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Summary

Solomon built the temple and a great nation, but under his son Rehoboam the kingdom split into two parts, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Jeroboam, the first king over the northern tribes, set a bad pattern for Israel's kings. Elijah, the model prophet, and Elisha, his successor, were called to struggle against a corrupting, alien religion and the leaders who had accepted it. Micaiah, Amos, Hosea, and others appeared in a variety of circumstances. In contrast to the many kings of Israel who followed bad patterns, Joash, in Judah, set a good example.

Basic Bible References

1 Kings 3:16-28; 18; 19:9-18; 22:5-28

2 Kings 2:1-18; 5:1-19a; 12:9-16

Amos 7:10-15

Hosea 6:1, 2; 11:1-12; 14:1

Word List

Aram

Ephraim

Leprosy

Messiah

The Twelve

GOD CALLS LEADERS

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GOOD LEADERS / BAD LEADERS

Solomon

David and Bathsheba's son Solomon succeeded to the throne despite the fact that he was not the oldest surviving son. He was able to consolidate his power, and his realm extended beyond the former limits of the tribes. The LORD gave him great wisdom. Read **1 Kings 3:16-28**, a story about his wise judgment.

His greatest achievement was building the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. Its magnificence is described in some detail in chapters 6 and 7. Its importance was incalculable, for it became the focus of the worship of the LORD in the remaining history of the Jews in their homeland. Seven years were devoted to building it. The dedication ceremony brought all the tribes together. Solomon made a speech, offered a great prayer, blessed the assembly, and offered sacrifices. Read 8:27-30 as a summary of the significance of the occasion. The celebration lasted eight days.

Solomon's political ability was significant. The geographical boundaries of the nation were greatly extended. He had a navy (see 4:21; 9:26-28), and he was famous beyond Israel. You have probably heard of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, which illustrates his reputation for wisdom and the grandeur of his court (10).

There were negatives, however, in his life and conduct. His own palace took thirteen years to build. His court and retinue were undoubtedly magnificent. His harem was portrayed

as including *seven hundred princesses* (11:3), and unfortunately his foreign wives involved him in worship of strange gods. Rulers of surrounding kingdoms plagued him. In time, however, a worse problem involved the unrest among the northern tribes that were led by Ephraim.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him. He lacked his father's wisdom, and when he failed to reconcile the northern tribes, they rebelled. Their leader was Jeroboam. From this time on, the texts refer to the northern tribes as "Israel." Rehoboam and succeeding kings of the line of David ruled over "Judah," which also included the tribe of Benjamin.

Jeroboam, the leader of the rebellion, became Israel's king. Knowing that worship at the Jerusalem temple would take the seceding tribes back into the influence of Judah, he made *two calves of gold* and declared that Israel should worship them. Bethel became the religious center for the northern tribes (12:25-33). The texts thereafter refer to Jeroboam as he *who caused Israel to sin* (for example, 22:52).

Now there was recurring warfare between Israel and Judah. Rehoboam was not a good king. Some of his successors were good, some bad. The Davidic dynasty, however, remained on Judah's throne, as God had promised. In Israel there was a succession of dynasties, and tribal rivalry sometimes still appeared. Under King Omri (the fourth dynasty) Samaria became the northern capital. Omri's record however, was bad (16:24-26). His son Ahab was one of the worst rulers, and his foreign wife, Jezebel, became a symbol of evil.¹ The couple reintroduced worship of the foreign god Baal (16:30-33). Recall the career of Gideon and its sequel.

Elijah, the Model Prophet

Prophetic leadership is characteristic of God's own way of speaking to a people. It requires a notable amount of courage to both listen to and speak for God. The prophet Elijah appears at this point. Because of his powerful relationship with Yahweh and the bold pattern

¹ 21:25, 26. Also see Revelation 2:20.

he set for later prophets, he became the model prophet.² Samuel had marked the transition of religious and moral leadership from the judges to the prophets, and he was followed by other less well-known prophets before Elijah. Some were notable, as was Nathan, who confronted David about Bathsheba (12). Most of the well-known prophets, however, were leaders in the times of the monarchies. They labored under a driving sense of God's special guidance.

Elijah's ministry was in Israel. His duel on Mount Carmel with the priests of Baal is one of the most striking stories about a prophet in the ninth century BC. Read **1 Kings 18**. Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, and he fled from the country. God confronted him; the scene is noteworthy. Read **19:9-18**. He returned to Israel, and shortly he called Elisha to be his follower. Ahab and Jezebel had some military success, but after a particularly despicable episode in Samaria Elijah confronted Ahab again and forecast death for the wicked couple (21).³

Elijah was not the only prophet to confront King Ahab. A few years later, Ahab enlisted the help of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, in a joint military operation. Read **1 Kings 22:5-28**. The four hundred prophets were a kind of professional court guild. It is apparent that they were yes-men and not God-appointed leaders. On the other hand, Micaiah proved to be the true interpreter of Yahweh's will. This story suggests that prophecy in itself was not always godly.

Elijah's ministry ended in a unique way. The tradition underscores the significance of the prophet by recording that he ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot. Elisha was present, took up *the mantle of Elijah*, and immediately became his successor. Read **2 Kings 2:1-18**. In later Jewish belief Elijah was expected to be the forerunner of the messiah, God's future anointed deliverer of the people.⁴ So Malachi writes, *Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the*

2 See Luke 9:30, where Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets.

3 Ahab's death is recorded in 22:29-40. Jezebel's death is later, 2 Kings 9:30-37.

4 "Messiah" is from a root meaning "anointed."

great and terrible day of the LORD comes (Malachi 4:15). Some contemporaries of John the Baptist thought that he was Elijah come back to life (John 1:21).

Elisha

There are a series of stories about the awesome deeds of Elisha, many of them reflective of Elijah. (Some may also make you think of Jesus.) He raised a dead boy to life and fed a large group of people with a small amount of food. The healing of Naaman, an Aramean army commander, is notable; read **2 Kings 5:1-19a**. “Aram” denoted an area that we today would designate “Syria.” Its principal city was (and is) Damascus. An NRSV footnote on “leprosy” reads, “A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain.”

Several times it is reported that Elisha was instrumental in saving Israel from Aramean attacks. For example, when Ben-hadad besieged Samaria, the LORD intervened, and there was a great celebration (6:24-7:20). A son of Ahab was king at this time. He was replaced by a military commander, Jehu, who caused Jezebel’s death and then killed all the worshipers of Baal (9:30-37; 10:18-31). Unfortunately *he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to commit*. The record can be confusing at this time, for there was a king Joash in both Israel and Judah. Elisha’s death occurred during the reign of Joash of Israel (13:14-20a).

Amos

Amos is reckoned to be the first of the “writing prophets,”⁵ who appeared in the eighth century BC. The book consists entirely of his messages. Repeatedly he begins with the prophetic watchword: “Thus says the LORD.” Because of this first-person intensity, there is more about what was said than about what was done—the opposite of the records in Samuel/Kings.

Amos came from the Kingdom of Judah, but he prophesied in Israel. His book is one of “The Twelve,” the fourth scroll of the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew Bible.⁶ His stature

5 That is, they themselves wrote the record of their own activity.

6 Often referred to as “minor” prophets, a reference to their length, not to their importance. For convenience they were inscribed on one scroll. The Hebrew Bible considers Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and The Twelve as the “Latter Prophets.”

among the prophets should not be measured by the brevity of his book. The courage with which he denounced evil is intense, and the force of his ethical message is memorable.

Amos labored *in the days of King Uzziah of Judah* (Amos 1:1), whose death is noted in Isaiah 6:1. Read the capsule description of Amos' activity in **Amos 7:10-15**. We can only guess at the immediate results of his powerful preaching. His preaching did not divert Israel from destruction. He lived about the middle of the eighth century.

Hosea

Although the book of the prophet Hosea is placed first among The Twelve, his career appears to have covered a longer period than that of Amos, since he was active during the reigns of several kings of Judah after Uzziah. Hosea turned tragedy in his personal life into a basis of his message to Israel. His unfaithful wife became a symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to the LORD, and this was woven into his prophecy. This same motif appears elsewhere in the Old Testament (for example, Jeremiah 3:20).

Read **Hosea 11:1-12**. "Ephraim," one of the tribes of the northern kingdom, stands for the whole nation.⁷ The prophet's message of God's persistent love for Israel and reassurance of ready forgiveness is memorable. God graciously invites the people to "return"; note **6:1, 2; 14:1**. The book is full of striking figures of speech. An undercurrent, however, anticipates the alternative: national disaster.

Both Amos and Hosea lived *in the days of King Jeroboam* of Israel. We know this ruler as Jeroboam II. He had a long career, 41 years, and he extended the territory of the northern kingdom to its farthest limit. Unfortunately, *he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin* (2 Kings 14:24). Hosea's distinctive type of prophetic leadership extended during the rapid decline of Israel after Jeroboam and indicates that response to God's revelatory truth is indispensable for true leadership at any time.

⁷ Note the "poetic parallelism" in verse 1, where Ephraim = Israel

Joash of Judah

Meanwhile, in Judah, Ahaziah became king. He was no improvement over his predecessors. His family was of no help, for his mother was Athaliah, Omri's granddaughter. His in-laws were from the house of Ahab. Upon his death Athaliah seized the throne and destroyed all of the royal family except the king's son Joash (also spelled Jehoash). He was hidden by Athaliah's daughter, and six years later a coup under the priest Jehoiada crowned him king—at age seven! The story is in 2 Kings 11.

Joash had a long reign and *did what was right in the sight of the LORD*. His great accomplishment was the restoration of the temple, which had fallen into disrepair. Perhaps you have heard of the chest that was made to receive money gifts for the repair work; read the story in **2 Kings 12:9-16**.

You do not need to try to remember all the involved details of the histories of Israel and Judah. We are concentrating on the lessons to be learned from the influence of the dynastic and prophetic leaders of these peoples. These stories are also part of the long sweep of the story of God's faithfulness and purpose in the life of the people.

For Further Study and Reflection

Memory Bank

Tell something important about each of the following:

Solomon

David

Jeroboam I

Elijah

Elisha

Jezebel

Amos

Joash of Judah

Research

1. Read the story of Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kings 21, a very nasty episode in the careers of Ahab and Jezebel.

2. Why is Elijah singled out for the role of forerunner of the day of Yahweh (Malachi 4:5, 6)? How is this reflected in modern Jewish observance of Passover?
3. Find out more about Hosea or Amos. A Bible dictionary will help.

Reflection

1. What leaders in the twentieth century might fit the pattern of leaders we have studied in this theme? What are your bases of comparison?
2. Religious groups may influence political decisions. What historical examples can you think of outside the Bible? Today?
3. How should religious leadership be exercised?