

## Summary for Session 14: Divided Kingdom—Part 2

Prep work: 1 Kings 12-22 and 2 Kings

DVD: After a quick recap of the division of the kingdom into Israel in the North and Judah in the South, Jeff launches into the review of Judah's history from division until exile. He begins by noting that, unlike Israel, Judah has the Temple, the Law, and the Davidic line—all blessings that should ensure they follow God. It is all the more shameful, then, that they also stray like their kin to the north. Most of the writing prophets of the Bible speak to Judah during this period, including Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. (It's debated whether Joel is writing to Israel or Judah, so Jeff recommends reading the Book of Joel twice, once with Israel in mind, and once with Judah.) The prophets are often divided into the categories of major or minor, but that is based on the volume of writing attributed to them, and Jeff reminds us that all of their messages are important.

Jeff returns to the history of the period by reviewing some of the kings of Judah and pointing out that there does not seem to be a pattern of who was a good king and who did evil. Rehoboam was Solomon's son and first king of Judah. While he fortified the cities in Judah in order to keep them from foreign invaders, he also turned from God and allowed altars and pagan worship sites to be set up. Jehoshaphat, the fourth king, can be considered “the worst of the best” of the Judaic kings. He did what was right, but did not take down the pagan altars (1 Kings 22:43-44). His son, Jehoram, married Athaliah, daughter of King Ahab and Jezebel of Israel (the worst of Israel's kings) as part of a peace treaty between Israel and Judah. Jehoram's rule was much like Ahab's, with a huge influx in idolatry. It is Athaliah, however, who will cause the most trouble for Judah. Once her husband and son (King Ahaziah) die, Athaliah starts killing off members of the royal family in an attempt to rule. Her daughter, Jehoshеba, smuggles prince Joash, then but a baby, and hides with him in the Temple for six years until Athaliah is overthrown and slain. Jeff pauses to note that because of an imprudent marriage, the Davidic line is reduced to one child and almost annihilated. He observes that this is a recurring theme in the Bible: marriage is important, and one should pay close attention to choosing a good spouse.

Uzziah, the tenth king of Judah, ruled 52 years; the longest of the good kings. He is stricken with leprosy and his son acts as steward in his stead, or in Hebrew (*al ha-bayit*, literally, “head of the household”). This will become an important point later on. Also, his mother is mentioned, which Jeff points out is often the case—another reminder of the importance of the role of Queen Mother. Later on, while King Ahaz does not listen to God or pray, his son Hezekiah is a good king. Hezekiah tears down the altars and stops all idolatry. He listens to God “as his forefather David had done” (2 Kings 18:3) and puts all his trust in God. When he is struck with a terminal illness, Jeff remarks that it is symbolic of the condition of Judah as a whole. Just as Hezekiah turns to God, prays for healing, and is healed by God, so Judah, now sick, will turn to God in the future and experience healing. Hezekiah's hymn of thanksgiving for his healing can be found in Isaiah 38.

Paradoxically, after such a good king comes the worst king of Judah: Manasseh.

Manasseh rules while to the north, Israel is sent into exile. Jeff observes that previously,

the rivalry with Israel spurred Judah to keep closer to God's commandments. Now that Israel is gone and there is no external threat, Judah becomes lax and Manasseh is a product of that. Manasseh brings back all the altars and idolatrous practices that Hezekiah banished. He even sets up pagan altars within the Temple—the dwelling place of God! It is because of him that God declares Judah will go into exile, as God says “I will measure [Judah] with the same cord as Samaria” (2 Kings 21:13). The last king of note is Josiah, one of the best rulers of Judah. Josiah is only 8 when he ascends the throne but he quickly brings reform to Judah, once again abolishing all idolatrous places and practices. He is devoted to the Temple and the Law of God, or *Torah*, listening and responding to God's Word. (A Catholic parallel is found in the two parts of the Mass: Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist.) Upon hearing the Law read aloud for the first time in many years, Josiah rends his garments as a sign of his anguish that the Laws of God have been disobeyed so flagrantly up to now. Jeff pauses here to explain the symbolism of rending garments, since it happens so often in the Old Testament. Garments were associated with truth (as in “put on holiness” being symbolized by putting on the white garment of Baptism) and rending them was done in recognition that truth had been lost. In this case, the travesty was that the Truth, the Law of God, had been obliterated by God's own people. The Book of Sirach speaks of Josiah and describes him as sweet as honey (in reference to his love of the Law), and a special blend of incense (in reference to his devotion to the Temple) (Sirach 49:1-3). As an aside, Jeff relates that 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews, in the time of Jesus, would learn to read by pouring honey over the Hebrew consonants written out, and once they memorized the consonants, they could lick the honey up, thus linking words (and the written Law, which was the purpose of reading) to sweetness in their minds.

Jeff then moves on to the prophets sent to Judah, highlighting Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah in particular. The writings of the Book of Isaiah can be divided into two smaller components: the “Book of Woe” (Chapters 1-39) and the “Book of Consolation” (Chapters 40-55). Within the “Book of Woe” is a description of how Judah is living and a warning that the kingdom will soon lie in waste. A sign is given that consolation shall come; however: “the virgin shall be with child” (Isaiah 7:14). This is the prophecy Mary and Jesus would later fulfill. Jeff remarks that the fact that Matthew would later have to quote this prophecy in his gospel means it was not obvious to 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews that Jesus was the person of whom Isaiah made reference. Later in Isaiah, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali is noted as first disgraced, but then made glorious by the emergence of Prince of Peace from there (Isaiah 8:23, 9:1-6). This land, also named the “Way of the Sea” and “Galilee of the Gentiles” describes the region west of the Sea of Galilee where an important trading route linked the northern lands of the Ancient Near East with the southern lands, such as Egypt. The route narrowed here, bordered by the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea to the east, and the Mediterranean to the west. It was a prime spot for ambushing and much blood was shed there. However, out of this region, and specifically due west of the Sea of Galilee, will come the Promised Savior. Just so, Jesus is raised in Nazareth and makes Capernaum, on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, his base for his ministry. Jesus is the light that will emerge and will be “a light

to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6) as he provides salvation for all people. In this way, Jeff affirms, the Old Testament is definitively Christocentric—“the Old Testament was deliberately so oriented that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ” (Catechism 122).

The “Book of Consolation” in Isaiah can be read as the Jews waiting for the coming of the Promised Savior. The ministry of John the Baptist is described by Isaiah as the voice who cries out “Prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3). The later chapters of Isaiah also describe the Savior, who will be the “Suffering Servant” for the redemption of all (Isaiah 40, 53). Jesus will fulfill this in his suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, which offers the opportunity for salvation for all people.

Also in the book of Isaiah is a description of the role of the *al ha-bayit*, or steward. A better title to match the importance of the role would be “prime minister.” This person would rule in the king's absence and would receive the keys to the household or kingdom. He has the authority to bind and loose and will be like a father to those under him (Isaiah 22:15-25). As Catholics, this job description should sound very familiar. It perfectly describes the role of the pope (or “Papa” in Italian) as head of the Church. When Jesus tells Peter he will give him the “keys to the kingdom”, it is a clear reference to this role as “head of the household” described in Isaiah.

Jeff tells us that Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, but his prophecies were directed to western Judah. Jeremiah prophesied later than these two, but his message is no less heartfelt. With clairvoyance, he writes of the trouble Judah is setting itself up for and predicts exile by the Babylonians (remarkable because the Assyrians were currently in power and Babylon was not considered super powerful). He calls the people of Judah to task for their idolatrous practices and immorality, their lack of social justice, and their adamant refusal to follow the Law of God. (Jeff notes that the list of Judah's wrongs, found in Jeremiah 34, is a good examination of one's own conscience.) Jeremiah castigates the poor leadership and urges all to repent and turn back to God. Jeremiah predicts the 70 year exile, but he also writes that God will not forget His people; He will gather them up and bring them back to Judah to join the remnant that was left. Jeremiah proclaims that God will then write His Law, not on stone tablets, but on the hearts of His people.

The history of Judah ends when the last king, Zedekiah, is overthrown by the Babylonians, bound, forced to watch his sons' deaths, and then blinded and led into exile with a large contingent of the people. And so, God Chosen People end up right back where they started: Abraham was called from Ur, in Babylon, and to Babylon the people are forcibly led back. This exile is a physical representation of the spiritual reality that God's Chosen had turned back to idolatrous ways and their hearts were far from God. Jeff remarks that the kingdom of Judah took for granted God's presence in their midst. As a result, they were forcibly removed from God's presence in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jeff asks us to consider the presence of God in our midst—do we take this for granted? Have we, like the people of Judah, become spiritually lax or worse, have we turned from the ways of God? May we heed the prophetic voices today and make sure the Word of God is written on our hearts.