

2 Kings 16:1-20

The teeter tottering back and forth between the kings of Israel and Judah has almost come to an end. Which is a good thing for us (regarding the confusion it can make for while studying) but it's a bad thing for Israel because the *reason* they'll no longer be brought up (that is after ch 17) is because they'll have been carried off into captivity, being as it were *removed* from the picture. There's no reason to speak of what King is reigning in Israel when Israel (for all intents and purposes) no longer exists as a nation.

Now we left off last week in Judah reviewing briefly the reign of Jotham the son of Uzziah, he was a good king, his dad was an outstanding king outside of the blunder he made when he (in all his outstanding pride) tried to play the role of both king and priest and because of that was struck with leprosy until the day he died. Jotham excelled as king as well, but he didn't make the same mistake his dad made. Which in that we give him kudos because he was able to capitalize on his dad's strengths and not repeat the mistakes of his weaknesses. And Would to God that we would all be people of like manner, able to learn from both the strengths and weaknesses of those who are over us and have been given to lead us. Because as its been said before, even the best *of* men are *at best* men. Which is to say, we're all going to make mistakes regardless of how noble we may be, or how godly of a life we may live, there will come a time (& plenty of them I might add) that you're going to fail, that I'm going to fail. So what would I have you to do? If you see a particular strength in me, capitalize on that, imitate that quality, learn to implement it in your own life. But if you see a weakness in me, don't repeat it. Learn what *not* to do from it, too often it's the other way around. People don't want to discipline themselves towards a particular strength, but they're looking for justification for weakness. So when you find a leader who has went a certain direction that's unhealthy spiritually, often times the people around them will do the same thing. It's the, "It must be ok if _____ is doing it" mentality. But as much as I want to show you Christ, I am not your standard, Jesus is, the word of God is your road map in life, not me. But that's 1 reason so much accountability lies in leadership, because people have a natural inclination to *follow your lead*. That's why we find that if a particular king falls into idolatry, he takes the whole nation with him. If he follows the Lord, the entire nation follows suit. So be mindful of that if you're in leadership, but then also if you're not, don't justify your behavior due to what you've seen in someone else, we're all individually accountable before God, and we err (the bible says) when we compare ourselves amongst ourselves. When I go out to the Pastor's conference I sometimes learn not only what *to do*, a standard that needs to be raised in my own life, but sometimes I learn what *not to do*, I see things that I don't want repeated in my life, or an approach to a particular ministry that didn't pan out. So, like Jotham we want to continue in *strength* of our leaders, but not repeat the folly of a particular *weakness*.

Now in chapter 16 we're going to remain in Judah because even though we learned in chapter 15 that Pekah, the king of Israel was assassinated by Hoshea who conspired against him to reign in his place. Pekah had 20 yrs on the throne prior to that and that reign overlapped 3 of the kings in Judah. So we're still learning what happened in Judah, during the 20 yr reign of Pekah in Israel. Pekah began his reign during the last yr of the reign of Uzziah, Jotham (Uzziah's son) reigned for 16 yrs, which means that Pekah still had 3 yrs on the throne, and so we read in vs 1 of ch 16.

Vs1-2

So immediately we learn here that he was the antithesis of both his dad, and his granddad. And As to where his dad took the strengths of *his* father and continued in them, Ahaz did just the opposite, rebelled against the Lord, didn't follow in the example of his father. Now I thought about this for a little bit, and I wondered why (having had a godly heritage) he walked away from that and walked instead, in such radical wickedness? And I'm not sure I have an answer for that. Sometimes children can have a godly upbringing and kick against it the whole time; they want to be like anything other than their parents. Sometimes though the parents may be godly, they fail to communicate and really teach the children what it means to know God, to fear God, and walk with God. They're always so busy with everything else they neglect their primary responsibility to the home, I think we can all identify with that. It's difficult to be a good time manager, and keep your priorities straight around the home, God help us. But then also we see a pattern in scripture that shows us that when a person, or people are destitute, they're more apt to cry out *to* God, or seek desperately *after* God. But when they're prosperous, or God has prospered them they have tendency to *forget* God, or to walk *away* from God thinking that they have no need for God any longer. And There's even a 3rd generation pattern, meaning that it's generally about the 3rd generation after God does a work that begins to forget. For example as long as Moses was on the scene, Israel (for the most part) walked the line. They had their days, but ultimately they made it to their destination, when Moses past from the scene, the next generation still did ok. (Those were the days of Joshua) The book of Judges opens up by telling us that the people served the Lord *all the days of Joshua*, and *all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua*. But as soon as the elders past from the scene, the very next vs (which makes them the 3rd generation) says, "*Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.*" Judg 2:11-13

Now when Uzziah took the throne, Judah was in quite a mess, but because he trusted *in* the Lord, and sought to be pleasing *to* the Lord, God prospered the nation under his reign. Jotham saw some of that, and what he didn't see, his father was able to communicate 1st hand. But by the time Ahaz rolls around, he's known nothing but prosperity his whole life, never known what it means to be in need, hasn't had the 1st hand experience with God for himself, so in his mind, "What's the big deal?" Did he just rebel? Was there failure in passing on the need to serve and fear the Lord?

Was he so far removed from the reality of what God had done in his family that he just didn't internalize and personalize it? I don't know, but be mindful of those things so that when it comes to passing on your godly heritage to the succeeding generations in your family that you might avoid some of those pitfalls. Be careful to communicate the need to love the Lord, to fear the Lord, and serve the Lord. Be careful to explain to them the reality of what it is that God has done in your life, let them see the personal work of God in your life, explain to them that just because you're doing ok (perhaps) materially, that the true need are the things that concern them eternally. Not to be overly consumed by the things of this world, but to be mindful of the eternal perspective.

Ahaz did not do right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done. Again David was the standard, not because he was perfect, but because he had a true heart before God. He had a heart that was *loyal* to God, he had a *love* in his heart for the *word* of God, he *longed* to spend his time in the *worship* of God. Ahaz did/had, none of the above.

No affection for the *worship* of God, no concern for the *service* of God, no love for the *temple* of God, and no regard for the *Word* of God.

Vs3-4

Now no doubt this is a hyperbole meaning that he was basically a connoisseur of idolatry, he worshipped everywhere, and followed every pagan practice that he could get his hands on. From burning incense here, there and everywhere, to the most gross of idolatrous abominations involving the human sacrifice of his own children. He'd just nose up to the "buffet" of idolatry and put a little of all of it on his plate. So you see he was the direct antithesis, the very opposite of David who served the true and living God, he served little trinkets, man made carvings, having eyes that couldn't see, ears that couldn't hear, feet but unable to walk, mouths but unable to speak. And Once you've rejected the *Creator*, there's no limit to the extremes to which one will go in enslaving himself to the *creation*. Be it astrology, demonology, humanistic philosophy or whatever; we read that he didn't follow after the ways of David to do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, but rather he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. Which means he abandoned God, and sold himself into idolatry, even making his son pass through the fire.

Now when you read this it sounds like a one time thing, but the Chronicler elaborates a bit more; he says, "...*he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals. He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*" 2 Chron 28:2-3 Which points to multiple human sacrifices of his own children to the god Molech.

You remember Molech; he was the god who had the body of a man, and the upper torso of a bull, and he stood or sat on his throne with his arms outstretched, and perhaps the back of throne would be hollow but they would stoke a fire in there so as to turn the arms red hot, and then they would lay their baby in his arms and literally watch him sizzle until he died. Of course God had expressly forbid this type of practice, we read in Lev 18:2, “...*you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.*” And again in ch 20, “...*Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.*” Lev 20:2-5 But in several ways to the one who worshipped these pagan gods, the worship of Molech was both convenient and practical. Because much of the worship of the other gods, the Baals, Ashtoreths and all, involved illicit sexual relations, but obviously that would result in many unwanted pregnancies, the worship of Molech took care of that.

Besides to offer your child to Molech was supposed to invoke his blessing upon your life, materially, agriculturally, or whatever. So there were self serving ends to it as well. You say, “Who in their right mind would sacrifice their child for self centered ends?” Well, in the United states an average of 1,210,000 per yr and an average of 46 million people per yr globally which translates into about 126,000 people per day. And About 35-3,700 a day in the U.S. Now it makes us sick to think of these pagan practices of what people would do to their children simply because they chose to engage in an illicit sexual act. And Then didn’t want to bear the responsibilities so they would sacrifice the child so as to free themselves of the burden and pursue their own self centered ends, but have things really changed? No, we just let the modern medical community handle for us instead of the incandescent arms of Molech, but does the end ever justify the means? No, the end result is the same.

Vs 5-6

Now I told you a couple of weeks ago that during this time Isaiah was on the scene in Judah, he received his calling the year that King Uzziah died. Well, in ch 7 of Isaiah this very event comes into focus, and God sends Isaiah to king Ahaz to encourage him to just trust in the Lord, not to seek an alliance with Assyria, but to just believe in God to deliver him and that Judah wouldn’t fall. Because Israel and Syria had bonded together against Assyria and wanted Judah to join them, but Ahaz didn’t feel the threat down south like they did so he said “No.” So they decided they’d wipe him out, and set up their own king in Judah who’d do what they wanted. But in so doing, they’d have eliminated the line of David, God said, “No go, it’s not going to happen.” Turn to Isaiah Ch 7:1-14

So you begin to get a little insight as to where this guy was truly at, people who don't know the history of Ahaz think, "Well wasn't it commendable that he wouldn't test the Lord?" No! God told him to, he was simply refusing to obey the *word* of God, or be open to the reality of the accountability he had *before* God. He had his own thing going on, and God wasn't going to be apart of it. But from this came the incredible prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ

Now verse 9 is key, because Isaiah is calling upon him to trust the Lord, but he warns him that if he doesn't he won't be established, he'll come into ruin. Which is the case of all who refuse to trust in the Lord, but what happened? Look back at 2nd Kings.

Vs7-9

He didn't believe, he couldn't put his trust in the Lord, he had the right cry, but he made it to the wrong king. He said, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me." Now Isaiah just told him to trust in the Lord, to place his hope in the Lord, and so Ahaz cried out, but not to the Lord, but rather to the king of Assyria. Which is to say that he trusted in the arm of flesh rather than allowing the Lord to be his strength, and what does the bible say? "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.*" Jer 17:5-6 And again, "*Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the LORD his God,*" Ps 146:3-5 But his hope wasn't in the Lord, it was in the world, in the arm of flesh, perhaps he didn't feel like he *could* call on the Lord after some of the things he'd done, I don't know. But all the more reason to lead your life set apart to Him, so that you can call upon Him with out reserve in your time of need.

But not only did he not call *upon* the Lord and in so doing sin *against* the Lord in that capacity, but then he took *from* the Lord to try and buy his way out of trouble. Vs 8 tells us that not only did he deplete his own resources, but he took from the house of the Lord to try and pay off the King of Assyria so that he might help him out. How many times do people find themselves in trouble, they've over extended themselves, feel like they're in over their heads, and what's the 1st resource they pull from to try and remedy the situation? The Lord's, "I can't afford to tithe with all the trouble I'm in," and in that mentality they not only deplete their own resources, but they rob the Lord of what's rightfully His in the process. But apart from crying out *to* the Lord, and subjecting yourself to the word *of* the Lord, it's all a temporary fix to a permanent problem and in the end it does you no good. Because nothing changes, you continue to repeat the pattern, it seems to work initially, but ultimately it doesn't solve your problem.

That's what Ahaz discovered, seemed to work at 1st, he took Damascus the capital of Syria, killed king Rezin. But we read in 2 Chron 28:19-21 "...*the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the LORD. Also Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, and did not assist him. For Ahaz took part of the treasures from the house of the LORD, from the house of the king, and from the leaders, and he gave it to the king of Assyria; but he did not help him.*" And that's just like our enemy, false promises, false hope, but ultimately he'll only distress you, take from you, and not help you.

Vs10-11

This guy just continues his downward declension and spiritual decay doesn't he? It just keeps getting better, from refusing to trust in the Lord, to trusting in the arm of the flesh, to now imitating the ways of the world. He sees this altar that he thinks looks cool, or ornate or whatever, and he says, "Man, I need this kind of altar!" And we're told in 2nd Chron that his reasoning was that because the Syrians pounded around on them back in vs 6, that since their gods helped them, perhaps they'd help him if *he* sacrificed to them. But I guess he didn't take into account that they didn't help them too much against Assyria... 2 Chron 28:23 tells us that he said, "*Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.*" God had told them in His word that when a nation was dispossessed before them, "...*take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'*" Deut 12:30 In Rom 12 Paul put it like this, "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*" Rom 12:2 We're not to be conformed to the things of this world, being as it were imitators of the world, "Works for them, it'll work for me" type mentality. But rather we're to pursue Christ, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Vs12-18

You see he's willing to worship any god, but his own, the True and Living God. He just continued to snowball downhill. Note there in vs 14, he took the altar that was there by divine design, and placed his own model in its place, and pushed the one that God had ordained aside. Now that's a huge mistake, why? Because what does that altar stand to represent? The brazen altar foreshadows the cross. It's the place where the sin offering was made, the peace offering, the trespass offering, and all the rest. It spoke of the ultimate sacrifice that was to come in Christ, and he just took it and set it aside and said, "I like this better, it suits my taste, I'll use this one for other things when I have a need." And so in essence he sets the cross aside for something else that seems better to his own wants. How like that are people today? They push the cross aside for something else more appealing to them, but they want it to sort of be there to the side in case they have a need. But you can't serve 2 masters, God will be *everything* to you, or eventually He'll be *nothing* to you, just pushed aside for something else that caters more to your flesh.

But in verse 17 we note that once he pushed the altar aside, there was no limit to his willingness to do, or try other things. He just took it upon himself to rearrange the furniture of the temple. You say, what's the big deal? The big deal is that he presumed to both *add*, (with the new altar) and *take away* from the divine design. The design of the tabernacle was given to Moses directly by God as a model of Heaven, and Solomon (though he didn't perfectly rebuild it) fed off the model of the tabernacle for the temple. And Ahaz is taking it upon himself to destroy the picture that God gave them of His dwelling place, and God doesn't take kindly to people messing up His paintings. This was a design for worship through sacrifice, it pointed to our access to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

And Ahaz is messing it all up, Moses messed up a picture once...once, and it cost him the Promised Land. But what prompted Ahaz to do this? It was his yoking up with Assyria, and when he went to see the king, he fell in love with this altar, this altar of the world. What does the bible say? *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."* 1 John 2:15-17 God only has one altar for our lives, and it's the cross of Jesus Christ It's folly to set it aside thinking that something "new and improved" has come along, how can you improve on perfection? Be careful to keep the cross in the center of your life, rather than pushing it off to the side for something more aesthetically pleasing to the eye, or that caters more to the flesh, we're to crucify the flesh and make no provision for it. Because once you're willing to place the cross to the side for something else, the rest of the peripheral matters of worship, or the word will come to mean nothing to you, you'll add to it, take away from it, whatever it takes to justify your position and keep you feeling like you're where you need to be. Once he set aside the altar, every other compromise related to the temple, worship, or whatever was easy.

Vs19-20

They buried him in Jerusalem, but not with the Kings, they knew he was way out to lunch, he was just a bad example all the way around to the nation, and because of him the nation suffered. This takes us full circle in our study, that's how we began, be mindful of your example, and what it speaks to others, because it'll influence their lives, be it for the good, or for the bad, make sure that there's no mixed message about your priorities, keep the altar right where it needs to be, front and center in the temple of your heart.

Prayer Points: Help us not to love the world or the things of the world, to place priority on the things of this world rather than the cross of Jesus Christ what it means to us, what You've accomplished for us in Your sacrifice. Help us to never set that aside for the things of this world, may You always be the One we love supremely, that we give our praise and our worship to You exclusively, and that we provoke one another to *good works* by the example we set one to another. May we trust in You and not in the flesh...

