

## 2nd Kings Chapters 15-16 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "Why we should care about God's Judgment". An alternative title is "I'm saved, but can anyone tell?" I admit, when I think of God's judgment, I picture a person standing on a busy street corner wearing a big sandwich sign that says, "Repent, judgment day is coming". That person then hands out tracts to anyone willing to take them. The good news is the focus of this lesson is not on that type of eternal judgment. It is about how God judges people, as we live out our lives. It's about why we should care about His judgment and what to do about it. If that doesn't scare you away from reading this lesson, I'm guessing nothing will.
  - a) To explain this better, let me summarize the whole lesson in a few quick thoughts. These two chapters go back and forth between what is happening in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah roughly between 700-800 BC. To put it simply the kings who reign in the North for the most part don't live very long as God is judging each of them for being bad kings. This will lead us well into the next lesson, as we'll read of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. As to the Southern Kingdom they have their own judgment issues as well. Their kings reign much longer as they're mostly trusting in God and He blesses them with long reigns. However, we have some bad eggs there as well.
  - b) OK John, so a bunch of kings who lived long ago lived and died. The bad ones died by being killed for being disobedient to God and the good ones get to live a long time. This is getting old and we get the idea that God is judging them based on how they ruled over His people. Why should I read further? So glad you asked.
    - i) As I love to state, the purpose of studying one's bible is not to memorize history. It is to learn how it applies to our lives. In this case it is not to state, "Hey too bad for you kings. You disobeyed God and here comes the consequences". The point is to remind ourselves that we too can pay a major price for disobedience to God. No it is not about losing our salvation, but losing our opportunities to be a good witness for Him. More importantly, God does not want us to live in our own little worlds. He wants us in effect to be like one of the prophets and be witnesses to others how trusting in God helps us to live the type of life He desires of us.
    - ii) Let me try this another way: The great commission that Jesus gave to us is for all of us to go out in the world and make disciples of people from all nations. Also in the book of Revelation, Jesus refers to all believers as a "kingdom of priests" (from Revelation 5:10). The point is not that all Christians have to wear special robes or "priestly collars". God only calls a small percentage of people into the professional ministry. Most of us God calls to be a witness for Him in our daily lives. That just means that we live differently enough that we are a good witness for Jesus and are willing to share His grace with others around us.
    - iii) Coming back to the lesson title as we read about these bad kings, God is telling us not only to not live like them, but to be live a little like the prophets mentioned in this book. In other words if we are saved, we use our time to be a witness for Him in our daily lives. Yes of course we still have to earn a living and still need to take care of our own needs. That's not the issue. It is in effect, "If we are saved, can anybody tell? Are we leading other people closer to Him? Are we a witness for God or just someone strictly using our time in order to benefit our own lives?"
  - c) Yes, all of that makes us feel guilty. It's not a matter of "We have to do more". It's asking if we are doing what God has called us to do. As I also love to state, the most valuable we each own is our time. The question comes down to how are we using our time. When we look back at our lives, do we want to say we made a difference? Again the issue is not the size our ministry, but if we were loyal to what God called us to do. In other words did we act like the "priests" that Jesus called us to be. That's the judgment that we each must face.

2. Ok John now that you've made us all feel guilty for not doing enough, what does any of this have to do with this chapter? First, let go of the guilt. You can't change your past. All you can do is consider how to use whatever time we have left to make a difference for God.
  - a) As to the text in this lesson, as you read about the problems and the mistakes that each of these kings made, don't think, "Oh well, too bad for him." Consider how they choose to live out their lives and think, "What can I learn from them? What can I learn from those mistakes as to be a good witness for God? That's what we read our bibles in the first place and hopefully that's what you'll get from studying this lesson.
  - b) With that said, time for us to put on our "sandwich board" that reads judgment is coming and each need to consider our own lives and how we are using them to make a difference for God with our lives. With that said, I'm ready to start the verse by verse comments.
3. Chapter 15, Verse 1: In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. <sup>4</sup> The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.
  - a) Our story here begins with in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Since I have new people join every week, time for the two sentence summary here: Israel at this point in its history was split into two kingdoms. The north one was called Israel and the southern one was called Judah. So unless I am referring to all the Israelites, when I say "Israel" here, know that I'm just referring to the Northern Kingdom. What is even more confusing is the text marks time by the reign of the opposite kingdom in this book. For example Verse 1 says that in the 27th year of the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, that marks the start of the next king of Judah. The good news is I don't push you to remember names or dates. What I am interested in is learning what God wants us to know about these kings.
  - b) Speaking of which, this latest king of the south reigned for 52 years. Given the fact that he did rule that long is generally a good sign that God is blessing his reign. This king's name is Azariah and he was also known as "Uzziah" in other references. In case you care, Isaiah began his ministry effectively when this king died as a cross-reference. The text also says he had a "godly" mother by mentioning in Verse 2 that his mother was from Jerusalem. A key point of these verses is simply that this king of the south lived a life pleasing to God.
    - i) Here comes the "but". The king still tolerated Israelites worshipping God any old way they felt like it. To recap briefly from the last lesson, God wanted Israelites to worship Him by using the system of priests that God set up centuries earlier. But instead of going to the official temple to seek God, the Israelites were seeking God "however and wherever they wanted to". A rough equivalent is to say, I'm going to ignore going to church and just spend a few minutes pray by myself and call it a week. God desires accountability to fellow believers, which is why He encourages us to go to church in the first place. The point is that if we just think "I'm saved, I can go live however I want", then we are just focusing on ourselves and ignoring the lives of others around us. That is the warning of these verses and of course the main theme of this lesson.
  - c) Let's focus on the good news for the moment. This king was for the most part given high marks in Verse 3. The text said he "did what was right", which probably means he sought God with his life and encouraged the people living in his kingdom to seek God as well.
    - i) The companion chapter to this one is 2nd Chronicles Chapter 26. We learn there that this king invented things to help in warfare. He won battles. The reason that God judged him is that wanted to be a priest as well as a king. Ever since the time of Moses, God ordained that Jewish priests and the civil leaders (think kings) were to be separate offices and no one was allowed to do both.

- ii) Speaking of Moses, I always found it interesting that God picked Moses brother to be the first top priest. If you read about the life of Moses' brother Aaron he was far from perfect to put it mildly. Still God called Aaron to be the first Jewish priest. By ordaining two brothers to be in charge, it sort of says, "Each office is to be separate, but each is to depend upon the other as both are brothers".
  - iii) Bringing that into modern times, I can think of two prominent Christian leaders of the 20th century who have both made statements effectively saying that the worst mistake they made was getting into politics. My point is those that God has called into the professional ministry is also who he has not called into politics and vice-versa. I'm not saying those in the professional ministry can't vote. I'm saying that if God gives one the privilege of being a spiritual leader or a civil leader, focus on doing that job well and don't seek both offices for themselves.
  - iv) The reason I bring all that up leads us back to this king. In 2nd Chronicles 26, we read that this king offered incense as the top priest was supposed to do. Despite the fact he was generally a good king, God held that king accountable as he should have known better. God then struck that king with the horrible disease of leprosy for the remainder of his life. With that understood, Verse 5 makes more sense:
4. Verse 5: The LORD afflicted the king with leprosy until the day he died, and he lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.
- a) John's loose translation: Because of what this king did late in his reign, his son did most of the work around the palace while the king was still alive, but suffered from leprosy.
  - b) With that said, let me come back to God's judgment. As we will read later in this chapter about the kings of the Northern Kingdom, they mostly reigned short time periods. God judged them each for failing to do what He desired of them. Yet here with this good king in the South who got to reign 52 years, the text just focuses on the one major mistake that king made in his life, which was when he wanted to act like a priest and not just a king.
  - c) My question is why was God so tough for this one act? To state the obvious, until Jesus rules over us as both our high priest and as God, God the Father wanted separate roles for both priests and civil leaders. That way there is no central concentration of power in any one person. If this king was generally a good one, why bring up his one big fault and not the good that he did? It is because this text focuses on God's judgment for disobedience.
    - i) Let's apply this to us: Let's say for the most part we do what's right and say go to church regularly. We seek God and trust Him to guide our lives. Still, give that we are human we make mistakes. The point is God does not judge us on a curve. We don't go to heaven and God say, "Your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds". That's why we can only be saved through Jesus complete sin payment. Once we get that, God calls us to live out our lives to make a difference for Him. Of course He is aware of the good we do and He can consider us a "good egg". But when we mess up, He loves us too much to let us get away with sin. When we are called to positions of leadership we are now even more accountable for our actions.
    - ii) My point here is simply that if one desires one day to have some sort of power in this world, be it a civil leader or a religious leader, that leadership comes with the cost of accountability. That's also why in the New Testament, James warns us that we should not desire to be teachers without realizing the cost. (See James 3:1.)
  - d) Coming back the verse, the point is we learn this king was judged for what he did wrong as to fit in with the theme of this section of the book. Yes he did good things as stated in 2nd Chronicles. The point to learn here is when we are called into positions of leadership in the ministry or in say the government or even the business world, God can and does judge us by His standards of how He has called us to live. That is He desires that we be a good witness for Him in the world. In other words we don't avoid sin in order to be more saved. We avoid sin as that is how we are called to be a witness for Him.

5. Verse 6: As for the other events of Azariah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? <sup>7</sup> Azariah rested with his fathers and was buried near them in the City of David. And Jotham his son succeeded him as king.
- a) To restate what is quickly becoming one of my running jokes through these lessons, "If one wanted to learn more about these kings, when this book was put together, one could go study more about each king. In other words, "Go to the library to study more about him or in today's world, Google him." My point is the book of kings is not here for us to learn the entire life's story of each of these kings. It is to show how God works in our lives with the kings of Israel (and Judah) as examples of how we are, and how not to act.
  - b) With that disclaimer stated, the next king is named Jotham and he reigned here.
  - c) Here's an interesting bit of trivia to consider: If one studies the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, there were eight family dynasties that reigned as kings. The Southern Kingdom of Judah lasted over hundred years longer and all of that time, there was only one family dynasty: The descendants of King of David. It shows how God kept His word to David despite centuries of war, fights, famines, and some pretty bad egg as kings. The point for you and me is despite the fact that we can be judged for turning from God the reward for serving God are eternal despite whatever happens in the meantime. In other words, all of this effort to use our time to make a difference for God is worth it in this life let alone the next life.
  - d) In the meantime, it is time to switch scenes back to the Northern Kingdom and the latest bad egg of the moment:
6. Verse 8: In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned six months. <sup>9</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.
- a) Remember from Verse 2 of this chapter the king reigned for 52 years. The latest king of the Northern Kingdom reigned six months. Personally to live as a king for 52 years seems like a much better "gig" than to only reign six months. That fact alone is a good sign that God is judging the Northern Kings based on how they acted.
  - b) In effect the only thing stated about this king is that he was a "bad egg". He turned the residents of that kingdom away from God just like the first king of that nation did. That is why the only thing we really need to know about this king was that he was displeasing to God and therefore, was judged after only a short time on the throne. But John, didn't his father who was also a "bad egg" reign a lot longer? Yes, and that's the point too. The son should have learned from his father and because he didn't, he suffered the consequences. The point for you and me is God judges us based on what information we do have about Him. The price of being a bible knowing Christian is God now holds us accountable for the information we do know about Him. On that scary thought, time to move on.
7. Verse 10: Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against Zechariah. He attacked him in front of the people, assassinated him and succeeded him as king. <sup>11</sup> The other events of Zechariah's reign are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel. <sup>12</sup> So the word of the LORD spoken to Jehu was fulfilled: "Your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."
- a) First I need to say that this six month reigning king named Zechariah is not the same guy as the prophet named Zechariah. Whether you realize it or not, there are bunch of guys in the bible with that name. However, this Zechariah is the great grandson of a king named Jehu. God promised Jehu some chapters back that his descendants would reign for four generations. With that said, I wondered if Zechariah thought much about that prophesy. Did he worry his reign would end soon or did he even think about God much? My guess is that because he only reigned six months, he didn't give God much thought. That's why God punished him by giving him such a short reign. The point to learn is that judgment is not just about possibly going to hell. It's about being a good witness for Him.

8. Verse 13: Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned in Samaria one month. <sup>14</sup> Then Menahem son of Gadi went from Tirzah up to Samaria. He attacked Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria, assassinated him and succeeded him as king.
- Well if you think the last king displeased God, the guy who killed him is no better. It is stated in Verse 13 that this next king only reigned one month. The background on this king is that he was from another city in Northern Israel (Tirzah) and he successfully led a plot to kill the last king and became king himself.
  - There are actually records found by the Assyrian Empire (more on them coming up) that refers to this king. They refer to this guy in effect as a "son of a nobody". My point being is just that we have nonbiblical records that confirm the book of Kings as historically true.
  - Short version: Another bad king. God judges him and he only reigns a month. With that said, we read of the end of his reign in the next verse.
9. Verse 15: The other events of Shallum's reign, and the conspiracy he led, are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel.
- Again we get the "Go to the official library (that existed back then) if you want to learn more about this king during his brief reign. OK, enough of that "loser" of a king. Time for us to read about the next bad egg.
10. Verse 16: At that time Menahem, starting out from Tirzah, attacked Tiphseh and everyone in the city and its vicinity, because they refused to open their gates. He sacked Tiphseh and ripped open all the pregnant women. <sup>17</sup> In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria ten years. <sup>18</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. During his entire reign he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.
- Let me "translate" this in simple terms. The next king to be, made his point that he is in charge, by killing pregnant women as a sign that he is not to be messed with as a king to be. He killed the current bad king of the moment. God considered him another bad egg, and this guy reigned for 10 years. During that time, he was no better than the first of the kings of the North as when he reigned, he turned the Israelites away from God.
  - Bottom line is God judged this guy for being a bad king. He reigned a relatively short time and I suspect he is in hell not only for killing the pregnant women, but as one raised up to a position of leadership, he made the fateful decision to not seek God during all of the time that this king was raised up by God to be the leader. The joke is, "And you think the current leader of your country/city/church or business is bad news? Imagine living under this guy." Not only does he turn people away from God, but he murders innocent pregnant women in order to achieve that power.
  - The sad news is we are not done with this king. We are going to read of the strange way that God effectively judges him based on how he lived his life.
11. Verse 19: Then Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom. <sup>20</sup> Menahem exacted this money from Israel. Every wealthy man had to contribute fifty shekels of silver to be given to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria withdrew and stayed in the land no longer.
- To explain this, I need to give a little ancient history of empires in the Middle East. The short version is the first great empire that conquered over much of Israel is the Assyrian Empire. Think of it as centered in Northern Iran. It covered most of what we know today as both Iran and Iraq and other areas. This empire was eventually conquered by what we call the Babylonian Empire based out of "Iraq" today. That empire was eventually taken over by the Medo-Persian empire that stretched from "Turkey to India" and based out of Iran. That empire was eventually conquered by Alexander the Great and the Greeks. The final great empire was the Romans, who's territory was far greater and it literally did last for a millennium. My point is the Assyrian Empire enters the scene in these verses.

- b) That leads us back to the "bad egg of a king" of the moment. That king of Israel bought off the Assyrian Empire by giving that Empire lots of silver and requiring any Israelite with money to pay a fine to that king. In effect, this is the beginning of the end of the Northern Kingdom. Now they are effectively servants of this empire. The official end of the Northern Kingdom will come in Chapter 17. It starts here with the king agreeing to be subject to subject to that great empire that lasted over a century.
- c) The point for you and me is that the king of the moment gets judged by God not by him losing his life immediately, but by making all of Israel suffer for turning away from God. But why does all of Israel have to suffer because of this bad king? The answer is that we suffer due to the decisions of our leaders. The king turned from God and then God let the latest empire of the moment grow over His people as we read in these verses. My point is judgment in this life is not always death. Sometimes it is worse as God allows bad stuff to happen as to say in effect, "You ignore Me? Great here are the consequences".
12. Verse 21: As for the other events of Menahem's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? <sup>22</sup> Menahem rested with his fathers. And Pekahiah his son succeeded him as king.
- a) These verses say in effect, all you need to know about the king of the moment is that he made the decision to turn from God and therefore God turned from him. That's why God allowed the Assyrian Empire to be in charge of Northern Kingdom of Israel at this time. Still, the Assyrian Empire didn't empty Israel just yet. The son of this bad king is named in Verse 22 (Pekahiah) and he is the next "bad egg" in Israel to reign and be judged.
13. Verse 23: In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned two years. <sup>24</sup> Pekahiah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. <sup>25</sup> One of his chief officers, Pekah son of Remaliah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he assassinated Pekahiah, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah killed Pekahiah and succeeded him as king. <sup>26</sup> The other events of Pekahiah's reign, and all he did, are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel.
- a) The first thing one may think as one glances at this paragraph is that this is a whole bunch of names of people I can't pronounce. Let me make it simple: The latest bad king of the Northern Kingdom is named Pekahiah. He only reigned two years. God was angry as the king had turned the Israelites away from serving Him. After two years, an officer of the king named Pekah killed the king. The rest as they say is the details.
- b) So is that all we need to know? This guy messed up and God gave him a short leash? In effect yes. This leads me back how God's judgment works. The scary thing about being a devout believer in God is that we are held accountable for the positions God raises us up to in life. This king of the moment was killed by an another king who in effect became a subject of a large empire. You would think King Pekahiah (say that three times fast) would think, OK as king I'm now subject this foreign "Iranian" empire. Maybe I should seek the true God and He would rescue us from them. Of course he didn't and in effect that's what caused him to lose his job let alone his life. The lesson to us is God takes whatever role we are given to serve Him seriously. If we have a small role and would like a bigger one, be faithful in that service and then and only then will God raise you up over time.
- c) In the meantime, it's time to read about the next bad of the North:
14. Verse 27: In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twenty years. <sup>28</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.
- a) The next "bad king" is named Pekah. He is the one who killed Pekahiah. This loser got to reign for 20 years. OK, why should I care? One of the big themes of the book of Kings is how God's judgment grows worse and worse (or stronger and stronger) as his people continue to turn away from Him. We'll read an example of that in the next few verses.

15. Verse 29: In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria.<sup>30</sup> Then Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.<sup>31</sup> As for the other events of Pekah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?
- a) My point #1 here: Don't panic over all of these names.
  - b) My point #2 here: Understand the fact that when we make the conscious choice to turn from God's desire for our lives, there are consequences.
  - c) There I just described the whole lesson with two simple points.
  - d) Here are the details of the moment. The large growing empire in that region at that time was called the Assyrian Empire. In effect, God has said to the Northern Nation of Israel, I've had it you people. I've been patient for centuries hoping a good king would come on the scene and lead you people back to Me. I've sent prophet after prophet as a sign that I am here and I want to lead you. (Remember Elijah and Elisha? Two prime examples.) I have let person after person become the next king hoping they would lead the Israelites back to Me (God). Since you as a nation have grown worse and worse, the most merciful thing I can do is bring this kingdom to an end, which happens in Chapter 17. Here in this chapter, we get the "start of that end" as parts of the Northern Kingdom were now part of the Assyrian Empire, and the Israelites who lived there were deported to other parts of that large empire.
    - i) The things to get out of this lesson is 1) God is patient with us and 2) Even He has His limits of how much He will tolerate of us turning from Him. That in effect is what God's judgment is all about: Not the eternal type, but the consequences of failing to be a good witness for Him. We can be punished either individually or as a group or even as a nation if we say we have committed our lives to serving Him and then turn from that commitment. Is that scary? Just ask the Israelites living at that time who then were deported as they were captured by the Assyrian Empire.
    - ii) So you know, it was common for millenniums that when one group of people are captured by another it was common practice to split them up as that way it is less likely they get together to plan a rebellion against that empire. That is why when the Assyrians captured an area, they split up the people living there. In effect that is a preview of the fall of this nation in Chapter 17 and the inevitable fall of the Southern Kingdom near the end of the book of Kings.
    - iii) Bottom line is "Kings" is a tragic story of what happens to anyone who make a commitment to trust in God and then fails to live up to that commitment. That's a good summary of the judgment of this lesson and the consequences of turning from God in our lives. OK, enough guilt, back to the text.
  - e) The short version of these verses, is that the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom at that time were angry that their kingdom was getting smaller due to the successful attacks by the Assyrians so the king of the moment was killed. Yes I can give you more details about the life of the king, but the main thing to get is that this king failed to trust in God as did the Israelites living there at that time, and God judged them for turning from Him.
    - i) In these verses we get introduced to the next "bad egg" of this story. His name is Hoshea. No it is not the same Hoshea as author of "Hoshea" in the Old Testament. Like the name Zechariah, there was more than one Hoshea. The point is besides the biblical prophet of that name, there was also a king of the Northern Kingdom named Hoshea, who like all the kings of the North, was another bad egg.
    - ii) The good news of the moment is we're done reading of king after king who did turn from God in the Northern Kingdom. The bad news is God's judgment will now continue in the Southern Kingdom with more "bad eggs" on the horizon.

16. Verse 32: In the second year of Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel, Jotham son of Uzziah king of Judah began to reign.<sup>33</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok.<sup>34</sup> He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done.<sup>35</sup> The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the LORD.<sup>36</sup> As for the other events of Jotham's reign, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?<sup>37</sup> (In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah.)<sup>38</sup> Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David, the city of his father. And Ahaz his son succeeded him as king.
- a) The focus of our story now moves back to the Southern Kingdom. As usual by now, time is marked by the opposite kingdom. When the "bad egg" Pekah was in his second year, we get a new king of Judah named Jotham. This new king of the South gets 16 years as a king. The text simply says in effect, that he reigned sixteen years, but he was guilty of the same sin as his father in that he allowed the people who lived in the Southern Kingdom to worship God any old way they felt like it.
  - b) Stop and think about our modern political leaders. How would you feel if our current president told us how we are to worship God? Would we obey or rebel? One has to get the idea that living under a king is different than living under a president or congress. In effect living under a king means doing what that king says, period. My point is that God wanted the kings to set a good example of their people. I suspect that if the king took the worship of God seriously, people would follow. The fact that king after king in the South let people worship God any old way they want to, led to that nation's downfall.
  - c) With that said, it may help to remember a political line that applies well to Christians. It goes, "We are not Democrats or Republicans, we are theocrats". That just means that it is our desire to live under a king with Jesus as our king. The key to living the Christian life is to remember that Jesus rules over our lives and literally will return one day to rule over the world. The practical aspect here for us is simply that if we do believe Jesus is God, we should live like we believe it. Therefore we don't "offer sacrifices in a way God would not approve of" such as only caring about ourselves and not trying to make a difference in the world around us in His name.
  - d) This leads back to these verses. The text gives a quick mention to the fact that this latest king in the South did rule for 16 years, but the key point is "Like father, like son". That just means he was a good king but still had the same faults as his father. Did that king do a lot more in those 16 years? I'm sure of it. Remember that we are reading a "report card" on each of these kings and seeing their lives from God's perspective. That is why what he did is listed so briefly here as to say in effect, "Generally a good king, but he still messed up the same way his father did and both facts are noted by God here."
  - e) In the meantime, we are about to get a more detailed judgment on the next king of the Southern Kingdom as his son named Ahaz takes over.
17. Chapter 16, Verse 1: In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign.<sup>2</sup> Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God.<sup>3</sup> He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.<sup>4</sup> He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.
- a) One of the secrets to understanding why the text is written the way it is, is to compare and contrast the different kings and their stories. To put it simply, the latest king named Ahaz ruled the same length of time (16 years) as his father. However while his father was considered a "good egg", Ahaz was a bad one and he gets a more detailed judgment here.



- b) Before I get into my what's wrong with this king speech, it may help to consider how God wanted a relationship with the Nation of Israel and how He wants a relationship with us. God says to Israel in effect, "You trust in Me alone and obey My rules, and then I promise to protect and guide your lives for My glory". When all of Israel (either or both nations) failed to do that, God allows disasters in order to get their attention back on Him again.
    - i) This leads me back to the tough subject of how God judges us. Not eternally, but about our witness for Him. To trust in Jesus over our lives is in effect, to put Him in charge as our king. That doesn't mean we can be lazy and ignore our lives. It just means we are trusting that God is watching over us and is in effect judging how we live. Are we living as He desires we live or are we just doing the "Sunday thing" and ignoring Him the rest of the week?
  - c) With that guilt ridden speech out of my system, back to the king of the moment down in the Southern Kingdom who is another bad egg. The text here says that he lived like one of the bad kings in the Northern Kingdom and worshipped God "any old way he wanted to". What was worse is that he sacrificed his son in the fire.
    - i) I need to explain that one a little better. When the Israelites first entered the land that they lived in, God gave them the explicit instructions to kill all of the people living in that land. No it is a not kill everyone judgment, just the specific groups that lived in Israel at that time. The reason being is that those "Canaanites" lived in a way that would disgust most people today. They offered up their own kids to their gods to prove their loyalty to them and to put it cleanly, I'm barely scratched the surface of their deviant sexual practices. Let's just say it included sodomy and even sexual practices with animals. I've read an archeologist studying this group that said in effect, "Why did God wait so long to wipe them out?"
    - ii) My point here is the current king of Judah not only acted like those who lived in that kingdom by offering sacrifices to God "any old way he wanted to", but this king also started to do what the Canaanites did many hundreds of years earlier.
      - a) God's response is going to be in effect, "If you think I was hard on those Canaanites who lived here hundreds of years earlier, what makes you the current king think I'm going to treat you any better?"
      - b) The message for us is simply that God expects obedience and there is a price to be paid in this lifetime when we claim to be serving Him and turn away from that act. Remember the difference between sin and hypocrisy: To sin is to realize, here is God's standard and I've violated that standard at this moment. Hypocrisy is to think, "I expect you to live by this standard, but not me." That's why Jesus criticized some of the Jewish leadership in that they had a holier than thou attitude over everyone else.
    - iii) I mention that here as I suspect the king was thinking, "I'm the king and no one can stop me from doing what I want" and what is God or anyone living here going to do about it? The answer is we'll find out in the next few verses.
18. Verse 5: Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him. <sup>6</sup> At that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram by driving out the men of Judah. Edomites then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.
- a) To summarize a lot of ancient history, the Southern Kingdom started to lose territory and lives to both the Northern Kingdom and two other traditional enemies of Israel. The idea is to connect the personal disobedience of the latest Southern King with the tragedies that occurred in that kingdom at that time. If you want a good reason why we should pray for our political leaders (especially the one's we didn't vote for) is at the least it can affect our own lives by God saying "I've had enough rebellion of this leader. It's time for Me to do something drastic (like foreigners invading the land) to get them to pay attention to Me."

19. Verse 7: Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."<sup>8</sup> And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria.<sup>9</sup> The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.
- a) Unfortunately the king didn't turn to God when the trouble started but turned to the king of the growing power of that region the Assyrian king. The king of Judah essentially said, "Hey bail me out. I'm still a rich king in that there is a lot of silver and gold in the temple that is dedicated to God and I'll give you that gold and silver if you bail me out here and attack those who are attacking me."
  - b) It's sort of amazing to look how far Israel as a combined nation has fallen in the 200 year period since Solomon was king. When Solomon ruled, gold and silver became worthless as there was so much of it. The nation of Israel sought God under David and God blessed that nation. Now after a whole bunch of bad kings in both the North and the South we've gotten to a point where the latest king says, "Let me rob God's temple to pay you off." A good way to tell you've sunk low is when you start robbing priests to bribe others."
  - c) In the meantime, the king of Assyria effectively said, "We'll take your money and spare your country." Therefore the Assyrian king attacked Damascus (in Syria) as opposed to attacking the Kingdom of Judah. But John, isn't that good news for the Israelites? God spared that country by having this powerful larger force attack someone else? To state the obvious, one can't turn their back on the true God and get away with it. This king is now messing with his eternal salvation let alone his witness as a king over God's people. To summarize the rest of the chapter, let's just say things go downhill from here for this guy.
20. Verse 10: Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction.<sup>11</sup> So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned.<sup>12</sup> When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it.<sup>13</sup> He offered up his burnt offering and grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar.<sup>14</sup> The bronze altar that stood before the LORD he brought from the front of the temple--from between the new altar and the temple of the LORD--and put it on the north side of the new altar.
- a) Let me summarize the bad details here and then explain why we should care. The king of Judah was so impressed by the power of the Assyrians, that the king of Judah ordered an altar of the god that the Assyrians worshipped be made just like it in Jerusalem. It's like saying, "Wow, you guys are powerful and your god is obviously blessing you right now, so let me copy what you do and worship that way when I get back home."
    - i) To me, the amazing thing to read about the history of the kingdoms of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah is not that their kingdom came to an end; it is the fact that God waited as long as He did to wipe them out. When you read stories like this how the Israelites literally turned their back on God, it is amazing to think about the fact God wasn't tougher on them than He already was. It shows that He is always reaching out to those He loves despite the sins we commit. It makes me appreciate all the more the mercy He shows for you and me reading these stories.
  - b) To state what will become obvious, God is going to show His superiority over all other so called gods that exist at that time. To put that in our vocabulary, God does not want to be #1 on a list of 10 things that are important to us, He wants to be #1 on a list of 1. That just means He wants to be in charge of all aspects of our lives and we should care about our behavior in all we do. OK, enough judgment on us. Back to the bad king of the moment in the Southern Kingdom of Israel.

21. Verse 15: King Ahaz then gave these orders to Uriah the priest: "On the large new altar, offer the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offerings and sacrifices. But I will use the bronze altar for seeking guidance."<sup>16</sup> And Uriah the priest did just as King Ahaz had ordered.
- a) To put it simply, things are continuing to go downhill for this king. He now orders that the daily offerings to God as required in the Jewish law now be made on this new altar dedicated to the Assyrian god. In fact the king then announced that he'll use this altar to seek guidance. Talk about trying to worship God "any old way we feel like it", here is the king of Judah, purposely ignoring God's requirements of how He is to be worshipped and ordering the top priest to use this Assyrian god's altar for sacrifices and guidance.
  - b) So why did the priest cooperate? He feared the king's wrath more than God. With that said, we're not done going downhill of turning away from God. It gets even worse in the next few verses.
22. Verse 17: King Ahaz took away the side panels and removed the basins from the movable stands. He removed the Sea from the bronze bulls that supported it and set it on a stone base.<sup>18</sup> He took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple and removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the LORD, in deference to the king of Assyria.
- a) To understand these verses, we have to go back to the time of King Solomon. Among the things he made to worship God were portable washing basins to help the priests clean the sacrifices that were made. Besides the portable washing basins, there was also a large tub used for ritual bathing. The current king who was a descendant of Solomon, removed the statues of bulls that supported this bathing basin.
    - i) Here is where that is significant. There were 12 of those bull statues made under the guidance of King Solomon. The idea was to show that the priests working in God's Temple were to help the 12 tribes of Israel draw closer to God. By the king of the moment removing those 12 statues, it sent a symbolic message to Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom that they are no longer seeking God but are now seeking this Assyrian god for protection. As to the washing basin, it now rested on a stone slab. This is showing how God is now getting "second fiddle" to the new temple built to this Assyrian god.
    - ii) The text also mentions a canopy. This is a covered that led from the king's house to the temple. It was not an "official" canopy but just a way of saying the king is a special person and we've covered the way for him to travel from where he lived to where the temple was located. The point being that the current king wanted to honor the Assyrian god, so the canopy was moved so the king could bypass God's temple and walk to the altar that he cared about.
  - b) OK John, we get the idea this is a bad king and he is probably in hell now as he decided to turn from God with his life. These kings lived millenniums ago. I've got my own issues to worry about. Why should I care about a bad group of kings that lived so long ago?
    - i) Yes we get the idea that turning from God is a bad idea and sin multiplies upon itself and people go from bad to worse once they stop caring about being judged by God. To be honest, this is getting old and repetitive. We read these lessons as we are trusting in God and care about His judgment. So is the point here just to avoid acting like these kings? For starters, yes.
    - ii) More importantly, it is about keeping in mind that God wants to be in charge of every aspect of our lives and guide them for His glory. I've had to learn over and over again, that just trying to do the right thing doesn't work. We need to trust in His Power to do the right thing. Further, I find that when we focus on helping others we are less likely to fall into our old bad habits.

- c) Coming back to the king of the moment, to put it overly simple, he really was a bad egg and a bad example to the people living under his rule. Unfortunately when you have a bad leader, those under that leader suffer. That is the true tragedy of the judgment that occurs in this world. This leads me to the final two verses in this lesson:
23. Verse 19: As for the other events of the reign of Ahaz, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? <sup>20</sup> Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king.
- a) The final set of verses in this chapter state in effect that Ahaz eventually died and despite the sins he did, he was still buried with his ancestors as he was a descendant of David.
  - b) The good news coming up in the next lesson is that the next king of the South is a really good king. In fact, Chapters 18 through 20 focus on this next king. What I'm saying is we are now one more chapter away from getting through all of this negative judgment talk and focusing on something positive.
  - c) I'll be the first to admit, this was a tough lesson to get through. Let's face it, there are a lot better ways to spend our time than to read about bad kings who lived millenniums ago. The reason this is all part of the bible is to say to you and me, "There are consequences to turn away from God with our lives". It will cut short our time to live let alone face eternal consequences for our behavior.
    - i) What I want us to get out of this lesson is not to "shake in our boots" that God will judge us if we dare sin today. What I do want us to get is the idea that God cares about our lives and would like us to glorify Him in all that we do. That means we trust Him to guide us and we seek Him for that purpose. We remember that our time on earth is short and the best use of that time is to make a difference for Him in whatever capacity God has called us to live in this world. It is to realize that His judgment is not just the eternal kind, but also judgment on how we used the time and the opportunities God has given us in our lives. We can't lose our salvation by sinning too much, but we can lose opportunities to make a difference for Him and that is what this lesson focused on. OK, end of the guilt session. Time to close in prayer.
24. Father, we don't know what you have planned for the us for the rest of our lives, but we trust that You are guiding us to make that difference for You. Help us to remember that You know all things and want to guide us to make that difference for You. Help us to have a healthy fear of Your judgment, not that we can lose our salvation, but that we can waste the opportunities that You give us to make that difference for You. Guide us as we trust in Your Spirit to strengthen us to do what it is You call of us to do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.