

Kings and Prophets 16-02-04

This is February the 4th, 2016. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets tonight, resuming and concluding the look we are taking at the third chapter of Habakkuk, Habakkuk chapter three. We'll move rather quickly and conclude our study of chapter three of Habakkuk and then in the second, there isn't a second session, well in the first half of the class.

I had this whole big plan for the second session, I just this moment realized we don't have one. Well, you're gonna have to hang on tight because the second half of this is gonna be what would have been a whole nother class. So I'll just have to revise my talking speed while I'm praying.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer and then we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for the fellowship that you have made available to us in our church. The believers here and who join us remotely and who will join us in the future, who recognize the importance of relationship with you and cultivating and growing in relationship with you through the study of your word, through thinking about it, asking for the ministry of your spirit to make it real and pertinent and meaningful.

We pray that our study tonight will contribute to those goals, will draw us closer to one another, draw us closer to you through the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name, amen. Habakkuk chapters one, two, and three, you remember they are discreet.

That's really a pretty nice division for a change by the folks that put our English translation together. And this is a psalm. It is a song on Shigianoth.

It is something to be made memorable, something to bring it to mind and to reflect on. There is a superscription there that we've already covered, a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigianoth. So we have our author identified twice, chapter one, verse one, and chapter three, verse one.

And then this breaks naturally into sections. There is a request in verse two that looking at God's words and God's work, looking at them both, in the midst of them both, it is a petition for God to remember mercy. I don't, as you know, believe that this is in the midst of the years.

By the way, I've done a little bit of research now that my eyes have been opened to the double meaning. It's not exactly a double meaning, but Shanim is two different words that are spelled exactly the same, sort of like the word bear, B-E-A-R. If I just throw that word out there, you don't know if I'm talking about a four-footed, dangerous creature or the verb that means to carry something along.

In the same way, Shanim comes to us in Hebrew and is often the word for years, plural. But it means two of a thing or both of a set of things. And I have found a couple of other passages where I think it has also been misunderstood to be years.

And it is referring to two things in the previous context. So it was sort of an affirmation. We don't have time to go there tonight, unfortunately, but remind me someday and we will.

At any rate, this is the words and works of God. I have heard your speech. I have heard the report.

I have heard your word, what has been spoken about you. And I have seen your work, words and work. In the midst of them both, oh Lord, remember mercy.

Habakkuk knows that God has made promises, the blessings and cursings on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal being a prime example. The prophecies of Isaiah in their reflection of what happens to God's people when they depart from their covenant obligations are already set down. So he knows that judgment is coming.

So then in the next section, which is, so what do we have here? The first section is the superscription, the title block. The second one is this initial request in verse two. So that's two parts now.

You've got the title and superscription. You've got the sort of thematic element at the beginning that in the midst of God's words and works, i.e. of judgment, there is the plea, the petition, the request that God remember his mercy. This is along the lines of a certitude that we nevertheless pray over.

Give us this day our daily bread. God has promised to care for us and that we should take no thought. God provides for the lilies of the field.

He will take care of us. Nevertheless, Jesus encouraged us to pray. It isn't that if we don't pray, God won't do it.

It is a recognition of what God has promised. And we reflect. It's a homologueo.

It is like confessing our sins. We know we sinned, God knows we sinned, but we name those sins and confess them nevertheless as we claim God's grace in cleansing forgiveness. The same thing is true in praying things that we know God has promised.

We affirm that we know the promise, that we stand and rest on that promise, and we are in an expectant posture for the fulfillment of that promise. So Habakkuk knows God is going to remember his mercy. He's already gone up in the tower.

He's already watching. He has been comforted and encouraged by the word of God, but he reflects it back in his prayer. We pray what we know.

We pray what we know. In case you missed it, we pray what we know. That's the example.

That's the opening salvo here in this great psalm. The next section now, verses three through seven, God came from Teman. You have any recollection at all of seeing that before? Think of

Job's three friends.

Can you name them? Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz the Temanite. Temanite, goes back that far. It's an ancient designation for that area.

The Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens. The earth was full of his praise.

Heaven and earth, harking back to the first chapter of Genesis. His brightness is like the light. First chapter of Genesis.

He has rays flashing from his hand, and there his power is hidden, or there is a covering. His power has to be covered. Otherwise, we would be incinerated.

The glory of God, no man can see it and live. It's too much, we are too separate from it. There is a day coming when that will not be the case.

Isn't that exciting? God is going to regenerate us, and in resurrected form, those of us who persist and who pursue and who push and press will be qualified to be in the very presence of God, like the angels, like the seraphim and the cherubim and those angels that are granted access to the very throne room of God. We have boldness to enter into the presence of God by a new and living way. Hebrews 10, 20 and 21.

The veil of the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ. Interesting discussion with one of our members just earlier yesterday and today about the veil of the temple being rent when the Lord Jesus was crucified and the expectancy that something cataclysmic would happen at that point. The ark of the covenant, the presence of God, the mercy seat, the place where only the high priest with great trepidation and a rope tied around his ankle would go in once a year, and if he was slain dead by the presence of God, they could drag his smoking carcass back out of there and put him in the valley of Ophel or something.

And when the veil is rent, there is a spectacular lack of drama. Why? Holy of holies is empty. There is no ark, there is no mercy seat, there is certainly no Shekinah.

By the way, the Shekinah didn't hang around always over the ark. It appeared at those times when its symbolic value for the presence of God was important, when the tabernacle was dedicated, when Solomon's temple was dedicated. But you remember in Ezra chapter three, when they dedicate the rebuilt temple, the glory of God does not appear.

And there's no mention of the ark because the ark, the last site of the ark was during the days that we're looking at before the Babylonian captivity, when it is still present in the temple and in the holy of holies. But at the point of the Babylonian captivity, the ark disappears, never to be seen again on this earth thus far. Many theories about what might've happened to it.

Was it secreted by King Josiah in the bowels of Mount Zion? Is it hidden away in a cavern? Did

Jeremiah spirit it away in his flight to Egypt? Nobody knows, but it wasn't there for the dedication of the temple. So it came to my mind as a result of this question and discussion that there's an interesting bracket at the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, because at his death, God parts the veil to reveal an empty holy of holies. At his resurrection, God rolls away the stone to reveal an empty tomb.

And when you think about the comparison and contrast in both cases, God does the revealing. God supernaturally opens what has been closed and hidden. In the first case, I think, we always talk about rent from top to bottom, indicating that God did it.

It wasn't from the bottom to the top, top to the bottom. But when you think about Jesus rebuking the money changers, when you think about the fact that the Shekinah had never returned, why? We studied that in Ezekiel. The glory of God departed from the mercy seat, went to the door, went to the gate, went to the Mount of Olives and then went to the nations.

And it will not return until the Lord Jesus returns. And in one swoop, the glory of God will enter and be present in the millennial temple that Ezekiel describes in chapters 40 through 48. But there was no glory.

And so by ripping that veil apart, there is the exposing of the hollowness and the emptiness of the man-made tradition that had come to surround and characterize what had formerly been the place of God's recognition. You can't help but think about Romans chapter one. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

They exchanged the glory of God for the glory of other things, four-footed beasts and so on. Anytime I see that four-footed beast always makes me think of the tension between creationism and evolution, because that's literally saying it wasn't the glory of God that brought things into creation. It's the animals created themselves.

They just sprung out of the ground magically. It's just a happy coincidence of some feature of carbon molecules. And you take the glory of God away and you substitute the glory of creation itself.

Creation has its own glory. Kind of like Satan thinks he has his own glory and doesn't need to be attached to God. At any rate, at that rending of the veil, there is the exposing, and I think in a dark and forbidding way, the emptiness of the temple ritual.

But three days later, because in between, you have the rending of the veil of the flesh of Jesus Christ, which makes a new and living way. A lot of people say, well, the rending of the temple veil, that was a symbolic indication that now there is access to God through Christ. The veil is Christ.

Well, nobody at that time would have understood the veil to be Christ. They would have been shocked to see that there was nothing at the center of their worship, which was literally true. And it was a rebuke.

The real veil was outside the gates. The real veil was being torn at the cross. But then three days after the crucifixion, you have the, instead of the tearing of fabric, you have the tearing of rock.

You have the removal of the sealed stone. And inside the empty tomb is a glorious sight. When John sees that, he believes.

When you see the empty Holy of Holies, you disbelieve in the emptiness of human tradition. When you see the empty tomb. Anyway, you can think about that a lot.

And I'm in haste because I want to get to the second part of my lesson. So I leave that for your fruitful reflection. But this is in Habakkuk chapter three.

His brightness is like the light. He has rays flashing from his hand and his power is covered. There is a covering.

The Lord Jesus was a covering for the glory of God. He is the fullness of deity and bodily form. And that covering enables us to see God, God with us, God among us, God in our midst.

And it is a foreshadowing of the day when we can be in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, in the presence of God, and we will not die. We will live and it will be glorious. Before him went pestilence and fever followed at his feet.

This is God in judgment mode. This is before and behind. It's like radiation.

You can't come up on it from behind. You can't stand before it. It is judgment day.

Who can stand? He stood and measured the earth. He looked and startled the nations. The everlasting mountains were scattered.

Perpetual hills were bowed. His ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Kushan in affliction.

The curtains of the land of Midian trembled. And we talked about that. This second section here in verses three through seven is a presence of God vision.

It is a theophany, if you will. It is the presence of God coming in contact with an unholy earth and judgment is the result. It's not a happy visit.

People are not celebrating. And Paul the apostle had the fear that when the Lord Jesus returned, there might be shame at his coming, judgment at his coming rather than celebration, rejoicing and welcome because the people of God aren't ready. The Lord Jesus himself said, when he comes back, will he find faith on the earth? So that's the third section.

This theophanic vision, this presence of God and coming in contact with apathy and indifference and rejection and self-centeredness and self-will. The next section is in verses eight through 15. And this is the tension, the conflict between God and his righteousness and those

who are opposed, those who are enemies of God.

The rivers and the sea, remember the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. These waters, man, especially in those days couldn't tame them or control them. They were the chaotic forces.

There are things hidden beneath them. They are difficult to traverse. People die in them.

This is why the sea gives up the dead that is in it at the end time judgment. So the rivers and the sea, and of course many times God's power is demonstrated in power over these. The great deliverance after the Passover of Israel from Egypt is initiated with a path being made through the unpassable sea by God.

Their entrance into the land is passing the unpassable swollen river by the power of God. And it speaks of God's absolute sovereignty and control over even the chaotic forces that man, especially in that day had no ability to control at all. And we still don't.

Think of a hurricane, think of the flooding that has taken place with tsunamis and various things in recent years. Dams and manmade attempts to circumvent and avoid those things are just futile. I am always running those films in my mind about how puny we are.

It's like your garden hose overwhelming an anthill. The ants, there's nothing they can do. What could they possibly do? And we're that way with the waters.

God rides on his chariot, his chariots of deliverance. He has a purpose in judgment. He's not just an angry God.

He's not just vindictive. He doesn't just like the sight of human blood. He's coming down to wreak havoc and stomp and smash and throw a tantrum.

The reason he is coming in judgment is it is necessary for deliverance. Imagine that you are a cancerous tumor and here comes the surgeon with his scalpel and with his tools. And people could say, look at the violence.

Look at the rending of flesh and the excision of living tissue. How awful, how horrible. But the surgeon has a purpose.

It is necessary for the health and the life of the rest of the body that that be removed. God's not just anti-tumor for its own sake. He's anti-tumor because it threatens the health and the life of what is worthy and beneficial and qualified to stand before him.

So this pestilence that goes before and the disease that comes behind and the writing of this chariot, this is a chariot of deliverance and the judgment serves a purpose. These nations are judged because they are a threat to God's people. Evil from Satan all the way down to the last unbeliever and God rejecter in this human race is removed for one reason and one reason only.

It is a threat. The reason God allows it and permits it during this time in human history is to show us who would not believe if we were just told in the abstract, well, you know, if there's ever disobedience and if you ever depart from God and disconnect yourself from the source of all life and righteousness, that it's gonna be really bad. Well, how do you know? It's never been tried.

Well, it has been tried and God has allowed it to run its course. And that's why there is disease and illness and sickness and pestilence. And this is why the God of this world has been given sway.

It is a permanent demonstration so that in the eons and the eternal ages to come, no one will ever again go down this road. We know what it does. We have suffered through it.

We were born into it and we are delivered out of it when God rides in his chariot of salvation. Your bow is made ready. Oaths are sworn over the arrows.

We have to give this a really light touch and I apologize. There's so many interesting things in here, but this section eight through 15 is the conflict, the confrontation between the righteous God of creation and the rebellious evil of those who reject him and choose themselves instead. You divided the earth with rivers.

The mountain saw you tremble. The overflowing of water passed by. The deep uttered his voice and lifted its hands on high.

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation. Do you see that poetically Habakkuk is reviewing? Remember he said, I have heard your words and I know your works. He's going back to the account of creation in Genesis.

He's going back to the account of deliverance in the Valley of Ajalon when the sun stood still and the moon, both, remember? We always say, well, the day the sun stood, the moon stood still also. Sun stand out still and moon in the Valley of Ajalon. People say, well, obviously the Bible is mythological because in a solar centric system, this would create all kinds of physics problems.

If God can make it, if God can design it, you don't think he can mess with it? Well, once I've made it, it's got a life of its own and I've just lost all control. Look, if God wants to suspend gravity, we would all go flying off into space in an instant. And, you know, we say, well, but that defies the laws.

Whose laws are those? You know, to me, it's absurd. And I like the story that's recounted of a guy whose son came to him and said, you know, this whole thing about Jonah being swallowed by the fish and living in it, I just can't, I can't swallow that story. And the guy said, well, sit down here and let's talk about this a little bit.

So you have trouble believing that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days? He

said, dad, I just can't, it just defies all logic. And he said, well, son, I understand your problem, but I have a more fundamental problem. I have trouble wrapping my mind around a God who could create the great fish to begin with and give it life and enable it to reproduce and who could create a man and put him on this earth with life and breath and thoughts and self-determination.

And once I can wrap my mind around that, I don't think I'm gonna have any trouble with one swallowing the other, in either direction, probably. You know, the bigger question is that it all exists to begin with. But it's trivial for the God who created these things to do anything he wants.

And the fact that it defies the laws of physics, well, excuse me, but who's running the laws of physics? Like, sorry, God, you can't do that. Well, you tell him that. So the sun and moon stood still.

At the light of your arrows, they went. At the shining of your glittering spear, it is a previous time of judgment on an evil population. The Amorites, the iniquity of the Amorites was full.

And God had promised centuries earlier that he would judge it. He said, when their iniquity is full, I will judge it. Well, this is the day when it was judged.

And Habakkuk remembers this. He's reviewing what he knows of scripture, of truth about God, God's words and God's work. God promised he was gonna do it and God fulfilled it.

And he's sketching this out in this wonderful poetic language. You marched through the land in indignation. You trampled the nations in anger.

Remember the seven nations greater and mightier than you that God told the Israelites he was gonna drive out from before them, send hornets into the land, and he slaughtered them with hail and fire and brimstone and several other manifestations that are not explicable from a natural point of view. Why? Look at verse 13. You went forth for the deliverance of your people.

This is why God judges evil. There's so many people who say, well, you know, there's this, you remember that long quote from Richard Dawkins about what a mean guy God is? And they think, well, he's just petty and likes to destroy things. That's so one ply and shallow and inept in terms of perception.

God never does anything without a reason. And in the same way that I would shoot a mugger that was attacking my wife or one of my daughters or anybody else, God will judge and destroy those who oppress and threaten his people and those who threaten the human race with their grotesque and high-handed dedication to evil. God will judge them.

He is going to judge every single one of them. They will all end up in the lake of fire. Every last one, angels included.

They all go to utter separation and destruction. You went forth for the salvation of your people for salvation with your Mashiach, your anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked by laying bare from foundation to neck.

He shall bruise your head. You will bruise his heel. The head is going to be severed and destroyed.

So that's this great section. You thrust through with his own arrows, the head of his villages that came out like a whirlwind to scatter me. Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret.

You walk through the sea with your horses through the heap of great waters. It is unstoppable. It is certain.

It is sure. It is a fulfillment of God's word. It is consistent with his works.

And Habakkuk says, Lord, please remember mercy. And that brings us to the next section. Verses 16 through 19.

When I heard my body trembled, my lips quivered at the voice. Do we not also deserve judgment? Are we not left to ourselves conceived in iniquity, born in sin, incapable of pleasing God? Are we not ripe for judgment? Isn't that why every prophet in the Bible that ever came near the presence of God fell on his face? I am a sinful man. I'm a man of unclean lips.

Peter, when he realized who Jesus was, depart from me, Lord, before I die. It's a healthy and accurate response. Habakkuk has it here.

When I heard, remember, I've heard your report. My body trembled. My lips quivered at the voice.

Rottenness entered my bones and I trembled in myself. Oh, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

And this is God with his hosts. Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts, represented by the horses, the unstoppable military force as it were. And so this is Habakkuk revisiting his request.

Oh Lord, remember mercy in the fulfillment of your words and in the manifestation of your works. Oh, that I might rest in the day of trouble. Then he goes on to say, though the fig tree may not blossom nor fruit be on the vines.

What does that suggest to you? Fig tree is supposed to blossom, right? You remember what Jesus did to one that he thought ought to have figs on it and didn't. And how many times are the people of God referred to as a vineyard or as vines? I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and bear fruit.

The branches that don't bear fruit are pruned and God will prune the bearing branches that

they will bear more fruit. It is all a picture of the people of God. The fig tree, people of God.

The vines and branches, people of God. The engrafted branches, grafted into the plan and program for the people of God. Snapped off, lack of faith, gathered in bundles and burned.

Judgment of the people of God for not getting with the program, for being self-centered and absent-minded and indifferent and apathetic and distracted and stupid. No fruit on the vines, though the labor of the olive may fail and the fields yield no fruit, though the flock may be cut off from the fold. Remember the sheep that the shepherd had to go find because it was lost.

Parable of the Lord Jesus. There be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Notice he is looking around.

This is Habakkuk in the land of Judah in those closing days of the kingdom. And he says, the fig tree's got no fruit. It's going to wither.

The vines are not bearing. They are going to be chopped up and burned. The sheep are scattered.

The oxen have left their stalls. They're not available to do their work. They're not available to be dedication offerings of Leviticus chapter one.

It's all chaotic and outside the plan and will of God. All of this is true, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my deliverance.

I may be in the midst of a people that are ripe for judgment, but I will rejoice in my God. I will rejoice in the salvation he has promised me. The Lord God is my strength.

He will make my feet like deer's feet. He will make me walk on my high hills. I will be up high when the flood comes.

So that's that petition. Then the appearance of God in sort of a theophanic vision, the judgment presence of God coming in contact with earth. Then the contest, the conflict between the righteous God and those who are in line for judgment.

Then the expression of confidence and faith on the part of Habakkuk that in the midst of judgment, he trusts the God of his salvation. He recognizes he's taking the long view. Then finally, you have this final superscription.

We had an introduction. Now we have a conclusion. To the chief musician with my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk is playing his guitar. He's playing his harp. And this is a solo.

Anybody who plays an instrument knows that a lot of times the most enjoyment and satisfaction and fulfillment you have is when you're by yourself and you are reflecting and

playing and there's nobody there but you and the Lord. And this is what Habakkuk is doing. He says, I'm not down with the orchestra.

We're not having a big group rehearsal. I am by myself. This is a meditation.

This is a prayer delivered to the Lord. But he sets it down when it's finished and it is given to the people and others can enter into that reflection and that thought process. And it has been preserved and recorded for us because it is divinely inspired.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Habakkuk. And it communicates to us this wonderful perspective. Well, it's a terrific book.

I have profound appreciation and respect for Habakkuk that I never had a chance to have before because I'd never realized what a terrific book this is. But before we close tonight, turn back now to 2 Kings chapter 21. We want to pick up now in the narrative.

We need some narrative pieces. And you remember that we saw, you know, bad King Manasseh reigning in Judah and verse nine of chapter 21, God sent a prophet to the nation to warn them, but they didn't heed. The Lord had said to David and to Solomon in this house and in Jerusalem, which I've chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put my name forever, verse seven, verse eight, I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers, only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.

The promises of God for blessing, for provision, for protection, for presence, for fellowship, for meaning and purpose in life, which is the ultimate, we are ultimately fulfilled, ultimately happy at the point that we abandon the search for our own purpose and happiness and submit ourselves under the mighty hand of God. When we do that, when we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus in full dedication to the will of the Father, happiness, fulfillment, peace, blessing, joy, and ultimate satisfaction overtake us at the point that we stop looking for them and trying to gain them ourselves, God grants them exponentially. But if we take the opposite tack, if we become self-willed, I will, I will, I will, I will, and the fifth, I will, following in the tracks of Satan, judgment is coming, the promises are fulfilled if we are obedient.

They paid no attention, verse nine, Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. The Lord spoke by his servants of prophets, because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations, he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him and has made Judah sin with his idols. Therefore, as thus says the Lord God of Israel, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.

Remember Habakkuk hearing the word and works of the Lord? The prophet comes and says, you ain't heard nothing yet, your ears are gonna be ringing with this information. I will stretch

over Jerusalem, the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. That's, measuring line is horizontal, plummet is vertical.

It's gonna cover the whole thing. I will wipe them like you wipe a dish, I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance. Why, verse 15, because they have done evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt even to this day.

Parable of the unjust steward, he's forgiven a great debt. The master says, don't worry about it, I don't think about that debt anymore. But then he is unappreciative, he is self-centered, he abuses his underservant and demands a debt from him and he is unforgiven his debt.

The forgiveness that God has granted to the nation of Israel in their previous revivals, in their high points, in those days of deliverance in judges, then in the days of the revivals under Joash and Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, all is forgotten. I will bring on them judgment going all the way back to when they first came out of Egypt and started Maraba in the wilderness. It's all coming back because this nation is indifferent, apathetic, distracted, unappreciative, rebellious and so on.

Now verse 17, the rest of the acts of Manasseh, all that he did and the sin that he committed, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? Now pay attention, this is our verse for tonight, for the second session that we're gonna do in the next five to 10 minutes. This is lesson two, pretend you just had your break, you ate your snack, you've been gone 15 minutes, we heard great music, now you're back. Okay, second session, verse 18.

So Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzzah, then his son Ammon reigned in his place. What do you think about that? I could go two more hours on this, but let me see if I can do it in like two more minutes. Notice what happens here.

Let me ask you this, Manasseh, good king, bad king? Bad king, bad king. So where is he buried? Not with the rest of the kings, where is he buried instead? In his own garden, which is what? It's got another name. What does it tell you here, right in verse 18? The garden of Uzzah, this ain't the garden of Eden, it's the garden of Uzzah.

Who is Uzzah? Not the art guy. Suppose Uzzah was such a bad guy that the theophanic element of his name was removed. He's such a bad king, shall we say? He's such a bad grandpa, shall we say, that the Yah portion of his name is removed.

And instead of being Uzzah-Yah, he's just Uzzah. Also known as Ezzer-Yah, Azariah. Azariah, Uzziah, remember him? Remember what he did? Flip back, go back a few pages.

Before Hezekiah, we're talking about Hezekiah's daddy here. Remember we had Athaliah, and then we had Jehoahaz and the death of Elisha, and we had Amaziah. And then in chapter 15, we have Azariah, also known as Uzziah.

Azariah was 16 when he became king, he reigned 52 years, his mother's name was Jecholiah. Notice verse five, verse four. Well, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done, except verse four, chapter 15, the high places were not removed, the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

Then the Lord struck the king so that he was a leper until the day of his death, so he dwelt in an isolated house. You remember how he became a leper? If you flip over to 2 Chronicles 26, let's go to Chronicles because this is where we need to be anyway. 2 Chronicles chapter 26.

26, 16, when he was strong, this is Azariah, Uzziah. When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. Where is the altar of incense? Is it in the courtyard? What's in the courtyard? You enter the courtyard, there's the brazen altar where the sacrifices, that's typically as far as anybody goes, even the ruler.

He comes there to offer his sin offering. We covered that in Leviticus. Then there's the laver, then there's the doorway to the Holy of Holies.

You enter into the temple or the tabernacle and inside, on your right, you have table to show bread. To your left, you have golden lamp stand. And before you, you have the golden altar of incense immediately behind, which is the veil.

Nobody but priests goes in there to even see that veil. And the high priest, once a year, will go past the veil to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. You remember that? Well, Uzziah, Azariah, decides he's strong and he's going to go in, so he does.

The priest withstood him in verse 18 and said, it is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for priests, the sons of Aaron. Consecrated, get out of the sanctuary you've trespassed. You shall have no honor from the Lord God.

Uzziah became furious, had a censer in his hand to burn incense. While he was angry with the priest, leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priest in the house of the Lord beside the incense altar. He is in the holy place, capital H, capital P, and he breaks out with leprosy.

Leprosy, clean or unclean? In the holy place. It tells you he's beside the altar of incense. He's just within arm's reach of the veil.

And God strikes him with leprosy. Azariah, the chief priest and all the priests looked at him and there on his forehead, he was leprous. Who declares somebody leprous in Israel according to the law of Moses? The priest.

Buddy, you're leprous. That's the point at which you are officially leprous. And there's a whole gaggle of priests right there to immediately on the spot pronounce him leprous.

So what happens? Thrust him out of the place. He hurried to get out because the Lord had

struck him. Everybody agrees, it's time for him to leave.

King Uzziah was a leper till the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house because he was a leper. He was cut off from the house of the Lord.

So Jotham, his son, was over the king's house, judged the people of Israel. The rest of the Acts of Uzziah, first to last, prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos wrote, so Uzziah, notice verse 23 here, pay close attention. Uzziah rested with his fathers and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial, which belonged to the kings, for they said, he is a leper.

The field that belongs to the king, don't pay any attention to rested with his fathers. That just means he died. His soul went where all souls of believers go.

That's resting with your fathers. The land of rest is Abraham's bosom, however you want to characterize it. But his body is put in a field.

This is a garden attached to his house. It's the Gan Uzziah. Gan is garden in Hebrew.

Gan Uzziah, he's buried in his garden. Jotham reigns, he's not a bad guy. Verse nine, Jotham rested with his fathers when he died and they buried him in the city of David.

So you have the first burial outside the city of David with the kings is Azariah, Uzziah. And he's buried in this garden because of his pride. Now, burial is a look forward to future things.

It's your last statement or the last statement about you. So then you have Ahaz. Good Ahaz, good king, bad king.

Bad king. Go down to verse 22. In the time of his distress, King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord.

This is that King Ahaz. He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, which had defeated him. I will sacrifice to them since they beat me.

Maybe they'll help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. 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.

Some people, by the way, say this is where the Ark of the Covenant went away because Ahaz takes the holy things in the house of the Lord and chops them up. And there are some who say, well, he chainsawed up the Ark at this point. And in every single city of Judah, he made high places, burned incense of the gods.

Verse 26, rest of the acts and all his ways first to last are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. Ahaz rested with his fathers and they buried him in the city in Jerusalem, but they did not bring him into the tomb of the kings of Israel. So where did he get buried? Gone, Uzzah.

He got buried where his predecessor in manifest evil got buried, in this other place. He's in the city, that's where the king was, but not in the tomb of the kings. Then you have Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's burial place, it just says he rested with his fathers and kings. But if you flip over to the end of chapter 32, the rest of the acts, this is 32, 32 of second chronicles. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his goodness, they are written in the vision of Isaiah, the prophet son of Amos, book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

Hezekiah rested with his fathers. He died. Saul went to Sheol, to the waiting place.

And they buried him in the upper tombs of the sons of David. The upper tombs of the sons of David. Where do you think that is? City of David, along with David, Solomon, all the rest of those guys.

So you now have two kings buried outside this place. And so far it's been every other one. Isaiah out, Jotham in, one guy out, one guy in.

Hezekiah is in. Now you have Manasseh. What do we know about Manasseh? Out.

Death of Manasseh, just flip over to the end of chapter 33, rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, the words of Seir spoke to him, et cetera, et cetera. His prayer, how God received his entreaty. Verse 20, Manasseh rested with his fathers.

They buried him in his own house. Didn't bury him in the city of David. And we know from kings that he's buried in Gan Uzzah.

He is the third king in the line of David now to be planted outside, outside. The garden of Uzzah is where the bad kings go from Azariah forward. So then you have Ammon.

Ammon was 22 when he began to reign. This is the end of 33. Did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Sacrificed the carved images his father Manasseh had made. Did not humble himself before the Lord. His servants conspired against him and killed him in his own house.

The people of the land made his son Josiah king in his stead. We don't even know where the body of Ammon went, but I would wager it didn't go into the tomb of the kings. It probably went to, yeah, what does that say? Yeah, so he goes to the garden of Uzzah as well.

So how many kings now out planted in the garden? That's four. There are passages in Isaiah that talk about this. I wish I had time to go into this in more detail.

But let me see if I can give you these passages real quick. Because Isaiah talks about evil that is done in the land, and it all has to do with the gardens. It's in chapter one.

It's in several places where it talks about under every green tree and so on. What had happened was, in a nutshell, and I could give you the documentation maybe on another day we can do it,

out of Isaiah and a couple of other places in the Old Testament. But this garden of Uzzah became an alternate worship place.

And there are verses that talk about you eat the flesh of swine, you stay all night in the tombs. You can Google or concordance those verses about eating the flesh of swine and spending the night in the tombs. It's the tombs in the garden of Uzzah.

Swine were, here's what happened. Here's how perverse things got in Israel and later in Judah. People said, it's kind of like Eve and the original lie.

Well, God has forbidden that fruit because it's desirable to make you wise. God has forbidden swine because if you eat them, you'll come in contact with the higher beings and powers. And so people would consciously go and eat swine on purpose because they figured, well, God doesn't want us to eat this because there's something real special about it.

And it was anti-God worship. It wasn't just alternate worship, it was anti-God. I'm suspicious of God.

I think God's a bad guy. He's denying me swine flesh. And we've got examples from Ugarit and other ancient near Eastern cultures contemporaneous that swine and the flesh of swine was associated with cultic worship, with demonic contact and things of this nature.

And this lends additional resonance to the Lord Jesus casting the demons into the swine because there was a long history of their association going back to ancient times and people in the land still knew this. But what happens to the swine and what happens to the demons? They go to the chaotic waters that God is going to judge with his chariot of deliverance. Anyway, there's a whole lot going on here and I'm sorry to compress it so tightly, but there is no wasted word in scripture.

And even that one little verse that says that Manasseh is buried in the garden of Uzzah is fraught with significance. There's a reason for it. There's a reason why Ammon goes to the same place.

These guys, and the reason the judgment of God is coming on Judah is that this is so prevalent that this is a popular destination. And these guys' corpses going in there lends weight and attractiveness to people who are pursuing those cults that Isaiah condemns repeatedly, that the other prophets condemn repeatedly, and these kings are associated with it. And their apostasy and their pride in trying to alter and change the worship of God, starting with Uzzah, Uziah, Azariah, is reaching a climax.

That's why despite good King Josiah, who we will begin studying next time, in the days of Manasseh, Manasseh is the third guy that reaches that judgment. And God doesn't care about the intervening two years of Jotham and so on. He says, look, three kings in a row in Judah, you've had only as many as two bad kings.

If you look at the good king, bad king list, you never had three in a row until now. And the combination of Azariah, followed by Hezekiah starting well and ending badly, followed by Manasseh being wicked, and then a short interlude, and then you have Ammon. God says, that's it.

But in the days of Manasseh, remember the judgment? I will do a thing that will make everybody's ears tingle. And this planting in the garden of Uzzah is a sign. And when people see that and see this weird cult worship going on in that garden and others like it, ancestor worship, tomb worship, worship of the dead, seeking spirits, necromancy, it's all tied up with the garden of Uzzah.

So no wasted word. It is significant if you're watching, if you're looking. Well, I've gone over and I apologize for that, but we'll close here in a word of prayer and we'll pick up with the last ray of light in Judah with King Josiah, with the ministry of Jeremiah next time.

But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the encouragement as well as the warning and motivation that it gives us to use the time and the opportunities that you have granted to us to live our lives in your service, to please you, to fulfill our purpose, the reason for which you gave us life and breath to reflect the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We pray that these things will stick with us, that God, the Holy Spirit, will speak to our hearts through them, that we will bear that fruit of righteousness that pleases you and enables you to bless us with all the abundance that the Lord Jesus secured for us on the cross in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, and that he now appeals to you on our behalf at your right hand. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.