

Kings and Prophets 13-07-19b

We pick up our study now in 1 Kings and we've seen the outcome of this battle where Ahab recruits his southern king compatriot to join with him and try to retake territory that was originally given to the nation of Israel but has been lost through judgment and mismanagement. If you think about the career of these two kings, and we've left a lot out in the career of Ahab that we'll pick up, but in the southern kingdom, you remember how well Jehoshaphat began. The reforms that he instituted, the measures that he took in his reign, 2 Chronicles 17, verse 4, Jehoshaphat experienced the presence of God because he walked in the former ways of his father David.

He did not seek the bales. He sought the God of his father. He walked in his commandments and not according to the acts of Israel.

Not according to the acts of Israel. He was different. He was separate.

He charted a much better course. Therefore, the Lord established the kingdom in his hand. This is what's not happened in the north.

The kingdom is not established in Ahab's hand. There is a difference that God marks out. All Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches and honor in abundance.

And in 2 Chronicles 17, verse 6, it says, Jehoshaphat, his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord. Moreover, he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah. In the third year of his reign, he sent his leaders, Ben-Hael, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah to teach in the cities of Judah.

And with them he sent Levites, and it names them. In verse 9, they taught in Judah and had the book of the law of the Lord with them. They went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people.

Now, in Kings, the chapters that we've skipped over, and I gave a brief summary of those last time as we skipped forward to chapter 22 to see that battle. We had several chapters in there of the ministry of Elijah, right? Most of us are familiar. We know the general outlines of Elijah's ministry.

We know about the widow. We know about Mount Carmel. We know about him being pursued by Jezebel and so on.

We know about the famine and the shutting up of the heavens and praying for rain and so on. We know these things, right? Where are the people of faith? In the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom? Where are the people that are doing what they're supposed to? Where is the king that's doing what he's supposed to? It's in Judah in the south, right? Where are the people that are worshipping idols, going to the high places, looking at the golden calves,

following a depraved and insolent and selfish king and a malevolent queen? Where are those people? Up in the north, right? Where does God send Elijah? Where do the miracles take place? Where are the prophecies delivered so that you will know that I am the Lord? Where? In the north. Doesn't this seem a little bit unfair? If you're faithful and obedient and you love God and you do what you're supposed to and you've got a good king, shouldn't that be where the prophet of God is? Shouldn't he be down there ministering and encouraging the people? Where are the extraordinary things taking place? Where are the show-stopping, mountaintop-removing things taking place? Up in the north.

Why? This is an important thing for you and for me, I think. Why is that? Because Ben-Hael, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebediah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites, and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests, are doing what in the south? Do they go about performing miracles and healing and raising the dead? Do they go about slaughtering priests and taking the tops off of mountains and dousing sacrifices with water and stopping up the heavens and releasing the rain? What happens in the south? Teaching. Bible class.

And guess what? The people down there don't need attention-getting devices. They don't need extraordinary interventions of God. And let me ask you, of those extraordinary interventions up in the north, which of those would you construe as a blessing? Was the confrontation with the prophets of Baal, did that bless everybody in the area? Did manna rain down from heaven and everybody had prosperous crops and healthy babies? How about the drought and no rain? How about the conditions that brought about God's intervention up there? The reign of Ahab and Jezebel.

Did Naboth think it was a great thing that Ahab was on the throne and that Jezebel was his queen? The blessing is in the still pastures, the green pastures and the still waters in the south where the Word of God is being taught, where the character of God is being proclaimed, where these men who are knowledgeable and faithful are quietly inculcating God's truth to the people. Elijah isn't sent to the south. The more you think about that, the more it ought to be kind of shocking.

Because Elijah is sent to a disobedient and stiff-necked king and queen leading a disobedient and stiff-necked kingdom that is ripe for judgment. And this is by way of warning. This is by way of admonition and last chance to turn before disaster will strike.

Right? So, for us, and as sort of at least a suggested point of application, many times you'll hear of people telling stories, there's anecdotes, and oh, God is doing extraordinary things, and look at this miraculous intervention, or seemingly so. The place of growth and production and blessing is in the green pastures and the still waters of learning and growing in God's grace the way they were doing down in Judah. Not the helter-skelter confrontational and wildly climactic events that are taking place up in the north.

The prophet of God was not there so much to teach as he was to confront. How much of the

teaching of Elijah do we have preserved in Scripture? Do we have any sermons on the mount by Elijah? Do we have any books written by Elijah? Do we have any pronouncements or explanations on the law of Moses, on the character of God? What's Elijah's job up there? It is to confront. It is to force people to recognize what they refuse to recognize, which is that there is a God in Israel, and concomitant with that, there is a duty to that God.

There is a requirement for response, for obedience. And if that requirement is not met, there will be severe judgment. It's a mission of confrontation and judgment, and it all happens up in the north.

Elijah doesn't operate in Judah. Elisha doesn't operate in Judah. What's happening down in Judah? These guys, not nearly so well known, but which one would you rather be? Do you want to be Elijah and Elisha? Or do you want to be Shemaiah and Asahel and Zebediah and these guys down in the south? I'm with the guys in the south.

Much easier to teach and fellowship with people who are interested than those who aren't, and who need a wake-up call. Think about the kings now. What happens in this confrontation with Ben-Hadad? You have two kings up there, and neither one of them ought to be there.

What was the request that Jehoshaphat made as soon as Ahab said, let's go prosecute the battle? Do you remember that? What was his request? Is there a prophet? In 2 Chronicles 18, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, please inquire for the word of the Lord today. So the king of Israel gathered all the prophets, and they said, yes, go up, it's all going to be great. But in verse 6, Jehoshaphat said, is there not still a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of him? Really great instinct.

And so you remember, because we've reviewed it, they find Micaiah, and after some back and forth, Micaiah finally says, here's what happened in heaven, and here's what's going to happen on the hills, it's going to be a disaster. So, what did Jehoshaphat do? He packed up his retinue and ordered his troops to about face and marched back down to Judah and had nothing to do with it, right? Hear me now. What's the point of inquiring of the Lord if you don't act on what you hear? What's the point of inquiring of the Lord if you're not going to pay any attention? You can hear it.

You can pat yourself on the back. I inquire, I found the true prophet of the Lord, and I heard exactly what the truth is. But what did he do about it? Did anything happen differently than if Micaiah had never showed up? What was Jehoshaphat's response to the word of the Lord through the prophet of the Lord? Nothing.

Didn't change, didn't even wise up, and realized that he was being made a target by his alleged ally. Yeah, you go up there in the crown and the robe. I'm going to hang back here in a common soldier's outfit.

It doesn't do any good to inquire of the Lord if we're not going to listen to the answer. What's

the other thing about Micaiah's prophecy? Who does the prophecy concern? What does Micaiah say is going to happen? Does he mention Jehoshaphat? Does he mention the troops from Judah? Does it make you wonder at all? Jehoshaphat is the guy that asked for this prophet to come, and the prophet doesn't say anything about him or his troops. Why would that be? Shouldn't even be in the picture.

This episode is a judgment on the northern kingdom, and what should Jehoshaphat have gotten from that word? Did he even ask? Well, Micaiah, what did the Lord say about those of us from Judah? What did he say about me? He didn't say shepherds are struck. He didn't say masters are missing. Where's the word about me? He didn't even ask.

Why call for the prophet when you're not going to listen? Why go to Bible class if we're not going to try to live and think differently? It is not enough to hear the word of the Lord, is it? So, this is a fruitful thing. We have these two kings, and they show us two different sides of our own nature. We are the king of our domain.

Our Israel is our soul and our heart, and we are the sovereign over that domain. We are in covenant relationship with God. Now, we're not covenant theology people, but we do have a relationship with God through Christ that is based on promise and is built on mutual pledges of faithfulness.

God says, I will never leave you nor forsake you, and we say, I will trust and obey, right? And if we drop our side of that agreement, of our pledge, a branch in the vine that doesn't bear any fruit, what's God going to do? He's going to trim it out. He's going to break it off. He's told us He'll do that.

So, we say, well, I don't want that to happen. I'd better get with the program. But look at these two kings, because we can learn from both of their examples, and they intersect at this point.

It's not too often that you find both kings in the same place. Remember, there's a hymn that talks about God. Oh, tell of His love.

Oh, sing of His grace. His canopy is space. He's pavilioned in splendor.

These two kings are pavilioned, and I was looking at that word for pavilion, and it actually is a word that means a butterfly. These pavilions were beautifully spread out things like butterfly wings. These kings are pavilioned in splendor, and they're very full of themselves.

It looks great. What a sight. The two kings side by side, harmony, sympathy and understanding, love abounding.

It looks great. There's a lot that people could commend. I'm sure the editorial pages were full of what a wonderful day this is and what bright prospects there are for the future, but the prophet of God says this is going to end badly.

It's going to end badly, and Jehoshaphat does not listen. So think of us as the king responsible for our kingdom, our soul, our heart before God and the responsibilities that we have to drive out the enemies, to cultivate understanding, to do what Jehoshaphat has done down in Judah and ensure that there is teaching, that there is growth, that there is obedience, that there is commitment, that there is honor and glory and reverence and praise for God. Jehoshaphat begins well, but look where he ends up.

He's up in the north. He's out of his territory, out of his element, doing something he shouldn't do with somebody he shouldn't be doing it with, leading his armies into a disaster. And when God warns him through God's prophet that he asked for, he doesn't listen.

He doesn't change his decision. He doesn't alter his behavior. He doesn't reverse his course.

He began well. And this is the contrast of these two kings. Jehoshaphat does so many things right.

He walks in the ways of his father Asa. He walks in the ways of his father David. The only thing he doesn't do is completely eradicate the high places.

And you say, well, there's a little bit of a deficit there. But that deficit, that gap, begins to widen. Because if you're not completely faithful and completely obedient, the places where you're not, it reminds me of adaptive tests.

Have you ever taken a computerized adaptive test? I think I talked about that last week. Those tests, you go in, and they'll ask you one question from this area of knowledge, one question from this one, one question from this, one question from this. And the computer is picking questions from a random pool.

It's a program. And it offers you the question. It gives you multiple choice.

You say, see. And it says, in its own mind, you're right. It doesn't tell you if you're right or not, but it offers you another question.

You get that one right. It offers you another question. You get it right.

Let's say that I have an adaptive test in systematic theology. So it asks me a question on bibliology. And I get it right.

It asks me a question on theology proper. I get it right. It asks me a question on Christology.

I get it right. Then it asks me a question on pneumatology, the Holy Spirit, and I miss it. Well, it'll go ahead and ask me a question on soteriology, on salvation, or homardiology, on sin.

But it says, you know, he missed one back here on pneumatology. So it'll go back. And instead of going back around through all eight categories, it'll go back to pneumatology.

And it'll ask me another question. Let's say I missed that one. Well, now my next question is going to be pneumatology.

And now my next question is going to be pneumatology. And it will fail me because it has found my weakness. You studied seven of the eight things well, but that whole Holy Spirit deal, you know, I don't know what happened, but you didn't get that down.

And adaptive tests home in and exploit your weaknesses and fail you on purpose. I hate them. I hate them.

All of your wonderful advantages that you get from testmanship and sometimes getting things right that you really don't know because you know how tests work go away in adaptive testing. I don't like them. To me, exams are something of a chess game.

It's you and the teacher. They're trying to test you, and you're trying to figure out the way their mind works when they ask the question so that you can get the question right even if you don't know exactly what's going on. A lot of times it has nothing to do with the subject matter.

It's, well, what do they typically do? And see, this I like. It's a contest of wills. It's a matching of intellects.

How well do I know my teacher, and what were they likely to ask if they wrote this test? These computerized things, this is like playing chess against a computer. You're always going to lose if you're me. Well, at any rate, this weakness begins to show in Jehoshaphat.

He's a great, great king. He does so many things right. You look at yourself.

I'm a great, great king in my own soul. There's so many things I do right. Look at the investment I make in my spiritual life.

Look at these things that I've met and overcome. There's this one little area here that's kind of weak, but, you know, look at these others over here. This is all great.

I don't really want to think too much about this area that isn't fixed and isn't right, where I'm not being faithful and obedient. I want to concentrate on my strengths. Well, there's a sense in which the plan and purpose of God is like an adaptive test.

Our weakness will come to the fore. Jehoshaphat's weakness comes to the fore. He's not 100% dedicated to God.

He's 95%. But this 5% is where he ultimately is going to fail, because this is what leads him north. And it is going to cost not just him, but his entire kingdom.

I just want to quickly skip forward to chapter 22 of 2 Chronicles, just for a foretaste. We'll get here and do this in detail. You notice, if you've got subtitles in your Bible here, in chapter 22 of 2 Chronicles, Ahaziah reigns in Judah.

So, you have some defugalties in chapter 21 after Jehoshaphat rests with his fathers. But Ahaziah comes to the throne. The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah the youngest son king.

This is the youngest son of Jehoram. So, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, reigned. He was 42 years old when he came king.

He reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. She's the granddaughter of Omri.

She's the daughter of who? Ahab and Jezebel. So, she is the mother of this youngest son, Ahaziah. Well, when Jehu comes along in verse 8, he's executing judgment on the house of Ahab.

He found the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers who served Ahaziah, and he killed them. Then he searched for Ahaziah himself, caught him hiding in Samaria, brought him to Jehu, killed him, buried him. He's the son of Jehoshaphat who sought the Lord with all his heart.

If you get buried, that's some consolation to being left above ground, to be picked apart by the carrion eaters. Now, when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah. But Jehoshaphat, the daughter of the king, took Joash, the son of Ahaziah, stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom.

Jehoshaphat, the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, Ahaziah's sister, hid him from Athaliah so that she did not kill him. But Athaliah goes on to be a holy terror in Judah. She's like imported judgment from the north.

And this is Jehoshaphat's fault. Athaliah wouldn't be anywhere near the royal family. There wouldn't be these sons.

There wouldn't be this level of judgment. There wouldn't be judgment down in Judah from Jehu except for Jehoshaphat. It's Jehoshaphat's fault that Jehu comes down to Judah because he intermarried, he intermingled his family with Ahab, who he knew was under judgment, who he knew had a value system completely opposite of his own.

He thought, well, but concourse with Ahab will reap benefits. This will be a good thing. Look at the peace and the harmony and being allied, we can fight our common enemies and so on.

And he wanted to try to play this out against Ben-Hadad over in Gilead. Mistake, mistake, mistake. What concourse, what fellowship has light with darkness? If something uncorrupted touches something corrupt, which one changes? They used to tell me this when I was in Sunday school.

If you put a bad apple in with a whole barrel of good apples, which one changes? If you put a good apple in a barrel of bad apples, which one changes? Corruption will always taint. The only exception was the Lord Jesus himself. If you touched the unclean thing in Israel, you were unclean and defiled, and you had to take steps to become cleansed again.

The Lord Jesus is the only human being in history who could touch a leper, and the leper became clean. Everybody else, you touch a leper, you are now defiled, and you've got to take steps under the law because we are commanded not to have concourse and fellowship with that which defiles. And we can justify it, we can rationalize it, we can say, but look at the benefits, look at the good, look at what will come out.

And in the short term, it may seem that way. Jehoshaphat did not see Athaliah slaughtering children. Didn't see Jehu coming down and slaughtering entire families.

Had no idea that his fellowship with Ahab would result in this huge amount of bloodshed that we're going to see in these upcoming chapters. So I return to the question I asked at the beginning. How do we know what to support, what to join, what to engage with, what to become a part of? The significant omission, when you look at this story for Jehoshaphat, is not even what he did, it's what he did not do.

Did he consult? He asks for a prophet once he gets to the north. Did he ask for a prophet? Did he consult with God? Did he ask any of the men that he sent out into the kingdom and said, you go teach all the people these wonderful things about God. He should have kept one of them around to remind him of God's will.

He was ready to make sure the land was educated by these priests and Levites and teachers, but he didn't take it on board himself. Did he consult with God? Remember how often they would go and say, Lord, should I go up? And the Lord would say, go up, for I have delivered them into your hand. Or do not go up.

He didn't consult, he didn't ask. He thought it was a good thing. When we are offered a choice, when we are given an option, when someone asks us, when an opportunity arises to be a part of a thing, we can do what Jehoshaphat did not do.

We can stop, and if somebody is right there at the door saying, hey, would you write a check? Would you subscribe? Would you come? Would you join? Would you carry a sign? Would you speak? Would you, whatever it may be, stop and say, let me think about that. Let me pray about that. I'll get back to you.

And take some time to stop and think, is this, not, is this a good cause? Not, is this a wonderful ministry? Not, is this a valid issue that needs support? That's not the question. The question is, should I take a portion of my resources of time, energy, money, whatever it may be, to support this? It says nothing bad about the ministry or the opportunity or the effort or the issue or the cause that we don't participate. We can't support everything.

The question is, when something comes up in our periphery, there are charities that make appeals all the time. You look on the TV and see these sad-faced dogs with these big round eyes in cages. It just breaks your heart.

You see these little swelled-bellied children over in Africa, and it breaks your heart. You see people starving and dying around the world. You see people who need the Lord Jesus.

You see missions and mission trips and mission efforts, and you see evangelism and you see efforts all over the place. There are plenty of wonderful causes and good things that need to be done and people are trying to do. The question is not, is it good? Because if it's good, I should support it.

That's not the equation. The equation is, okay, this is a good thing. Should I, is it God's will that I be a part of this, that I support this? Who has God handed this to, if it's a good cause? If it's a godly ministry cause, well, does God want every single one of his people involved in this, or has he handed it to specific ones? If he has given it to specific people, then he'll make logistical provision for them.

I've got my hands full with what I'm assigned, and God will be making logistical provision for mine. If I take provision that God has given me for my efforts and give it to some other effort, now I'm short. I've been a bad steward.

It's like taking money out of the Social Security fund and spending it on Medicare. Not supposed to do. These are designated funds.

If God gives you resources of time, talent, opportunity, money, whatever it may be, we have an obligation to ensure that we use them for the purpose which they were given. And nothing against wonderful causes, but the question isn't, is it wonderful? It's, am I supposed to be a part of it in that way, or to that extent, or with that resource? This is the question we must ask. It's a separate question whether or not this city or cities over in Gilead ought to be returned to northern Israel, but it's not Jehoshaphat's problem.

It's not his assignment. It isn't a part of Judah. But he entangles himself and entangles his family and entangles his kingdom in something that he didn't consult the Lord, he didn't think about, and the results are catastrophic.

He himself is spared for the time being, but awful things are going to happen in his family because he makes this commitment. You and I need to learn from this example. Look at these two kings.

Ahab starts bad and goes downhill from there. Jehoshaphat starts well, but fails at a critical point. He knows better.

He's busy teaching the rest of his kingdom and he's not listening himself. Two different views of the same mistaken effort. Nobody should be trying to fight Ben-Hadad without God's approval

and without God's support.

It may in fact be a worthy cause, but not if God isn't in it, not if God hasn't called for it, not if it's not God's time and not God's way. You can't just say this is a good thing, therefore I must be a part of it. This is one of the flaws, by the way, in the oft criticized experiencing God materials.

If you look at that, there's very little, if anything, said about, when they talk about, well look around where God is at work and join him in his work, there's nothing said about, is it appropriate for me to join this particular part of God's work? God has people designated. It's division of labor. It's chain of command.

It's structure. You hoe this row, these people hoe this row. And if you see this row is not being hoed properly, that doesn't mean you leave yours to go over there and do that.

But there's such a lack of understanding in this day, and this is why people in California are protesting decisions in a court clear across the country that have nothing to do with them. They make it their business. They construe it to be an issue in which they should be involved, and they shouldn't.

You and I can learn a valuable lesson from this example, and from this example in God's word. We have a responsibility to identify what God has given to us by way of responsibilities and ensure that first and foremost we are fulfilling those. Why would you march to northern Israel and try to take a city back when the high places aren't removed? This is Jehoshaphat's failure.

This is what we want to avoid. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the powerful way that you illustrate these truths for us and communicate them to us.

We thank you for the privilege of being taught of being able to receive the ministry of your spirit and impressing your word on our hearts. We pray that the result will be beneficial, that we will grow in grace and knowledge, that we will bear fruit, that the Lord Jesus will be pleased when he returns for us and that we can stand at the judgment reflecting his glory in yours. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.