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Dear Associates and Friends,

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This month's article is "[Israel and Judah: 23. King Ahab's Decline](#)." The text is exclusively from the Book of First Kings chapters 19 to 21, with no mention of these events in the Book of Second Chronicles. The story focuses on King Ahab of the apostate northern Kingdom of Israel, continuing the ways of his ancestors to worship other gods besides YHWH.

Cast of Characters:

1. King Ahab of Israel continues his 22 year rule. He faces many challenges, but remains an idolater. The pain and death of others does not seem to faze him at all. His only concerns are his problems.
2. Jezebel, Ahab's chief wife. A mass murderer, she seeks to murder Elijah.
3. Elijah the prophet, threatened by Jezebel, has a direct encounter with YHWH.
4. Ben-hadad, King of Syria, invades Israel. He is a big loser, but continues to reign, continues to fight.
5. Naboth, an archetypal victim, is murdered in a plot by Jezebel. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard.
6. Elisha, the eventual successor of Elijah, is introduced to the story. He figures large in future events.
7. Several (in fact quite a few) unnamed prophets of YHWH interact with Ahab. Why are they not named? We can only wonder.

The center of this story is Ahab. Everything revolves around his actions, how he is in decline, and receives judgments predicted against him for sins against God and man. Even though he is being judged, he is victorious as a ruler and leader, all of which come through God's help. Ahab must know this is true, although he never acknowledges it so far as the texts tell us.

Nothing seems to get through to Ahab, unless it affects him personally. Ahab is another hard-headed villain like Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, or Herod, all of whom were horrid, self-centered people always willing to exercise deadly power over others, rarely accepting moral advice, and only accepting God's word when it is to their benefit or when God is "in their face" with judgment.

Why Did the People Follow Ahab?

The people of Israel, the northern kingdom, generally supported Ahab. They certainly were not troubled by his idolatry. In fact, they followed his example in worshipping gods besides YHWH. At Mount Carmel, YHWH made His presence known as the only true God. As a result of that theophany, the people quickly followed Elijah's orders to kill 950 pagan prophets opposing him. Ahab just watched and did nothing.

Then the people quickly forgot about the incident, for whatever reasons they went home and continued to worship other gods besides YHWH. Elijah was disheartened and under threat from Jezebel. The bottom line was that only 7,000 people in the entire kingdom exclusively worshipped YHWH. That number was tragically few compared to the total population.

The people worshipped YHWH but they worshipped other gods also, totally forbidden in the covenant Israel made with YHWH in the time of Moses. The people of the northern kingdom were just as bound by that covenant in the time of Ahab, as were the people living at the time of the exodus.

If they lived in the land God promised to them, and they were descendants of the tribes of Israel, then they were required to follow God's covenant laws or they would receive severe punishment for disobedience. God would not protect them and give them blessings unless they obeyed His covenant laws.

We know from the New Testament that it was impossible for them to keep the laws of the covenant properly. The people of Israel and Judah were just as unable to fulfill those laws as you and I are unable to avoid sinning. Both were inevitable. God placed His special people in this role of failure to be an example to all people throughout history — that physical acts cannot fulfill God's demands for spiritual righteousness.

The End Result

As we proceed through the histories of Kings and Chronicles, we will begin to intersperse the prophecies of the major and minor prophets where applicable into the story. The narration will slow down as more information is available to inform us what the people and their leaders were doing and, from God's point of view, even what they were thinking. God's word, through the historical and prophetic books, will tell us.

The words of Isaiah explain the situation of the northern Kingdom of Israel as much as it explained the situation in the southern Kingdom of Judah in Isaiah's day:

“Seek you YHWH while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto YHWH, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says YHWH. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

• *Isaiah 55:6–9*

In the days of Isaiah, the people of the northern kingdom became so corrupt, so evil, so disobedient, and so willing to ignore YHWH's mandate to worship Him exclusively, that God decades before wiped the northern kingdom off the face of the earth and sent the people into exile to a foreign land. This occurred just as Moses predicted would happen to those who disobey God's Covenant laws (read Deuteronomy chapter 28 for the complete list of punishments for disobedience).

Thank You

Our purpose at ASK is to help you elucidate the Word of God. “Elucidate” is a fancy word, some synonyms for which are: clarify, explain, explicate, expound, illuminate, reveal, expose, and interpret. All these are what we do at ASK, beginning with the mass of research by Dr. Ernest Martin and others, and then going beyond that body of work to present the whole counsel of God. Why do we do that? It is because the Word of God is so useful and intense in its life-application; it always leads quietly and never coerces us. The Spirit of God influences our individual human spirit — gradually and gently — to change us toward God's character to love him and to love our neighbor.

“For the word of God is living and operative, and keener above any two-edged sword, and penetrating up to the parting of soul and spirit, both of the articulations and marrow, and

[the word of God] is a judge of the sentiments and thoughts of the heart.”

• *Hebrews 4:12, Concordant Literal Translation*

Re-read that verse and fully understand how important the Word of God is. So too is its proper understanding. We need your financial support to continue elucidating the Word of God. We operate from contributions you send to us, and only a small fraction of you who read these words ever contribute. Please begin doing so.

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