Kings and Prophets 16-02-11

This is Thursday, the 11th of February, 2016. We're studying Kings and Prophets. We're at the threshold of the final phase of the monarchy in Judah.

King Josiah is acceding to the throne. We stopped last time to take a look at sort of a detail with regard to burial of some of the immediate ancestors of King Josiah, beginning with Uzziah, also known as Amaziah, also known as Uzzah. And this brought up the interesting question of gardens gardens and being a passionate gardener myself, I thought there could be nothing more interesting than taking a look at gardens.

So tonight is garden night. We introduced the topic and you can just, this is the, tonight is gonna be the Grace and Truth Garden Society. So all of you that have a green thumb and enjoy all things vegetable, why this is your night.

But we'll take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time, our fellowship, our concentration, now our focus on the word of God to the glory of the Lord Jesus and to the success of God's plan for our lives, which is that we grow and mature and bear fruit. Shall we pray? Father, we're so grateful for your grace, your faithfulness, the expressions of your love in providing for us, protecting us and challenging us with opportunities to grow, to learn the reality of the things that we learn from your word as they are manifest in actual life. We thank you for these passages from the days of the Israelite monarchy and the wonderful truths that are communicated through them.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together tonight, that God the Holy Spirit will superintend and that as we examine together what your word says, that each heart will be encouraged, strengthened and with a renewed focus on the time that remains to us in this life and the wonderful opportunities that are coming our way with the return of the Lord Jesus, the entrance into the realms in which you yourself dwell. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. I had to rush a little bit last week in talking about the Garden of Uzzah in which Uzziah himself was buried and several later kings of which we took note.

So without belaboring that point, it isn't actually going to be the main focus of our study tonight, but it is the starting point. So what we really need to establish in order to appreciate the significance of the Garden of Uzzah is to place it in the context of very late Southern Kingdom, capital city culture. It wasn't just a place with some shrubs.

Turn with me to 2 Kings chapter 21, just to dig our cleats in at the starting line here before the gun goes off. 2 Kings chapter 21, verse 18, Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his own house in the Garden of Uzzah. Of course, his own house is not a house unique to him so much as it is the king's house, which he inherited from his father, which his father inherited from his grandfather and so on.

Hezekiah and before him Amaziah or Uzziah. And this was a contrast, of course, Uzziah himself

as a dead leper, couldn't be buried in the tomb with the previous kings going all the way back to David. So he instead was planted in his garden and Hezekiah, of course, being a somewhat better king with less certitude, we can say that he rested with his fathers, but then Manasseh most certainly is buried with his grandfather there in this garden.

And as you go on down to Ammon, the people of the land executed those who had conspired against King Ammon, the rest of the acts of Ammon that he did are written. He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzzah, verse 26 of that same chapter. So twice in chapter 21, just previous to where we are now, beginning the reign of Josiah, you have this double reference to the garden of Uzzah.

Now, how many wasted words are there in scripture? Not a one. Why would there just be an idle detail? Oh, by the way, I just happened to know it isn't an idle detail. There are no idle details.

So the garden of Uzzah is important. So turn with me now to Isaiah chapter one, verse 29. We've been studying kings and prophets.

Does anybody remember what the timeframe is for Isaiah? Do you remember any king at all that Isaiah ever talked to? What was Isaiah's time? Oh, speak up now, don't disappoint me. Isaiah, something about a boil, something about you got 15 more years. What can, Hezekiah, right? Is this anywhere near our time that we're talking about here with Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah? Would Isaiah probably still be around? And when did Isaiah begin his ministry? Do we know that at all? Such as Isaiah 1.1, in the days of whom? Well, as they say in Oklahoma, looky there.

Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah. That's when he's doing the major part of his ministry, right? So the things that Isaiah says, here's my point. The things that Isaiah says pertain to the time that we are talking about, the time of the garden of Uzzah.

So in chapter one, skip down to verse 27. Zion shall be redeemed with justice and her penitents with righteousness. Her repentant ones, the ones who changed their minds.

The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For they, the ones who forsake the Lord shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees which you have desired and you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens which you have chosen. The impenitent people, Isaiah refers to here, those who forsake the Lord, where do they live in this context? Throughout Judah, in the Shephela, down in the region of Bethlehem, where do these people live? What does it say at the beginning of verse 27? Zion.

So where do these impenitent, forsaking the Lord people who like the gardens and the terebinth trees, where do they live? Jerusalem. Not just Jerusalem, but apparently upper Jerusalem at or near Mount Zion, which is where something important was built. The house of God and very near to it, the house of the King.

And beside the house is the what? Garden of Uzzah. So this would be a helpful note to put in the margin of 2 Kings chapter 21, near the Garden of Uzzah, because this is what was going on in the gardens of which this was perhaps the most prominent. Can you think of a better garden that would have more style and more panache and more credibility and more impact in the minds of people who were going down this road than the one that is the Royal Palace Garden? That's the creme de la creme.

That's Hollywood for them. Flip over in Isaiah, same prophet, to chapter 65. Isaiah chapter 65.

Chapter 65, verse one. I was sought, God says, by those who did not ask for me. I was found by those who did not seek me.

I said, here I am, here I am, to a nation that was not called by my name. I have stretched out my hands. How many times have you heard me quote Jesus? I'm going to quote this verse.

I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good according to their own thoughts, a people who provoke me to anger continually to my face. Where is the face of God in Israel? If you had to pick a spot in Israel where God's face is, where is it? In the temple. And where in the temple? In the Holy of Holies.

This is where, you know, that Shekinah hasn't departed yet. We're not in the days of Ezekiel yet. So what's inside the Holy of Holies? Ark of the Covenant and on top of it, what does the high priest sprinkle the blood on once a year? The mercy seed.

And who's seated on the mercy seat? The Lord God of glory. So if somebody is going to provoke him to his face, where are they likely to be? Somewhere very close to the temple, right? So Isaiah 65 verse three, a people who provoke me to anger continually to my face, who sacrifice in gardens and burn incense on altars of brick who sit among the graves. They're in a garden and they're at the graves at the same time.

Do we know of a garden that has graves? Yes, we do. Do you think there was only Isaiah buried in that garden? How about Mrs. Isaiah? How about concubines of Isaiah? How about illegitimate children and offspring that didn't inherit the throne of Isaiah? This has become a graveyard for the rich and fabulous who are not worshiping God, who are going down that disobedient road. Sacrifice in gardens, burn incense on altars of brick, who sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs, who eat swine's flesh and the broth of abominable things in their vessels, who say, keep to yourself and do not come near me for I am holier than thou.

These are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day. Is there a fire that burns all day and there's smoke that is a pleasing aroma to God? Did we not study that in our sacrifices review? What is in the holy place just outside the veil? Golden altar of incense on which ascends that incense which in revelation is tied as a symbol to the prayers of the saints. But instead of this sweet aroma, these people are making a smoke that is a stench in God's nostrils.

And it's doubly significant when you think how close these two fires are, how close these two sources of smoke and how opposite the hearts of the people behind it. One chapter ahead now in Isaiah 66, verse 17. Start at verse 15, 66, 15 of Isaiah.

For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with his chariots like a whirlwind to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword, the Lord will judge all flesh and the slain of the Lord shall be many. Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse shall be consumed together, says the Lord.

Another unclean animal. I suggested last time that this notion of eating swine's flesh is that in rebellion against the authority of God and the law of God, the assumption is, well, if God told me not to do it, there must be something really special about it, so I'm going to do it. And two of the most prominent dietary prohibitions in Israel were don't eat pork and don't eat these creeping rodents.

And so naturally, that's what they go to. And you have to think that there's some strong motivation to eat a mouse, if you're human, that is. Why would they do this? Because it has been assigned in their minds some sort of charm-like power.

And I could go into long detail about some of the practices of the Canaanite people that were displaced and some of the bizarre rituals that they had going on, but I won't. Suffice it to say, this is sort of in-your-face alternate worship. This is, I'm disobedient and proud of it, and I'm doing it right here on the holy mountain.

And if you reread verses 15 and 16, you find out that God may tolerate that for a time, but when his patience runs out, the judgment is going to be extremely harsh. So, this is tied not only to idolatry, but to necromancy, to communion with the dead, to other concomitant associated practices that were a part of idolatry in the land that we don't have to go into the gory details of, but things that are done in secret. You go to these places, you have initiatory rites, you have strange goings-on that are abominable in the sight of the Lord, and it's doubly exciting to these people because they are in such proximity to the God they are flouting, his law they are flouting, and his presence they are, is there a word, disreverencing? They are purposely being irreverent.

They are purposely committing sort of a sin of the high hand here. And the excitement factor, it's the same sort of excitement that people get when they're doing something they're really not supposed to do. Once they're given permission to do it, a lot of the fun goes out of it.

You know, when everybody knows and it's a commonplace thing. It's the sneaking and the furtiveness and the fear of getting caught, and there's sort of a adrenaline rush that goes with it. Well, this seems to have been a part of this.

So that's all good as far as it goes. However, I would suggest to you that there is more,

significantly more than just this. I think these are very solid references by Isaiah to gardens in general and the garden of Uzzah in particular.

And the reason Wicked King Manasseh got buried there and Wicked King Ammon got buried there is that's how they lived their lives. Those are the people with whom they associated and people wanted to go there even more. This enlivened and nurtured this abominable practice.

And there are other studies you can do on terebinth trees and so on, but I don't think we need to do that. I think you get the picture. Here's my next suggestion.

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 11. Genesis chapter 11. Genesis 11, just off the top of your head, before or after the flood? After, right? You got Genesis 6, Genesis 7, 8, 9, Noah drunk, curse on Canaan.

Then you get to 11 after some genealogy information. What is chapter 11 about? Tower of Babel. Where is the Tower of Babel's location? Babylon, just Babylon.

People babble, babble, babble in Babylon. They babble at the Tower of Babel. They call it babbling because there was confusion of language that's literally a etymology for that word.

If you're babbling, you're speaking what people cannot understand because this is Babylon. So read carefully these first couple of verses of chapter 11. Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.

What would you guess is the Hebrew word translated earth? Eretz. You are correct, young lady. Your prize for this one, Eretz.

Eretz, Yisrael, land of Israel. Often translated earth, but of course, interesting question when you say that the whole earth is of one speech, how much of it are you talking about? Well, we get a clue as we keep reading. Let's just, for the sake of humoring me, translate this land.

The whole land had one language and one speech and it came to pass as they journeyed from the east. As they journeyed from the east. Who's they? The whole earth or those in the land? The whole earth can't journey east, right? It's the people of this land.

They're fairly concentrated. Now, as they journey from the east, the east of what? What's our fixed point of reference in the first 10 chapters of Genesis? You've got Eden. You've got east of Eden, right? Cain and his crowd, east of Eden.

There's been a famous play written east of Eden. So you're starting from the garden guarded by the cherubim. You go east, then you have the flood, Ararat, which isn't very far away, and people spread back down into their old haunts and now they're going further east.

So if Babylon and Babel is east, what's west of that? West is the point of reference and west is what? The old location of the garden, right? So the geography here is that they, they are now east of the promised land, let's say, which is the origination point, okay? Now, if you think about

the garden and the original landscape before the flood, back in Genesis chapter two, verse 10, it gives us a little bit of reference. Verse eight, Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden. By the way, Eden is bigger than the garden.

It's really a garden in Eden rather than the garden of Eden, meaning Eden is inside the garden and everything outside is not Eden. It's eastward in Eden. The whole region is Eden.

The garden is a much smaller spot within that region. You may remember this when we did Genesis a long time ago. Eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed out of the ground.

The Lord made every tree grow, et cetera. Verse 10, a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads, Pishon, Gihon, Hittikal, and Euphrates. It is interesting that the amount of description that is given to each of these rivers is more general.

The less we know about where that river really is. So the Euphrates is the most well-known river still there today, and it's only stated because everybody knows where the Euphrates is. But as you get to these other rivers where we weren't too sure where they are, there's more detail given about what their characteristics and surrounding geography was.

So the Euphrates is pretty much just named. When you get to the Pishon, which is unknown, it's given in great detail. So our conclusion is that the inundation of the flood rearranged the geography to quite an extent, and the only recognizable river really of these, especially for the Gihon and Pishon, we need some help knowing anything about those rivers.

We do know the Tigris and the Euphrates, and where they empty into the Persian Gulf and so forth. By giving the geography of these, the only way that all four of them had a common source would be if the source, and therefore the region of Eden in which the garden was planted, was somewhere near present-day Israel. That's the only way you can get ahead for all four of these rivers.

I could go into a lot of geographical detail, but I'll give you a place you can look that up later. Suffice it to say, if you try to put the original location of Eden up in Mesopotamia or over in the Armenian area or something, it doesn't work. Using the geographical clues from Genesis, the only place where Eden could have been is in the region of Israel, the Promised Land, once again.

So we have now two clues that Eden was in the vicinity of, if not the same as, the area of Israel. What I am leading up to here is something I've mentioned, I think, once or twice before, which is that when you work through all of these types of indications in scripture, you can fairly confidently make a case that the garden in Eden was where Mount Zion is. Interestingly, some of these rivers that have disappeared, there are going to be fresh rivers flowing again in sort of a happy, chiastic way out from under the throne and the temple in Zion.

Remember when God's going to rearrange the geography again, when the Lord Jesus comes back and the Mount of Olives splits, and guess what, the head of that river is going to appear once again and flow out of that area. So to cut a longer story short, because my time is short, it would appear that the first garden, the perfect garden, the garden that God himself planted was at Zion, where this alternate garden with alternate sacrifice and alternate worship has been located. You could imagine that if there were vestiges of this knowledge floating around 2,500 years ago, 2,700 years ago, that this would add even more glitz and glamor to the notion that we're all singing Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and we've got to get back to the garden, and they're making their own garden in the same way that they said we'll build a tower and raise ourselves up to God.

So this is no small thing to me in my observation. And my suggestion to you is, when the Bible mentions the Garden of Uzzah twice in the space of half a dozen verses, it's saying, if you look into this a little bit, you will see the reason for the judgment of God on the southern kingdom of Judah in general and on the city of Jerusalem in particular. Why do you think God utterly and totally knocked that temple down and his glory departed from it? Because of the abominations that took place around it.

Some of those we saw, I remember the weeping for Tammuz and the Ezekiel hair of the head and all of the other things that were going on up there, and this is another part of that. And the leadership of the nation, the kings themselves, these grandsons of David, if you will, in the latter generations are promoting it and contributing to it, and even in death are encouraging it. And that's why in the days of Manasseh, when you go back to 2 Kings chapter 21, you have this very vigorous pronouncement of judgment beginning in verse 11, 2 Kings 21, 11, because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations, acting more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him.

And I asked myself, how can you get more wicked than the Amorites? They're roasting their children alive in brass idol-shaped ovens. They are practicing all of these heinous things. How can you get worse than the Amorites? What act could you conceive of that would be worse than all of the bestial, degraded practices that Israel was sent in to eliminate? What could be worse? Well, how about climbing God's holy mountain and right next to his presence and in his face, set up your own version of the garden where instead of life, there is death.

Remember in the day you eat thereof, you will surely die. And God said, there's no death in this garden. You've got to leave.

Tree of life is in this garden. This is a garden of life. These people have a garden of death with tombs.

That's the difference between God's provision and man's provision. And the notion that at the location of that tree of life is now where God's presence is and coming to him and worshiping before him and finding an entrance and a way back into his presence is anticipating and prophesying in a way the return in a symmetrical fashion to the days when man did dwell in

God's presence and God would walk in the garden in the cool of the day. And man was qualified to be in his presence.

You could see God and not die. And in the intermediate time between the trees of that garden and the tree of life on each side of the river of life, you have the tree of the cross. There was life through the death of Christ on the cross.

There is new life that qualifies us for that future kingdom of the father. And for those who by faith and faith in Christ and patience inherit the promises, not just living in Eden, but living in the garden, not just living in the kingdom of the father, and there will be other kingdoms, but in the kingdom of the father, Eden, but in the city itself, inside those walls, inside that garden barrier, citizenship in the new Jerusalem. You see the symmetry and you see the deceitful counterfeit that Satan tries to perpetrate.

Well, you don't need God's garden. You don't need God's way to life. You can make your own garden.

It's a garden where lepers are buried for crying out loud. And this is where people go and stay all night in the tombs and find the worst ways they can possibly violate God's law. We'll bring pork right up here onto the holy mountain and we'll eat it in the very presence of God.

We'll catch mice and we'll eat them right in the very presence of God. How disgusting can we get? Because we've got our alternate. We've got our own way and we think it's a better way.

So as we enter now into this final stage, the last days of the Southern kingdom of Judah, and you see Josiah attempting reform, attempting to rebuild, attempting to reinstill some responsibility and some actual worship of God. And you wonder, why did it fail? This, I think, helps to explain it. Helps to put flesh on those bones and to understand that even a visible reform can be superficial.

If hearts don't change, if attitudes don't change, outward manifestations of obedience and of celebration, you know, the people that were yelling, Hosanna, blessed are you who comes in the name of the Lord. And a few days later, the Lord Jesus is on the cross. And a lot of those same people are mocking.

Emotion is no substitute for thought and human ideas of problem solving and of a way forward that are separate and apart from God, and especially consciously so. I will consciously eliminate anything of God from this. We've got a better way and we don't require any God or any godliness in it.

And this is a precursor. And here's my final general point for the night. That attitude, when it is prevalent and when it is widespread, is the immediate precursor to national judgment.

It just is. It happened in 721 BC. It happened in 605, 598, and 586 BC.

It happened in 70 AD. It has happened in nations since who had widespread communication of the gospel and the teaching of God's truth, only to have it over time become stale and tired and the target of apathy, indifference, and eventually hostility and eradication followed by national judgment. It is a pattern in history with unvarying regularity.

You never see that nation whose God is the Lord going out and being destroyed. You don't see any nation with a strong core, even 10%, 10 righteous people in the nation, you don't see that nation going out and disappearing off the face of the earth. But every nation that disappears is godless.

It is an unvarying pattern, ancient history, medieval history, modern history. Every nation that goes out, there's no strong presence of the gospel in it at all. You don't see the armies under Joshua getting defeated.

You don't see the people with a strong spiritual presence in leadership, such as David, being defeated. This nation is the next great entity to face that challenge, is facing, may have already passed a point where sentence has been pronounced as it was here in 2 Kings chapter 21. At that point, believers, individuals, and families and groups that are faithful, the marking angel comes along.

And if you are sighing and crying and you recognize that it is wrong and you distinguish yourself from the trends and the preferences of that nation, there is always deliverance. Not necessarily physical deliverance. There have been a lot of martyrs down through history, but you remember at the end of Hebrews chapter 11, and this is our closing passage, turn over to Hebrews chapter 11.

This pertains to the Southern kingdom and that small remnant of faithful believers that were there. But after the roster of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11, in verse 32, 32, what more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. Notice some escaped the edge of the sword, others did not, but in that, they obtain a better resurrection. Now, let's think about the quality of resurrection.

If you've got a poor quality resurrection, we're saying better here, so there must be a worse resurrection or a less great resurrection, right? So if they're obtaining a better resurrection, does this mean that, well, all of me except my left foot got raised and that most of me got raised? Or is it talking about the life to which you are raised, the opportunities and the potentials and the possibilities for service and for reflecting the glory of God in that resurrection. And even if you perish, even if you are not physically delivered like Noah through

the judgment, there is an element here of recognition that in whatever our assigned chapter is in God's history, we have the opportunity not to think up some really great last words or leave some sort of a testimony behind. Well, you know, I think I'll get saved because look at old Sam, he didn't scream when they burned him alive at the stake.

That's not the idea here. What is the idea? What is the basis upon which, here's another way of asking the question, what's the basis for obtaining a better resurrection? Not compromising for that reason. This is the motivation.

They're not thinking about the consequences in the present. They're not even thinking about the consequences in the immediate aftermath of the judgment or of their death. What are they thinking about? At the time that they make these decisions, at the time that they are going through these trials, what are they thinking about? It starts with R, resurrection.

They're not thinking about temporal mundane earthly consequences. How will this be viewed in the light of the resurrection? When we tend to be overwhelmed, when we tend to be shaken and shocked, and it's difficult to get our minds wrapped around the parameters of a decision, how should I go forward? What should my policy be? How should I answer this challenge? A good way to establish or reestablish objectivity in that time, in that hour, is say, in the resurrection, how am I gonna look back on this? Put myself in the resurrection. Think about the resurrection.

Will it be better when the Lord comes back and I stand in His presence, what will He think and what will I think in His presence of the choices I make now, of the priorities that I set now, of the goals that I pursue now? How will it look in the resurrection? I wanna choose the thing that looks better in the resurrection. Good decisions open up my options. Why should I go for a short-term, temporary, perishable goal when I can persevere and attain an imperishable and undefiled crown that fadeth not away in the resurrection? It's really hard for us to do.

We are temporal, time-bound, clock-watching people, right? But studies like this where we get to step back and look at the span of human history from the first garden to the last garden and those alternate gardens that people have tried to plant. I am the vine, you are the branches. How many times does God, through the Bible, use agricultural imagery? The seed sown, 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold field? It's about growth and it's about results.

It's about production. It is about bearing fruit. And if we can have enough faith for that to be our reality, it will define the choices for us.

It will shine a light on the options and it will be clear what contributes to a better resurrection and what doesn't. Thankfully, for most of us, we're not going to be tortured to obtain a better resurrection. All we have to do is focus on good time management, focus on good priorities, focus on laying aside the sin that so easily besets us and the weight that burdens us down and slows us down so that we can run with diligence and with patience and with endurance the race that is set before us.

We have such a positive opportunity looking toward that future city, which symbolically sits in the very same place as the original garden of God. What spoiled the garden of God? Remember Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28? What does God tell the king of Tyre and through his little thin veil of flesh, Satan himself? Where were you? You were in Eden, the garden of God. What happened to you? You walked among the stones of fire.

You were the throne room angel, highest thing ever to come from God's hand, perfect in the day you were created until sin entered your heart. The garden was perfect until sin entered it and sin can't survive in it, had to be removed from it, had to be covered over until it could be. This is one of the reasons you sort of favor the garden tomb of the Lord Jesus because it is a garden and it has a tomb, but oh, what a difference.

And for people to glitz it up and try to make it a place of idolatry is, you know how they do. The Byzantine church building instinct that says any lily I find, I'm going to gild it and build an altar on top of it and charge money to see it. They have their reward and I suspect there will be more later.

But I find the garden of Uzzah a very fatal destination for a believer. How much better to remember the garden of God and that better resurrection that makes it a garden of life and not a garden of tombs and false worship. Well, this sets us up now culture-wise, spiritual status-wise to go into chapter 22 of second Kings and see the really last major King in Judah, King Josiah.

And we'll pick up there next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the truth of your word and how in both obvious ways and in very subtle ways, you have placed the truth here for our edification to help us to grow, to help us to see clearly how to live the days that you have allocated to us on this earth.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will be our teacher, will remind us and encourage us and motivate us through these truths to live the life to which we have been called to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, our Savior. We pray it in his name, amen.