

1ST KINGS

Week 27, Chapter 16

When last we met we had just begun 1st Kings Chapter 16 that opens with the story of **Ba'sha's** inglorious and shameful end. We'll re-read the entire chapter but first I want to set the stage for today's lesson with some words spoken by C.F. Kiel, that great 19th century German Biblical scholar, as concerns especially the behavior and character of the kings of the northern tribes of Israel. He says this of them: ***"There was something very strange in the perversity and stolidity of the kings of Israel....."***

Essentially Kiel's take is that each new king's insistence on emulating and outdoing the wickedness of the previous king of Israel that they succeeded cannot be accounted for in normal carnal human terms because they personally saw or were directly involved in the destructive outcome of the previous king and his regime. These new kings were smart and they were cunning, so why would they do the same things the deposed kings did, but think they would achieve a successful outcome? In fact this kind of mindset is reflected in a modern proverb that says, "The definition of insanity is to keep doing the same things while expecting a different result".

No doubt this strange perversity that dominated the lives of the Kings of Israel that we see exposed throughout the Book of Kings was a kind of spiritual blindness, or at the least their lack of interest in dipping into the bountiful well of Godly wisdom and instead choosing something else from a darker source. And that something else is identified for us as idolatry. But as we begin to re-read chapter 16 keep something in mind: up to this point in Israel's history the idolatry of the northern tribes that was begun in earnest by Jeroboam was expressed primarily in the worship of the golden calves that he ordered built (one located in Beit-El, the other in the city of Dan). And in a rather convoluted way, it's not that the northern tribes stopped worshipping Yehoveh, God of Israel. Rather the golden calves were largely meant to be representations of Yehoveh meant to replace the God-ordained symbols that existed in the Temple in Yerushalayim. Of course to create this graven image violated the Torah Law as given to Moses in the 2nd commandment, but to their thinking they were not giving up their God. They were merely mixing in some standard pagan ways with their worship of Yehoveh and in their spiritual blindness felt that the era had passed when such a thing as making god images was prohibited.

So with that background let's re-read 1st Kings Chapter 16.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 16:

King **Ba'sha** was an abject failure. He had been prophetically given the task of wreaking God's judgment upon the dynasty of **Yarov'am** by destroying it to the last man. But instead of recognizing that the wickedness of Jeroboam and his son Nadav were the true source of their demise, and that the only way that **Ba'sha** could ever have attained his new regal standing was at the hand of the God of Israel, **Ba'sha** merely continued in those same wicked ways and so would share the same fate of those kings who came before him and after him.

As we discussed early in our lessons on the Book of Kings, the time references used are based on synchronizing the reigns of the Kings of Judah with the reigns of the Kings of Israel. Let me remind you that the former glory days of a united sovereign nation of Israel under David and Solomon (one that incorporated all 12 Israelite tribes plus the Levites) were over and that the nation had undergone civil war. It was now split into two independent kingdoms. The kingdom in the south was called Judah and in chapter 16 is being ruled by King **Asa**. The kingdom in the north was called Israel and consisted of 10 Israelite tribes. This is the kingdom over which **Ba'sha** reigned. King **Asa** would continue in power in Judah for nearly 40 years, and watch many kings come and go in the northern kingdom.

Verse 1 has God's prophet **Yehu** pronouncing a curse (the death penalty) over the house of **Ba'sha**. It is interesting to me that despite that terrible idolatry and sin that the people of Israel were committing, God had not disowned them. Notice how in verse 2 the Lord refers to them as "My people, Israel". This is the loving reminder of a father who longs for his children to repent and to return to Him.

It is equally interesting that the curse against **Ba'sha's** family in one sense didn't apply directly to him. Instead of being murdered or dying young, **Ba'sha** ruled for over 20 years and died of natural causes. He was respectfully buried in the city of **Tirzah**, which he used as his capital city. After him followed his son, **Elah**; it is this son who would suffer the prophetic curse pronounced by **Yehu**.

Elah is said to have ruled for only 2 years. However it is important to remember that because of the dating system used for kings at this time in history, those 2 years are referring NOT to an overall span of time of 2 years (24 months) but rather to the fact that he reigned during parts of 2 consecutive calendar years (generally agreed to have been the years 883 -882 B.C. by modern calculations). He began his rule over Israel in the 26th year of King Asa's reign over Judah, and **Elah** only ruled Israel for a few months dying in the 27th year of King Asa's reign. Verse 10 says that **Elah** was murdered by one of his own military commanders named **Zimri**.

What we are about to see from here forward is a new dynamic in Israel in which the military leaders use their armies to put themselves into power by force. This only became possible because once David became king he created a substantial standing army in Israel instead of a militia. This army of professional Israelite soldiers of course recognized their power and during these chaotic times saw fit to use that power to their advantage. In most aspects Israel was becoming a kingdom ruled as a military state.

We're told that like his father, **Elah** used the city of **Tirzah** as his capital city. It is interesting to know that **Tirzah**, as were most cities, named after their founder. **Tirzah** was a woman that we first encounter in Numbers 27. Her father was **Zelophehad** and his wives had bore him no sons, only daughters. As the 12 tribes were nearing the Promised Land and as the result of a census, these daughters approached Moses and demanded that their family be given territory in Canaan even though their were no sons and their father was dead. Zelophehad was of the tribe of Manassah.

^{CJB} **Numbers 27:1** *Then the daughters of Tz'lof'chad the son of Hefer, the son of Gil'ad, the son of Machir, the son of M'nasheh, of the families of M'nasheh, the son of Yosef, approached. These were the names of his daughters: Machlah, No'ah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirtzah.*

² *They stood in front of Moshe, El'azar the cohen, the leaders and the whole community at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said,*

³ *"Our father died in the desert. He wasn't part of the group who assembled themselves to rebel against ADONAI in Korach's group, but he died in his own sin, and he had no sons.*

⁴ *Why should the name of our father be eliminated from his family just because he didn't have a son? Give us property to possess along with the brothers of our father."*

⁵ *Moshe brought their cause before ADONAI.*

⁶ **ADONAI** answered **Moshe**,

⁷ **"The daughters of Tz'lof'chad are right in what they say. You must give them property to be inherited along with that of their father's brothers; have what their father would have inherited pass to them.**

Thus this city the northern kings were using as their capital city was in Manessah's tribal territory and it was founded by **Zelophehad's** daughter **Tirzah** and was still going by that name all those centuries later.

Zimri commanded a brigade of chariots; in fact we're told that half of the chariot forces of the northern kingdom were under his command. And it is clear from what follows that **Zimri** was not a popular commander and neither did his sway extend beyond his own chariot brigade. In what was an obvious conspiracy, **Zimri** used a moment in time to assassinate King **Elah** when the bulk of the Israelite army was away laying siege to the Philistine enclave of Gibbethon. Apparently the King was lured to a drunken party arranged by a co-conspirator named **Arza**, who was actually the house steward over the king's palace. After **Elah** had lapsed into an alcohol-caused stupor **Zimri** murdered him and declared himself King of Israel.

However to his surprise, the Israelite military did not support him. Verses 11 and 12 explain that **Zimri** immediately set about to kill not only all male relatives and offspring of **Elah**, but even **Elah's** friends. But in most Bibles (including our CJB) where it uses the English word "relatives" (for those who were killed by **Zimri**), in reality that gives us the wrong impression. The Hebrew word used is **ga'al** and it means kinsman redeemer. So the idea is that those in **Elah's** family (the kinsman redeemers) who would be duty bound to reclaim the honor of **Elah's** family by hunting down **Elah's** killer (namely **Zimri**), were promptly done away with. And for all practical purposes that meant every male family member, no matter how young, and it could have also meant no female was spared who was close enough in blood line to **Elah** to produce a male child who could assume the kinsman redeemer role at some later date.

Thus **Ba'sha's** blood lines were completely terminated at the death of his son **Elah** and all of his living descendants as well as all possible future descendants in fulfillment of the curse handed down by God's prophet Jehu. The reason for God's anger to cause this slaughter is stated in verse 13. It says that it was because of all of **Ba'sha's** and his son **Elah's** sins, and in turn their sinful leadership caused the people of Israel to sin (which meant that the holy and just God of Israel had no choice but to take action that would be harmful to His people). But more the end of the verse says that another reason was because of their worthless idols (in the CJB). Other versions say it was because of their vanities and this is a superior translation. The

Hebrew word being translated is ***habel*** and it means having the characteristics of vapor or breath. That is something that has almost no substance and is here for a moment and then gone, a vanity. Rabbi Baruch taught us in his most recent Love Israel Conference that the idea is similar to another Hebrew word as used in Amos 7, and that word is ***yishaq***. And the learned rabbis say that this word means to play-around, to do useless worthless things. And that is essentially also the meaning of ***habel***. So instead of the Kings of Israel teaching their people to do what God has commanded, they have led the people to do lots of religious actions but those actions have no value in God's eyes.

This is exposing a very important God-principle that has eaten at my soul for a long time because my beloved Church has ventured far down this same dark path from which few of the brethren will likely ever return. The sense of what is being said in verse 13 is that the Israelite people (as led by their leaders) ceased worshipping God in the ways that He says He is to be worshipped and instead had taken up worship practices that they enjoyed but were in reality nothing but vanity. They tried to worship Him in ways that were in tune with their pagan neighbors; in ways that served a leadership agenda; in ways that seemed less stringent and more fun, and in tune with the times and the predominant free-wheeling culture. These ways served to try and make the God of Israel seem more attractive and winsome; the people actually believed they were doing good because their leaders told them it was good; but these ways were simply vanity and amounted to no worship whatsoever.

In those times, there were no scrolls or books of the Torah for the general population to consult; those were in the sole possession of the Priesthood. For the average family there were only whatever word-of-mouth traditions that had been handed down from generation to generation. So it was primarily the leaders of Israel (secular and the priesthood) that God held responsible for the peoples' perverse behavior and pagan worship practices since it was they who taught the people. And we read of God's attitude concerning that here and will read of the same as we continue through the Book of Kings.

But in our modern era, the general population has no such built-in excuse for gleefully following their blind guides that pass today for our religious leadership. Christians especially don't have to ignorantly believe our political leadership and fall prey to their power and social agendas often using Bible passages taken out of context and supposed better moral positions that reflect modern intellectual enlightenment to achieve it. Bibles are available to us anywhere from cheap to free. Good sound biblical teaching can be had on the Internet, often at no cost, if one wishes to take the time to find it. The congregation of the Church can only be fooled if we want to be fooled because we like what we hear. And while our Christian leadership bears much blame for this state of affairs, unlike the era of the Kings the general Christian population is also on the hook for God's wrath and we see that personal, individual responsibility for our behavior, religious observances, and worship practices emphasized throughout the New

Testament.

One must understand that in the Oriental mindset, the end of **Elah's** family meant that his father **Ba'sha's** eternal essence would also end as it was thought to be transmitted from generation to generation by means of a son's bloodlines. It was truly the worst possible curse that a human could fear: the simultaneous end of one's physical life and of one's eternal soul.

So what we have is that **Ba'sha** killed off all the bloodlines and thus terminated the eternal life essence of Jeroboam's family, and now **Zimri** has done the same to **Ba'sha**. But **Zimri's** reign over Israel would be short lived; in fact it is probably not even correct to call him a King of Israel. Rather it is a title that he gave to himself and few in Israel ever acknowledged. Further (as verse 15 explains) his so-called reign lasted but 7 days. Was there even a coronation ceremony? Probably not.

Verse 16 explains that when the Israelite army that was besieging Gibbethon heard about **King Elah's** assassination and **Zimri** declaring himself king, they became enraged, determined that if any military commander would be king it would be **Omri**, quit their siege of the Philistine fortress city and marched to their own capital city of Tirzah and laid siege to it. **Zimri** was caught by surprise and trapped. Seeing that he had no chance to survive he fled into the palace and set it on fire, committing suicide, and thus denying **Omri** the honor of executing him and of having a royal palace to rule from.

I want to point out that we've run into the term "all Israel" on a number of occasions in this chapter and will in the following chapters as well. What we have to be careful of is applying its meaning in proper context. In general, from a political and national standpoint, Israel right now means the 10 northern tribes and NOT Judah. However from a spiritual standpoint Israel in God's eyes means all the tribes.

Even more, "all Israel" at times means the specific people involved in an action. So when we are told in verse 17 that "all Israel" made Omri the King of Israel, it really only means the Israelite army at Gibbethon and not all the civilian population.

This section of the narrative ends by telling us that the other things that occurred during **Zimri's** brief reign, as well as the details of his assassination conspiracy, are recorded in the

Book of the Kings of Israel, a lost work.

But things weren't going well for **Omri** either. Verse 21 tells us that the people of Israel weren't entirely on board with this idea of a military coup that ended up with a professional soldier now occupying Israel's throne. This would have deeply upset the tribal princes. The citizens of the northern kingdom split into two factions: one that was with Omri, and the other which preferred to have a fellow named **Tibni** son of **Ginath**. It was apparently a rather even split.

No doubt it was the military that was for **Omri** and the civilians who were for **Tibni**. We really don't know anything about **Tibni** as this is the only mention of him in the Biblical record. It is almost certain that he was a civilian or he would have been identified as controlling a certain part of the military rather than being called "the son of". What goes around tends to come around, doesn't it? It was the northern tribal princes under Jeroboam's leadership that wanted to secede from the unified nation of Israel and their greed split God's earthly Kingdom into two. Now because of jealousies and infighting and the lust for power we have the northern kingdom itself split and operating as two separate factions.

So what we find is that there was an ongoing battle for probably around 4 years between **Omri** and **Tibni** in the fight to reunite the northern tribes. No doubt as the northern alliance completely fractured and there was no clear cut "nation" any longer, the tribes gained back much autonomy and it is now that the most powerful tribe of them all, Ephraim, asserted its dominance. It is now that the northern territory name begins to evolve from Israel (a national oriented name) to Ephraim (a tribal oriented name). And like the Patriarch Jacob who became known by 2 different names (the national name of Israel and the personal name of Yitzchak), so it is that the northern kingdom will henceforth go by 2 different names (the national name of Israel and the tribal name of Ephraim). This is something that all Bible students must be acutely aware of from this time forward in the history of the Israelite people or it can become significantly confusing especially when dealing with end-times prophecy concerning Israel.

In time **Tibni** died; there is much speculation as to whether he died in battle or from some other cause. That event ended the power struggle and the northern kingdom now had one king, Omri. It happened in the 31st year that King Asa was reigning in Judah. So as an aside we see that Judah has enjoyed a relatively long period of political and religious stability at the same time that the northern kingdom of Israel went through coup after coup, king after king. The length of Omri's reign is quoted as 12 years, but that includes the time his rule was being disputed by Tibni. So it seems that Omri ruled unchallenged for only 7 or 8 years. During the first 6 years of his reign, he continued to use the city of Tirzah as his capita. However it must have become apparent to this military commander that Tirzah was not easily defended and so

when peace was finally attained he sought to move his capital city to a place that was more formidable and secure.

The story of the move of Israel's capital city to a hilly region that in time came to be called Samaria is now told beginning in verse 24. It seems that Omri purchased a hilltop from a fellow named **Shemer**, and so Omri called the place **Shemeron**. Apparently at some later time the way it was vocalized sounded more like **Shomron** and that's how we find it in the Bible. In reality, **Shemeron** and **Shomron** are spelled exactly the same in the all-consonant Hebrew alphabet. Vowel sounds had to be known through experience because they weren't written down.

The place **Omri** chose was a plateau about 1400 feet high, 6 miles northwest of Shechem. It was a commanding location, surrounded by mountains, with only a narrow entrance from the west. There was a steep approach to the top from all sides and abundant water. It was a perfect location for a fortress and defensible capital.

Verse 25 explains that once again Israel's king took the low road; he is said to have been worse than all the kings who came before him. And once again we're told that Omri led the people in ways of religious vanities that didn't honor God but merely angered Him. Let's remember that the place Israel had arrived, and Omri was now leading them to, was the result of a steady slide that had gone on for decades. Omri could hardly be blamed as the sole cause of such a confused and backslidden society. But when Omri died, and his son **Ahav** took over, an entire new dynamic began. History shows us that there are moments when the wrong leader at the wrong time can take a bad situation and turn matters into catastrophes.

Asa was still king of Judah and so there is not a lot of Biblical mention of what was going on in Judah at this time. It was nearing the end of Asa's reign that Ahav came into power in the north and his rule and leadership was by far the worst ever seen by an Israelite king. It was so devastating that the LEAST of his bad leadership was to continue in the ways of the idolatrous Jeroboam. But now he took a path from which the northern kingdom would never recover. He married a pagan woman named Jezebel and he and she became co-rulers over Israel. **Izevel** was the daughter of the notorious Ba'al worshipper **Ethbaal**, king of Sidon and Tyre. Ethbaal had murdered his own brother Pheles to become king. He made himself the chief priest of Astarte, and his daughter Jezebel took after him in every way. Obviously this was something that Ahav sought for himself.

After their marriage, **Ahav** did the unthinkable: he renounced Yehoveh as Israel's God. As bad as the golden calves of Jeroboam were, at least they were considered to be images of Yehoveh and so Yehoveh continued to be seen by the people and the kings as Israel's God. No longer. Ba'al and Astarte were now the official and legal father and mother gods of the northern kingdom. As a result we begin to see a great extension in the role of Yehoveh's prophets is this time as a counter to Ba'al worship. Starting with Elijah we will see a whole series of divine power and miracles on display because anything less would not do.

I want to dare to venture off to end today's lesson in hopes we can learn something important from the pattern of behavior of Israel's kings and what the effect upon their nation was. What I'm about to say is in no way intended as partisan politics nor is it to over generalize; however all leadership of a nation or an institution (religious or secular) is inherently political so there is no way to discuss one without the other.

Today is one of the saddest times in the history of the Church and I have no doubt that it has turned an important and dangerous corner within the past decade or two. There is at present great apostasy within our Christian institutions and in response God is raising up a new movement of pastors, teachers, and leaders who have shunned the traditional Church seminaries that simply replicate and multiply the worthless traditions of men that have replaced the matchless Word of God.

It ought not surprise us that because of where we are in the timeline of Redemption History that this movement revolves around Israel, the Jewish people, the Torah, and the entire body of Holy Scriptures, almost all of which is now considered to be irrelevant, worthless, even heretical and a danger to a large segment of the mainstream Church both in the East and in the West. With no authority whatsoever to do so, centuries ago Church leadership adopted 2 pagan holidays, attached Christ's holy name to them, and then declared those holidays to be the most holy days of the year to Christians. Against the express, recorded instructions of our Savior the entire foundation of God's Word has been torn out and dismissed and declared "nailed to the Cross". And this was done while banishing all the God-ordained appointed times from our midst, calling those who continue to faithfully observe those Biblical holy days "judaizers"....or worse.

Now a 2009 survey of the Church in America accomplished by the respected Barna Group shows that only 34% of self-identified Christians believe in the absolute moral truth as taught by the Holy Scriptures. Only half believe that the Bible is accurate in the principles it teaches. Most believe that the sacred books of other religions such as Islam or Buddhism are on par with, and teach, the same principles as does the Bible. A mere 40% believe that a person can

be affected by spiritual forces such as demons or angels and only 27% believe that Satan actually exists.

On the political front President Bill Clinton brought gay and lesbian issues to the forefront and declared them normal and desirable. He championed same-sex marriage, abortion on demand, and personally demonstrated and instructed us that sexual morality was dead.

Our next President, George Bush, stood in a Mosque shortly after 911 and declared that the God of Christianity and the God of Islam was the same god.

Then in June 2007 candidate Barak Obama said this: "Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation". In April 2009, President Obama on a diplomatic visit to Turkey told his Islamic audience: "We do not consider ourselves to be a Christian nation.....we consider ourselves to be a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of common values".

You see, it always takes a series of steps and stages brought about over time by poor leadership to finally arrive at a whole new reality. From challenging Biblical values, to declaring that there is no difference between the God of the Bible and any other god, to finally officially telling the world that as a society and a government we no longer hold (and in fact reject) God-ordained Biblical values and we will decide those values for ourselves took only a few misguided leaders 2 or 3 decades to accomplish.

It was that path that was the way of the Kings of Israel, and now it is the way of America, and the way of the largest mainstream Christian denominations. For ancient Israel, in time it all ended in their exile and it was the end of their nation. What will it be for America? What will it be for the Church? What will it be for you? Do you have the courage and the trust to do what is right in God's eyes and return to the path of holiness and purer worship, or will you succumb to the comfortable, the familiar, the preferred, and follow the way of the bigger crowds?

This chapter ends by telling us that a fellow named **Hiel** from Beit-El decided to rebuild the fortress city of Jericho that had been supernaturally destroyed by God in Joshua's day. In Joshua 6:26 we're told of a curse that the Lord issued against anyone who would suppose to rebuild that which He has torn down. And the curse was that the re-builder of Jericho would lose his sons in the process. That is exactly what happened to **Hiel**.

Let me be clear that **Hiel** did not go as a private citizen and decide that he would personally resurrect the ruins of Jericho as a kind of private residence. No doubt the point of placing this notice here in chapter 16 was to connect **Hiel** with King **Ahav's** administration. It would take the resources of a royal treasury and hundreds of workers for such an endeavor, and no king would allow a private citizen to erect a private fortress city within his national territory. Even the wicked kings before **Ahav** knew enough to steer clear of trying to rebuild Jericho no matter what a wonderfully strategic location that it was. But **Ahav**, who had renounced all allegiance to Yehoveh, along with his wife Jezebel had no such misgivings.

We'll begin chapter 17 next time.