
Day 157 - June 6

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Ahab and Jezebel

Readings: 1 Kings 22:29-36; 2 Chronicles 19:1-3; 1 Kings 22:37-40; 1 Kings 22:52,53; 2 Kings 3:4,5; 2 Chronicles 19:4-11; 2 Chronicles 20:1-30, 35-37; 1 Kings 22:48,49; 2 Kings 1:2-18; 3:1-3

Reflections:

- As Micaiah said, “Mark my words!” Well, Ahab has enough fear from what he said to try to disguise himself in battle and used Jehoshaphat as a decoy. No one goes for the decoy and then a soldier fires an arrow randomly and takes down Ahab. The lesson is obvious. If God wants to do something, he is going to do it. There is nothing you can do to stop it. The will of God will be done. His slow death and dogs licking his blood out of the chariot is all pretty sick. There is an interesting note about his chariot being washed at a pool where the prostitutes wash. Is this the writer subtly reminding the reader the condition of Israel that religious prostitution is widespread under Ahab? In any case, Jehoshaphat is reprimanded for helping the wicked and loving those who hate the Lord but he is not fully judged because he did take a stand against the Asherah worship and did seek God at some level. The story of Ahab’s death should put the fear of God in anyone who blatantly rejects the known will of God and lives a life committed to evil and self-centered indulgence. But the cycle continues as his son Ahaziah carries on in the ways of Ahab and Jezebel in his love of Baal worship.
- Back in Judah, Jehoshaphat makes an effort to restore justice with the reinstatement of the judges and priests. Their enemies, the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites, mount an attack on Judah. This threat drives Jehoshaphat to gather the people at the Temple to cry to God. His words echo in many ways the words of Solomon when the Temple was first completed. The essence distills down to “God you are our only hope!” As Jehoshaphat declares, “For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do but our eyes are upon you.” This humble dependence is what God is looking for in our relationship with him. God knows we can not handle much of what comes our way in life. He desires to partner with us but the starting point is us laying down all of our schemes to rescue ourselves and simply trust in him. He will do all the rescuing we need. We simply need to make sure we aren’t getting in the way but are fully positioned for his miraculous salvation.

- The community that gathers and stands before God is described as “men...with their wives and children and little ones.” Everyone is valued right down to the littlest baby! God is all about family and everyone is important from the eldest to the youngest, strongest to the weakest.
- The Lord’s Spirit comes upon one of the priests, a descendent of Asaph. (Remember him? One of the main psalm writers in the book of Psalms.) His speech is one of the most encouraging speeches and echoes the confidence that God proclaimed to Joshua when Israel first reached the Promised Land (see Joshua 1:1-10). “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s...You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you...Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out and face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you!” The battle that God’s people must fight is not the battle against our enemies or the problems we encounter. The battle God’s people must fight is the battle against fear and unbelief. God will deal with the problems that come against us. Our challenge is to face the challenges squarely, standing firm in our complete confidence in God. For anyone who struggles with fear and doubt, this is encouraging to read. God knows this is our biggest problem and so he gives us these passages for us to soak into our hearts and minds. His words here in this text are meant for us too today. “Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. I am with you! Stand firm! I will fight the battle for you!”
- As in the days of Joshua, Jehoshaphat put together a group of singers, probably priests, to go ahead of the army to lead the way in musical worship! Completely unarmed. Completely vulnerable. Completely victorious because God went before them and set ambushes for the enemy. God caused the enemy armies to turn on themselves and destroy themselves. When the army of Israel arrived on the battle scene, everyone had already been wiped out. Talk about an incredible display of the power of God! It said it took three days to collect the plunder. Wow.
- We must remember that here in the Old Testament, the kingdom of Israel is a physical kingdom with land, a temple and blessing being defined as material wealth. Yet, in this story we see a glimpse of God dealing with enemies directly so that his people need not fight. With the coming of Christ, all Christ followers are called to love their enemies and to allow to God to be the one who dishes out judgment and wrath on those that would hate, persecute and kill us (see Romans 12:14-21).
- This story ends with a huge party at the temple and peace on all sides of the kingdom. You’d think that Jehoshaphat would do everything possible to honor God in light of this incredible miracle but right away he fails to trust God and makes a shipping alliance with the incredibly evil Ahaziah of Israel and comes under judgment. You’ve got to slap your head and say, “Will they never learn?”

- Our attention now turns to Israel in the North under the evil Ahaziah. The story of his final days and death again reveals God's judgment against evil. Elijah appears again in the story to both declare and miraculously call down God's judgment in the form of fire. Again the reader must be struck by the terrible judgments that fall on those who willfully do injustice and evil before God.
- As we move past the period of the Kings and move into the period of the Prophets, we can now see a new theme emerge in the meta-narrative of Israel. In the ongoing story of "what doesn't work to change the human heart" we have learned that having all the right rules and religion doesn't work – Moses, the Torah (Law) and Tabernacle. We've learned that having the right leader doesn't work – David, Solomon and the kings. We will now see over and over again that threats and punishment don't work to change the human heart either. That's right! Being tough on yourself or others doesn't bring lasting change. Consequences, no matter how harsh, can not transform the human heart. Thank God for Jesus!