

# Old Testament History

Lesson #17

1 Kings 15:16-20:43

## Outline

- I. ***The Early Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-16:34)***
  - A. War between Asa and Baasha (15:16-24).
  - B. Nadab of Israel (15:25-32).
  - C. Baasha of Israel (15:33-16:7).
  - D. Elah of Israel (16:8-14).
  - E. Zimri of Israel (16:15-20).
  - F. Omri of Israel (16:21-28).
  - G. Ahab of Israel (16:29-34).
  
- II. ***The Ministries Of The Prophets (1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 8:15)***
  - A. The prophets and Ahab (1 Kings 17:1-22:40).
    1. Elijah proclaims a drought in Israel (17:1-24).
    2. Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal (18:1-46).
    3. Elijah flees to the mountain of God (19:1-21).
    4. Ahab condemned for disobedience in war (20:1-43).

## Notes

### ***1 Kings 15:16-16:28; 2 Chronicles 16:1-14***

- Asa was a good king, a welcome change after years of evil rulers. He tried to remove the sins established by Rehoboam (14:24). Sad to say, his reign did not end as well as it began because he trusted in men for protection and failed to trust in the Lord. He used the temple wealth to hire Syria to fight for him, and this ungodly alliance personally cost him a lot.
- According to Chronicles, Asa was criticized by the prophet Hanani for relying on Syria, rather than God, in his struggle against Israel (2 Chronicles 16:7-10). Almost 200 years later, Judah's King Ahaz was bitterly denounced by Isaiah for doing the same act (Isaiah 7:1-25). By that time, Syria had become one of Israel and Judah's most troubling enemies.
- Meanwhile in the northern kingdom, Jeroboam had died and was succeeded by his son Nadab. Nadab reigned only two years before he was assassinated by Baasha, who instituted the short-lived second Israelite dynasty. Baasha's ascension year was the third year of Asa's reign. Baasha took the throne by force and then, in true Oriental fashion, murdered Nadab's whole family. The scriptures say that this was one of the grounds of Baasha's later judgment (1 Kings 16:7). Baasha reigned for 24 years and fulfilled the prophecy of 14:14-15 that

all of Jeroboam's seed would be destroyed. Baasha's only claim to the throne lay in his military strength, which Judah would soon experience. Under his reign, the state of chronic warfare between the two countries erupted into open hostility. Baasha formed an alliance with Syria to try and stop the migration of Israelites into the kingdom of Judah, and the growing influence of Asa upon the people.

- Asa had a serious challenge when a huge Egyptian army, led by Zerah, swarmed into Judah. The Egyptians were completely routed. It is the only occasion when the armies of Judah met with success either Egypt or Babylon in the open field. Egypt ceased to be a significant danger for Judah, and 330 years passed before its army marched against Judah.
- Moving swiftly into Judah, Baasha seized Ramah, only four miles north of Jerusalem. Oddly, Asa turned to human devices to deal with the problem. Asa asked Ben-Hadad, the Aramean king, for help. He attacked Baasha's forces in the north, and he had to abandon his attack on Jerusalem. When Asa was attacked by a disease in his feet, he did not seek help from God, but from physicians. Unlike Hezekiah, Asa died without any help from the Lord (cf. Galatians 6:7). During his reign, eight kings sat on the throne in Israel.
- The reign of Elah last only two years. Baasha had set the example of a "military coup," and this is how the kings in Israel were chosen from this point. Zimri led the nation for only one week (16:15), but during that time he wiped out the family of Baasha and fulfilled the prophecy of Jehu (16:1-4). The formula given for the pronouncement of Baasha's death reflects the curse of Deuteronomy 28:26.
- The greatest claim of Omri was that he built Samaria. It was a place of great beauty, adapted both for observation and defense. The Moabite Stone (850 B.C.) mentions Omri, king of Israel. An inscription of Adad-nirari III of Assyria (810-782 B.C.) mentions the land of Israel as "Omri." The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) mentions tribute from Jehu, successor to Omri.

### ***1 Kings 16:29-33; 22:41-11; 2 Chronicles 17:1-18:2***

- Omri was succeeded by his son Ahab in the 38th year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah. With the ascension of Ahab a new period begins in the history of Israel, both religiously and politically.
- Omri's son Ahab was married to Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, and this brought Baal worship officially into the kingdom. When the nation was moving into idolatry, God called His prophets forth to preach to the people. Again and again had God sent messengers to announce His judgments without producing virtually any response. More was needed; therefore, the period is marked by an unparalleled frequency of miracles in Old Testament times, mostly intended to prove the futility of idols

when compared to the power of God, the reality of the prophets' mission, and of the authority which the Lord had delegated to His messengers.

- Politically this period was one of great change. Whereas the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been in a state of constant warfare, an alliance between them was now formed.
- Josephus records that Ethbaal was originally the high priest of the great temple of Astarte in Tyre. He murdered the king and usurped the throne, which he occupied for 32 years. His daughter Jezebel was a clever, strong, bold, and unscrupulous woman. She was a devotee to the most base and disgusting idolatry that the world has ever known, combining with this the contempt of the rights and feelings of others, and total indifference to the cruel means employed, which characterizes the worst aspects of Eastern despotism.
- The religion of Jezebel essentially became the worship of Israel. Ahab built a temple to Baal in Samaria, in which he erected not only an altar, but an Aserah pole as well (2 Kings 3:2; 10:27). The forced introduction of this new worship led to a systematic persecution of the prophets and the worshipers of God, all due to the power which Jezebel held over her husband.
- Left to himself, Ahab might have yielded to better influences (cf. 1 Kings 18:39-46; 20:13; 21:27-29). Ahab was a strange, though not uncommon, mixture of good and evil, ending up finally not in a decision for God and what was right and true, but in a decision for evil to his own destruction and that of his nation. He possessed qualities that, if directed by the fear of God, might have made him a great king (cf. 1 Kings 20:11, 32; 22:39; 2 Chronicles 18:2).
- While these influences were at work in Israel, Jehoshaphat, encouraged by the blessing which rested on his kingdom, vigorously resumed the work of religious reformation in Judah (2 Chronicles 17:6-9). In the third year of his reign, he sent five of his princes, accompanied by Levites and priests, throughout the towns of Judah to teach the people the law.
- Jehoshaphat's reign was prosperous. Some of the Philistine chiefs paid homage to him. The Arab tribes, whom Asa had subdued during his pursuit of Zerah, the Ethiopian, also paid tribute. New fortresses for the defense of the country were built, "store-cities" were constructed, and various towns were provisioned. A large army was also prepared.
- During all of these signs of prosperity, Jehoshaphat created an alliance with Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:1). Ahab really needed the help from Judah to hold off Syria, but the motives of Jehoshaphat are not so clear. He certainly would not want the power of Syria along his northern border,

but perhaps he wanted to see the breach between Israel and Judah healed.

- In the eighth year of Jehoshaphat's reign, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Chronicles 21:6). Sadly, Jehoshaphat lived to see some of the bitter fruits of the unwise alliance in which he had entered. The worse came after the death of Jehoshaphat when Jehoram introduced the idolatry of his wife in Judah, and brought shame upon his people. The son of Athaliah reigned after Jehoram and died by the command of Jehu. Lastly came the terrible tragedy of the murder of the royal princes by Athaliah, then her reign and death.

### **1 Kings 16:34-17:34**

- A grander figure never appeared in Old Testament times than Elijah. As Israel's apostasy had reached its highest point in the time of Ahab, so too did the antagonism to it in the person and mission of Elijah. On one side there was Ahab, Jezebel, Baal, and Israel -- on the other hand stood God and Elijah. It was a question of reality and power, and Elijah was to be the embodiment of divine power, the minister of God. The contest between them could not be decided by words, but by deeds.
- There were time when he was absolutely fearless in his zeal for God, and yet he had his hours of weakness and loneliness, as when he fled before Ahab and Jezebel, and would have loved to have died in the wilderness. His was a life full of contrasts -- fierce light and deep shadows -- not a happy, joyous, prosperous life; not one even sprinkled with peace or gladness, but completely devoted to God: a bush burning on the mount, but not consumed.
- His first appearance would be emblematic of all that was to follow. He unexpectedly appeared before before Ahab in Samaria. He was like a torch that blazed up in the still darkness of the night. His dress showed poverty and renunciation of the world -- a huge contrast between the Baal-debauched Samaritans and Elijah. His message was abrupt. Apparently the drought had begun six months before Elijah appeared to announce that the drought would last another three years (Deuteronomy 11:13-17; 2 Chronicles 7:12-15).
- Elijah's first stay was at the Wady Cherith -- probably east of the Jordan. Over the course of time, the brook dried up. He was commanded to go to Zarephath ("Sarepta," Luke 4:26). God had an even more strange provision for him arranged than the ravens: a poor, famished Gentile widow. Elijah had to learn compassion in her house before he was sent to preach to his own people. This had been a happy, quiet, resting time for him -- perhaps the only quiet, happy time in his life. The dry brook was Elijah's test; the dead boy was the widow's test.

- She willingly gave him her last morsel of bread, casting her faith in the prophet of God. Because of her simple, childlike trustfulness in the God of Israel, she climbs to greater heights in her faith. Elijah had spread the wings of the God of Israel's promise, and this poor, Gentile woman had sought shelter under them.
- A greater trial of faith still awaited her. In the case of Elijah, this was not a time for teaching by words, but by deeds. The boy was the first recorded instance of resurrection in the Bible and it positively demonstrated God's love for people beyond the boundaries of Israel (cf. Romans 3:29).
- The widow makes a confession which proved the object and necessity of miracles. The widow learned that mercy, not judgment, and love, not punishment, were the highest objectives of God's dealings with people.
- Archaeologists have uncovered significant building remains at important sites in Israel that date to the reign of Ahab, making him the greatest builder in Israel since Solomon. Among these are Ahab's palace at Samaria, fortifications at Megiddo, Hazor, and a religious complex at Dan.

### **1 Kings 18:1-46**

- The effects of the drought must have been absolutely devastating, but we read of no trace of repentance in the king or the people, only the silence of misery. As the misery had become more pressing, Ahab searched Israel and the neighboring countries for Elijah, while Jezebel inflicted her revenge on the prophets of God. Obadiah was in a difficult position. He was trying to serve Ahab publicly and trying to serve God secretly.
- With no repentance among the people, they knew that a great, decisive battle between God and Baal would soon take place. That day Carmel witnessed one of the grandest scenes in the history of Israel. The scenes on Mt. Sinai, Mt. Carmel, and Mt. Hermon are the most significant events ever to occur on mountaintops.
- The very presence of these prophets of Baal and Asherah demonstrated that the people really could not decide who they would serve: God or Baal. Two divided opinions were now to be brought to the test of truth. The two parties must now measure their strength. Israel will have to see and decide for themselves. It was necessary for the futility of Baal worship to be exhibited in the fullest manner. Baal was the "rain god," but he could neither send fire nor bring rain!
- As one reads through the account of what occurred on Mt. Carmel, it almost is beyond description. The prophets enter into a frenzied, ecstatic state, and the people are not far behind. When they did not

have any success, Elijah taunted them, exclaiming that the fault might lie within them.

- When it was his turn, he gathered the people around him, reminiscent of a happier time when Israel was undivided in their allegiance, and he rebuilt the altar of God using twelve stones reminiscent of the twelve tribes of Israel. Elijah makes it twice as difficult by dousing the altar and sacrifice with water. In all of this Elijah was only the servant of God. God had to show Himself as the living and true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- After the fire devoured the altar and sacrifice, once more Israel was converted to God, and now a stern judgment must be executed on the idolaters (Deuteronomy 13:13; 17:2). The victory that day must be complete; the renunciation of Baal worship beyond recall. Not one of the priests of Baal and Asherah must escape.
- When God blesses, He blesses abundantly. Ahab had to leave quickly or he would be hopelessly bogged down in the mud. Elijah outran Ahab to Jezreel. At this point, the two parted, and Ahab must now decide for himself who he would serve.

### **1 Kings 19:1-21**

- Jezebel's reaction to the news of what happened on Mt. Carmel was predictable. She gave Elijah 24 hours to leave Jezreel or be killed. Elijah ran for his life. James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was "a man of like passions," so he was subject to the same trials and failures as any Christian. The main cause of Elijah's failure was spiritual: he saw Jezebel and failed to see the Lord; he listened to Jezebel's threats and forgot to wait for God's promises.
- Elijah fled to Judah, forgetting that Ahab's daughter was reigning there with Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16-18). He traveled more than 80 miles into greater danger. Elijah was extremely despondent, wanting to be relieved of his work and suffering, terrified that he alone was left to fight what seemed to be the unstoppable pair of Ahab and Jezebel.
- When God asked him the question in vs. 9, Elijah stated that he had been zealous for the Lord, appealing perhaps for vengeance upon his enemies. When he came out of the cave, God revealed Himself in a still, small voice to show Elijah once and for all that He was not only more powerful than Baal, but, more importantly, in His essence He was a Being completely different than the deity worshiped in Mt. Carmel (cf. Habakkuk 2:20).
- The storm was about to burst upon an unrepentant people. Hazael was to be anointed king of Syria, and foreign wars, more desolating than any that had come before, would sweep over Israel. The earthquake would

shake the house of Ahab to its foundations, and Jehu would be appointed as a deliverer of vengeance.

- It was a wonderful assurance to Elijah that God still had 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Furthermore, for the rest of his ministry, he would have a man of "like precious faith" to make the burden of dealing with Ahab and Jezebel easier to bear.
- Elisha went back briefly to his family and then returned to kill the oxen. This left Elisha completely unswayed by Elijah, rationally making his own choice. The number of oxen with which he was plowing suggests that he came from a wealthy family. The fact that Elisha killed the oxen and used the tools for his firewood indicates how definitively he was breaking with the past. He was "burning his bridges behind him" in this "farewell feast."

### **1 Kings 20:1-43**

- The spectacle of what had happened on Mt. Carmel must have made a deep impression upon Ahab. He must have known that God was the only true God, but he was too weak to resist Jezebel. The Lord stepped in to save the king and his people, not because Ahab deserved it, but because God was against Syria and the time of her judgment had arrived. Ahab was not a man of faith but was clutching to the last hope offered him.
- It was the policy of Syria to isolate and weaken Israel. Ben-Hadad broke his agreement with Baasha and joined with Asa against Israel. While Ben-Hadad and his men reinforced their courage by drinking, Ahab received an unknown prophet of God who advised the king that if he would call on the select officers of his commanders to lead the attack, God would give him the victory.
- After Ahab's victory, the prophet returned to warn the king to strengthen his defenses, for Ben-Hadad would certainly return next year. The Syrians had a well-conceived plan, but it was fatally flawed. They attacked on the supposition that the God of Israel was like one of the heathen deities. Ben-Hadad's advisors were telling him that since Israel's gods were mountain gods, Israel could be defeated in the plains. This was probably because the Israelites raised altars on the high places. Ben-Hadad only needed to replace the defeated officers with new commanders, raise another army, and choose a battle site in the plains. They were badly disappointed and they suffered a crushing defeat.
- Thinking that there was little way of escape, Ben-Hadad's advisors counseled him to throw himself upon the mercy of Israel's king. What Satan could not accomplish with force, he accomplished with guile; for he led Ahab into a wicked compromise with the enemy. The two kings

made a treaty, and Ahab sent Ben-Hadad away alive, in direct disobedience to the word of God, and ominously similar to Saul and Agag.

- Ahab's leniency toward Ben-Hadad and self-trust were not to go without divine rebuke. By telling the story of the escaped prisoner, the prophet was able to get King Ahab to confess his own guilt and pass his own sentence. God had already decreed that Ahab would be killed, not by Ben-Hadad, but by Hazael (19:15-17), so the time was not yet right.