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The end of the house of Jeroboam. Prayer in persecution, in suffering, in sickness, and in sin.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings chapter 15. Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. He reigned for three years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Meachath the daughter of Abishalom. And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless, for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

Now there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles

of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David.

And Asa his son reigned in his place. In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah. And he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Meachath the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done. He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

He also removed Meachath his mother from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook Kidron. But the high places were not taken away.

Nevertheless the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days. And he brought into the house of the Lord the sacred gifts of his father, and his own sacred gifts, silver and gold and vessels. And there was war between Asa and Beasha king of Israel all their days.

Beasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and gave them into the hands of his servants. And king Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad the son of Tabarimon the son of Hezion king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father.

Behold, I am sending to you a present of silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Beasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me. And Ben-Hadad listened to king Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and conquered Ijon, Dan, Ebel, Bethmeaca, and all Kin-eroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

And when Beasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and he lived in Terzah. Then king Asa made a proclamation to all Judah. None was exempt, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Beasha had been building.

And with them king Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, and all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father.

And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place. Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah. And he reigned over Israel two years.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. Beasha the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar conspired against him. And Beasha struck him down at Gibethon which belonged to the Philistines.

For Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibethon. So Beasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. And as soon as he was king he killed all the house of Jeroboam.

He left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shalanite. It was for the sins of Jeroboam that he sinned, and that he made Israel to sin, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And there was war between Asa and Beasha king of Israel all their days.

In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Beasha the son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Terzah, and he reigned twenty-four years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin. 1 Kings chapter 15 and 16 cover a considerable amount of time, the whole length of the reign of Asa, the period covered by 2 Chronicles chapter 13-16.

However while the reigns of both Abijam or Abijah and Asa are described in these chapters, unlike in 2 Chronicles, much of the material relates to the kings of Israel. During the reigns of Abijah and Asa in Judah, Israel suffers a crippling defeat at the hands of Abijah, a defeat which 1 Kings does not relate, a continuing war with Judah, mostly a cold war, but intermittently coming into direct conflict, a war with the Syrians, civil war, four different dynasties, and a number of different kings. This should be contrasted with the stability of the dynasty of David.

The stability of the Davidic dynasty arises not from the faithfulness of the dynasty, but rather from the faithfulness of God. Although there are faithful kings in Judah in a way that there are not in Israel, Israel's kings are pretty well universally wicked. A nation of Judah is spared the sort of judgment that Israel receives in God's mercy because of God's covenant with David.

As we read in verse 4, Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Abijam or Abijah is the son of Meachah, the daughter of Abishalom, who seems to be Absalom, as we see in 2 Chronicles 11.20. It is possible that she was the granddaughter of Absalom, rather than his daughter. The one daughter of Absalom that we read of in 2 Samuel is called Tamar.

Perhaps Meachah was born to one of Absalom's sons before they died. A few verses later we are told that Asa was the son of Meachah. While some have suggested that this is evidence of incest within the house of David, it seems more likely to me that Meachah is being foregrounded as the woman of greatest influence in both the court of Abijam and of Asa his son.

She is the queen mother figure, and she mediates the influence of Absalom. Asa's removal of her from her influence then is a very important step in delivering Judah from its idolatry and unfaithfulness. The portrayal of Abijam here is a much less positive one than we find in 2 Chronicles 13, where his victory over Jeroboam and his appeal to the faithfulness of Judah over against the unfaithfulness of Israel is narrated.

This suggests a more complicated picture. In 1 Kings 14 7-11 we read of the prophecy of Ahijah the Shalanite. Go tell Jeroboam, thus says the Lord the God of Israel, because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over my people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you.

And yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes. But you have done evil above all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back. Therefore, behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung, until it is all gone.

Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the Lord has spoken it. This prophecy is fulfilled as Beasha cuts off Jeroboam and his house. There is a frustration of growth in the northern kingdom.

One king cuts off another, one dynasty cuts off another. However, despite this moving from dynasty to dynasty, there is a continuation of the same rebellion of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Israel still walks in the fundamental idolatry that he has set up.

Abijah the son of Jeroboam died in chapter 14. Now his brother Nadab is cut off. The characters of Abijah and Nadab might remind us of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who were cut off as a result of their offering of strange fire to the Lord.

Jeroboam takes on negative characteristics of Aaron in a number of different ways, and his sons suffer the same fate as the two judged sons of Aaron. While they are cut off, David is not cut off. David was committed to the Lord even despite his sin concerning Uriah, and so his descendants are preserved.

Perhaps we can see this as a fulfillment of the pattern of Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses

9-10. I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. The generations following the righteous David are preserved, while the unfaithful lines of people like Jeroboam are cut off after only a few generations.

The line of the rebellious is cut off before it can grow to its full potential in evil, whereas the line of the righteous is preserved. Even when one generation falls away, the next may turn back to the Lord. Moving from the stories of Jeroboam and Rehoboam and Solomon and David that preceded, the story of the kingdom now increasingly takes on the form of the story of the judges, moving from one to another with few isolated incidents being related and large periods of time being covered.

There is alternation between the two kingdoms and various synchronizations that help us to see when one king arose relative to the history of the other kingdom. The overall impression given is of two wayward siblings caught in an ongoing rivalry. A question to consider, what lessons should we draw from the obliteration of Jeroboam's house? What lessons might faithful people in Israel have drawn? 1. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.

You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

2. Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door.

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will

be forgiven.

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain.

And for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

James chapter 5 begins with a similar section to that which concluded chapter 4. It begins with come now, followed by a condemnation of the self-assured rich. It leads into a consideration of approaching judgment, in which the unrighteous rich will be condemned and afflicted, and the righteous poor delivered and vindicated. The denunciation with which the chapter begins addresses non-Christians.

This isn't because they would have been among the hearers, but rather to encourage the righteous that they will be vindicated. This denunciation sounds like that of an Old Testament prophet. We might hear, for instance, the words of Isaiah chapter 13 verse 6, Wail, for the day of the Lord is near, as destruction from the Almighty it will come.

James is anticipating this coming day of the Lord. We should not assume that this is merely the final judgment, although it might have one eye towards that. Rather devastating judgment on Jerusalem, and on the Jewish persecutors of the early church, is about to come.

James is writing to Jews who have experienced persecution at the hands of their compatriots, at a time shortly before the bloody destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Again, this is reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 21. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Again, it's similar to the woes that Jesus gives to the rich and to the unrighteous, and also to things such as the parable of the rich fool in Luke chapter 12 verses 16 to 21.

And he told them a parable, saying, The land of a rich man produce plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this.

I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. It is foolish to rely upon these treasures, but the rich have placed their hope in them, and the sand is draining now from the hourglass. Their riches will testify against them.

They have been accumulating these riches through sinful oppression, and they have also not been using them to aid the poor who were in desperate need at that time. We might remember the parable of the unjust steward and the statement concerning unrighteous mammon in Luke chapter 16 verse 9. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. Again in Luke chapter 12 verses 33 to 34, sell your possessions and give to the needy.

Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. James, like so many of the Old Testament prophets, is concerned deeply with economic injustice and oppression of the poor.

Wealth at that time was being concentrated in the hands of a smaller group of rich landowners, and poorer people were being oppressed and defrauded. The money that they had been denied for their difficult labours is described like blood crying out to the Lord from the ground, like the blood of Abel that called out against Cain. It calls for judgment upon them.

Possessions and money are not neutral media. Our money and the luxuries that we enjoy at the expense of the mistreatment and oppression of others cries out to God against us on behalf of them. The rich have fattened their hearts, yet they are in a day of slaughter, and this marks them out for destruction.

The righteous oppressed person is condemned and murdered, justice is twisted against him, and his life is threatened by oppression. Yet he does not fight back. God, however, will come to his aid.

Speaking to poor Christians in a situation like this, James wants them to learn the importance of patience. They should not retaliate, they should look to the Lord. They should not be envious of the wicked, they should consider the end of the wicked.

Douglas Moos suggests that we might notice the parallels with Old Testament statements, like those of Psalm 37 verses 1-12. Like the rain, God's vindication will come as we patiently wait for and seek it. The temptation in such a situation of persecution would be to grumble against or to each other, but they must resist that.

God the judge is near at hand, and they must act accordingly. They must learn from the examples of suffering and patience given by the prophets and by people such as Job. Job's patient persistence in faith is a pattern to follow, especially when we recognize the Lord's purpose and goodness in his story.

He warns them about oaths, this is similar to Matthew 5 verses 33-37, once again a connection with the Sermon on the Mount. Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no, anything more than this comes from evil. There is the danger of invoking God's name in an oath.

God the judge is at hand, and we must speak and act in the light of this. Truthfulness, care and candour in speech are absolutely essential. He speaks to the situation of suffering and sickness.

Once again he encourages people to pray, if they are suffering, the response is to pray, if they are cheerful, they should sing praise. Our emotional state should provoke us to render our hearts to God in speech, in the speech of prayer and in the speech of praise. A healthy Christian life is always one in which we express our inner states to God, presenting ourselves and our hearts to him.

And he also stresses the importance of prayer in response to sickness. In response to sickness it is not just the individual prayer but the prayer of the church. The elders of the church, mature members of the church who can also represent the church as a body, should come to the person who is sick, they should pray over that person and anoint that person with oil in the name of the Lord.

This is done so that the person who is sick will be saved, that the Lord will raise him up. This raising up is not merely a deliverance from sickness, it might take that form, but it looks to something greater. We suffer with Christ so that we might be raised with him.

Christ is the anointed one, and at that time of sickness, when that person might feel most isolated from the body of Christ, the body of Christ should come to them and anoint them so that they know that they are a member of the anointed one, so that they might approach and face the enemy of sickness and death with the confidence that they are doing so in the name of Christ, facing it as those anointed for a mission, and with the confidence that they will be raised up through it, that they will experience God's deliverance through suffering. We have a God who physically heals people, and we should not be surprised if people are physically healed in such situations, but we should

also recognise that much of the time, God will call people to go through suffering and even to death, and that they will experience the raising up as secure in the knowledge that they are in Christ, they face death without fear, manifesting the victory of Christ over the one who held people in bondage to the fear of death, and looking forward to the deliverance of resurrection on that last day, and at that moment when we feel ourselves to be on the threshold of final judgement, we are assured once again of the forgiveness of our sins, what sins we have committed are forgiven us, and we are assured of access into God's very presence. We must pray for each other in response to sin and spiritual failure, sins obstruct the hearing of our prayers, hearing of prayers for instance here in the context of sickness, we must be those who settle accounts with God and man swiftly, and illness may particularly prompt us to do this, in moments when we feel our great need for God to come to our aid, we may become keenly aware of all the unrepented sins that lie between us and him, at such times we must confess our faults to our neighbours, set things right with them, and confess our sins against God, as we do so all the things that would prevent us from coming to God with a whole and undivided heart will be removed.

Prayer is powerful and effective, but it can be obstructed by sin. This has been a continuing theme of James' book. He began in chapter 1 by talking about the prayer for wisdom, a prayer for wisdom that must be made with a whole heart.

In chapter 4 he discussed the failure of our prayers because of our uncontrolled desires. Prayer doesn't rest upon superpowers, Elijah was a human person like us, yet he prayed and there were three and a half years of drought, and then he prayed again and there was rain. The three and a half years here might make us think of that period of time of judgement, a time, times and half a time, or 42 months.

There is a connection perhaps to the theme of judgement and vindication, faced with the great oppression of the rich, the early Christians that James is writing to might have felt the need to be like the persistent widow in praying for vindication against the adversary. The book ends with a call to action. We must look after each other, we must bring back any who are wandering.

We are called to be our brother's keeper. We might here think of the commission of Ezekiel in chapter 3 verses 17-21 of his prophecy. Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel.

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, you shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way in order to save his life. That wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a

righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand.

But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul. Sin leads to death, and we must treat it with the utmost seriousness, not just for ourselves, but also for our neighbours. A question to consider, what are some particular things that we might do in order more seriously to seek the hearing of our prayers by the Lord?