

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 2 KINGS 16

2 KINGS 16:1-4 - AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH

IDOLATRY RETURNS, AND WITH DEMONIC ZEAL.

V. 3 - "MADE HIS SONS PASS THROUGH THE FIRE" - THERE ARE FEW THINGS IN SCRIPTURE WORSE THAN THIS. THIS IS A DESCRIPTION OF THE WORSHIP OF THE EVIL CANAANITE GOD MOLECH. WORSHIPPERS OF THIS GOD WOULD HEAT UP THE IDOL WHO WAS OFTEN DEPICTED WITH OPEN HANDS. NEWBORN CHILDREN WOULD THEN BE PLACED ON THESE BURNING HANDS AND OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE. THIS WAS SO THAT THE GOD WOULD BLESS THE FAMILY WITH ADDITIONAL CHILDREN AND FERTILITY IN BODY AND LAND. SCHOLARS ADD THAT LOUD DRUMS WOULD BE PLAYED DURING THESE RITUAL SERVICES SO AS TO DROWN OUT THE CRIES OF THE CHILDREN.

THIS ISN'T HAPPENING IN WACKED-OUT PAGAN NATIONS. THIS IS HAPPENING IN JUDAH. THIS IS AN INDICATION OF HOW BAD THINGS ARE DURING THE REIGN OF AHAZ AND THE LACK OF MORALITY AND CARE FOR THE WORD OF THE LORD. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT IN ORDER FOR SUCH EVIL TO BE ALLOWED, THERE IS STRONG DEMONIC INFLUENCE AT WORK. IT IS HORRIFICALLY SAD BEYOND WORDS.

THESE PRACTICES WERE THE SAME PRACTICES THAT LED TO THE CANAANITES TO BE DRIVEN OUT OF THE LAND TO BEGIN WITH. IF JUDAH IS FOLLOWING THAT PATTERN, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THEM?

2 KINGS 16:5-6 - WAR AGAINST JUDAH

REZIN, THE KING OF ARAM (SYRIA) AND PEKAH, THE KING OF ISRAEL COME AGAINST AHAZ IN BATTLE. THEY SET A SIEGE AROUND JERUSALEM. WHILE THE ATTACKING NATIONS WERE UNABLE TO TOTALLY DEFEAT JUDAH, THEY WERE PRETTY CLOSE. 2 CHRONICLES GIVES US MORE DETAIL TO THIS TIME.

2 CHRONICLES 28:5-15 - JUDAH'S ALMOST-EXILE

200,000 PEOPLE FROM JUDAH WERE NEARLY EXILED TO ISRAEL TO BECOME THEIR SLAVES! IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE INTERVENTION OF THE LORD (THROUGH HIS PROPHET ODED), JUDAH WOULD HAVE BEEN DONE! IRONICALLY THE FORSAKEN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL LISTENS TO THE LORD'S WORDS AND CHANGES THEIR MIND. HERE'S WHAT THEIR LEADERS CONCLUDED:

2 CHRONICLES 28:13 (NLT) - "YOU MUST NOT BRING THE PRISONERS HERE!" THEY DECLARED. "WE CANNOT AFFORD TO ADD TO OUR SINS AND GUILT. OUR GUILT IS ALREADY GREAT, AND THE LORD'S FIERCE ANGER IS ALREADY TURNED AGAINST ISRAEL."

AS DIFFICULT AS THIS BATTLE AGAINST ARAM (SYRIA) AND ISRAEL SOUNDS, THERE WAS EVEN MORE GOING ON DURING AHAZ'S REIGN. 2 CHRONICLES 28 TELLS US MORE:

2 CHRONICLES 28:17-19 (NLT) - THE ARMIES OF EDMO HAD AGAIN INVADED JUDAH AND TAKEN CAPTIVES. 18 AND THE PHILISTINES HAD RAIDED TOWNS LOCATED IN THE FOOTHILLS OF JUDAH AND IN THE NEGEV OF JUDAH. THEY HAD ALREADY CAPTURED AND OCCUPIED BETH-SHEMESH, AIJALON, GEDEROTH, SOCO WITH ITS VILLAGES, TIMNAH WITH ITS VILLAGES, AND GIMZO WITH ITS VILLAGES. 19 THE LORD WAS HUMBLING JUDAH BECAUSE OF KING AHAZ OF JUDAH, FOR HE HAD ENCOURAGED HIS PEOPLE TO SIN AND HAD BEEN UTTERLY UNFAITHFUL TO THE LORD.

SO NOW NOT ONLY IS JERUSALEM SURROUNDED BY ARAM (SYRIA) AND ISRAEL, JUDAH IS FIGHTING ARAM (SYRIA) IN THE SOUTH (ELATH) AND WHILE EDMO IS ATTACKING IN THE NORTH ALONG WITH THE PHILISTINES! YOU WOULD THINK THIS WOULD BE THE TIME AHAZ CRIES OUT FOR HELP! IN FACT HE DOES! BUT NOT TO WHO YOU WOULD THINK...

2 KINGS 16:7-9 - ASSYRIA COMES TO SAVE AHAZ

AHAZ REACHES OUT TO TIGLATH-PILESER, KING OF ASSYRIA FOR HELP AGAINST ARAM (SYRIA). HE SENDS A LETTER AND "SILVER AND GOLD...FOUND IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD AND...OF THE KING'S HOUSE (V. 8)." IN TURN THE KING OF ASSYRIA WENT AGAINST DAMASCUS, THE CAPITAL CITY OF ARAM (SYRIA), FORCING REZIN AND HIS ARMY TO LEAVE JERUSALEM AND JUDAH.

BEFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT THIS WAS GOOD POLITICS ON AHAZ'S PART, 2 CHRONICLES 28 HAS SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

2 CHRONICLES 28:16 - AT THAT TIME KING AHAZ SENT TO THE KINGS OF ASSYRIA FOR HELP.

2 CHRONICLES 28:20-21 (NET) - KING TIGLATH-PILESER OF ASSYRIA CAME, BUT HE GAVE HIM MORE TROUBLE THAN SUPPORT. 21 AHAZ GATHERED RICHES FROM THE LORD'S TEMPLE, THE ROYAL PALACE, AND THE OFFICIALS AND GAVE THEM TO THE KING OF ASSYRIA, BUT THAT DID NOT HELP.

NOW PRESSED IN THE NORTH, SOUTH, EAST AND WEST, AHAZ IS AT ANOTHER POINT OF DECISION. HE'S ALREADY CRIED OUT TO ASSYRIA FOR HELP, WHICH CAME WITH MIXED RESULTS. NOW, FINALLY NOW, IS WHEN HE WILL CRY OUT TO THE LORD, THE GOD OF HIS FATHER'S FOR HELP RIGHT?! THIS IS WHAT ALL OF THE KINGS DO, THEY MESS AROUND WITH IDOLS FOR A WHILE BUT THEN TURN TO THE LORD IN THEIR TIME OF NEED...BUT...NOT AHAZ.

2 CHRONICLES 28:22 - NOW IN THE TIME OF HIS DISTRESS THIS SAME KING AHAZ BECAME YET MORE UNFAITHFUL TO THE LORD.

HARD TO BELIEVE. AND THE VERSES THAT FOLLOW SHOW US JUST WHAT THIS UNFAITHFULNESS LOOKED LIKE.



2 KINGS 16:10-16 - THE NEW ALTAR

WHILE IN DAMASCUS PAYING TRIBUTE TO TIGLATH-PILESER WHO HAD JUST TAKEN OVER THE CITY, AHAZ SAW A GREAT ALTAR THAT WAS USED IN DAMASCUS TO WORSHIP THEIR GODS. DAMASCUS WAS THE CAPITAL CITY OF ARAM (SYRIA), THE NATION TIGLATH-PILESER JUST DEFEATED. AHAZ WAS SO IMPRESSED BY THIS ALTAR THAT HE GETS BLUEPRINTS MADE OF THE ALTAR WHICH ARE SENT BACK TO JERUSALEM. THE PRIEST OF THE LORD'S HOUSE STARTS WORKING TO REPLICATE THIS NEW ALTAR SO IT CAN BE READY TO BE SEEN AND USED BY AHAZ UPON HIS RETURN HOME.

AHAZ RETURNS AND IS SO PLEASED WITH THE NEW ALTAR AND THE PRIEST'S WORK THAT HE ORDERS FOR THE DAILY SACRIFICES OF THE TEMPLE TO BE MADE ON THIS NEW ALTAR. HE ORDERS THE ORIGINAL ALTAR, THE BRONZE ALTAR OF THE LORD, TO BE PLACED ON THE SIDE OF THE NEW ALTAR.

AHAZ WANTS TO KEEP THE BRONZE ALTAR (THE LORD'S ALTAR) FOR HIM TO "INQUIRE BY". IN OTHER WORDS HE WANTS TO KEEP THE LORD ON HAND IN CASE HE WANTS TO GET SOME HELP OR INFO FROM HIM. BUT HIS CENTRAL PLACE TO WORSHIP WILL BE ON THE DAMASCUS ALTAR IN THE CENTER OF THE TEMPLE.

WOW.

WHAT MOTIVATED AHAZ'S DECISION? 2 CHRONICLES 28 TELLS US THAT AS WELL:

2 CHRONICLES 28:23 (NLT) - HE OFFERED SACRIFICES TO THE GODS OF DAMASCUS WHO HAD DEFEATED HIM, FOR HE SAID, "SINCE THESE GODS HELPED THE KINGS OF ARAM, THEY WILL HELP ME, TOO, IF I SACRIFICE TO THEM." BUT INSTEAD, THEY LED TO HIS RUIN AND THE RUIN OF ALL JUDAH.

AHAZ WORSHIPPED THE GODS OF DAMASCUS, A CITY THAT HAD JUST BEEN DEFEATED BY ASSYRIA BECAUSE ARAM HAD HAD SUCCESS WHEN THEY FOUGHT AGAINST JUDAH. THAT DOES NOT MAKES A LOT OF SENSE.

WE CLOSED 2 KINGS 15 SEEING THE BEGINNINGS OF ISRAEL'S EXILE AND WONDERING HOW FAR AWAY JUDAH MIGHT BE FROM TOTAL DESTRUCTION. THE REIGN OF AHAZ IS NOT A GOOD INDICATOR OF WHERE THINGS ARE HEADING. MORE ON THIS LATER. FIRST WE HAVE TO CONTINUE ON AND SEE THE ADDITIONAL ABOMINATIONS OF AHAZ.

2 KINGS 16:17-20 - ADDITIONAL CHANGES TO THE TEMPLE

AHAZ ORDERED FOR ADDITIONAL CHANGES TO BE MADE IN THE TEMPLE AND THE ITEMS THAT WERE DIVINELY ORDERED BY THE LORD. HE CHANGES THESE THINGS (THE SEA, THE UTENSILS, THE ALTAR) "BECAUSE OF THE KING OF ASSYRIA." TO PUT IT BLUNTLY - AHAZ IS PATHETIC. AHAZ IS MAKING HIS OWN CHOICES BUT HE IS NOT FREE. HE IS TRYING TO PLEASE THE KING OF ASSYRIA, THE GODS OF ARAM (SYRIA).

WHAT A HORRID TIME IN JUDAH. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF LESSON FOR US TO GLEAN FROM THE TEXT.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE CANNOT WORSHIP GOD ON OUR TERMS. WE CANNOT CHANGE HIS PLANS AND HIS WAYS. WHEN WE CHANGE THE WAY HE SHOULD BE WORSHIPPED TO FIT OUR NEEDS, WANTS OR PREFERENCES, WE CEASE TO WORSHIP THE LORD. AHAZ STILL SHOWED UP AT THE RIGHT

BUILDING, AT THE RIGHT TIME AND OFFERED SACRIFICES OF ANIMALS AND GRAINS, BUT HE PLACES THEM ON AN ALTAR THAT WAS FOREIGN AND PAGAN. AND HE MOVED THE LORD'S ALTAR IN TO THE CORNER TO KEEP AROUND IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY.

AND HE WORSHIPS THE GODS OF THE NATIONS AROUND HIM BECAUSE HE THOUGHT THEY WOULD HELP HIM. HE SAW SOMETHING IN THE LIVES OF THE IDOLATERS AROUND HIM THAT HE WANTED AND SO HE WAS WILLING TO BECOME AN IDOLATER HIMSELF. HE WAS LOOKING FOR IMMEDIATE RELIEF IN THINGS THAT WOULD LEAD TO HIS DESTRUCTION RATHER THAN DRINKING AT THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.

HUMANITY STILL DOES THIS. WE TURN TO DRUGS FOR IMMEDIATE HIGH RATHER THAN WAITING ON GOD FOR PEACE. WE TURN TO SEXUAL IMMORALITY RATHER THAN FOLLOWING GOD'S WAY AND FINDING SATISFACTION AND PLEASURE. WE DON'T LOOK AT THE WAYS THESE IDOLS WILL HURT US WHEN WE MAKE THESE DECISIONS, WE JUST LOOK AT WHAT WE CAN GET FROM THEM UP FRONT.

ONE OF THE WORST PARTS OF AHAZ'S STORY IS THAT HE DIDN'T REMOVE ALL OF THE OBJECTS OF THE LORD'S TEMPLE, HE JUST MOVED THEM AROUND AND CHANGED THEM. IT WOULD APPEAR FROM THE SURFACE THAT THE LORD'S WORSHIP COULD STILL CONTINUE. BUT WHILE THE ITEMS OF TRUE WORSHIP WERE STILL NEAR, THE HEART OF THE KING AND THE PRIEST WERE FAR FROM THE GOD OF THEIR FATHERS.

A QUESTION THAT WE DON'T OFTEN ASK IS "WHAT DO YOU THINK YAHWEH THOUGHT OF THIS?" WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD'S OPINION OF SUCH AN ACT WAS? DOES THAT EVER FIGURE INTO OUR THINKING AND INFLUENCE OUR DECISIONS? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT OUR RELIGIOUS DEVOTION? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT THE WAY OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT THE PLACE WE CURRENTLY GIVE HIM IN OUR LIVES? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT THE WAY WE SPEND OUR MONEY OR TIME? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT OUR ENTERTAINMENT CHOICES? WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT HOW WE TREAT AND CARE FOR OTHERS?

YOU SEE LIVING FOR AND LOVING THE LORD INCLUDES THE IDEA THAT WE LOVE HIM WITH ALL OF OUR MINDS...IF WE ARE NOT THINKING ABOUT HIM AND HIS WAYS, HIS RENOWN, HIS STANDARDS, HIS LOVE, HIS HOLINESS AND THE LIKE, THEN WHO IS THE ONE INFLUENCING OUR THOUGHTS AND DECISIONS? WE MAY NOT BOW TO AN IDOL OR SEEK COUNSEL FROM A WITCH, BUT ARE WE CREATING A GOD OF OUR OWN IMAGINATION BY DEFAULT SIMPLY BY RUNNING OUR OWN LIVES AND KEEPING THE LORD ON HAND IN CASE THINGS DON'T WORK OUT?

OR ARE WE PRAYING AND LIVING A LIFE OF SURRENDER, WHERE OUR MINDS AND HEARTS ARE OFFERING OUR PLANS AND ACTIONS TO GOD, SAYING "NOT MY WILL BY YOURS BE DONE..."?

WHAT'S NEXT:

2 KINGS 17 IS GOING TO DESCRIBE THE FINAL DAYS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL. THEY ARE GOING TO BE DESTROYED AND EXILED INTO A FOREIGN LAND, NEVER TO BE HEARD FROM AGAIN. THEY AREN'T GOING TO STAY IN CAPTIVITY FOR A FEW YEARS, SEEK THE LORD AND THEN RETURN TO THEIR HOMES. THEY ARE DONE. CUT OFF. THEY HAD BEEN RECIPIENTS OF GOD'S MERCY TIME AND TIME AGAIN BUT HAVE FINALLY REJECTED HIM FOR THE FINAL TIME. AND FROM THE SOUND OF IT, JUDAH, THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM WHICH HAS DONE A LITTLE BETTER AT TIMES, IS NOT FAR BEHIND THEIR NORTHERN KINGDOM COUSINS.

THE REIGN OF AHAZ IS MUCH MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF A PAGAN NATION THAN IT IS THE COVENANT PEOPLE OF ABRAHAM AND DAVID. BUT CHAPTER 16 LEAVES US HANGING. WILL THEY HEED THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS OF THE LORD AND TURN BACK TO THEIR MAKER? WILL THEY CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE WAYS OF AHAZ? WE WILL LEARN OF THEIR TRAJECTORY AS WE RETURN TO THEIR STORY IN 2 KINGS 18 DURING THE REIGN OF A KING NAMED HEZEKIAH.