

Royal Lessons from the Kings

By Doug Hamilton

Jehoshaphat: “The Seeker of the Word of God” King

- *2 Chronicles 17:1 Jehoshaphat his son then became king in his place, and made his position over Israel firm.*
- He began his rule in 871 BC and would remain in power for twenty-five years, including five as co-regent with his father Asa.
- He was a proponent of a strong military presence. *2 Chronicles 17:2 He placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured.*
- Even the neighboring countries feared and honored his leadership. *2 Chronicles 17:10-11 Now the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat.* ¹¹ *Some of the Philistines brought gifts and silver as tribute to Jehoshaphat; the Arabians also brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats.*
- He was the second of five godly rulers of the Divided Kingdom, having taken away the high places of pagan worship for those areas that were within his control. *2 Chronicles 17:6 He took great pride in the ways of the LORD and again removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah.*
- His name meant “Jehovah is Judge” and he certainly lived up to the name. It says in *2 Chronicles 17:3-4* that Jehoshaphat “...*did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father...*” He was a seeker of God, a trait that will serve a person well through the ups and downs of his or her life. It is that thought in mind that we will start with an account toward the end of Jehoshaphat’s.

2 Chronicles 18:1-4 Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab. ² Some years later he went down to *visit* Ahab at Samaria. And Ahab slaughtered many sheep and oxen for him and the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. ³ Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, “Will you go with me *against* Ramoth-gilead?” And he said to him, “I am as you are, and my people as your people, and *we will be* with you in the battle.” ⁴ Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Please inquire first for the word of the LORD.”

- In a move to try and reconcile the divided kingdom, Jehoshaphat allied himself with the Northern Kingdom through an arranged marriage of his son and the daughter of King Ahab. It probably was not the brightest move Jehoshaphat ever made, for this alliance would open up some damaging consequences down the road.
- While at a barbeque at Ahab’s home in Samaria, he was encouraged to combine forces with the Northern Kingdom in an effort to recover Ramoth-gilead from the Syrians. He was willing to do so, but he wanted to know FIRST what the word of the LORD was concerning that situation.
- That leads us to investigate the question, how do you really know something is the word of God? It would be so easy to just say, “If it is in the Bible, then it is the word of God”, but we need to be more specific in order to take it from theory to practice. People can twist and misunderstand the words of the Bible all day long, therefore we must have

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some firm principles to follow concerning whether something is the word of the LORD or not. It is in the life of Jehoshaphat that we learn three answers to that dilemma.

1) In order to know what the word of the LORD is, we must read it.

- 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 Then in the third year of his reign he sent his officials...and with them the Levites...and with them...the priests. ⁹ They taught in Judah, *having* the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.
- Do you realize what we are reading here is one of the early small home group Bible study programs? He was an admirer of the word of God and instituted a program that would take the word of God to the people. He understood that in order to know **FIRST** the word of the LORD, they must **FIRST** read the word of the LORD.
- That sounds so simple, yet it is the most over-looked aspect of ignorance in godliness.
- Psalm 119:160 The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.
- 2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- The Bereans searched the scriptures daily for the answers to the questions that they had (Acts 17:11).
- Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- Matt 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.
- The more familiar we are with God's word, the more familiar we are with God. That is a simple fact of life. When we as the church fail to envelop ourselves with daily reading and studying of God's word, then we are only lying to ourselves.

Bible literacy slipping, experts say

originally by Clayton Hardiman, Religion News Service

For comedians, there are subjects that are almost too easy -- sure things that guarantee a laugh. For Jay Leno one late night, it was the Bible. During the taping of one of his television shows, Leno moved through his audience asking people what they knew about the Bible.

- "Name one of the Ten Commandments," he said. "God helps those who help themselves?" someone ventured.
- "Name one of the apostles," Leno told them. No one could.
- Finally, he asked them to name the Beatles. Without hesitation, the answer came ringing from throughout the crowd: George, Paul, John and Ringo.

Leno wasn't spoofing the Bible that evening. He was spoofing our society, which claims a grounding in Judeo-Christian principles and yet -- according to a number of surveys -- is increasingly losing touch with the Scriptures of those faiths.

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Only two of 10 people participating in a recent Gallup survey correctly identified who delivered the Sermon on the Mount, said David Eikenberry, youth pastor at Orchard View Congregational Church in Muskegon, Michigan. "Typically, people could name only three or four of the Ten Commandments," Eikenberry said. Even that, however, did place Gallup's respondents ahead of Leno's "Tonight Show" audience.

The trend can be attributed in part at least to "the busyness of people's schedules," Burrell said. "Because of their work load and play load, people are spending less time in the Word of God. Eikenberry said he recently gave a simple quiz on Bible facts to people at his own church, Orchard View Congregational Church. The average score was just 40 percent -- and that, said Eikenberry, is no knock against his congregation. The truth, he said, is that many Christians are struggling. Eikenberry, who wrote a 100-page thesis on Bible literacy while working on a degree at Cornerstone College (Grand Rapids, Michigan), said people generally have some pieces of the puzzle but lack the framework in which those pieces fit in a meaningful way.

Eikenberry asked churches and youth pastors in West Michigan to administer a simple biblical literacy survey to parishioners. "The scores were just atrocious," he said. "I don't expect those outside Christianity to know the Christian book, but shouldn't people of the Book be familiar with it?"

In China, people have the time and interest to read Bibles but, because of government restrictions, no access to them. On the other hand, Eikenberry said, "We live in an America where we have Bibles everywhere, and yet we're too busy to read them."

If you want to make sure that you know FIRST what the word of the LORD is, then simply read it continuously. Let it not only permeate your schedule, but also your thinking and behavior.

2) In order to know what the word of the LORD is, we must be willing to listen to others.

- Ahab tried to bring in bad counsel, but Jehoshaphat stayed true to his principle. 2 *Chronicles 18:5-7 Then the king of Israel assembled the prophets, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king."* ⁶ *But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?"* ⁷ *The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla."* *But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."*
- When Macaiah came to speak the word of the LORD to both of the Kings, he announced that the battle would not be going well for them. Jehoshaphat already knew what the scriptures said about alliances with evil people. Now he is being told by a man of God that it will not go well. Two avenues of God's word now was before him.

In order for us in the church to know FIRST what the word of the LORD is, we must be willing to listen to others. No one person has all the answers, but together we can understand more and more clearly.

- Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days (Prov 19:20).
- 1King 12:8 Rehoboam "...forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him."

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- Prov 15:22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.
 - Don't ever pretend that we are FIRST seeking the word of the LORD and refuse to hear others that might know the word of the LORD.
- 3) In order to know what the word of the LORD is, we must be willing to learn from the circumstances.
- 2 Chronicles 18:31-32 So when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of Israel," and they turned aside to fight against him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God diverted them from him.³² When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.
 - Jehoshaphat still went into the fringe of the battle while Ahab went in undercover. The end result was the enemy chasing after Jehoshaphat and him running for his life. Jehoshaphat cried out to the LORD and He helped deliver him. Ahab would be dead by morning and the alliance would be effectually let go. The circumstances had spoke loud and clear.

When we think we see it in the Bible and have had it confirmed by others who value the writings of the Bible, we should be optimistic that it is the word of God. Sometimes it takes just a little more persuasion and that is in the form of circumstances.

- 1 Cor 16:8-9 But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;⁹ for a wide door for effective {service} has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.
- 2 Samuel 12: 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food."²² And he said, "While the child was {still} alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.'²³ "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."
- Judg 6:36-40 Then Gideon said to God, "If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken,³⁷ behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken."³⁸ And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground."⁴⁰ And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

There are sometimes we think that we might know what the scripture says and might have even sought out a few like-minded people to reinforce it. Then reality hits and the circumstances have something to say about it, teaching us another more accurate perspective. *1 Corinthians 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;*

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When the Bible, the people of the Bible and the circumstances of the people all line up, then you will know that it is the word of God.

Closing Thoughts:

There have been times in my life as a young Christian that I would be completely convinced of something. I was so positive on some issues that I actually refused to listen to others nor would pay attention to the circumstances that surrounded me. I felt no obligation to the latter because the Bible could speak for itself. It ended up leading more people from Christ than to Christ. I knew the verses on the gospel, but had a hard time transitioning the people to the cross. It was only at the time that I truly started seeking the word of the Lord fully, working with others and paying attention to the real circumstances of my outcomes that I could be who God wanted me to be.

There are many others that will not study, but simply ask others or let the circumstances take them where they need not to go. They are also not right. If we are ever going to be FIRST seekers of the word of God, we must read the word, listen to others and learn from the circumstances. That is the 3-dimensional approach to know whether something was the word of God or not.