

2ND KINGS

Week 23, chapter 16

As we begin our study of 2nd Kings chapter 16 today that will take a couple of weeks to complete, I'll reiterate that in order to properly understand the times and to better understand certain events that are being depicted, we have to incorporate the Book of 2nd Chronicles and some of the Books of the Prophets, especially that of Isaiah. It is only when we interweave the information contained in these various Bible Books that we begin to discover the true context not only for the historical actions and reactions of the various kings of Israel and Judah to their circumstances, but we also begin to illuminate the true context and meaning of the several Messianic prophecies present in the Prophets.

I also want to again point out (and will continue to do so because of its importance) that the so-called End Times prophecies that have gripped and fascinated the modern church (at least it has in the West) were mostly written during the times of the Kings. It was under the backdrop of Israel's and Judah's deepening apostasy, and their falling away from God's Word in favor of manmade doctrines and strange mixtures of Yehoveh worship with pagan rites and rituals, that we find God's Prophets not only warning the Israelites of their coming fate, but also offering hope for a better future AFTER they are exiled for their abandonment of the God of Israel. And this better future is going to happen because of a mysterious Deliverer that will come from the House of David. He is called in Hebrew **HaMashiach**; it literally means the anointed one. But our modern English Bible translations use the term "The Messiah" or "The Savior".

As we concluded our lesson in 2nd Kings chapter 15 last time, we witnessed a litany of wicked kings come and go in the northern kingdom of Israel, most of them murdered by their successors. In the mere 13 or 14 years from the death of King Jeroboam II, four different kings sat briefly on Israel's throne. But Judah's monarchy, even though it was still ruled by the House of David, was also descending into spiritual ruin even if at a different pace than their brethren to the north. **Yotam** King of Judah had just died, and his son **Achaz** had taken over the throne. **Achaz** would become perhaps the most apostate king Judah had ever known. And as a result of his rampant idolatry and outright defiance of God, he would find himself not only constantly fighting off enemies to keep Judah sovereign, but also trying to personal attacks.

In fact, we find that the latest King of Israel, **Pekach**, had joined forces with Aram (Syria) and their king, **Retzin**, and one of their goals was to attack Judah and remove **Achaz** from the

throne and replace him with a foreigner of their choosing. Part of the reason for that strategy was to secure Israel's southern border, so that Israel and Aram would be free to try and liberate themselves from Assyria's domination. However as we continue with our study, keep one critical thing at the forefront of your mind: the hope of the Kings of Israel and Syria also involved putting an end, once and for all, to the dynasty of David that had ruled over Judah for 250 years.

And while it most certainly was Satan's number one goal to somehow thwart God's effort to provide a Messiah for all mankind through the House of David, **Pekach** of Israel and **Retzin** of Aram had no such thought because this divine concept of a universal Redeemer coming from the House of David had not yet been sufficiently revealed by Israel's prophets. These 2 Kings' purpose in eliminating David's dynasty was purely political and pragmatic. However Satan of course recognized that if the House of David could be destroyed by using this military alliance of a Hebrew King with a Syrian King, then the Anointed One (the Messiah) would never come because the Messiah had to be a member of David's royal line according to God's plan. If that happened, then redemption would not happen, and that would mean that the Evil One had defeated God and would retain his place as prince over the earth.

And when we grasp the enormity of what was actually at stake here (something that was completely unknown to the main players involved), then we can also grasp the background for Isaiah's well known Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7. Because the context for Isaiah 7 is that these 2 Kings (1 a Hebrew and the other a foreigner) have together plotted to end the Davidic Dynasty (currently represented by **Achaz**), and what we are about to read is God's response to their (and Satan's) wicked intentions. Let's revisit that for a moment.

READ ISAIAH 7:1 – 14

So here we see that it is not for King **Achaz's** sake that Yehoveh is going to save him from being dethroned; rather it is because the House of David must continue in order that God's promise plan for a Redeemer continue. And in Isaiah's prophetic oracle to **Achaz** when the king is told that he need not worry (at least for the time being) that Israel and Syria would succeed, one of the most important pieces to the Messianic puzzle in the entire Bible is given to us in verse 14 as God says ¹⁴ **Therefore Adonai himself will give you people a sign: the young woman* will become pregnant, bear a son and name him 'Immanu El [God is with us]. (Isa 7:14 CJB):**

Now stay with me: what is the reason for God wanting to give **Achaz** a sign? It was to be a divine assurance to King **Achaz** (and in reality to all who were paying attention) to guarantee God's promise in Isaiah 7:7 that Israel together with Syria would NOT defeat Judah, remove **Achaz** and end David's dynasty. After all, God had long ago promised that the House

of David would endure forever. Recall what God told King David through the Prophet Natan:

CJB 2Samuel 7:12-16

12 When your days come to an end and you sleep with your ancestors, I will establish one of your descendants to succeed you, one of your own flesh and blood; and I will set up his rulership.

13 He will build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.

14 I will be a father for him, and he will be a son for me. If he does something wrong, I will punish him with a rod and blows, just as everyone gets punished;

15 nevertheless, my grace will not leave him, as I took it away from Sha'ul, whom I removed from before you.

16 Thus your house and your kingdom will be made secure forever before you; your throne will be set up forever." _

God had made it clear that He foreknew that some of David's descendants would become lousy kings. Those future kings of the Davidic dynasty would do wrong things, and they would be punished appropriately for their sinning against Yehoveh. NEVERTHELESS: God will NOT revoke His promise that David's kingdom will be a "forever kingdom"; rather the Lord would show these rebellious kings grace. And as we continue our study today, you are going to find out just how lousy a Davidic King could be as we follow King **Achaz's** career. So even though there is not the slightest hint that the military coalition of Israel and Syria, or that King **Achaz** of Judah, even remembered God's promise to David, God remembered.

But there is also something else: the future of the Davidic dynasty is going to rest in the subject of this sign from God. A virgin is going to become pregnant, bear a son, and his symbolic name will be Immanuel, meaning God is with us. Now, what exactly was King **Achaz** (or the Prophet Isaiah for that matter) supposed to think about the meaning of those words? It is beyond any kind of reasonable expectation that either of them had a clue what that meant. Remember, the context of all that we're reading is that **Achaz** is scared out of his wits because he's about to be invaded by overwhelming forces. Obviously, this virgin girl was from the House of David (that much was plain). And then her son is going to be called Immanuel. Really, it was quite usual for people of the bible era to be given these lofty symbolic names invoking the divine (and we have run into them regularly), so I can't imagine that **Achaz** or **Isaiah** were troubled or confused by that. But an unnamed virgin girl is going to have a baby, a male child? That just

doesn't make any sense. And what has her male child got to do with the invasion that **Achaz** is currently facing?

In reality, since King **Achaz** refused to ask God for a sign of God's assurance of Judah's and King **Achaz's** survival (and thus survival of the House of David), God instead used the occasion to give a sign that only future generations of Judah would understand. For King **Achaz** (and no doubt most of David's descendants) the continuation of the House of David had no spiritual meaning at all; it was purely practical and it was about politics and power and family wealth and status.

So with that background, let's read 2nd Kings 16 and we'll keep on weaving the pieces together.

READ 2ND KINGS 16 all

Verse 1 begins with what we now know as the rather typical way of dating the Kings of Israel and Judah, and it is by synchronizing the period of their reigns. So we're told that in the same year when **Pekach** had been ruling over the northern kingdom for the 17th year, **Achaz** became the King of Judah and he would sit on the throne of Judah for the next 16 years. However we are also told he was 20 years old when assumed leadership. That is impossible, because later we'll find out that at the end of **Achaz's** reign his son Hezekiah took over, and Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king. That means **Achaz** would have been 11 years old when he fathered Hezekiah! The Septuagint and the Syriac Bible (among others) say that **Achaz** was 25 years old when he began his reign (not 20), and that at least works from a common sense if not biological standpoint.

Verse 3 is terribly disturbing, so much so that many Jewish and Christian scholars have tried to downplay some of what it says. First we're told that rather than behave as his great Judean ancestor David did, **Achaz** adopted the ways of Israel's kings. And remember that the ways of Israel's kings is primarily referring to the Golden Calf worship that King Jeroboam had set up more than 2 centuries earlier. But **Achaz** did them all one better: he adopted the pagan practice of child sacrifice. Verse 3 says that he even passed his own son through the fire in imitation of the pagan nations that had long ago been run out of the Promised Land for practicing such evil.

I've heard many a well meaning Rabbi, Pastor, Bible teacher, and several scholars insist that "being passed through the fire" did not mean child sacrifice; that as bad as **Achaz** was, a Hebrew would never do such a thing. Their belief is that in fact it was referring to a painful but

not fatal practice in which a boy child would essentially be branded with burn marks (passed through fire). The ceremony is said to have typically happened using a hollow bronze statue of a god (usually Molech), inside of which a fire would be burning that would heat the metal statue. Then the naked child would be laid upon the statue for a few moments, and the resultant burn scars were either a sign of dedication of the child to this god or perhaps it was a sign that this boy child had now passed from being a child into being a man. I have no doubt in my own research that this sort of thing did happen. But I also have no doubt that this is NOT what is being referred to here. This is indeed speaking of human sacrifice.

Turn your Bibles to 2nd Chronicles 28.

CJB 2 Chronicles 28:1 Achaz was twenty years old when he began his reign, and he ruled sixteen years in Yerushalayim. But he did not do what was right from the perspective of ADONAI, as David his ancestor had done.

2 Rather, he lived in the manner of the kings of Isra'el and made cast metal images for the ba'alim.

3 Moreover, he made offerings in the Ben-Hinnom Valley and even burned up his own children as sacrifices, in keeping with the horrible practices of the pagans, whom ADONAI had thrown out ahead of the people of Isra'el.

In this parallel account to 2nd Kings 16, the Hebrew word that is being translated into English as “burned up” is ***ba'ar*** and it means to burn up or to kindle a fire. Further the occasion for this was as a ***qatar***, this means to sacrifice or consume by fire or to create the smoke of the sacrifice. If you have a KJV bible you'll see that here it says that ***Achaz*** burned ***incense*** and he burnt his children, making it sound more benign in that while the children did get burn marks, what got burned up was incense. The word incense never appears in the Hebrew Scriptures; it was inserted there by the King James editors to soften an otherwise unthinkable act by a Hebrew king upon his own offspring. We'll find the same mistranslation in some Hebrew publications because Judaism seeks to protect the integrity of David and his dynasty at all costs, and thus cannot accept that a descendant of David would commit child sacrifice.

2nd Kings 16 verse 4 also adds that the King made offerings and sacrifices on altars all over Jerusalem and typically under a green tree. In Bible speak, a green tree is usually one or another variety of fir tree because they are evergreens. And a fir tree was a standard pagan symbol for Ashtoreth, and thus they were usually called Asherah. They were fertility symbols. Although we have read throughout the Books of the Kings that the people sacrificed and offered on ***bamot*** and under fir trees, here we have Judah's King doing it and this is a dire sign of Judah's descent into spiritual darkness.

Further, as we're soon going to read, King **Achaz** would shun God's offer to deliver Judah from Aram and Israel or even to choose a sign to indicate that the Kings of Israel and Syria would not overcome him; but instead **Achaz** chose to turn to the King of Assyria for rescue and give control of Judah to Tiglath-Pileser as part of the bargain.

Before we get there, though, this is a good time to pause and make application about what we've been reading; and it is that what is going on is that King **Achaz** is doing what too many leaders did then and do now: they are seeking bottom line results. They look around at other leaders, who seem to be very successful, powerful, or publically acclaimed and try to imitate them or to join them. Faith and principle take a back seat to achieving their goals. **Achaz** borrowed the ways of his pagan neighbors who impressed him with their power and success and in doing so he also gained their approval and favor. Politicians do that all the time. Marketers of products and services for companies see what works for their competitors and try to do the same. The National Football League is regularly called the Copy Cat League (but that could apply to most sports nowadays). But sadly we often see the same dynamic employed among leaders of God's people, as it was with King **Achaz**. What works replaces what is right. I can tell you that it is very tempting for any leader to try to rationalize some questionable way of achieving a goal that your heart greatly desires, because that way has worked very well for others.

Several years ago Rick Warren grew a huge church in Southern California, gained immense notoriety, and then wrote a book about how he did it. The book was so popular that he wrote another book and then designed an expensive companion kit complete with posters and banners and flyers that other churches could purchase and use in hopes of accomplishing the same thing he did. It was called Purpose Driven Life, and the marketing plan that Churches could purchase was called 40 Days of Purpose.

It became all the rage. It seemed like at some point or another every church across America interrupted everything they were doing for 6 or 7 weeks, studied his book together, tried to apply his principles, and the goal was always to grow the church. Did it work? Sometimes no, sometimes yes...at least temporarily. But the question never seemed to be asked among church leadership: is this how God's church is supposed to operate? Is a slick marketing plan the biblical way to bring the unwashed to Christ, or the fallen-away back to church? Certainly even if some of the supposed Christian principles in the book weren't necessarily right doctrine, the marketing plan that came with it was excellent and often effective.

I can remember when the Singing Christmas Tree first came about, and led to tremendous growth in the first handful of churches who used it. It was very popular in the local communities, and lines were long to purchase tickets. Soon every church with a big enough auditorium was trying to buy one (they were really expensive), again with the hopes of packing in the "seekers" in order to grow the congregation. Since Christmas Trees are a pet peeve of

mine, I can't resist pointing out that when I say that Santa and Christmas Trees have become the focus of Christmas even in Christian homes, I'm always told "but not in mine!". Yet, here were church leaders across the land that intentionally made the Christmas tree the center point not only of Christmas, but of their church's main Christmas celebration. Did it work? Did more people come to church? In some cases no, but in many cases yes.

As the Body of Messiah, we are not to follow the secular crowds, or try to out-world the world, just by adding a nickel's worth of Christ to the mix. We're not supposed to adapt inherently worldly ways that achieve worldly goals, or adopt worldly morals that grow ever more popular, or worldly methods that do seem to bring bottom line results, to the proper worship of God and observance of His commandments. Nor are we to attempt to grow the number of His followers by watering down the Gospel message, shifting the focus to something more popular or fun, or becoming more tolerant and accepting of what the world calls diversity but God's Word calls wicked.

Keeping up with the technological advances and comforts of one's culture is perfectly fine; God doesn't ask His worshippers to live in the past or to shun innovation. What Solomon was able to build for a Temple couldn't have been done by Israel in Moses' day because they didn't have the technology and know-how yet. But the goals and principles and the focus and purpose for doing what we establish as our Christian Fellowship and our personal goals are timeless and need to stay tightly in line with God's laws and commandments or we arrive at what we're reading about in 2nd Kings no matter how much we might deny that it could happen to us.

In verse 5 we read that Aram and Israel attacked Jerusalem, but didn't defeat King **Achaz** of Judah, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy and God's promise to that effect. But there's much more to this ultra-brief report of the invasion of Judah in 2nd Kings 16 that is important, and we get more information about it in 2nd Chronicles and in Isaiah.

So first turn your Bibles again to 2nd Chronicles 28.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 28:5-15

So what seemed to be kind of a not-so-bad result of the invasion in 2nd Kings 16:5, turned out to be a terrible disaster for the citizens of Judah, even if King **Achaz** managed to stay in power. Notice that 120,000 of **Achaz's** troops were killed, and 200,000 civilians of Judah were captured and taken as slaves. The result was horrible. But, we have to go back to the first part of today's lesson to remember that God's goal of retaining the dynasty of David, for the purpose of eventually bringing redemption to the world through this mysterious son of a virgin

(Isaiah 7), overrode all else. That King **Achaz** was that representative of David's dynasty and notwithstanding that he was as wicked a king as Judah would ever see prior to their exile, God promised that **Achaz** would survive the onslaught of Aram and Israel and he did.

But while we're here, let's follow this episode a bit farther in 2nd Chronicles. Notice that in 2Chronicles 28:5 many captives of Judah were taken to Damascus, Syria; this is in addition to the 200,000 that were taken to Israel. So the total was enormous. And there is no evidence that those taken to Aram were ever returned. But this is not to say that **Achaz** escaped unharmed. His regime and administration were decimated, and his son **Ma'aseiyah** was killed. What **Achaz** had left after the invasion was a greatly diminished kingdom.

Verse 9 then begins a narrative that explains that a prophet named **Oded**, who was a member of the northern kingdom, met the victorious homecoming troops bringing their 200,000 Judean captives and large quantities of spoils of war, and told them that while, on the one hand, they had carried out the Lord's intention of punishing Judah for their sins against Him, on the other hand they had gone much too far. This is a theme we've seen before, and a theme we'll see again. God will use the wicked to punish His people; and if they don't overdo it, then they are praised or at least shown some measure of grace. But if they become too brutal (which they usually do), then God turns against them and destroys them. And **Oded** is warning the military and tribal leaders of the north that it was never God's intent that Judah be ravaged, and that Israel would capture their own brethren as slaves and bring them home with them (this was against the Law of Moses).

In what seems like an amazing departure from all that we've been reading about concerning the dark spiritual condition of the northern kingdom of Israel, we find that 4 obviously influential tribal leaders heeded **Oded's** oracle, stood up and spoke against what was happening, and Israel's military leaders turned the entire rag-tag mob of captives over to them on the spot, along with the bulk of the spoils the soldiers had taken in Judah. One of the things that this demonstrates is that while we can always generalize and call an entire nation "wicked", or an entire people group "evil", in fact there will always be remnants of folks who are different than the rest. In this case, it is obvious that there were many in the northern kingdom of Israel who still believed in Yehoveh, still had some righteousness left in them, and feared the God of Israel enough to listen to and obey God's prophets. They acted appropriately and treated the Judean captives well; they fed them, clothed those without proper clothing, put the weakest on donkeys and brought them all back to Judah leaving them at Jericho.

But in the end, even though many individuals of both low and high social status in Israel were basically good and righteous and feared God, and likely did not buy into the apostasy of their king and their neighbors, they would be exiled to Assyria right along with the rest of the northern kingdom. And this is because God views and judges all people on two levels: the individual level and the group level. We are eligible for salvation on an individual level and we will be eternally judged on an individual level. But we will also suffer blessings or curses

collectively, and be judged on some matters nationally, depending on the group we attach ourselves to and identify with.

The group level can be as small as a family and as large as a nation. The group can be a church or synagogue, a community or a state. Should the Lord lose His patience and finally judge America justifiably, it won't matter whether you are saved or not; we will all suffer the consequences. The first 4 chapters of Revelation deal with the 7 churches of Asia (symbolic of the 7 general conditions of various congregations even today), and we find that the Lord warns that a Believer who chooses to be part of any particular fellowship of Believers is going to suffer many of the things that the congregation as a whole will suffer regardless if you are the exception to the rule. So we admonished to choose our groups wisely, when we have a choice.

One final point and we'll end.

Look again at Isaiah 7.

In verse 3 we read this: ^{CJB} **Isaiah 7:3 Then ADONAI said to Yesha'yahu, "Go out now to meet Achaz, you and your son Sh'ar Yashuv, at the end of the aqueduct from the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderers' Field;**

The pertinent point is in the name of Isaiah's son, **Sh'ar Yashuv**. It is a symbolic name that means, "A remnant shall return". And of course that is what happened, as predicted, when Israel released its 200,000 captive Judeans, but apparently Aram kept their Judean slaves. So we must also keep in mind that the term "remnant" doesn't always necessarily mean a small number; it can mean all that remains.

We'll continue with this chapter next time.