionary effort going on somewhere. There is a tremendous ministry effort taking place, and there are all over our country, all over the world, there are worthy missions, missionaries, evangelists, ministers, people doing the work of God.

It's legitimate. It's wonderful. God wants to bless it.

People are being blessed by it. Should you support it financially? Something is going on to relieve victims of a disaster. Should you support it financially? It's a fair question, right? We get faced with this all the time.

Should you support it in other ways? Should you go and join and be a part of it, perhaps? They're having a trip. They're going to go do some ministry work somewhere. Should you go? Well, it's a decision that we have to make, don't we? There are many more ministries than what we can support.

That would be a fair first conclusion, right? I cannot give to every good ministry, can I? I just can't. So which ones do I give to? How do I choose? There are many issues that face the country. There are many injustices.

There are many wrongs. There are many social inequities. There are many political calamities, economic calamities.

Which ones do I rise up and oppose or throw my weight under what I think is a protest or some sort of a solution? You and I have an obligation to be good stewards of our time, of our money, and of our attention. Is it good stewardship of our time to boil away over things like court verdicts, congressional decisions, legislation, Supreme Court decisions? How much attention and how much investment personally in discussion, in opposition, in letter writing, in protesting or whatever, how much of it constitutes good stewardship and when does it cross the line? Is this a fair question? Do you ever get faced with a request for your participation in some form with something that's not local? Well, of course you do. I do.

We all do. This sense of something being incredibly wrong is one of the avenues by which we are asked to oppose, asked to join in. I get emails from the homeschool advocates in Texas fighting for better textbooks, fighting for equity in the way science is taught and various things.

I get appeals from political entities. I get appeals from social action entities. I get appeals from ministries.

Help us. Send money to us. Come and join us.

Even pray for us. If I prayed for everybody that asked me to pray, I could never get off my knees, right? So here's my question to you. How much is good stewardship and how much crosses the line? Because it is incumbent on us, God demands of us, that we be good stewards of what is given to us.

So how do you know how far to go? Well, take a look. Pay attention to what happens here. There is an issue that faces northern Israel.

They're about to try to take back some territory that by rights is theirs, but Ben-Hadad won't give it up. Ben-Hadad promised to give it up, but he's not giving it up. The king of northern Israel goes to the king of Judah and says, help me solve this injustice.

Help me return this portion of Israel that by divine gift should be Israel's, but is being held by the Syrians. Come help me take it. So is it right for Jehoshaphat to go up there and help? Is that in fact territory that should belong to the nation of Israel, yes or no? Does Gilead belong to Israel, yes or no? Yes.

Good try. You're almost there. Yes, it does.

In the days of Moses, he gave permission for the tribes to stay on the east side of the Jordan, and that's a tribal land. It's a tribal inheritance. It's theirs by right.

They lost it through disobedience and faithlessness, and their territory got whittled down. And then God gave them victory over the Syrians, and Ben-Hadad said, oh, I'll give you back the cities and the way my father dominated your cities and stuff, now you can dominate ours. And he agreed to give it up, and that was part of sort of the treaty.

But he hasn't given it up. And so Ahab's up there saying, well, that ought to be ours. And hey, Jehoshaphat, why don't you come help me right this wrong? Isn't that what's happening? Is that a fair characterization? Here's the question.

You are Jehoshaphat. Should you go up and participate or not? And if not, which I think you have already figured out is the answer, why not? Is this a bad cause? Does it make good sense to ally and to mend fences and build bridges and try to heal the breach between the two kingdoms? Why would this be a bad thing? Improve relations, trade agreements, drawing the two sides closer. Maybe we can evangelize them.

Maybe we can bring them back to the spiritual priorities that we have in Judah. If I make a friend of Ahab, maybe I can get him to tear down some of these centers of idolatry and kind of return this, I'll be an influence on him. I'll be in his inner circle and I can woo him toward the Lord.

Maybe we can make an agreement where I can get the northern people to come down and celebrate the feast in Jerusalem like they used to. Wouldn't it kind of make sense on a lot of fronts? I would imagine that some of these were thoughts that Jehoshaphat had or counsel that

he received in going up there. It is wrong, wrong, wrong for Jehoshaphat to go up there and he's going to pay dearly for doing it.

He began well, but when he starts cultivating this alliance with northern Israel, you know what's going to happen to cement the deal? He is going to marry his son to a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The daughter's name is Athaliah. He is going to bring into his home and into his kingdom a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

And we're going to see just a few chapters hence that she is going to wreak catastrophic damage in Judah. This is wrong. Micaiah says this is a disastrous attempt.

God is not going to bless it. God is going to use it to judge Ahab. But be thinking, why do we care what happens to Ahab and Jehoshaphat? Because we care whether or not we are being good stewards of our time, our talents, our money, our opportunities in this life.

And looking at this we can figure out how do you know when you should participate and when you shouldn't, when you should support something that seems good on the surface and when you shouldn't. And I will offer you my first observation. This problem that Jehoshaphat decides to enmesh himself and his army in is not local.

It does not impinge on Judah. He wants to cultivate good relations with northern Israel and this is a problem that northern Israel has. And so he gets drawn into and between Ahab and Ben-Hadad.

It is a divided kingdom. It is a divided kingdom by God's word. God told them it would be divided.

There's a reason it's divided. There's a place for disaffected, disobedient, apathetic, indifferent, idolatrous Israelites to go and live and it's northern Israel. They've got their own idolatrous worship.

They've got their golden calves. They've got Dan and Bethel. They've got these corrupt practices that are segregated.

Faithful believers can either try to exist up there or go south and get closer to Jerusalem and dwell with people who have a higher interest in the true things of God. There's a reason why this kingdom is divided. In the same way that in a marriage what God has joined together, let no man divide asunder, works the other way.

What God has divided asunder, let no man try to join. You remember we just saw the rebuilding of Jericho last time? What God has sowed with salt, let no man try to un-sow and rebuild. And there's a warning there.

It's one of a total of about seven warnings that the northern kingdom gets in and through King Ahab. We only looked at about five of them last time, but if we had gone sequentially through

the ministry of Elijah, he gets, and through him the kingdom gets, seven wake-up calls, big warning gongs, seven opportunities to turn, and he misses every one. So this is what I encourage us to be watching for as we go through chapter 20 now.

Where exactly should Jehoshaphat have gotten this figured out? Because when you get a letter in the mail soliciting your financial support, when you get an opportunity to go be a part of something, when you are drawn by commentators or by bloggers or by news events to try to, I want to speak up and make a difference, I want to get involved in this cause, I want to right this wrong, I want to somehow engage in the struggle for this issue, stop and think about Jehoshaphat. Is it a bad cause? Not necessarily. But is it a cause that Jehoshaphat should be involved in? Not necessarily.

Well, how should he have known? How can we know? Look at this account now in 1 Kings 20. So messengers came in 1 Kings 20, verse 5, Thus speaks Ben, Hey, Dad, I have sent to you, saying, You shall deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children. I will send servants to you tomorrow about this time.

They will search. This was the first time that they had the confrontation. And as they went forward, God gave Ahab the victory.

Right? But in the meantime, there is a lot of history that goes on, and Ahab doesn't take advantage of that victory. He doesn't take advantage of the manifestation that God is God in Israel. And when you get to chapter 22, Three years pass without war between Syria and Israel.

Then Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went down to visit the king of Israel. And that right there shouldn't have happened. Seems innocuous enough.

There is no commentary in Scripture, but it should not have happened. What fellowship hath light with darkness? But he goes up there. Do you know that Ramoth and Gilead is ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria? Ahab says to Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth-Gilead? Jehoshaphat says to the king of Israel, I am as you are.

My people are as you are. I will join with you in this effort to solve your problem, which isn't a concern of ours. So we had the scene with the prophets and Micaiah.

How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth? And so he sees all Israel scattered on the mountains as sheep. In verse 17, These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.

These have no master. That's the ominous part of that pronouncement. Where is the master of the sheep of Israel? Well, he doesn't survive the confrontation.

So Ahab says to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell you? He would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. So in verse 28, Micaiah says, If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And he says, Take heed all you people.

That's verse 28. Take heed all you people. Take heed.

That's what we hope to do. The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you put on your robes.

So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now, would this raise any suspicions or any uncertainties at all in the mind of Jehoshaphat? You dress up like a king, but I'm going incognito. I'm going in mufti.

I'm going to wear a great big mustache and a rubber nose. They're not going to recognize me. Now, how he managed to convey this to Jehoshaphat, well, you know, Ben-Hadad will be impressed with your glory and splendor, but he's really angry at me and I don't want him to make me a target.

I don't know how he justified this. But the long and short of it is he says, look, I'm not wearing my crown and royal robes, but you be sure and wear yours. And, you know, the sad thing is at this point, Jehoshaphat doesn't realize that Ahab is using him more or less as bait, that he's making him a target.

Might as well put a great big orange target logo on him and a great big K on his head with a neon light. Here's the king. Kill him.

Kill him. And he's obviously taking some note of what Micaiah said. He is concerned that Micaiah's prophecy will come true.

So the king of Syria had commanded the 32 captains of his chariot, saying, fight with no one, small or great, but only with the king of Israel. Did Ahab somehow get wind of this? Did they have spies in the camp, some servant escaped that told him what was said? We don't know. But how do we know what the king of Syria told his kings, his under kings? Somebody communicated this information either before or after the battle.

So it was, verse 32 of 1 Kings 22, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, surely it is the king of Israel. Therefore they turned aside to fight against him, and Jehoshaphat cried out. I'm guessing that whatever the Hebrew equivalent of what was I thinking came out.

Ahab? I don't know what he cried out, but he yelled something. He cried out. And it happened when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel.

Maybe he's saying, I'm not him, I'm not him. Elsewhere, over there. We're not told what he cried out.

But apparently when he cried out, they figured out that it wasn't Ahab. Had they seen him before? I don't know how they knew. But they saw that it was not the king of Israel.

They turned back from pursuing him. Now, a certain man drew a bow at random. In the Old

King James, this is at a venture.

Drew a bow at a venture. And I can't tell you how many Criswell transcripts we've corrected, because nobody in the younger generation now knows that phrase. And so our transcripts all said, drew a bow in adventure.

Like, I'm going to adventurously, but it's at a venture, meaning just accidentally he just drew his bow and shot. There's a little poem, I shot an arrow in the air, it landed, I know not where. This is what the guy did.

He just popped an arrow off. He's just raining generalized artillery fire down from the sky. He's not aiming.

He aimed high. He just popped it in the air. It's got a huge arc.

He has no idea where it's going to hit. He hopes it hits something somewhere. But God guides this arrow.

Drew a bow at a venture, at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. Isn't this always the way? You've disguised yourself, you've gotten out of the center of battle, you've fooled all the kings, and some random arrow. This is sort of the gist of the legends associated with the battle at Troy and Achilles' heel.

Somebody launches an arrow and it hits the one part of Achilles that didn't get dipped in the river by his mother, the only place where he's vulnerable. Nobody's aiming at his heel. Nobody knows that that's a vulnerable spot.

It's a, quote, accident. Well, slips between the joints of his armor. What are the odds? So he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn around and take me out of the battle for I am wounded.

The battle increased that day and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians and died at evening. The blood ran out from the wound onto the floor of the chariot. Of course, this is significant based on the prophecies that had been previously delivered.

As the sun was going down, a shout went throughout the army, saying, Every man to his city and every man to his own country. What did Micah say? In verse 17, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd and the Lord said, These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.

The master is gone. The shepherd is stricken. The shepherd is missing.

The sheep have no further obligation to follow that shepherd. They go back to their home. You get the idea that this judgment is not so much on the kingdom at this point as it is on the king.

There could have been a huge slaughter. They could have been routed, disorganized, tracked down to the last man. We could be reading about tens of thousands that died on this day, but

they are told, Look, the king is dead.

This whole enterprise is thwarted. Just go home. And they do.

They melt away and they go home. So the king died and was brought to Samaria and they buried the king in Samaria. Then someone washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria and the dogs licked up his blood while the harlots bathed according to the word of the Lord which he had spoken.

Now, you see a text note there that says when they washed his armor, they washed out his chariot, and I think the original is they washed his armor. And the blood that came off the armor and out of the chariot is what the dogs lick up, which reflects your divine judgment. The rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, the ivory house which he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the king of Israel? Ahab rested with his fathers.

Ahaziah his son reigned in his place. So then you have a brief summary of the career of Jehoshaphat. And it doesn't even really mention his participation in the battle.

We have to go to chronicles. But Jehoshaphat had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. He was 35 years old when he became king and he reigned 25 years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. He walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. Also, verse 44, Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. And you think, well, give peace a chance, visualize world peace, what's wrong with peace? We're going to see that this was a horrifyingly catastrophic mistake.

And it is a mistake we do not want to make. There is a way that seems right, but it ends in death. He doesn't gain anything by participating in this battle except losing some men and participating in the defeat.

But the consequences of going up there and joining in it at all are horrendous. You and I have to be careful about what we choose to join, what we choose to participate in, what we choose to lend our support to. Whether it is time support, conversation support, monetary support, even prayer support.

We have to be careful what we choose to support because you can't support everything. So how do you know what to undertake? How do you know what to underwrite? How do you know what to join? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see what the Bible has to say about this.

And it will illuminate for us why Jehoshaphat should have known better. But let's pause here and take our break.