

1ST KINGS

Week 25, chapter 15

The event that ended our lesson last time was the death of Rehoboam, King of Judah, who was Solomon's son that succeeded him to the throne. He had ruled for 17 years from **Shlomo's** death until about 911 B.C.

We're going to spend a good deal of time today by doing a little housekeeping and giving you some information that will help you in having some needed context for understanding what is occurring. While in some cases what I'm going to tell you may sound like something only a seminary professor might appreciate, that is not the case. You can understand it and it can be quite helpful in getting a good picture of what is going on.

As was mentioned in the last lesson one of the main difficulties with studying the 2 Books of the Kings from here forward is that the nation of Israel had by now dissolved into two independent Kingdoms under separate kings, and for the most part the two kingdoms were hostile to one another. Thus, each Kingdom had its own king, and so when a certain king is being discussed we must be aware over which of the 2 Kingdoms he reigned.

Further, since both of the Kingdoms are still Hebrew Kingdoms, Israelite Kingdoms, then they both matter and both play significant roles in redemption history. These Kingdoms split along the same traditional Israelite tribal coalition lines that had existed since before Joshua ushered the 12 tribes into Canaan. Thus since the 2 Kingdoms and their people bear equal importance the Book the Kings consistently gives us timelines and sequences not in terms of calendar dates but rather according to the synchronization of the years of reigns of the northern kings versus the southern kings.

As students of the Bible you need to know these things to help avoid confusion so let's also talk about the biblical timelines in another sense; the actual amount of time that these various kings sat on the throne. Chronology can be a real stumbling block for some folks. Several

lessons ago I explained that the Bible uses at least 5 different chronology systems and it can be difficult to discern which one is at work at any particular time. That said when it comes to the reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah we can make a general (though not absolute) statement that the dating system was what scholars call the Accession Year dating system. In other words, as we move through the Books of Kings (and we also add in information from Chronicles) we will get reports about how long a certain king ruled before he died, or even how long a King of Judah had been reigning before a new king came to power in Israel (or vice versa). However the numbers of years that he reigned can be misleading and so serious Bible teachers and scholars say they find many inconsistencies with how long Israel's kings ruled because when you add up a long list of kings according to the number of years each of them is said to have reigned often it doesn't line up with another Biblical record of that same time period.

Here's an example of what happens to cause the difficulty. In the Accession Year system the year in which the king comes into power is immediately counted as a full year no matter how few or many days or months might remain in that year. Thus (if we use the modern calendar just to make the explanation easier) if an imaginary king took the throne on December 31st in the year 2010, that one day of the year he ruled is said to count as a year's reign because he reigned during the calendar year of 2010. If that king somehow died 3 days later on January 2nd 2011, then the two days he reigned in 2011 are also counted as a full year because he reigned during the calendar year of 2011. Thus our imaginary king would have reigned 3 actual days, but the Biblical record would say that he reigned for 2 years because it doesn't mean a duration of 2 years, 2 solar cycles, but rather that he reigned some amount of time that involved 2 calendar years (one day in 2010 and two days in 2011 in our example). If this same king ruled until Jan 1st 2012, an overall period of only 368 days, the Biblical record would say that he ruled for 3 years because he ruled for at least one day in the calendar years of 2010, 2011, and 2012.

On the other hand if this same imaginary king took over on January 1st 2010 (the 1st day of the new year of 2010) and ruled until December 31st 2012 (the last day of the year 2012), he would also be considered to have reigned for 3 years because he, too, ruled for at least one day during the calendar years of 2010, 2011, and 2012 even though he reigned for 1095 days. Let me say that another way: because of the Bible using the Accession Year system for dealing with kings (because that's what the Hebrew culture and most Middle Eastern cultures did) a king could rule from as little as 366 days and as much as 1095 days and in both cases the length of his reign could be recorded in the Scriptures as 3 years.

So particularly as we have entered an era of the Kings when many of the kings ruled only briefly, you can get some strange results if you start adding up the recorded years of each king's reign. You wind up with many more years of reign than the number of actual years of

that time period. It is merely because of the traditional use of the Accession Year system that causes this anomaly. But let's also be clear that we really don't have a way to accurately straighten it out because most of the time we aren't given a month or day of the year when a king's reign began or ended. We can get somewhat close, but that's all.

Now for one more important housekeeping matter. It is difficult to teach about the era of the Kings by using only the 2 Books of the Kings, because this same era is also recorded in the 2 Books of Chronicles. And while academics refer to these two sets of Bible books as "parallel accounts" (that is they both talk about the same kings and mostly about the same events), in reality the Book of Kings will mention things that are not in Chronicles and vice versa. But even more challenging, sometimes you'll get conflicting information about the same king and same event between Book of Kings and Chronicles. Usually this is not very difficult to deal with but at other times it can be a real head-scratcher. Non-Believers and skeptics of course have a field day with these instances.

So I will continue to include statements and excerpts from the Book of Chronicles to add pertinent information that I think is helpful for us in our study of the Book of Kings. But also understand that at times these conflicts between what the Book of Kings says versus what Chronicles says are quite real and there are no simple solutions. The reason this happens for the most part can be best explained by using the familiar example of the so-called Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The thing is that while those 3 different Gospel Books often tell the same story, we'll sometimes get different information about those stories and the characters involved. And this is explained by Bible scholars and pastors (correctly so) by saying that the 3 different Gospel writers interviewed different witnesses to the events, created these gospel accounts for different employers who had different goals and interests in mind, came from different cultures, and so they wrote from different perspectives. Thus as concerns any particular event one writer might focus on one aspect and ignore other aspects, or interpret the meaning of relevant aspects of an event differently than another of the gospel writers. Frankly, this biblical reality has been a prime contributor to the reason that Christianity has become a fractured religion of over 3000 denominations, each taking unique views of the NT Gospels and Paul's Epistles, and each of whom often run around calling the others who have a different perspective than themselves a cult.

The 2 Books of Kings and the 2 Books of Chronicles operate a bit like the Synoptic Gospels. They were obviously taken from two separately created traditions that came from slightly different points of view about the era of the Kings; the ancient editors of Chronicles seem to have had access to different documents than the editors of Kings had at their disposal from which they gathered their information to form their books. And these books were written well after the fact so whatever they were using for documentation could also easily have had a few

copyist errors that would account for such things as slightly different names and places at times.

So with that preface, let's get into 1st Kings Chapter 15 and the time immediately following the death of King Rehoboam.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 15 all

Rehoboam King of Judah was survived by Jeroboam King of Israel; in fact Jeroboam would witness two more Kings of Judah arise, **Abiyam** and then **Asa** after him. Right away we see a disagreement between the writers of the Book of Kings versus those who wrote Chronicles; in the Book of Kings **Abiyam** is not painted in a good light. Verse 3 says that he behaved as did his father, Rehoboam, repeating all of his sins that the Lord condemned. And yet we read this substantially different assessment about **Abiyam** in 2nd Chronicles 13:

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 13:4 – 18

Here Aviyam is portrayed not only as a righteous hero but as very loyal to the God of Israel. The Rabbis say that the reason for this disparity is that the 2nd Chronicles account is taken from records that highlight the early part of **Aviyam's** reign, and the Book of Kings account is taken from records that focus on the latter part of his short 3-year reign. That may well be but I think there is another reason for the difference of the writers' perspectives as to Aviyam's status before the Lord and we'll tackle that in just a moment. First there are some other difficulties with this passage that don't entirely agree with the parallel account in 2nd Chronicles 13. The issue is the lineage of Aviyam and then later **Asa**.

Verse 2 says that **Aviyam's** mother was **Maacah**, and that she was a daughter of Absalom. In verse 10 **Aviyam's** son **Asa** ascends to the throne of Judah and the biblical record pronounces that **Maacah** is ALSO **Asa's** mother. But even more 2nd Chronicles 13:1, 2 says this:

^{CJB} **2 Chronicles 13:1** *It was in the eighteenth year of King Yarov'am that Aviyah began his reign over Y'udah.*

² *He ruled three years in Yerushalayim; his mother's name was Mikhayahu the daughter of Uri'el from Giv'ah.*

So we have all kinds of issues here; 1st in the Book of Kings we have the same woman (**Maacah**) as being mother to both **Aviyam** and to his son **Asa**; then we have 2nd Chronicles proposing an entirely different woman as the birth mother of **Aviyam**: **Mikhayahu** daughter of **Uriel**. It's not too difficult to untangle the problem of **Maacah** and her role, but the discrepancy of **Mikhayahu** versus **Maacah** as the mother of Aviyam is not so easily solved. We're not going to spend much time here but this much is certain: they can't both be right. The general agreement is that the correct woman is **Maacah** because the genealogy fits as of she is of the line of Absalom (a son of King David). **Mikhayahu** does NOT fit because her father is said to be **Uriel** of Gibeon. Gibeon is a city in the territory of Benjamin, meaning that **Mikhayahu** was a Benjamite and this doesn't allow for God's promise of a continuance of the Davidic dynasty in Judah. How did **Mikhayahu's** name get inserted here? Who knows? I could offer you a half-dozen speculations but that is all they would amount to. For sure this was intentional and not a copyist error. But as with the several things of this sort in the Bible, we must step back and realize that these name differences essentially changes nothing of any importance. Yet we should not be so naïve as to say that there are no contradictions in the Bible whatsoever, no matter how minor: there are and here we have just examined one.

Assuming that **Maacah** is at least the correct woman involved, here is what the evidence and the rabbinical research shows. **Maacah** was a granddaughter of Absalom. She was the birth mother of **Aviyah** and the biological grandmother of **Asa**. Why is the term "mother" employed especially concerning **Asa's** relationship with **Maachah**? In biblical Hebrew the word mother is '**em**' (in modern times Jews tend to use the affectionate word **imah**.) However '**em**' can carry with it a sense of not merely strict biological or parental relationship, but also one of a position of honor and authority as when the Judge Deborah was called an '**em**' of Israel (a mother of Israel) in the Book of Judges.

As we will soon see **Maacah** was a powerful women who held an official office in the royal court of Judah and that position was the **gevirah**. **Gevirah** is usually translated as Queen Mother and that probably is about as good as we can do in an English translation. She is not a Queen, but for whatever reason has amassed her own political power base and her son and

grandson had to do a lot of her bidding because of her political connections and clout. Thus she indeed was “mother” to **Aviyah** and to **Asa** in that sense; but who **Asa’s** actual biological mother is we’re not told (and that would be quite typical in Hebrew society to not record the mother’s name).

Now let’s redirect our efforts to trying to find out something this isn’t so academic but it does carry with it a greater importance than it might seem at first glance. And the question before us is this: why does 1st Kings 15 portray Aiyah as an unrighteous and unrepentant sinner in God’s eyes who was just like his father Rehoboam, yet 2nd Chronicles 13 describes him as a righteous king who spoke so well of the Lord and behaved in such an admirable way? The short answer is that both descriptions are true simultaneously; but the long answer is a lot more fun. And we’ll begin our investigation of this quandary by looking at what seems like a repetitive and insignificant phrase at the end of 1st Kings 15 verse 3 but it is actually the key that unlocks our understanding of this dilemma.

There in verse 3 it says that **Aviyah’s** problem (from this ancient editor’s point of view) was that he was not whole-hearted (*lo lebab shalem*) as was his forefather King David. This is followed by a long explanation in verse 4 that says that David did what was **right** (or better **upright** as is the better meaning for the Hebrew word *yashar*) in God’s eyes; EXCEPT for that little matter with Uriah the Hittite. You might recall that David had an affair with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, got her pregnant, then had Uriah murdered so he could have Bathsheba to himself and cover up the adulterous affair, and in the process of covering up Uriah’s murder many of David’s most loyal soldiers were killed to help him establish an alibi. So other than for fornication, adultery and cold-blooded murder David was a righteous man. Of course this seems like double-talk to say such a thing; but hasn’t it seemed so to you anyway as we read in the Scriptures about David’s inexcusable actions that caused such calamities and human suffering and yet for some inexplicable reason the **Tanach** regularly repeats that the Lord holds David up as the standard for all of Israel’s future kings to follow? I’ve mentioned on numerous occasions the tangled web of excuses that the Rabbis have invented to excuse David’s many horrific transgressions and make them not sinful or evil at all, because otherwise it seems impossible to them to say that on the one hand David was truly an adulterer and a murderer of grand scale but on the other hand is also a righteous king who bears the attributes of the hoped-for Messiah.

The issue of what separates the whole-hearted king from the evil unrighteous king comes down to what it is that makes David whole-hearted in God’s eyes and not ours. And I don’t know about you, but that is something that I want to know for myself. I want to know what it is that makes a human (makes me) whole-hearted from Yehoveh’s perspective. And here is what it is: it is to refrain from ever worshipping other gods. It is NOT committing idolatry. Whole-heartedness is sticking steadfast to Yehoveh and it is not mixing pagan worship practices with

pure worship or giving even tacit approval to others to do so. Whole-heartedness is a fierce and exclusive loyalty to the God of Israel, even despite our deepest flaws and our worst moral and/or criminal failures. David did many wrong things and he committed many detestable sins for which he paid a dear price; but he was never an idolater and never gave his approval for idolatry. His Psalms and the records of his deeds make it clear that his loyalty to the God of Israel (and Him alone) remained intact all of his days.

Notice how this fits hand in glove with what was said of Abraham perhaps 1000 years earlier than David:

^{CJB} **Genesis 15:6** *He (Abraham) believed in ADONAI, and he (God) credited it to him as righteousness.*

It wasn't a lack of sin, it wasn't living a perfect life, it wasn't being kind and merciful to other humans; it was a firm, passionate and unwavering trust in Yehoveh that was counted as Abraham's righteousness and as David's whole-heartedness.

Let's carry that through just a bit further. It is said that when we harm another person wrongly (we steal from them, we assault them, kidnap them, defraud them, lie to them or even kill them) we have sinned against God. Yet these kinds of sins are what I term indirect sins. The 10 Commandments list some laws that pertain to human-to-human interaction and other laws that pertain to interaction between humans and God. A typical criminal action means that we have not come directly against God, rather we have harmed another human in violation of the Torah commandments against such a thing and this is classified as sin.

On the other hand there are direct sins against God that really have no bearing on other humans and the chief among these sins is idolatry. Idolatry is not a criminal act as it harms no human. Making a graven image is not a criminal act because it doesn't do violence to a fellow human being. Refusing to offer a sacrifice of praise to the Lord or even a sacrifice of our income to Him causes no discomfort nor elicits any grievance from another man. Refusing to observe the Sabbath isn't a societal crime because there is no danger or loss to person or property. In other words one kind of sin (an indirect sin) is human against human; the second kind of sin (a direct sin) is human against God.

At least in Old Testament times, I can state unequivocally that the Lord used idolatry as the measure of whether a king was whole-hearted or not towards Him. A king of Israel could do all sorts of terrible things to his human subjects and it was certainly counted as sin and there was usually divine punishment for it; but as long as those sins didn't include idolatry we find that king is defined as whole-hearted towards the Lord. On the other hand a king of Israel or Judah could be generally good and reasonable with his people but if he becomes idolatrous at any point (as with King Solomon later in his reign) then he is NOT considered whole-hearted but evil in God's eyes.

Is there something like this pattern found in the New Testament? Yes; it is usually called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and the usual comment about this act is that it represents the only unpardonable sin. Interestingly there is no consensus among theologians on what the actual trespass of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit amounts to; but the crux of the matter is that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit does **not** involve any harmful human to human criminal action; rather blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a direct, intentional, malicious and hostile act of man towards God just as is idolatry. A person who has committed idolatry or blasphemed the Holy Spirit (which just might be essentially the same things) is therefore not counted as whole-hearted towards God no matter how good or moral of a life he or she might be living otherwise.

So applying this understanding of the term "whole-hearted towards Yehoveh" to our Scriptural conundrum concerning **Aviyah** what we find is that on the one hand **King Aviyah** didn't commit terrible sins against other humans that we know of, and in fact according to 2nd Chronicles he generally did do the things that God told him to do, and he did them in God's name. So in 2nd Chronicles 13 it is this admirable aspect of his life that is focused on and so the ancient editor sees Aviyah's lack of criminality against his loyal subjects as making him a righteous man. But on the other hand in 1st Kings 15 we are told that **Aviyah** walked in the ways of his father Rehoboam, and those ways are specifically referring to idolatry. 2nd Chronicles 12 says this of Rehoboam:

CJB 2 Chronicles 12:1 *But in time, after Rechav'am had consolidated his rulership and had become strong, he, and with him all Isra'el, abandoned the Torah of ADONAI.*

CJB 2 Chronicles 12:5 *Now Sh'ma'yah the prophet came to Rechav'am and the leaders of Y'hudah who had gathered in Yerushalayim because of Shishak and said to them, "Here is what ADONAI says: 'Because you have abandoned me, I have abandoned you to the hands of Shishak.'"*

To commit idolatry is to abandon God's Torah. To abandon God's Torah is to abandon God. Nothing has changed.

So **Aviyah** directly sinned towards God in the same manner as Rehoboam his father did: idolatry. And therefore verse 3 says "his (Aviyah's) heart was not whole with Yehoveh his Elohim", as contrasted with the heart of his forefather David that was whole (**shalem**) with God. Therefore 1st Kings 15 portrays **Aviyah** from the perspective as being wicked not because he was mean or uncaring of his people, but because he was an idolater to some level or another and thus not counted as whole-hearted with God.

Today whole-heartedness with God is trusting His Son Yeshua as our Redeemer. And this is so because Yeshua is God and trusting Him is trusting God. Our sinning against other humans matters greatly and we will suffer the consequences; but THAT is **not** the divine measuring rod of our passion and undivided loyalty for God and therefore of our whole-heartedness towards Him.

But beware that we don't deceive ourselves: no matter how high we hold our hands when we cry out to Him nor how low in humility we bow our heads in prayer, when we mix-in pagan worship and alternative manmade beliefs with our belief and worship of God, at some point that is idolatry and not whole-heartedness. When we refuse to accept the Holy Scriptures' description of God's nature and character and instead pick and choose in order to construct our own preferred image of God, at some point that is idolatry and not whole-heartedness. While harming other humans is sin and wrong and will bear consequences, it is nothing as compared to not being whole-hearted towards the Lord. The life of King David shows us that in the end, passion for God and exclusivity of our loyalty towards Him is what we must strive for unceasingly. And while the redeemed of all ages and eras are duty bound to obey all of God's laws and commandments (or it is sin), and we today are equipped to follow those commandments in the proper spirit by means of God's Holy Spirit who indwells us, that is not the biblical and divine definition of whole-heartedness towards God and of what we would today call a saving righteousness.

We'll continue with chapter 15 next time.

