

Kings and Prophets 15-05-29b

We pick up our study now, we're on the cusp of chapter 28, which I have been threatening to get to for the whole evening. We saw both Uzziah and Jotham associated with these two ladies, these two queens in Judah, mothers of kings. And you remember that both Uzziah did what was right in the sight of the Lord, chapter 26, verse 4, and Jotham in chapter 27, verse 6, became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.

And not perfect, these guys have issues, but you get the idea that along with the influence of their associated queenly mothers, they did get something right. And this sets up a great potential to accomplish what God has set by way of a challenge, an opportunity, they have been given ability, and this can result in laying hold of and maintaining possession of those blessings and inheritances from God that He has promised. So, Jotham reigned 16 years in Jerusalem, he rested with his fathers and they buried him in the city of David, Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

Ahaz was 20 years old, now we're in chapter 28, when he became king, he reigned 16 years in Jerusalem, and he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord as his father David had done. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. That is a very powerful statement.

He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. From the beginning, the account of Ahaz begins by setting up this comparison, this standard, and we're going to see the similarity of apostasy in the days of Ahaz. It is going to be closely associated with the pattern of apostasy that we have been studying for many chapters and many weeks in the northern kingdom.

So, and he's going to go all the way back to its source and its beginning in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. So, number one, watch for the comparison. It's set up for us here in verse 2. The apostasy is like that of the kings of Israel.

Now, let's read a little bit. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He made molded images for the baals.

What's the first thing Jeroboam did? Remember, he made the golden calves. He put one in Dan and the other up in Bethel. He burned incense in the valley of the sons of Hinnom.

This is eventually going to be Gehenna, the valley that becomes the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. Burned his children in the fire according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. Sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

Things were going so well, or reasonably well, in Judah. And then Ahaz shows up. But in typical historical fashion, the king reflects and represents and manifests the heart of the people.

And in this third generation, so to speak, after Uzziah and after Jotham, there is this great

falling away. Therefore, verse 5, the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him and carried away a great multitude of them as captives and brought them to Damascus.

Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter. For Pekah, the son of Ramaliah, killed 120,000 in Judah in one day. This is 120 Eliphs.

This is groups. They didn't have detailed, sophisticated accounting systems, I don't believe. And I think these are just group-size clumps.

I don't think this is a literal thousand. We've been through that a few times. But this is 120 Eliphs.

This is a lot of people. This is several thousand. Several thousand people out of a relatively small community in Judah and Jerusalem.

All valiant men. And remember the valiant men that were trained in the previous two reigns? Well, they're all slaughtered. The ability that comes from God seems to have deserted these men.

And they're beaten by the slapdash, slipshod, pagan, veil-worshipping guys from the north. And here they are down there. You would think, well, this would draw them closer because now they're following the same godless religious practices up in the north.

But it doesn't draw them together. There is a greater animosity. Their common failed religion doesn't draw them together any more than Islam is drawing together the Sunnis and the Shia.

Yeah, they've got religion, but there's a lot more than religion at stake. There's territory. There's political power.

There's economic opportunities. And you fight over all of those things even when your religion is in common. Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseah, the king's son.

Why is this even included? Who would have been the heir of Ahaz? This guy. He would have taken possession of the throne. He would have inherited kingship.

Instead, he is slain. Now he has no ability to do anything, and he has possession of nothing. And this is a harbinger.

This is a sign. This is a communication of a political and contemporaneous nature for the people in Judah. What has happened to God's protection of the kingly line and the throne and all these things that pertain to Jerusalem? Their people have been defeated, slain, taken captive by foreigners.

The heir to the throne has been slain along with the guy that is sort of the exo, the joab, if you will, to David. This guy, Azricam, the officer over the house, and Elkanah, who is second to the

king. So his eleazar, you know, Abraham had a trusted servant.

That guy is killed. The cabinet, the senior ranks around the king are all slain along with the heir to the throne. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren 200 elephs of women, sons and daughters, also took away much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria.

Now, what's the first thing we said? This apostasy in Judah is being consciously compared to what happened in the north, beginning in the days of Jeroboam and all of those sons of kings up there who followed in the pattern of Jeroboam. Even though they're not directly related. Remember all those different dynasties and one guy assassinating and taking over and this general and that guy comes in.

But they're still compared back to leading Israel into sin and perpetuating the practices of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Well, now Judah is being compared to that. So that's number one.

And secondly, what is happening in the north as a result of the Assyrians coming in? It hasn't happened yet, but what's going to happen up there? What are the Assyrians going to do to the north? It's called the deportation. They take all the citizens out. This is how you end up with Samaritans.

So this is a portent. But what's going to happen in the southern kingdom in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, in the days of Daniel and Ezekiel? What's going to happen? 605, 598, 586. There are three successive waves.

And what does Nebuchadnezzar eventually do to this same kingdom of Judah? He takes them. They are taken captive and they become a possession. You can either take possession of inheritance or you can be taken possession of by both northern kingdom and Damascus, foreigners.

This is a preview. This is an adumbration of what is coming eventually to the kingdom if they persist in this pattern of unbelief. This is a mini captivity.

They are taken captive and hauled off as slaves by their own people and by foreigners, by the people in the north and by foreigners. It's a preview of coming attractions. This is what will eventually happen entirely.

Ahaz can't blame his daddy, can he? His father Jotham did what was right. His father Jotham was a good king. His mother was Yerusha.

He had a great upbringing. He was schooled and nurtured by apparently godly parents. And he's just a rotten egg, as rotten as they get.

Look what he does to his own children. He burns some of them in the flames and he loses others in misbegotten military misadventures. And he's led the kingdom of Judah into this

gross immorality and judgment from God.

So, when you look back, keep your finger here and go back to 2 Chronicles 13. Let's go back in time. This is just after Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

And Rehoboam, the first king in Judah for the divided kingdom, look at the end of chapter 12. Rehoboam rests with his fathers. Here's Abijah, his son, reigning in Judah.

18th year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah, the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 choice men. Jeroboam drew up in battle formation against him with 800 elephants of choice men, mighty men of valor.

Abijah stood on Mount Zimrain, which is the mountains of Ephraim, and said, Hear me, Jeroboam, and all Israel. Now, pay attention, this is Abijah preaching to Jeroboam, the king of the north. What does he tell him? Should you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt? Yet Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, servant of Solomon, the son of David, the servant, has risen up, rebelled against his lord.

Worthless rogues gathered to him and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and inexperienced and could not withstand them. And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hand of the sons of David. And you are a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves, which Jeroboam made for you as gods.

Molten images. With me so far? Kind of a flashback. Verse 9. Have you not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of other lands, so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of things that are not gods? As for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him.

And the priests who minister to the Lord are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites attend their duties. They burn to the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense. They also set the showbread in order on the pure gold table and the lampstand of gold with its lamps to burn every evening, for we keep the command of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken Him.

That was the condemnation of Abijah, king of Judah, against Jeroboam and everybody up in the north right after Rehoboam's death. Right? So, where is Judah now? Turn back to 2 Chronicles 28, verse 3. Ahaz is burning incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burns his children in the fire according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. Isn't that exactly what Abijah was accusing the northern people of, offering

sacrifices and obeisance to the gods of the nations that have been cast out, burning incense? He sacrificed and burned incense in the high places, on the hills and under every green tree, not in Jerusalem in the temple where you have the table of showbread and the golden lampstand and so on.

So, they have now emulated, they are mimicking, they are following the pattern and the downward spiral that the northern kingdom began generations earlier. In Judah, the same things are happening that were condemned in the days of Abijah and the latter days of Jeroboam. Therefore, the Lord delivered him into the hand.

He says, from that look at the past, here's a look at the future. Defeat, ransacking, loss of goods, captivity, enslavement. It spans the gamut from the beginning to the end of what is about to happen in the northern kingdom and what will eventually happen in the southern kingdom.

It isn't like there was no warning. It's not like there was no preview, no word from the Lord. So, they are being carried away captive and Ahaz had shut the doors of the temple in verse 24 of chapter 28.

A prophet of the Lord came after they got despoiled and defeated by the Israelites, the northern kingdom guys under Pekah. Look at verse 9. A prophet of the Lord was there whose name was Oded. Oded in Hebrew means encouragement, exhortation.

So, a prophet of the Lord named encouragement, named exhortation was there. He went out before the army that came to Samaria and he said to them, Look, because the Lord God of your fathers was angry with Judah, he has delivered them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that reaches up to heaven. Now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves, but are you not also guilty before the Lord your God? Now hear me therefore and return the captives whom you have taken captive from your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.

Yes, God is judging the south. Yes, God has allowed them to be defeated, but you are taking advantage. You are killing them and now you are enslaving them and God's wrath is going to switch from them to you.

So, some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, and these men are named because they are men, there are a few men left in the north that have some common sense, such as Azariah the son of Yohanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillimoth, Jehoshiah the son of Shalom, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who came from the war and said to them, You shall not bring the captives here, for we have offended the Lord. You intend to add to our sins and to our guilt, for our guilt is great and there is fierce wrath against Israel. Acknowledgement of wrong, confession of sin, recognition of fault.

These men are mentioned because they have the courage to stand up against their brothers

and say, We are in the wrong here. Not a time to gloat, not a time to take advantage. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the leaders and all the assembly.

They said, All right, we won't take them. You figure out what to do. So the men who are designated by name rose up and took the captives, and those are the men named up above, and these men are named and remembered in Scripture because not only did they have the courage to stand up to the army and relieve them of their spoil and slaves, but they returned the slaves, the people, to their own land.

They rose up and took the captives from the spoil. They clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them and gave them sandals, gave them food and drink, and anointed them. Now they're not returning all of the spoil.

The army, I'm sure, would have risen up and probably slain them all. But they took enough out of the spoil to comfort, clothe, and feed the captives. Then they take the captives and put the feeble on donkeys, brought them to their brethren where? At Jericho, the city of palms.

Then they returned to Samaria. Jericho, the city of palms. What does the name Jericho mean? What is the name of the town? What does it mean? It is difficult to figure out because there are several different routes from which that name might be taken.

Some people think it is the city of prosperity, literally the city of wide places because if you look at just the consonants, which is what Hebrew is made up of, you have a Y for the J and then an R and then a CH. So it's Y, R, and then a CH. One of the words that that is related to is Ruach, from which we get Ruach.

It has a dual meaning. Sometimes it means breath or wind or spirit. Ruach Elohim, the spirit of the Lord.

The very first couple of verses of Genesis, the spirit of God, the Ruach Elohim moved on the face of the waters. So it also has a verbal idea of something widening or being wide. And you get this idea of wind blowing across wide spaces, of breadth of coverage, of a large place.

So the two are sort of related. The wind, the spirit, it's big, it covers a distance, wide places. And it can mean to breathe in and out, to inspire and expire, inspiration and expiration in terms of breath.

So inhaling air that is available all around you. Another meaning, another form of this Ruach, or Ruach, and that has this abstract idea of spirit rather than wind or breath. It also, in its wide or spacious meaning, is used for relief.

You are oppressed, and oppression has the idea of constriction and limitation and pressure and being pushed into a tight spot. And so wideness and openness and freedom from that is relief. And so it comes in its connotation to mean comfort or relief.

Jericho, the name, partakes of these ideas as a city of the air, a city of perfumed air, a city of wide space. It is said to abound in palms, not only here but also in Deuteronomy 24, verse 3. So our passage, 2 Chronicles 28.15 and Deuteronomy 24.3, Jericho is called the city of palms. There is a related word called Arach, which is an Aleph before the Resh and the Chet.

Arach, or Aruach, that is related to the moon. And so some people think that it's the city of the moon, and that maybe there was moon worship performed in Jericho prior to Joshua coming in and the walls falling down and the city being destroyed. One of the reasons it was destroyed is that it was a center of lunar worship.

It's somewhat speculative, but from this idea, the verbal meaning of Arach is to wander or to travel. And it's used of the moon because of all of the heavenly bodies, the moon is the most ambulatory. There is the most movement, more so than the planets.

The sun makes regular tracks, but the moon just seems to appear and disappear all over the place. It's not in the same place on different nights. It changes form.

It changes shape. And so it's the most changeable of the heavenly apparitions. And so Arach, to wander, to travel, to move around.

And so in Psalm 1611, we have a form of this word Arach, a way or a path, or the direction that you steer your life, the path that you travel in life, is referenced in this way. But when you think about the symbolic overtones in this passage, where it started with those queenly mothers, the opportunity that they had, and what Ahaz does with that opportunity is to go in directly opposite path, directly opposite way. And when people as a result are defeated or slain, and the mothers and sons and so on are taken captive and into slavery, God intervenes by sending a man of God to deliver a divine prophetic message, knowing that there are men in leadership positions in Ephraim that will respond and heed that message.

At the word of the Lord, at the behest of God sending Oded, these people are returned, and not just anywhere. They are returned to Jericho, the place of relief, the place of wide space instead of constricted loss of freedom, the place of palms. You can't help but think of the palm branches that are waved in triumph, in acceptance and welcome for the Lord Jesus on the Sunday, Palm Sunday.

Many of those palms might have actually been cut in or near Jericho and brought there. But there is this staving off of judgment. They are taken captive, but they come back, which is also going to happen in the Babylonian captivity.

They are taken away, but they will return. Return where? To Jerusalem. Via what? The road that runs right through Jericho, the same road that the Lord Jesus is going to travel later.

So we are told the very direction and path that these captives are returned to Jerusalem. It is via Jericho. So all of these things are significant.

They were significant to the people in the day who had their spiritual ears on, who were alive to what God would say and do with regard to their nation. And we should be similarly sensitive to the warning and the call for repentance that God issues through this passage. If we allow ourselves to go the way of the world, to follow the pattern that has already been illustrated, already been shown forth.

Judah saw what happened in the north. They've seen the chaos and the destruction and the murder and the disintegration up there. And here their king is leading them down the very same path and nobody seems to be lifting a finger to stop him.

Ahaz has the run of the southern kingdom to do what he wishes. Nobody is opposing him. Nobody is stopping him.

There's not even a man of God standing up and saying, Ahaz, what are you doing? We have no record of any... Where does the prophet appear? As a conviction, the man of God shows up and talks to the people in the north. And they respond. This is like sending Jonah to Nineveh.

What a rebuke. What a slap in the face to Judah. God won't even send them a man of God.

He sends the man of God to their enemies, to the people they've been looking down on in the north. And those people respond and return them. This should have shocked them to the very foundations.

But what happens? At the same time, King Ahaz, instead of getting down on his knees, instead of going to the temple, instead of offering sacrifice to God, what does he do? Well, the northern kingdom of northern Israel has handed us our helmets, so he goes to the kings of Assyria and asks them for aid. Who is the next big threat to both kingdoms? Who is just over the horizon? What can Ahaz not see that we already know? He has a cat problem, and he's going to the lion's den to ask for help. He's just insanely going to Assyria for help.

Because in their weakened condition, what did God promise? Remember in the cycles back there in Deuteronomy, if you disobey, this is what will happen. A thousand of you will be put to flight by one, and you'll be overcome and influenced by the outside. So in their weakened condition, being beaten up on by Pekah and being beaten up on by the Syrians up in the north, who else sees an opportunity? Edom.

Remember all of the back and forth with Edom that we've seen historically? Well, now Edom is coming in, attacking Judah and taking away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland and of the south of Judah. You know what the south of Judah is? It's a name for it that we saw when we were studying our prophet Micah.

Remember the Shephelah? Remember those towns? We have a little list of towns here. Beth Shemesh? Eglon? Remember Eglon? Immortalized in the prayer of Joshua? Son, stand thou still in the valley of Eglon, one of the places where God granted one of the greatest historic military victories of all time? Eglon has been pillaged and ransacked and the people taken captive.

Wake up, wake up, wake up.

Beth Shemesh, Eglon, Gath, Soco, with its villages. Timnah. What happened in Timnah? Remember Samson operating down there? This was Philistine territory.

Timnah with its villages. And Gath with its villages. Notice these are regional, these are like county seats with many other townships.

Whole counties, whole sections of Judah are being defeated and ransacked. And they dwelt there. They came in, the Philistines came in and retook this stuff that had been Judah's possession since the days of David.

They're losing ground that they've had since the days of Joshua and since the days of David, certainly. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel. For he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord.

Also Tiglath-Pileser, you have a note there that in Hebrew it says Tilgath. I don't know if that makes a whole lot of difference, I'm going to call him Tiglath. Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, came to him and distressed him and did not assist him.

Ahaz took part of the stuff in the house of the Lord from the house of the king and from the leaders. He made a big collection of loot, sent it to the king of Assyria, and the king of Assyria came down and said, thanks a lot, and then harassed him and didn't help him at all. This is like paying protection money to criminals who then come and rob you anyway, themselves.

Now in the time of his distress, verse 22, king Ahaz turned to the Lord, called for the prophet, offered sacrifice, got down on his face and said, O Lord, I see the error of my ways. King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord. This is that king Ahaz.

This, in Hebrew, it just says, became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord, this king Ahaz. What can you say about him? This king Ahaz? He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, which had defeated him, saying, because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to those that they may help me. It worked in the world, it will work for me.

This is what they do out in the world for success, this is what I will do. But they were the ruin of him and all Israel. Notice Israel here means Judah.

Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. Remember Abijah said that Israel was worshipping the golden calves, and them that are no gods, back in chapter 13. Ahaz has shut the doors of the temple, he's put out the lamps, he has stopped the offerings of incense and sacrifices.

You find this out in the next chapter when we get into the description of Ezekiel. I look at verse 6 and following. They have shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, have not

burned incense or offered burnt offerings to the holy place of the God of Israel.

Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has given them up to trouble, to desolation, to jeering, as you see with your eyes. This is Ahaz's doing. So much for the superiority of Judah over northern Israel.

They are doing exactly the same things that Jeroboam did, and they're going to suffer the same fate. They have not learned at all, Ahaz in particular. So, back in the early days, remember back in chapter 11, when we saw that from the territories in the north, the priests and the Levites had moved south? Remember when Jehoshaphat had teaching and the righteous in the north moved down to the south? Because they realized that that was the place where you could still worship God.

The Levites, this is back in 2 Chronicles 11, the Levites left their lands and possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving, and appointed for himself priests for high places, for demons and calf idols and all the rest of it. And so those people in the north came south. But, in the reign of Ahaz, righteousness is up in the north.

The guys who are doing right and heeding the word of the man of God are in the north. It's just like a flip-flop. The military outcomes are reversed.

Jeroboam suffered defeats. Now Judah is suffering defeat. Abijah and his people slew the people of Jeroboam back in chapter 13 with a great slaughter.

Remember when Judah fought against the evil northern kingdom and defeated them? Well, what happens here? The northern kingdom defeats Judah with a great defeat and great slaughter. It's just exactly reversed from what we saw in chapter 13. 28.5 tells us that Ahaz is delivered into the king of Syria's hand and delivered into the hand of the king of Israel.

In Abijah's day, back at the beginning, it was Israel that was subjugated. You look at chapter 13, verse 18. The children of Israel were subdued and the children of Judah prevailed because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers.

That's 13.8 of 2 Chronicles. Now, in the time of Ahaz, it's Judah who is subjugated. 28.19, the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel.

There is only one king in the entire history of Judah. All of the kings of Judah, from David, Solomon, Rehoboam, all the way down, there's only one king about whom not a single good thing is said. Guess who? Ahaz.

There's not one good thing said about the guy from beginning to end. He is the exact opposite of Abijah. And he is a spiritual son of Jeroboam.

And he's in the south. It couldn't be any worse if he had Athaliah back on the throne down

there. Well, this is a conscious allusion.

It is a conscious harking back. And Chronicles, perhaps, we don't know exactly when it was written. It's possible that it was put together and compiled and edited together from the court records even in the days of the captivity later on.

And you might wonder if the author here knows what's coming. And certainly God knew what was coming. And in this allowing captivity by both the northern kingdom and by the surrounding nations to take the people of Judah captive, this has never happened.

Since the earliest days, Judahites haven't been taken captive and enslaved and deported and hauled off for chattel. But it happens here. What is the conclusion that we draw as we look at this? To the extent that we depart from what we know from the Word of God is the narrow path that leads to the straight gate of life.

To the extent that we emulate the practices that seem successful by those around us, well, these attempts for, you know, I will dedicate myself in an imbalanced fashion to health. I will dedicate myself in an imbalanced fashion to financial security. I will dedicate my... Nothing wrong with health and financial wisdom.

But when these things become goals in themselves, when we rely on those instead of looking first to the Lord and asking Him for guidance and wisdom as we pursue these worthy goals, He is the one that gives us ability to discern, ability to achieve, ability to possess. And those things are only meaningful in His presence in Jerusalem, in the sphere of His glory, Jecholiah, Yerusha. Those things are meaningless without them, without the Lord, without the ultimate defining goal.

So it's a powerful reminder. And here are the good people. You remember some of the rebukes that the Lord Jesus dealt to Peter, the one that had been set aside, sanctified for special training and special purpose and special insight, mount of transfiguration, upper room, in the garden.

Tell the disciples and Peter. But Peter gets some pretty stinging rebukes. And this is a stinging rebuke to the people of Judah.

Don't follow a bad king. Don't support faulty policies. Don't allow this to go on in your kingdom, in your house, for us, in your heart.

We've got to find and expunge these things or we are going to pay a dear, dear price. We lose possession. Most of all, we lose presence.

You remember in the days of Ezekiel, the sad account of the departure of the glory of God from Judah, from Jerusalem, from the Holy of Holies, over the Mount of Olives, out to the nations. I will make a people who will glorify my name. You're no longer it.

It can't be us. Well, there is a reason for these accounts. It goes beyond mere history.

It goes beyond a mere record of long-ago dusty events. These are written for our instruction, for our encouragement and our exhortation. We want to be those to whom God can send His word, His message, and get a response.

Not those that He's given up on and He's actually sending the messenger to Nineveh. He's sending the messenger to the northern kingdom because even in that God-forsaken place, there's more response than there is among us. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for this portion of Your Word and the truths that it illuminates for us. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress them on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.