

2ND KINGS

Week 24, chapter 16 cont.

We're in 2nd Kings Chapter 16, and we only got a little way into it last week. Keep in mind that we are witnessing the last days of the existence of the northern kingdom of Israel. As of this chapter, some of the people of Israel are already being deported and the land is in the process of being emptied of Hebrews.

When we left off we found that the Kingdom of Israel had sunk so low that it had essentially thrown off its identity as a nation of Hebrews and so it now allied with the nation of Syria in a military coalition meant to overthrow the government of Judah. That's right: for the first time since the separation of the brother-nations of Judah and Israel as a result of a civil war following King Solomon's death, the northern tribal government (as led by **Pekach**) formally joined with a heathen nation to go to war against the southern kingdom of Judah. And their purpose was not only to conquer but to put an end to the Davidic dynasty. Even more the allies intended to put a gentile ruler over Israel into place.

And while Israel's reasons for doing this were meant for self-gain by King **Pekach**, and also represented a pragmatic regional geo-political strategy, the Evil One was at work behind the scenes orchestrating all this so that the advent of a divinely promised Redeemer that would come from the House of David would be aborted. After all: no House of David, no Messiah. Of course the Israeli and Syrian Kings had no knowledge or concept of this spiritual reality, or that they were little more than willing dupes in Satan's hand.

And yet, in a way that is regularly too much for even Messiah's ekklesia to accept as possible, Yehoveh was actually advancing redemption history towards its goal by allowing Israel's falling away. Soon Judah would follow. And then in a similar pattern, a little more than 5 centuries after the Babylonian exile, the Hebrews would again go astray and this time reject the Messiah who finally came: Yeshua of Nazareth. The result? Yet another exile, the one we refer to as the Roman exile. But there was another result as well, and it essentially fulfilled one of the key terms of the Abrahamic Covenant.

CJB Genesis 12:1 *Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you."*

I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Suddenly the redemption horizon expanded from Israel alone, to the entire globe; the gentile world would now be given the conditional privilege of being grafted into the covenants that God had made with Israel. The condition? That a gentile had to accept, by faith, the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, and give up his or her identification with the gods and the ways of the pagan world.

But again, how did this come about? It was in a way that any reasonable person living in those times, Hebrews included, would have viewed not as a victory but rather as an abject defeat; the people of the Promised Land would be removed from their land inheritance by a foreign enemy and scattered to the 4 winds.

CJB Romans 11:9-15

⁹ And David says, "Let their dining table become for them a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a punishment.

¹⁰ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can't see, with their backs bent continually."

¹¹ "In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?" Heaven forbid! Quite the contrary, it is by means of their stumbling that the deliverance has come to the Gentiles, in order to provoke them to jealousy.

¹² Moreover, if their stumbling is bringing riches to the world- that is, if Isra'el's being placed temporarily in a condition less favored than that of the Gentiles is bringing riches to the latter- how much greater riches will Isra'el in its fullness bring them!

¹³ However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work

¹⁴ in the hope that somehow I may provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them!

¹⁵ For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead!

Israel and Syria did attack Judah, and did have a large measure of success; but they were not able to fully conquer the southern kingdom. King **Achaz** (by the skin of his teeth) remained on Judah's throne, but his kingdom was greatly weakened. As a further proof of Israel's apparent loss of memory of their heritage, we find in 2Chronicles 28 that in addition to killing 120,000 Judean males (soldiers) Israel took 200,000 Judean women and children as captives and led them off to Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom. Israel's ally the Arameans (Syrians) did the same and took some uncounted number of Judeans back to Syria with them as slaves; most of them never returned as far as any Biblical or Syrian records indicate.

But this action of **Pekach's** troops, of capturing and intending to enslave brother Hebrews, brought a harsh response from God. For Israel to do such a thing was not only well beyond the scope of what the Lord had intended in allowing Israel to essentially be God's hand of punishment upon Judah, but they broke a cardinal commandment in the Law of Moses that prohibits a Hebrew from taking another Hebrew as his unwilling slave. Yehoveh sent a prophet named **Oded** to confront Israel's leadership with a divine warning, and 4 of Israel's influential leaders grasped the gravity of the situation and did the right thing. They obeyed what God's prophet told them; they immediately released the captives, fed them and cared for them, even putting the weak and elderly on donkeys, and took them all back home to Judah.

Naturally, this series of devastating events caused a paranoid reaction from Judah's King **Achaz**. And this is what we'll start with today.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 16:5 – end

Vs. 6 says that the Syrians took Edom back from Judah and kicked all the Jews out of that nation. Edom (whose founder was Esau, Jacob's twin brother) had a long history of subjugation generally by either Judah or Syria. King David was the first of the Israelites to conquer Edom, and Judah held on to Edom as a vassal for a long time until it was lost under King **Yoram** to Aram; then under Judah's King **Azaryah** it was re-conquered. What made Edom valuable was the port city of Elath that lay on a finger of the Red Sea called today the Gulf of Aqaba. This seaport gave the people of that region excellent access to a shipping supply route where trade could be accomplished with Northern African nations. That and Edom had a good supply of copper that was needed especially in the making of bronze. So Edom had been a ping-pong ball, bouncing back and forth between 2 nations who each wanted access to the Red Sea, Syria and Judah. Now it was Syria's turn again.

Verse 7 about King **Achaz** going to the king of Assyria for help is far more ominous than it might seem just reading it in 2nd Kings, and the reason is that there is another side to the story that doesn't appear here. It wasn't all that unusual for a weakened nation to seek the shelter of alliance with a much stronger nation; but it was something that God warned Israel to be wary

of and in general to not do it. But even more, it is only when we understand what immediately preceded King **Achaz** approaching Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria for his friendship and rescue that we can grasp the serious rebellion against Yehoveh that is inherent in his decision. Let's revisit Isaiah 7.

READ ISAIAH 7:3 – 12

So here we find that before Judah was invaded, God sent a prophet (Isaiah) to King **Achaz** to tell him that the Lord was not going to allow Israel and Syria to conquer Judah. Notice how the term "Ephraim" is used as a synonym for the northern kingdom of Israel. This is because Ephraim had become a super dominant tribe that essentially engulfed all the northern tribes and their dominance is being recognized by using their name interchangeably with Israel. This is primarily important for us to know because of the liberal use of the term Ephraim in End-Times prophecies, denoting especially their connection with the legendary 10 lost tribes of Israel. To be clear: since immediately after Solomon's death the terms Israel, northern kingdom, Ephraim, and The 10 Tribes (and in time the 10 lost tribes) are all essentially synonymous (and End-Times Bible prophecy will have you running in circles if you don't understand that).

God told King **Achaz** that he would deliver him from the coming invasion. It's not that God promised that there would not BE an invasion, but rather that Judah would not be conquered and divided between Syria and Israel and thus King **Achaz** would remain Judah's king. And notice in Isaiah 7:10 and 11 that God through Isaiah told King **Achaz** to ask Him for a sign, but in verse 12 King **Achaz** refused. Normally a sign from God is a visible proof of guarantee that what God said would occur will occur. It is designed to reassure the nervous recipient. However in this case, God telling **Achaz** to ask for a sign is a test for **Achaz**. And by **Achaz** refusing, he failed the test. By refusing to ask God for a sign **Achaz** is demonstrating that he is not interested in the Lord's leading, His protection or in His deliverance. In other words, the sign was never intended as a proof of God's faithfulness to deliver, but rather it was a test of **Achaz's** faithfulness to trust God.

Thus what we see is that **Achaz** had reached the spiritual point of no return. He committed the sin of blasphemy by staring down God and saying a firm "no" to His deliverance. It's not that **Achaz** didn't believe in the God of Israel. The oriental mind had no trouble with believing in all the gods. The issue was NOT which god you believed in, it was which god you chose to give your allegiance to. And how would one choose? Simple. Which one did you trust the most to give you the most?

While I could probably preach a couple of sermons only from this, I'll resist the temptation. However this is another good opportunity for us to see the difference between believing and trusting. The majority of people in the West would say that they believe in God; but very few would say they put their trust in Him. That is, believing that there probably IS a "God" (of some

sort or another) isn't anything of merit. However trusting in Him is another issue. Trusting means that you have committed to the principle that whatever that God tells you to do or don't do is right and so it determines your decisions and behavior. Trusting means that you have decided that this particular God is also the most likely of whatever other choices are available to come through for you.

CJB James 2:19

¹⁹ You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear!

King **Achaz** had no doubts that Yehoveh was real and that He existed. But **Achaz** did NOT trust God to deliver him. **Achaz** figured that he had options A and B for deliverance. And I can tell you that this pattern of knowing that God exists but not trusting Him for deliverance is the single largest reason for people refusing to acknowledge Christ. I can't begin to express the number of people who have bluntly told me that they are a "good person" and that will get them to heaven. Or that they don't sin; or that they give a lot to charity and do good deeds, so that surely puts them in good stead with the Lord. In fact, there have been relatively few people who ever told tell me that they did NOT think that Jesus saves. The bigger issue for the majority of them is that they think they have options A and B; option A is that they put themselves in Christ's hands for salvation, and option B is that they save themselves. And the majority prefer option B. Like **Achaz**, it's not that they don't believe in God; it's that they trust another means than God to deliver them.

King **Achaz's** option B was Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria (or of Ashur as it is often called in the Scriptures). So in verse 7 **Achaz** sends an emissary to Tiglath-Pileser with words that he should have responded to God's offer with: "I am your servant and your son.....just save me". In Middle Eastern terms to offer to be someone's son has many deep meanings. For one, it indicates a very close relationship. Another is that the son is under the authority of the father. Yet another is that the son inherits from the father. So it is quite right that a Christian ought to commit to the Lord by saying, "I am your servant and your son, just save me." But notice how different the result is when one commits in that way to God the king versus a human king. When one commits to God, one becomes a receiver of God's blessings and an inheritor of His kingdom. But in order for **Achaz** to be taken under his "father" Tiglath-Pileser's protection, a great payment of silver and gold had to be made to the Assyrian king as a bribe, and then continuing payments in addition. The human king became the receiver of the blessings, and in no way did **Achaz** get to inherit any part in his "father's" kingdom. From the moment Achaz submitted to the king of Assyria, he became little more than a hireling.

And where did **Achaz** get the necessary massive amount of funds to pay off Tiglath-Pileser? He plundered God's Temple (which he had no respect for anyway) and sent it off to Assyria. God's Holy Property was stolen and given to a pagan. And yet, because he was David's

descendant, the Lord held off His judgment of him in order to maintain His divine promise of a "forever" Davidic Dynasty. The bribe worked; Tiglath-Pileser accepted King **Achaz's** offer of submission in exchange for the Assyrian army attacking Syria and Israel so that they had no resources left with which to further harass Judah. Verse 9 explains that Assyria attacked Damascus, deported its people to other places in the Assyrian Empire, and then killed Syria's King Retzin who had troubled Judah so much. This deportation of the population of a conquered nation to some other nation in Assyria's growing empire became a hallmark strategy of Assyrian conquest and empire building. This is exactly what would happen to the 10 northern tribes of Israel.

As many bible scholars have noted it truly is astounding that after such breath taking apostasy **Achaz** would still be allowed by the Lord to complete his 16 year reign and then die more or less peacefully. But what we have seen thus far is but the beginning of **Achaz's** defiance of God. Judah's king now traveled north to Damascus on a diplomatic mission to this conquered city; there he would meet with the victor, Tiglath-Pileser, and pay homage. While he was there he observed an altar to their god that so impressed him that he had a small model of it built and sent it along with the specifications and instructions to the High Priest of the Jerusalem Temple to build it.

The writer of 2nd Chronicles adds that it was during Syria and Israel's invasion of Judah a few months earlier that King **Achaz** took the spiritually depraved tactic of worshipping the Syrian gods beseeching them for their help. Why would he do that?

^{CJB} **2Chron. 28:22-23**

²² ***During his time of distress this same King Achaz added to his treachery against ADONAI***

²³ ***by sacrificing to the gods of Dammesek, who had attacked him, reasoning, "The gods of the kings of Aram helped them, so I will sacrifice to them, and then they'll help me." But they became the ruin of him and of all Isra'el.***

Even though we have the editorial comment that sacrificing to these foreign gods eventually became the ruin of him, the reality is that when Isaiah's prophecy came true (that Aram and Israel would NOT conquer Judah, and they would NOT be able to depose **Achaz** from the throne and replace him with a foreigner), and this because the Lord God of Israel would prevent it, King **Achaz** responded by giving the glory for his deliverance to the gods of Damascus because during the attack he sacrificed to them in hopes they would find favor with him. Since Judah and he survived the invasion, he reasoned that it must have been those gods that had rescued him.

So now we see why he was so keen on the altar to those gods that he saw when he visited Damascus, and wanted one built just like it back in Jerusalem. It wasn't that it was so grand; it's that to his way of thinking it was so effective. In fact the altar must have been significantly smaller than the authorized Altar of Burnt Offering that had faced Solomon's Temple for 250 years because in verse 17 we see that after **Uriyah** the High Priest built this new altar for King **Achaz** and placed it at the Temple, it was necessary to remove the trolleys that the several water lavers sat upon, and the Sea was taken off of its ornate stand as well (the Sea was a nickname for the enormous water laver used to wash the meat before it was put onto the altar). The Altar of Burnt Offering was so big and tall that it was necessary that the various water lavers have stands under them to raise them up high enough so that the priests standing on the Altar platform could reach the water without having to go up and down the Altar stairs. However with the introduction of the new (and much shorter) Damascus-style alter, the water lavers were now too high to reach and so they removed the trolleys and the stands from under the water lavers and set the vessels directly on the courtyard floor.

Backing up a bit to verse 11 we find that **Uriyah** the High Priest didn't seem to express any reservations about building this new altar for the king. Thus the infection of apostasy and syncretism with pagan religions had even reached the highest levels of the Priesthood. In fact, **Uriyah** hurried to get it done before the king returned from his trip to Syria. The first thing **Achaz** did upon his return was to go to the new altar and sacrifice upon it. But even worse, he ordered that the original Altar of Burnt Offering be moved aside so that the new altar could take its place directly in front of the door into the Holy Place. The original altar was moved to the north side of the Temple. And if you think back to some of the lessons on the Book of Exodus, there we learned that the 4 compass directions held various degrees of symbolic status. East carried the most status and north the least. So the new altar was placed to the east of the Temple sanctuary, while the God-authorized Altar of Burnt Offering was moved to the north. And the decision by the king to put it on the north side was not arbitrary and would not have gone unnoticed by many of the priests and laypeople.

King **Achaz** had gone completely spiritually insane. Any doubt as to which god he gave his trust and allegiance to was now clear. Any doubt as to what people he considered his friends was now clear. Who he regarded as his savior and deliverer left no doubt. He had thoroughly rejected Yehoveh, God of Israel, and equally thoroughly cast his lot with God's enemies.

Verse 18 speaks of a Sabbath colonnade that was also removed under the King's orders. There has been some disagreement over just what this was, with many Christian scholars supposing that this was a special place for the king to come and stand for the Sabbath Day sacrifices. However Jewish scholars have a different view. They say that Tradition says that this was not a colonnade but rather an awning. It was built for use by the outgoing shift of priests. The Levite priests were broken up into 24 courses, each having a set time (set week) to serve at the Temple as a group. The shift change came on Shabbat. However, due to the commandment to do no work and not to begin a journey on the Sabbath, the outgoing shift could not start their journeys back to their villages until the day ended. Therefore an awning

was built for them to rest and wait under, protected from the elements, until the sun set. It was this awning that was removed and one can only surmise that its removal was aimed at some kind of public display of the king's diminishing regard of Shabbat and growing contempt for the Levite Priesthood.

But verse 18 gives us another fascinating fact that the ancient writers of Hebrew Tradition help us to understand. If you'll recall, the palace of the king of Judah was built very close to the Temple grounds, so that the Temple and the royal palace together more or less occupied the highest and most prestigious ground in Jerusalem. There was a public walkway between the palace and the Temple courtyard where the king would walk in procession on the occasions he would go to the Temple area.

But now that King **Achaz** had brazenly abandoned God, and had willingly put Judah under Tiglath-Pileser as a vassal state to Assyria so that he could keep his throne, many wanted him dead. So he had a private underground passageway built from his palace to the Temple so that he was protected. But this passageway didn't terminate at the Temple courtyard where it should have. Instead it desecrated the Holy Temple by exiting inside of it. King **Achaz** would have walked directly from his palace into the holy inner chambers of the Temple; this was forbidden to all but the priests.

What an alien place the Temple in Jerusalem had become. This was no longer the Temple of God Almighty; it was now the Temple of **Achaz**. He officiated at it, He had his own altar built to sacrifice to other gods, and even the High Priest **Uriyah** mixed his allegiance to Yehoveh with King **Achaz**. What was even more strange was the odd mixture of pagan and Torah-based rituals and ceremonies that happened there. It was the Syrian gods who were worshipped now; Ba'al, Ashtoreth, Molech, and the heavenly hosts of the moon, sun and stars. As Edersheim points out it was a weird combination of Syrian, Phoenician, and Assyrian idolatry that had replaced proper Levitical sacrifice and observances.

When one backs away and catches his breath long enough to grasp the horror of all that **Achaz** has wrought, we realize that to substitute a pagan pattern for the Biblical God-pattern not only destroyed the divine order established by God at Mt. Sinai, but it destroyed all the symbolism that the Temple, along with its rituals and furnishings, was meant to convey to the present and future generations. Even to do as **Achaz** did in mixing the holy with the profane, in which no doubt he thought he was appeasing all the gods (including Yehoveh), is folly of the worst sort. But a chicken-and-egg kind of question must be asked: was **Achaz** the cause of the spiritual darkness of his time in Judah, or was he the outcome of it? Was **Achaz** a manifestation of a new and evil brand of Jewish leadership, or was he merely representative of his people who readily accepted such apostasy because their hearts were already deeply compromised?

It has been a long time in the Book of Kings since we've read anything that even suggests that the Priesthood taught the people of Judah about the Torah, or even followed it themselves. It's pretty clear that their cultural progress, their desire for peace with their enemies, preference for manmade religious doctrines, and a want of the good things of life like their foreign neighbors possessed, all conspired with their ever increasing distance from God's Word such that they no longer knew right from wrong, good from evil. Their moral compasses were no longer pointing towards the Torah of God but instead towards the desires of their hearts. And this puts a great fear in me along with a depressing sadness. Because these ungodly attributes are the exact ones predicted by Christ, when he spoke to John and had him write it down in the first 3 chapters of the Book of Revelation, that now inhabit so much of Christ's Church. And just like the people of Judah, as Christians we are in denial of it as we practice a religion that contains so much pagan ceremony, human philosophical thought, and expresses primarily modern cultural desires. Then we look around and lament the hollowness of leadership that surrounds us, blind to the fact that they are essentially representative of us as a whole.

How has this happened? The same way as it did for Judah and Israel. Too many Believers have abandoned the Word of God for manmade doctrines **about** God that pleases us better. Too many Believers no longer read the Bible; we read books **about** what other people say is in the Bible. Too many of our teachers and religious leaders are satisfied to teach us what we want to hear rather than what we need to know, because the new call is to popularity rather than to service and obedience to God, and to the defense of His Kingdom.

King **Achaz** died and was given far more honor than he deserved. He deserved to be thrown into the same valley where he sacrificed his own son as a burnt offering to Molech, rather than to be respectfully interred beside the bodies of his Davidic ancestors. Yet, his infamy denied him burial near King David. 2nd Chronicles 28 tells us:

CJB 2Chron. 28:27

27 Achaz slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city, in Yerushalayim; because they did not bring him to the tombs of the kings of Isra'el. Then Hizkiyahu his son took his place as king.

King **Achaz** was not buried in the rocky tombs next to the great kings of Israel and Judah; rather he was buried in the ground, in the family graveyard, along with the more common ancestors of David that weren't eligible for royalty.

Then his son Hezekiah took the throne. However next week, in chapter 17, the Scriptures will move us back to the quickly disappearing northern kingdom and introduce us to Israel's final king before their exile. Only afterward do we learn about Hezekiah's reign.