

I. Intro.

A. It has become an overused axiom in college and graduate history classes to say “History is written by the victors”, a phrase attributed to Winston Churchill, but of unknown origin

1. I recognize a fair amount of truth in the reality that people in power positions tend to tell the story favoring their own perspective

- a) The church is no exception, where we often tell a congregation’s history in terms of who were the pastors or who led the elders team
- b) But we also have come to learn that a history that focuses only on the people in power is a history with significant blinders on it

2. Liberation theologies and various civil rights movements have taught us the value of “history from below”, where stories are told as experienced by the underdogs, by the marginalized

B. One of the richest yet most controversial themes that appear in the Bible is that of the God of the weak, who uses underdogs and seemingly powerless people for God’s purposes in the world

1. Think Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers & then saving them

- a) think of the Hebrew midwives who confounded Pharaoh’s murderous decree to kill the Hebrew boys ...
- b) think Rahab the prostitute who hid the Israelite spies in the land of Canaan ...
- c) think Jesus the son of God entering the world as a baby born to a humble peasant girl who was not yet married

2. Sometimes God’s purposes are transmitted by one of these underdogs, who do not get much worldly attention

- a) Last week I said that God’s shalom vision beyond the time of the judges was carried forward by the prophets and not by the kings
- b) Today, in a biblical time period that gets told primarily in reference to the kings, we would do well to keep this theme in mind.

II. (Reviewing to now)

A. As we left off, Israel was 1 united monarchy, which expanded to its largest proportions under King Solomon ...

1. but to exercise this much wealth & control, Solomon made many compromises that were not what God ultimately wanted:

- a) Continued to depend on standing, conscripted army
- b) Pressed his people into forced labor & imposed heavy taxes
- c) Made treaties with multiple foreign nations, symbolized by the hundreds of foreign wives he married

d) Keeping good relations w/ other countries required allowing the worship of their gods

2. As I named last week, these developments, starting with even having a human king at all, were all part of God's remedial will.

a) Although David & Solomon & many of the kings who followed them operated under the blessing of Yahweh, this vision of community was NOT what God really wanted for his people.

b) God's ultimate will was for the chosen people to live in a theocracy, where God alone was their king, who would fight Holy War FOR the people, so they themselves did not resort to violence.

c) But for the next 1000 years or so in salvation history, God worked w/in the limitations of kingship that the people chose.

B. (General transition from Solomon)

1. So for Solomon, his family & the noble elites who had power in Jerusalem, life was pretty good.

a) But even in Solomon's days, there were grumbings in other parts of his kingdom, especially among the tribes in the north, who resented the heavy taxes they paid, all flowing south to support Solomon's opulence

b) Interestingly, Solomon had put a northerner named Jeroboam, a gifted leader, in charge of the forced labor, but Jeroboam would soon turn tail against his bosses in Jerusalem.

c) In Solomon's old age, the throne was due to pass to his son Rehoboam, who had grown up sheltered amidst the wealth of the palace.

2. As the one united kingdom split into a northern kingdom & a southern one, this became the next major Heilsgeschichte crisis: the political conflicts within God's chosen people (note asterisks)

3. We will see that, although our readings are from the combined Book of the Kings, maybe it should have been called the Book of the Kings and the Prophets, because the prophets are often featured in the salvation history even more than the powerful kings

a) There were many prophets active during those times, most of them relatively unknown to us, other than Elijah & his successor Elisha

C. (E.g. of one of these prophets)

1. In the days of Solomon, one of these prophets named Ahijah was from the northern town of Shiloh

a) same town where Ark of the Covenant had been kept for many years

b) same town where Eli & Samuel had been judges over Israel

2. One day Ahijah the prophet prophesies to this young man Jeroboam, an official of King Solomon, that Yahweh will take 10 tribes from the throne of Solomon & give them to him, Jeroboam.

- a) Ahijah is wearing a brand new garment when he meets Jeroboam ... he tears this garment into 12 pieces & gives 10 of them to Jeroboam to symbolize the 10 tribes torn from Solomon.
- b) When King Solomon discovers this treasonous act, he tries to have his trusted official Jeroboam killed ... so Jeroboam flees south to Egypt, where the Pharaoh Shishak gives him political asylum

3. If you see political intrigue and questionable behavior among the leaders of God's people, stay tuned, because it only gets worse ...

III. (Summarizing division of the kingdom into North & South)

A. After Solomon dies, Jeroboam comes back to the northern town of Shechem

1. He wants to know what kind of king Rehoboam will be

- a) Now knowing Ahijah's prophecy that will make him the ruler, Jeroboam is sympathetic to the sufferings he himself used to enforce on his northern kindred.
- b) The northern tribes appeal to their new king Rehoboam to lighten the work load on them

Rehoboam ignores the older advisors from his father's generation, & listens to his younger advisors from the royal palace

He rejects the northerners' pleas for justice ... Taking a cue from the playbook of the ancient Pharaoh in Egypt when Moses pleaded for less work, Rehoboam ironically makes the yoke on his fellow Israelites even heavier

- c) In response, Jeroboam & the northern tribes declare their opposition to the house of David ... A northern revolt against the monarchy in Jerusalem is underway

2. You'd think Rehoboam would quickly quell this uprising since he commands the central army, but 2 other developments lead to the split of the Israelite kingdom

- a) Just when Rehoboam is gathering troops to forcibly reunite his kingdom, a prophet named Shemaiah speaks to the king with God's warning not to attack his fellow Israelites ... & Rehoboam respects this word. *So from a faith story perspective, God is behind this split.*
- b) There's also a political history reason that the kingdom did not reunite:

At that time Pharaoh Shishak's armies were threatening Judah from the south, so Rehoboam could not afford to move his army to attack the north ...

From a secular historical viewpoint, that too led to the split.

B. So fulfilling Ahijah's prophecy, Jeroboam establishes himself as king of Israel in the north, with Shechem as the new capital



1. In terms of religious life, being separate from the Jerusalem Temple, where worship of Yahweh was strongly focused ... that became a problem for King Jeroboam

- a) Worship required sacrifices led by properly prepared priests from the tribe of Levi ... Many of the levitical priests did not stay in Israel after the division, but fled to Jerusalem, so Jeroboam set up an alternate priesthood.
- b) In order to counter the pull of his people to go 10 miles over the border to worship God back in Jerusalem, he set up alternate worship sites within his kingdom

One was at Dan near the northern border, & 2 at Bethel & Gilgal near southern border

(Note worship sites on map shown by stars)

2. But this is what most got Jeroboam into trouble with the biblical writers:

- a) At the shrines at Dan & Bethel, he set up images of bulls
- b) Repeatedly in 1 & 2 Kings, this is described as the “sin of Jeroboam” even for kings who followed him, if they failed to take down those bulls

Scholars do not agree on whether Jeroboam meant those bulls for worshipping other gods or not.

But even if Jeroboam meant them to honor Yahweh, his bulls @ Dan & Bethel still led to syncretism, (the people combining the worship of other gods w/ Yahweh worship) ... this was the big strike against Jeroboam I

C. As we look back from the view of the bigger Heilsgeschichte, **this**

schism of David & Solomon’s kingdom is largely seen as God’s judgment against the monarchy & its abuses.

1. For a short time, the northern house of Israel has a chance for reform, a chance to return Israel to theocracy & greater social justice
2. But Jeroboam’s reform efforts fall far short of God’s shalom vision ... the end result is even more syncretism
3. Sadly, you now have God’s chosen people & their loyalties divided among several gods & 2 competing Jewish kings
4. You have God’s own people bickering and warring against each other more often than cooperating against common enemies.

IV. Let’s take a quick review of the ups & downs (mostly downs) of Israel’s kings & prophets:

Key Figures during Northern Kingdom				
DATE (BCE)	JUDAH (south)		ISRAEL (north)	
	Kings	Prophets		Kings
	Rehoboam	Shemaiah	Ahijah	Jeroboam I
900				Omri
			Elijah/ Micaiah	Ahab
			Elisha	Jehu
800			Amos	Jeroboam II
		Isaiah	Hosea	
722	Ahaz	Micah		Fall to Assyria

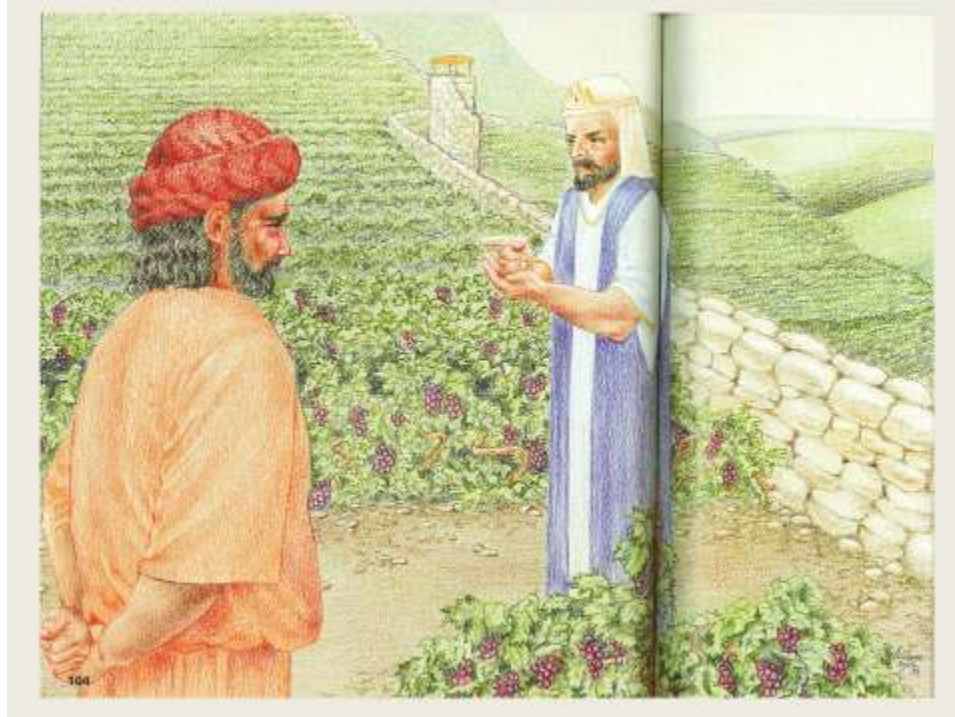
A. Jeroboam I did not establish a dynasty, but was followed by a series of 4 kings in only 5 years, with one bloody assassination after another

B. Omri in 876 finally established order & stability ...

1. He & his 3 descendants formed a dynasty that lasted 34 years, marked by mostly peaceful relations with other countries
2. One means for peaceful relations with other nations was to have the royal family intermarry with foreign royal families ...
 - a) So Omri’s son Ahab married the Phoenician princess Jezebel, who was a strong promoter of Baal worship

b) Much of 1 Kings tells tales of the conflicts between Ahab & his wife Jezebel, against God's prophet Elijah, whom Ahab labeled, "the troubler of Israel"

3. One small example of the conflict was when the greedy Ahab envied a nice vineyard bordering on his own property



(This illustration comes from Shine On children's story Bible that our families received.)

- a) When the vineyard owner Naboth refused to sell to the King, Ahab sulked about it so badly that Jezebel wondered why he was in a funk.
- b) She mocked him, asking if he was the king or not? With false witnesses & a kangaroo court, she basically arranged for Naboth to be killed so Ahab could seize the vineyard
- c) The king was pleased until Elijah called him on the carpet, letting him know of God's anger at him for this murder and abuse of power ...
- d) Elijah pronounced disaster on the Omri dynasty, but because of his sincere repentance, God's judgment was delayed from Ahab himself to his descendants

C. This story illustrates a central message about the divided monarchy:

1. how even with human kings, God's sovereignty over the long term decided the outcomes for Israel, which were communicated thru God's faithful prophets like Elijah & Elisha, Hosea & Amos
2. Even with God's patience & mercy, kings who disobeyed God too blatantly and for too long would eventually be destroyed

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D.

The second dynasty of Israel’s kings, lasting about 100 years, was begun by an army captain named Jehu, whom Elisha anointed

1. Jehu’s ascendance was marked by a brutal & bloody purge, killing off all family & friends of the previous dynasty
2. The Bible gives us mixed signals about the bloody legacy of king Jehu, but his dynasty did lead to one of the most prosperous times in Israel’s history under King Jeroboam II, who expanded Israel’s territory as much as Solomon ever had
3. During the reign of Jeroboam II, the prophet Amos reminded Samaria that, underneath all of Israel’s outward success, God still saw the ugly side of injustice and poverty
 - a) Amos reminded Israel’s leaders that acceptable worship must be connected with shalom justice
 - b) Indeed, it was against Jeroboam II’s monarchy that Amos thundered away in his famous words from ch. 5, v. 23-24

*Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

V. (Summary of fall of Israel)

A. After the death of Jeroboam II, Israel’s fortunes declined rapidly thru a series of weak kings and coup after coup

1. One year after Jeroboam's death, Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in Nineveh. in the rising empire of Assvria



- a) In 732 the marching Assyrians captured Damascus
- b) When Tiglath-Pileser died, Israel's king Hoshea decided to exercise his independence & stop paying tribute money to Nineveh for its protection
- c) Bad choice:
 - the new Assyrian King (Shalmaneser) invaded Israel, and laid a siege around the city of Samaria, choking out all travel, food and supplies in & out of the capital.

2. Although the siege took 3 years, his successor, Sargon II completed the total destruction of Samaria in 722 ... the kingdom of Israel, separate from Jerusalem, would never be rebuilt.

- a) The Assyrians transported over 27K Israelites beyond Nineveh, and they replaced them with peoples from other conquered territories.
- b) The peasants who were left behind in Israel intermarried with these foreign transplants to create an ethnically mixed people that the biblical writers called Samaritans
- c) So as you see from the dotted line & the word "Samaritans" on the timeline, out of the remnant intermarried peoples of the destroyed kingdom of Israel, came the Samaritans who would be so hated by the Jews of Jesus' day

B. After the crisis of the division of Solomon's kingdom, the next Heilsgeschichte crisis was the fall of the northern kingdom

1. For the biblical writers, this was seen as *God's patience running out on the kings who allowed or promoted syncretism*
2. Although larger and often dominating their sister nation of Judah, from a faith story perspective, Israel's rich resources did not spare them from destruction, especially since they stood outside of God's special covenant with David
 - a) The Zion covenant emphasized kingship coming from the line of David ... and worship happening only in the Jerusalem temple.
 - b) *Therefore, not having kings from David's line, and not worshiping in the Temple, from a biblical perspective, were the primary faults of the northern kingdom*
3. In the long run, Judah was not more faithful, and fared no better than Israel, as Mike Yordy will explain with us in 2 weeks

VI. Conclusion

A. So we've just walked thru some of the most amazing and disturbing stories in the Old Testament

1. Lies & betrayals, bloody massacres, miraculous feedings & floating axe heads
2. The world we live in tells us to pay attention to what the guy at the top does ... that it's the powerful people that matter

B. Jesus told us "blessed are the poor in spirit" and that the greatest are those who serve

1. God's vision of shalom was exemplified by Jesus, but for about a thousand years before Jesus came, it was God's prophets who kept that vision in front of the people, however imperfectly
 - a) In the biblical stories we reviewed today, as in real life for us, the figures to pay attention to, the people that really carry God's agenda forward are not the kings, presidents & prime ministers ...
 - b) No, it's the activists, the preachers, the moral conscience-bearers of the nation who we should be listening to ... in other words, the prophets
2. On radio, TV & internet, do we get sucked into believing what the media tell us that the only news worth reporting is what the President, & the Congress, the star athletes and the movie celebrities are doing?
3. If you want a Mennonite e.g. of the kind of "history from below" I'm talking about, come this Sat. night to see "Heavenly Voices"

C. Let's be on the lookout for what God is doing through the unsung heroes of the faith ... I see a lot of them when I look around here this morning