Kings and Prophets 14-06-06b

We pick up our study now in 2nd Chronicles chapter 15. Now, it may seem that I'm being a little bit schizophrenic or eclectic or scattered or chaotic here, jumping back and forth. There is, and yes, you're right, it is, it's madness, but there's method to my madness.

If you've got your chart, I'll show you why we're doing what we're doing here. Look again at your Kings of the Divided Monarchy chart. You will see that where we are, circa 840 BC, kind of right in the middle of the page there, a little below center.

You can see Elisha, his name is vertical there. We're in the middle of the ministry of the prophet Elisha, right? You look over to the left, and Jehoram, as we know, has been the king in Judah. We've got Joram over in the north.

But look who comes next after Jehoram. You've got a little skinny line there. Ahaziah lasts a very blippingly, eye-blinkingly short time.

And then who's next? Who's got the next big chunk? Athaliah. Who is Athaliah? She is the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. You see Ahab over in the northern kingdom.

How did the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel end up being the sole ruler in Judah after Jehoram and the little puff of smoke that was Ahaziah? How did this happen? Well, this is what did not happen in the days of good King Asa. There was another evil woman waiting in the wings trying to do destruction in the kingdom of Judah. So do you see the link now? We're going back and looking at Asa and the way he dealt with a woman that was his own mother who was trying to perpetrate evil.

But the prophet Ahaziah, I'm sorry, Azariah, the son of Oded. Azariah, son of Oded, came and delivered this message. Now, has there been any message delivered up in the northern kingdom by Elisha? Elisha has been confronting these people for years and Elijah before him with return to the Lord.

If you serve him, he will bless you. If you seek him, he will be found by you. And they've been ignoring this and their fortunes are going from bad to worse all the time up there.

Down in the south, when King Asa hears this message, look at the difference. We've been looking at the northern kingdom now for 11 months. Look at the difference in the time of Asa.

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and he said to him, hear me Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with him.

If you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. This is a refrigerator magnet verse.

This is much better than the prayer of Jabez or any other little saccharine sentiment that you

might want to look at. You know, every day in every way I'm getting better and better and it's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am. These are the things that you might have on your, you know, reminder surface.

I'm still appalled that refrigerators have become what they are and ours is the worst offender. That thing looks like when they take a ship into dry dock to clean all the barnacles off. That's what our refrigerator is, just, you know, accretions of time.

If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. And this ought to sober and slightly frighten, if not severely frighten, all of us. Nobody in their right mind wants to be forsaken by the Lord.

You remember when King Saul was forsaken by the Spirit of the Lord? That guy was miserable. He went nuts and died a miserable ignominious death that spread to his army and his own sons. Nobody wants to be forsaken by the Lord.

It's, this is a bad thing. We want God to be with us. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law.

Why? Why would Israel be without God, without a teaching priest, and without the law? Is it because God just withheld it to see what would happen? No one was seeking. No one was asking. No one was knocking.

And God doesn't just cast his pearls before swine. People who are going in the other direction are going to find out what it's like to be without God. And instead of benefit and blessing and teaching and law, there's going to be judgment and discipline and bad consequences, actively sent, commissioned, sponsored by God.

He will get our attention. So there was no priest teaching, and there was no law. But when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel.

Notice they had to turn. Why did they have to turn to the Lord God of Israel? Because they weren't facing Him. This is what Jesus said when he was talking about the swine and the pearls.

And he said, do not cast your pearls before swine lest they do what? Turn and tear you to pieces. They're going away. You're throwing the pearls at them, bouncing off of their thick skulls, and then they turn, and it's like the wild boars of Fiji or something, you know, ripping you all to shreds.

Are there wild boars in Fiji? There's wild boars somewhere. Turn and tear you to pieces. In those times, the enemies of Israel had no peace.

They suffered chaos and turmoil and destroyed each other. So verse 7, but you be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. Be strong and don't let your hands be weak.

Oh, look, my hands are weak. Don't let them be weak. Strengthen the hands that hang down and the feeble knees.

You remember that? And when Asa heard these words, he ignored them and continued to let the high places and the Asherah poles and his wicked mother and all the rest. Notice the difference in the response. You've had kings up in the north that had their arm withered and restored and still paid no attention to God.

This is just a message from Azariah, the son of Oded. The Lord is our help, the son of persevering and sticking with it. When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, you got a little text note there.

Some of the versions have inserted Azariah, but you get the idea that maybe this message had first come through Oded. It's hard to know which way the text got changed here, but Asa heard the words and the prophecy, and I think this is probably Azariah, the son of Oded, the way they've annotated it. But here's the thing.

Let's assume for the moment that that's right. And in this verse, verse eight, it says, he heard the word, the prophecy of Azariah, the son of Oded. That's three times in the text that you have that name and the father's name mentioned.

Three times. Is there an emphasis on the name Azariah? You know, other times it just says a man of God stood up and said, here the man and his father's name are repeated thrice. So is it important? I'm thinking probably so.

Ez-zer-ee-yah. The Lord is my help. The Lord is our help.

Oded, from Ud, Ad, continue, persevere, return, cycle through, do it again, keep after it. Ongoing action in a linear direction. That's Ud.

So Asa took courage. He removed the abominable idols. Notice courage comes from faith.

He hears the word of the Lord. He believes the word of the Lord and he takes courage. Joshua 1, 9. Be strong and have a good courage.

Be not afraid. The Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest. Be strong.

Do not let your hands be weak. God is with you. So he removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim.

And he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord. Now notice we're just about a hundred years, not even a hundred years, maybe two generations after Solomon. Solomon is roughly a thousand to nine sixty-ish.

Nine fifty-ish. And this is Asa's reign is in the nine, circa 900. So just a little over a generation

from the glory days of Solomon where God's glory filled the temple and 2 Chronicles 714, if my people recall by my name, all of that.

A generation later, look what he has to do for the altar in front of the holy place, in front of the vestibule. It has to be restored because within one generation after Rehoboam and Abijam, the thing has fallen into disrepair. How soon we forget how easy it is to assume that because we had a glorious start everything is fine.

The most dangerous thing we can do is assume that everything is good when it's not. We can look back on the glory. We can look back on the great wonderful sprint that we started with, but when the race starts settling in for an endurance pace, first thing you know, you're the rabbit sleeping under the tree while the tortoise crawls by.

And this is what happened in Judah. The altar had fallen into disrepair within just a little over a generation. It's just, it's just amazing to me.

But he has to repair it. So he restored the altar of the Lord before the vestibule of the Lord. Notice altar of the Lord before the vestibule of the Lord.

Again, you've got repetition for the sake of emphasis. He is looking to the Lord. He's looking at that holy of holies recognizing that the point of approach, the point of of propitiation is damaged and that's what he fixes.

What is the altar? What is it for? This is the place of propitiation. This is where the sinner places his hand on the head of the animal, acknowledges his sin. This is where the high priest places his hand on the head of the animal and acknowledges the nation's sin so that there can be restoration and fellowship and blessing.

I will be with you. Then Asa gathered, wow, just realized this is another place where my Bible it's rare to see a Bible with typos. My Bible has a typo here.

It says, then he he gathered. Well, this is Asa. Then Asa gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

Notice he didn't have to proselytize. He didn't have to evangelize. He didn't have to send ambassadors and somebody to go up there and bribe or cajole or influence or or try to woo these people.

People who care about God saw that God was with him and they came down. This is one of the reasons there's a little bit of a scarcity of faithful believers in the north because when they see that there's a good king down south who honors God, people who honor God come there, come down from Ephraim, from Manasseh, and Simeon. Those are your southern tribal areas of the northern kingdom.

They came down. They saw the Lord his God was with him. So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month in the 15th year of the reign of Asa.

So this is going to be in about 895-ish. Just a little less than 900 BC. Now it says in the third month.

What do we know about the third month? Why would that even be mentioned? What difference does it make what month it is? Well, what's the first month? What will help you is what happens in the first month on the 15th day of the first month? What happens on the first? What's the first feast in Israel? In the calendar year. Oh boy, we're gonna have to go back and redo Levitical feasts, aren't we? What's the first feast in Israel? What was going on when Jesus got crucified? Passover. 14 Nisan.

Right? That's the first feast. And that kicks off the spring cycle. What comes after Passover? Unleavened bread, which includes FF, first fruits, and culminating sometime later in what? Pentecost.

Fairly important feast since that's when our dispensation began, right? Those are the spring feasts. Now, if Passover is in the first month, and you count 50 days from Passover to get to Pentecost, what month does Pentecost always fall in? 15 days to the end of the month, right? Plus 30 days for the second month. That's 45 days.

Five more days. So what month does Pentecost always fall in? Third month, right? Always. Third month.

Has to. Because you've only got 15 days left in Nisan. It's either 29 or 30 days, depending on the whole lunar thing, for the second month.

But either way you slice it, by the time you get to fourth or fifth of the third month, it's Pentecost time. Third month. This, coincidentally, perhaps, is the month in which Asa and Judah, having heard the word of the Lord, given through the presence and power of the Spirit of the Lord, called the assembly together.

Gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those who dwelt with them. They gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the 15th year of the reign of Asa. And they offered to the Lord all, at that time, 700 bulls and seven alephs of sheep from the spoil they had brought.

They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul. This sounds great, doesn't it? They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers. They heard the word, if you seek him, he will be found by you.

And they said, we pledge that we will seek the Lord. However, the next verse is a bit of a back taker. Takes one aback.

And whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or

great, man or woman. Now, good or bad, seek the Lord or die. Are you seeking the Lord? Of course, I'm absolutely seeking the Lord.

Are you seeking the Lord? Well, and they're dead. He who hesitates is lost. You're seeking the Lord or you're dead.

Man, woman, doesn't matter. This is not good. Is there anything in the law of Moses? Is there anything by way of precedent that anyone who does not actively seek the Lord is executed? This is King Asa displaying a little bit of that which caused him problems.

He didn't remove the high places, but he's ready to kill anyone who doesn't act like they're seeking the Lord. You cannot force volition. You can't threaten people into the kingdom.

And this is what has historically happened with a lot of hellfire and brimstone preaching. You better get saved or you're going to roast. You know, believe or die kind of a thing.

This is believe or I ain't going to wait for hellfire. I'll kill you now. And it's not good.

This is not right. But remember this is a record. This is not a recommendation.

It's a record. This is what happened and there is a zeal for God that is not according to knowledge. And zeal is a good thing.

The quote scripture when the Lord chases out the money changers, you know, the zeal for your house has consumed me. That's a wonderful thing, but it's got to be in line with scripture. And no matter how ardent and how strongly we feel toward God, how much we love the Lord Jesus and how much we appreciate God's grace, we've got to confine our actions and our policies and our decisions to that which God can approve because it is founded on the truth.

And God does not approve of executing people. I mean, this sounds like Islam. You know, you will conform or you will die.

And neither Old Testament belief in God nor New Testament belief in God through Jesus Christ has ever been by force. Not in God's plan. It's not right.

So Asa exceeds his instructions here. Did Azariah say anything about anyone who does not seek the Lord shall be put to death? What did he say the consequences of not seeking the Lord would be? What was the word of the Lord on this occasion? If you forsake him, he will forsake you. It doesn't say if you forsake him, the king will kill you.

It had clear instruction from God. The consequences of forsaking God is being forsaken by God. Asa exceeds the instructions.

He goes too far. So whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death. We have to be careful about trying to inflict consequences on people who do not share our attitude, our response, our love for God and the things of God, our desire to learn his word.

And this becomes especially significant if you have some sort of power over those people. If you're a spouse or if you're a parent, you cannot force someone to that which God says is by choice. You choose whether to seek or not.

Everybody chooses to seek or not to seek. God will implement the consequences in his time and in his ways much wiser than us. And killing somebody is not helpful.

Verse 14. They took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice with shouting and trumpets and ram's horns. Now, the nation has already entered into covenant relationship and has already taken an oath way back at Mount Sinai.

And it was not an annual ritual that every new generation or as soon as somebody came of age if they got bar mitzvahed or bat mitzvahed or something that they would take an oath of fealty to God. It was done at the national level at Sinai. All that the Lord has said we will do.

It was not some ritual that was renewed. And again, this is methinkest thou protesteth too much. This is a lot of energy.

This is a lot of blowing of horns, a lot of protestations of fealty and so on. Yes, it's great that they are responding positively to the word of the Lord, but it's too much. There's too much human action here.

God said seek and he will be found. He didn't say pledge. He didn't say swear.

He didn't say kill anybody that doesn't get with the program. This is just way too much. There's this human element.

We will make this thing happen. We'll blow horns. We will shout.

We will swear. We'll take an oath and we'll take another oath and we'll cross our names at the bottom in blood and so on. This is all not anything God asked for, was impressed with, or wanted.

All Judah rejoiced at the oath. Why don't they rejoice at the promise? Why didn't they rejoice when when Azariah gave the message from the Spirit of God? That's the place to rejoice. They're rejoicing at the oath.

Look at us. Aren't we all in a rah-rah moment here? They rejoice and it's the Bible does not mince words. They rejoiced at their action.

They rejoiced at their side. Wow, isn't it great that we have committed to God. It's all wrong.

It's all wrong-headed. But it's you can allow for the fact that there's immaturity. There's been no teaching priest.

There's been no law. It has lain fallow and God is willing to overlook a lot. God will bless if

there's any remember our memory verse what whatsoever things are this that and the other and it's to the extent that it is pure to the extent that it is noble.

If you can find something in it that is good that's the part to think on and focus on and God in his grace honors the part that's good and at best just ignores the chaff. At worst he's going to come back. If it becomes too much chaff and not enough wheat, it's going to get burned.

It's going to get blown away by the wind. All Judah rejoiced at the oath for they had sworn with all their heart and sought him with all their soul and he was found by them and the Lord gave them rest all around. This was too much but God says look you're you're heading in the right direction.

So he gives them rest all around. Also he removed, this is Asa, removed Maakah the mother of Asa the king from being queen mother because she had made this obscene image and this picks up with what we've already seen in first kings. Asa cut down her obscene image crushed and burned it by the brook Kidron but the high places were not removed from Israel.

Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days and there was no war until the 35th year of the reign of Asa. This happened in the 15th year right and there was no war until the 35th year. So 20 years that's half a generation.

20 years they have peace all around because God demonstrated to them. This is kind of like the miracles that he did up in the north. He said look if you seek me and he didn't quibble with the details that they overdid it.

They messed it up in a lot of ways. He said look you have sought me and I will honor my word that your enemies around about you are going to be confused and chaotic and attack each other and you're going to have peace. And so Judah has peace for 20 years through the years of the reign of Asa.

Then we get into some things that we saw in first kings 15 the treaty with Syria and so on. And this brings our study for tonight to a close but what we see here as we kind of step back and look at the bigger picture in the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom is in the south where there is response and there is a heening and a listening to even though it's kind of ham-fisted and clumsy and and overdone and and immature God honors it and God nurtures it and God blesses it and he waits for them to grow up. You remember there will come a time when Asa's son Jehoshaphat is going to send teachers through the land and they're going to get a lot smarter than they are here.

But even though they kind of mess it up and this this to me is the equivalent of somebody asking Jesus into their heart and maybe getting all elbows and knees with trying to get involved in in the work of the church and doing a bunch of things before they have actually grown. God will work with us. God will find the parts that are good and encourage us just like a child.

Children make all kinds of mistakes. We don't kick them out of the house because they they

mess up. We we work with what they're doing right and we eventually discourage and eliminate what they're what they're doing that's not right.

And so God doesn't hold him to account. He doesn't send Azariah back down saying wait a minute wait a minute stop all this oath and horn blowing you're doing it wrong. It is what it is and and again, this is the grace of God.

If you want to talk about the grace of God, God is patient and long-suffering with us as a model among other things for us with each other to be patient and long-suffering. We no matter how long we live on this earth, we're not going to do everything right and we're going to overdo some things and underdo others. God works with what is good and what is right what is noble and pure and lovely and of good report.

Think on these things and the peace of God which passes all understanding. And that's what you have here the peace of God roundabout. Well, this is a comparison and contrast of what's going on up in the north.

When we return to our study next time we're going to see that there is a falling away from this in the days of Jehoram, especially the latter days of Jehoram. And this bright light and enthusiasm and recognition of the importance of the truth of God, they begin well, but they fade in the stretch. You know a good runner saves something for the kick, saves something for the sprint to the finish.

Well, when Judah gets to that point at least in terms of the reign of Jehoram, they're just all out of gas and instead of kicking to the finish, he kind of stumbles and falls. You ever seen this? Somebody runs a great race, then they fall like on the last lap. And it's like oh, and they get up and they cross, you know, a minute and a half after everybody else because they didn't maintain.

They didn't do the Oded. They didn't persevere and continue and persist and have that long-term faithfulness. Oded is in here three times no matter how you slice the text and Oded means stick with it, persevere.

We saw it in Ecclesiastes. It's not the tall spirit. It's the long spirit.

It's not he who stands tall at the beginning. It's he who runs the race with patience and crosses the line having completed the race and finished the course like the apostle Paul to achieve that crown. Well, we'll see this emphasized and illustrated for us very effectively as we move forward.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful truth of your word and how powerfully these ancient accounts of your dealing with your people in Israel express to us the truths that pertain as we live day by day. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enliven these things in our hearts, cause them to live and breathe fire in our souls, to motivate us and encourage us and rebuke and instruct us and correct us where we depart from the narrow road

and are deflected from the straight gate that leads to that life you have promised us, the life that you desire to give us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.