Kings and Prophets 16-09-01b

Let's continue our study now. We're in the days of the Southern Kingdom following the death of Josiah. We saw that his younger son, Shalom or Jehoaz, was elected or chosen by the council of elders in Judah to take his father's place.

They are the ones who had put Josiah on the throne. But he doesn't last too long. He reigns three months.

But Pharaoh Necho, who had done away with Josiah, basically does away with Jehoaz or Shalom and takes him off to Egypt and holds him hostage and places his older brother, Eliakim or Jehoiakim, on the throne. Now, that's son number two. First one, hauled off into captivity.

You know, there's a kind of a pattern in the Bible that the king, in a way, represents a nation. Remember Herod sitting on the fence. He couldn't make up his mind about John the Baptist.

He kept him in prison and he would bring him in and interview him and talk with him and listen to him. But he wouldn't release him and he wouldn't execute him. He just sat on the fence and just couldn't seem to make up his mind.

And then you have the dance of the seven veils and John's head on a platter and so on. And he finally ends up executing John, even though there's a part of him that doesn't want to. But it's an exigency, it's needful due to his priorities.

And he makes this sort of boastful promise to end John's life. Well, the same thing here. The king represents something.

He's the symbolic head of the nation. And what happens to him is often of communication value to the people. So what happens to Jehoahaz, to Shalem? He's hauled off captive, right? Not a good thing.

Hauled off captive to Egypt. So now his older brother Eliakim is, or Jehoiakim is reigning over Judah. He's there 11 years.

He does evil in the sight of the Lord. He doesn't learn, he doesn't parse what God is doing using the instruments or the agency of these outside nations. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him in bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.

Now, you remember Egypt and Assyria were confederated against Babylon. So one king, the first king gets taken south to Egypt. The next king that Egypt put on the throne gets carried off north to Babylon.

So they're being torn between these two conflicting powers and they can't resist either one of them. Nebuchadnezzar carried off some of the articles from the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon. Now, you remember in earlier days there was a singular

message from the prophet talking about how a man would make an idol out of a half of a log and then he would cook his dinner over the other half of the log and how powerless the log was.

Remember Dagon, when they put the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon, the Philistines captured it and Dagon fell over and broke his head and his hands on the threshold and no Philistines would step on the temple threshold ever afterward because it had the power to break their god. And these idolatrous gods were powerless to defend themselves or to act on their own behalf. When Josiah went around and did his big cleanup and everybody was saying, well, you can't destroy these gods.

And he said, watch me, what are they gonna do? They don't exist. They're not real. They can't defend themselves.

They can't keep themselves from being destroyed. They can't protect their own temples and their high places and their Asherah and the rest of it. Well, here are the instruments from the temple of God being carried off.

If God is the real God, how is this happening? If God is actual and if he truly has a presence, how are these things being carried off? What happened the last time an unauthorized person walked into the temple? Remember Hezekiah's father? He has going into the temple, leprosy broke out in his forehead. Remember that? Here, the Babylonians are carrying off artifacts from God's temple and nothing is happening to them. When the Philistines carried off the Ark, remember the rats and tumors, the emirates? That's an old English word for what you use preparation age for.

Rats and tumors broke out among them because they had taken something that represented the presence of God. Nothing's happening to the Babylonians. Why would that be? Do you remember Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God lifting up from between the cherubim and going through the holy place to the door of the temple, then to the gate of the temple, then to the gate of the city, then hovering over the Mount of Olives and then disappearing eastward to go among the nations? Why can Babylonians carry off things from the temple? Because God's presence isn't there.

This should have communicated something to the people of Judah. The mighty God who has always defended His presence and at one time filled this very temple with His glory so that the priests couldn't even enter it, now Babylonians are walking in and carrying stuff off in U-Haul trucks. How can this happen? It should have awakened them and it didn't.

What about us? Are the things that happen in our lives that are a wake-up call? You can certainly look around and see believers who claim the name of Christ, but who are not walking in faith, who are not nourishing their souls with the manna from God's word, the living bread from heaven, the word and person of Jesus Christ, who have no end of trouble, no end of difficulty, lack of peace, lack of stability, lack of direction, lack of wisdom, lack of fruitfulness,

lack of production, lack of the fruit of the spirit, lack of self-control, and yet this doesn't wake us up when it happens. We are blind. We are deaf.

Seeing we see and do not perceive. Hearing we hear and do not understand. Our heart becomes calloused.

The seeking heart, the searching heart, the heart that asks and seeks and knocks on the door, that is the heart that God honors. That is the humble heart. And we must cultivate humility if we are going to receive the grace of God.

God resists the proud. What does he do for the humble? He giveth more grace, James 4, 6. But he giveth more grace, wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. I've got the old King James because my mother taught me that verse when I was about four, and I've never forgotten it.

I haven't always been able to follow it, but I have never forgotten it. But he giveth more grace. But who does he give it to? The humble.

These people see the artifacts and implements that Josiah so recently refurbished and shined up and restored, being carried off to Babylon and placed in a pagan temple, and they don't change. They don't repent. They don't seek.

Whose fault is it if God gives us warning discipline and communicates to us that we're on the wrong path and we don't respond? Whose fault is it when things get worse? It can only be our own. So after Jehoiakim is carried off in the opposite direction in chains, again, the king foreshadowing what's going to happen to the nation itself. It says, Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his place.

Jehoiachin was eight years old, it says, in verse nine of 2 Chronicles 36. That should probably be 18. Other passages indicate that he's older than this.

2 Kings 24, verse eight. He reigned in Jerusalem three months and 10 days. He did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Notice there's a king put on the throne and he does evil in the sight of the Lord and he's carried away into captivity. So at the turn of the year, King Nebuchadnezzar summoned him and took him to Babylon. So now there's one king in Egypt and two kings in Babylon.

All three of them are brothers. All sons of a wonderful king, Josiah. Took him to Babylon with the costly articles from the house of the Lord and made Zedekiah his brother.

This is brother number four, son number four, king over Judah and Jerusalem. Now this is Jehoiachin's brother. Remember, Yohanan, who we never see, he may have passed away before this time.

He's a listed son of Josiah, but he never sits on the throne. But Shalem was the first. Then we

had Jehoiachin and now we have Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king. He reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, his God.

How many times does God have to make this point? How hard-headed can we be? How hard-hearted can we be when God repeatedly sends us a signal? Remember, he has an older brother that reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. Back in verse five, Jehoiachin reigned 11 years, Zedekiah reigns 11 years. Evil in the sight of the Lord did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke the mouth of the Lord.

He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. Remember Jeremiah's counsel? Comply, submit, this is of God, and he rejected that. Stiffened his neck, hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel.

Moreover, all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more. According to all the abominations of the nations, defiled the house of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. Now, turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 12.

This is an instruction for something to be done at the Feast of Tabernacles. Every seven years, you think about every seven years, if in the first occasion, someone is two years old, well, the next time they'll be nine, and the next time they'll be 16, and the next time they'll be 23. Every seven years, you're gonna hear it once in your childhood, you're gonna hear it once in your late childhood, once in your early adulthood, once in your coming to maturity, over and over and over.

Every seven years, it says in verse 12, gather the people together, men, women, and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law. What book am I reading from here? Deuteronomy, chapter 31. This is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, that's the book of the law.

It's the whole thing, everything that Moses wrote. Observe all the words of this law, that their children who have not known it may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you crossed the Jordan to possess. How far is the Jordan from Jerusalem and Jericho? It's not far at all, everybody's familiar.

Remember, John was baptizing in the Jordan and all Jerusalem went out to hear him and to be baptized, John the Baptist. Then the Lord said, this is verse 14 of Deuteronomy 31. The Lord said to Moses, behold, the days approach when you must die.

Call Joshua, present yourselves in the tabernacle a meeting that I may inaugurate him. Moses and Joshua went, presented themselves in the tabernacle a meeting. The Lord appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle and the Lord said to Moses, behold, you will rest with your fathers and this people will rise and play

the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land where they go to be among them and they will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them.

This is before they ever crossed the Jordan, God says, this is what's going to happen. My anger shall be aroused against them in that day and I will forsake them. Now, who did the forsaking first? Calvinists, I'm in the middle of a book called Whosoever Will that came out in 2010 addressing five-point Calvinism in an ironic and big tent way, but it's sort of on my mind as if it hasn't been other times.

But if God is the initiator and inaugurator of human decisions, then God would forsake and then the people would forsake, but it's never that way in scripture. The people leave, then God leaves. So, my anger shall be aroused against them in that day and I will forsake them and I will hide my face from them and they shall be devoured and many evils and troubles shall befall them so that they will say in that day, have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us.

Did you see the Babylonians emptying the temple? Did you see them taking the precious things when they take Jehoiakim out, Jehoiachin? I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil which they have done in that they have turned to other gods. Can we turn to other gods in this day? What do we rely on? Well, I rely on social acceptability. If I say the right things, if I use the right words, if I don't say anything politically incorrect, I can get by, I'll be accepted, I'll be approved, I can keep my job, there's certain things I just can't say, I can't stand up for, I can't represent because there's just too much pressure.

The gods of the land have decreed that things go a certain way and so I'll conform, I'll go along to get along. I will rely for my success on the good opinion of those around me or those over me. I will curry favor, I will compromise my standards, I will do whatever it takes because these are the gods that control my fate, instead of entrusting ourselves to the hands of a faithful creator.

You know, if John the Baptist had been careful about what he said, he'd have never been in prison and he'd have never gotten his head chopped off and the Lord Jesus would never have said, of man born of woman, there's none greater than John, right? If the Lord Jesus had been politically correct and had maintained a good relations with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the elders and the chief priests, he'd have never gone to the cross. He would have accepted the deal that the devil offered him to have all the kingdoms of the world without that and he wouldn't be seated at the father's right hand, he wouldn't have the name that is above every name, he wouldn't be coming back for us, he wouldn't be resurrecting us from the dead and giving us life and hope. Wonderful short term outcome, but the long term is catastrophic and disastrous.

Look at verse 18, I will surely hide my face in that day because of the evil which they have done in that they have turned to other gods. What are other gods? This is other things to rely on, other things that dictate our behavior, other things that determine how we're going to act and

how we're going to behave, how we're going to choose. Now therefore, verse 19, write down this song for yourselves you wanna know the value of music? God said, these people are gonna be so backward and forgetful and unfaithful and distracted, the only way they're gonna remember this is if I set it to music.

So write down a song, put down this song, teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouths that the song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. He's given this entire book of the law through Moses and they're gonna forget it. He says, they're gonna forget the book of the law, but teach them this song, they'll remember the song.

I've told you before, this is how some of my early Sunday school teachers helped us memorize scripture was setting it to music. A lot of you learned the books of the Bible by that little tune. I don't remember what that tune's really to.

Yeah, whatever that is. Go tell Aunt Rhody or something, I don't remember what it is, but let us sing the books of Moses, let us sing the books of poetry, let us sing the books of history and all the rest of that. That little tune gets you through.

You probably know more lyrics, some of us, to say eagle songs than we do verses of scripture. It's embarrassing. But songs, it's a good memory aid.

Committed to a song. When I have brought them, verse 20, to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat. Notice, what did we say in the first session tonight? What is it we lose? A sense of need, a sense of dependence.

I must tell Jesus all of my trials. I must tell Jesus, a great old gospel song, Hovi Lister did this one himself when he had the Statesman Quartet. I must tell Jesus, I cannot bear this burden alone.

Sense of need. Notice here, verse 20, they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat. They will turn to other gods and serve them.

Now, how can we lose our sense of need? How does that happen? I can tell you the most salient factor. We stop examining ourselves in the light of scripture, and we stop acknowledging our sin. If we don't look at our behavior, if we don't look at what we say and how we treat each other, if we don't look at our thought life, if we don't examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, if we don't acknowledge homo logeo, say the same thing scripture does about our poor behavior, then we don't feel a sense of need.

One of the signs of a psychopath, one of the clinical diagnostic tests for psychopaths is when you ask them, have you done something wrong? Do you ever do anything wrong? They say no. If you're talking to them about Christ and you say, well, you know you're a sinner, right? They say, no, I'm not. They're psychopaths.

They destroy everything in their path, sociopaths and psychopaths. But they have no sense of

sin. Therefore, they have no sense of need for a solution.

You can't cure them. You can't rationalize with them. You can't reason with them because they have no sense of need.

I'm not a sinner. I don't do anything wrong. Everything I do that people disapprove of, I'm forced into it.

Others are the cause of it. It's their fault. You know, I only shot those people because they pushed me to it.

They forced me into it. No requirement for self-control, no sense of guilt, no sense of need. If we do not regularly go before the Lord and review the past few hours and confess our sins, we're gonna lose our sense of need, our recognition of our fallenness and our corruption and our inadequacy in our own strength.

You say, well, you know, I really tend to go not just several hours, I usually go several days before I commit a sin. You've lost your sense of need. Look at the scriptures.

Examine and see what it says about the fruit of the spirit. And then look and see if it prevails, if it's evident, if it's manifest. Ask for insight, ask for light.

If we confess our sins, we immediately have an incredible sense of need. The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanses us from those sins, and we need it so that we can walk in the light as he is in the light, and we can maintain that relationship with him. When they have grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them.

They will provoke me and break my covenant. It shall be when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song will testify against them as a witness, for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants. I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I've brought them to the land of which I swore to give them.

Therefore, Moses wrote this song the same day and taught it to the children of Israel. Then he inaugurated Joshua, the son of Nun, and said, be strong and have a good courage, for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you. So it was when Moses had completed writing the words of this book, the law in the book, when they were finished, Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, saying, take this book of the law and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant.

Beside the Ark of the Covenant. Where do you think they found that book of the law when Josiah was refurbishing the temple? In the corner of the holy place, right next to the veil, as close as they could get it to the Ark. Solomon knew that, Solomon knew the law, David knew the law, David drew up these plans with Solomon, and they ensconced that book of the law in the holy place, as close as they could get it to the Ark of the Covenant.

Put it beside the Ark, that it may be there as a witness against you. How do we know we have a need? Scripture will witness against us. It will illuminate and enlighten us and show us the distance between ourselves and the righteousness of God.

Verse 27, I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I'm yet alive with you, Moses says, you've been rebellious against the Lord, how much more after my death? Remember Paul saying, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence. You know, stick with it.

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death, you will become utterly corrupt. There is a cheerful farewell.

Well, I'm going the way of all the earth and you all are gonna go the way of all flesh. Utterly corrupt, turn aside from the way which I've commanded you. Evil will befall you in the latter days because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.

Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel, the words of this song until they were ended. Now, we don't have time to go through this complete song, but based on what we just read, and he says this song, teach it to them, they'll remember it even when they've forgotten the book of the law, and it will be a witness against them, it will testify against them. What do you think would be in this song? 10 commandments, the moral code, here's all of the things you must not do, don't play the harlot with other gods, don't be fornicators, don't be adulterers and thieves and ne'er-do-wells.

Wouldn't that be the testimony, wouldn't you think? If you were gonna write a thing and say, now, I'm gonna have this stand as a monument to give you a sense of need after the fact. What does this song actually focus on? Look at it. Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak.

Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as rain drops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass, for I proclaim the name of the Lord. Ascribe greatness to our God.

He is the rock, His work is perfect. All His ways are justice, a God of truth, and without injustice. Righteous and upright is He.

They have corrupted themselves. They are not His children because of their blemish, a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you? Remember the days of old.

Consider the years of many generations. Ask your Father, and He will show you. Your elders, and they will tell you.

When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of

man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel, for the Lord's portion is His people. Jacob is the place of his inheritance. What this says in a nutshell is, of all the available nations, God consigned all the rest of them to the sons of man, left them unto themselves, basically to the God of this world, and God chose one nation for Himself.

All the rest He turned loose of. He chose the sons of Jacob. He found him in a desert land, in a wasteland, a howling wilderness.

He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading over its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings. So the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign God with him.

He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields. He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock, curds from the cattle, milk of the flock, with the fat of lambs and rams, of the breed of Bashan and goats, with the choicest wheat, and he drank wine, the blood of grapes. But Yeshurun grew fat and kicked.

You grew fat. Notice the previous one, when Jacob and the sons of Jacob had needs, God met them, and they relied on God for those things, both spiritual and material. But when Yeshurun, and this is the name for Israel in its prosperity and in its blindness and indifference.

Yeshurun grew fat and kicked. You grew fat. You grew thick, obese, forsook the God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the rock of his salvation.

They provoked him to jealousy with foreign gods, abominations. They provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods he did not know, to new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear.

And we have every new trend blowing through the world today, and especially in the Christian world. And people think, oh, this is the key. This is the trick.

This is the prayer to pray. This is the technique. This is the, you know, there's a trick to it.

You just do this little simple thing. And if you notice on your web browser, by the way, a lot of these side ads, try this weird old trick to get rid of bags under your eyes. Or try this weird old trick to make your bananas last longer.

Try this. People love to find the little trick, you know, the shortcut where they don't have to do much work and don't have to invest a lot of money and something happens. It's the easy way, the cheap, quick fix.

Try this weird old trick. Well, that's what they're doing here. The new gods, the new arrivals your fathers did not know.

Of the rock who begot you, you are unmindful and have forgotten the God who fathered you.

So without going through the rest of this song, what is the theme of it? It isn't the rules, is it? What is the reminder that God says will testify and has the best hope of bringing his wayward and recalcitrant children back to him? If we are communicating with each other and maybe we have the chance to save those, you know, pulling them out of the fire, hating the garment spotted by the flesh, we have the chance to speak the truth in love. What's our best hope for someone who is a child of God or ought to be and isn't? What's the best hope? Remind him of the rules.

It's the name of God. It's who God is. He is the creator.

He is the redeemer. He is the rock of our salvation and deliverance. It's the character of God.

So what is the biggest assault today by atheism and secular humanism on Christianity? It's on the character of God. Read Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, all of the naysayers against Christianity. What do they, what's their favorite target? The character of God, because it is the character of God that has the best chance of winning us, of converting us, of turning us, of appealing to us and helping us re-recognize our sense of need.

How did God show the fullness of his deity? We've got a verse for that. He is the fullness of deity and bodily form. Who is that? The Lord Jesus.

And what did he show forth? Was he big on rules and standards and morals? When he was the fullness of deity and bodily form and he walked this earth, what did people see? They saw the character of God, his compassion, his mercy, his long-suffering, his patience from the cross. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. It is the character of God reflected in us that is the best witness.

It is the brightest light to shine in a crooked and perverse generation. So how do we manifest that character? First of all, we have to see the difference between who we are and who God is, who the Lord Jesus is. There is a difference and we need change.

We need power to live that life, to have that character. And when we recognize that need, it drives us to our father in prayer. It drives us to the resources the Holy Spirit provides.

It drives us to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, motivated by hope for the joy that was set before him, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, laying aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us, run with patience, the race that is before us, right? All of that is what Judah did not do. They didn't even sing this song any longer, but the song is a song of the character, the grace and the compassion of God. If you want to communicate Christ, if you want to be a living witness, an active member of his body on this earth, we have to, first of all, in humility, recognize our own need before we start trying to diagnose the needs of others and let the light of the glory of the image of Christ, the glory of the gospel of Christ.

He is the image of God. Remember, if our gospel be hid, it's hid to them who are lost, in whom

the God of this world had blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Not image of the rules, not image of, here's every place you're messing up.

It's a positive message. The gospel is positive. It's not, let me make sure you're convicted of sin.

The Holy Spirit takes care of that. Holy Spirit convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. We are not the Holy Spirit, believe it or not.

He convicts in the innermost man of sin, righteousness and judgment. What's our privilege? The positive side. When that conviction is recognized, we say, here is the Lord God, who loved the world and gave his son, that whosoever believes in him doesn't perish, but has everlasting life.

Not only do we minister to the world, not only do we minister to one another, but we are prepared for whatever historical or natural or national disaster comes our way. It's the same mechanism for all. It's the same mode of operation, the same power, whether we are determining what we ourselves should do, or whether we are helping each other figure out what to do.

It is humility. It is recognizing need, first of all, in ourselves, and then sharing the truth of God to meet needs around us. This is what didn't happen in Judah.

This is why the four sons of Josiah all fail. All are evil. Josiah did a wonderful cleanup, made everything available, but nobody thought they needed it, and the nation was destroyed.

We don't wanna go that way. Well, we'll pick up here next time. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the wonderful examples and illustrations that are so memorable and so helpful as we examine our own lives and look at our own choices and priorities. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will minister these truths to our hearts, that we will have the time to slow down and pause and reflect on our choices and our values in the light of these things from your word so that we can see the path before us and have your word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.