

## 2nd Kings Chapters 17-18 – John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson the "good news and the bad news". Let me state a parable based on that title. A doctor tells his patient, "I have good news and bad news, which do you want first?" The patient replies, "I guess the bad news first". The doctor says, the bad news is you will suffer terribly and almost die from that suffering. The patient replies ok, what's the good news? The good news is you won't completely and you'll come out of that experience better than before.
  - a) Believe it or not, that statement ties very well into this lesson. In Chapter 17, we are going to read about the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as they get conquered completely by the Assyrians. That's the bad news. Chapter 18 then tells the story of a new good king in the Southern Kingdom of Judah who thinks, "I don't want to be like my father, the bad king nor like the Northern Kingdom." That Southern Kingdom does suffer from the same type of damage done to the Northern Kingdom, but not to a point where the Southern one dies. In fact, the kingdom will end up thriving despite the damage all around them.
    - i) To put it simply this lesson is full of good and bad news. Since Chapter 17 comes before Chapter 18, we will have to explain the bad news first, before we can enjoy the good news that is written in Chapter 18.
  - b) To put this in "Christian speak", one thing we have to constantly do as believers is "die to ourselves" in order to be used by God. It's about letting go of our old life where we trust in our own strength to make a difference for God. It's strictly about trusting in His ability to work through us in order to make that difference. Bringing it back to this lesson, we're about to read of the end of the nation of Northern Israel because they refused over a two hundred year period to trust in God and now face the ultimate judgment.
    - i) As to the Southern Kingdom yes they get to live on, but not without first having to learn some valuable lessons about trusting in God and what that really means. In fact, we won't actually read of them getting spared from the same fate as the North kingdom until Chapter 19. What we do see in Chapter 18 is them taking steps in the right direction to come back to God despite the end of the Northern Kingdom.
2. At this point I should give the technical and historical details: The growing empire of that region, the Assyrians, had the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a subservient kingdom. When the king of the Northern Kingdom stop paying the Assyrians their annual "you're really in charge here" fee, the Assyrians worked to completely wipe out that kingdom. After a few years, the Israelites who survived those attacks now had to go live scattered throughout that empire. The Assyrians also took other prisoners and relocated them in Israel. My point is that the land of Northern Israel is now a mixed multitude including some Jewish people and lots of foreign people. It's literally the end of Israel as an independent nation. That land would not be under control of Israelites again until 1948. In this lesson, I'll talk about why all of that occurred.
  - a) That is all Chapter 17. Chapter 18 then focuses on the same story from the perspective of the Southern Kingdom. The same empire that struck down the Northern Empire is now threatening and taking parts of the Southern Kingdom. The latest king in the South was a man who truly feared God and did what was right in His eyes. This king's father was one who openly worshipped the Assyrian god. The new Israelite king here in Chapter 18 is one who sought God for protection and relief from the Assyrians. We'll study his refusal to surrender to the Assyrians in the next chapter. We'll also read how the prophet Isaiah (yes the same one as the book) helped the Southern Kingdom turn back this empire when we get to the next lesson.
  - b) The way I view God at this point in the story is kind of like the last grain of sand coming out of an hourglass. It shows the limit of God's patience. He effectively is telling those living in the Northern Kingdom, "OK, you don't want Me to protect you? Great, watch the consequences play out! That fact of a limit of God's patience is also His warning to us.

3. With all that said, we're actually ready to take on a lot of text in this chapter. Since I spent the last lesson focusing on how God judges us in our lifetime, I won't repeat that same theme here. What I do want us to see is how the consequences do play out for those who refuse to use their lives to make a difference for God once they have committed their lives to serving Him. In other words, this lesson is not for the "unsaved", but the "saved". It's about paying the consequences for not trusting God with our lives once we do commit our lives to serving Him in the first place.
  - a) Like I learned when I first got saved, the challenge is not to get saved. The challenge is to use our lives to make a difference for Him despite the spiritual attacks that come when we do try to make that difference for Him with our lives. The good news of this lesson is that we'll read of the Southern Kingdom (during the time of the current king) make an effort to turn to God for His protection despite the mistakes their fellow Jewish brethren suffer for in this lesson. The lesson for us here is that despite the difficulty of living the type of life that God wants us to live it is worth the cost. We'll discover in this lesson how much the Southern Kingdom had to suffer for that trust. Anyone who has tried for a while to live to make a difference for God probably has also seen that same type of spiritual resistance.
    - i) The Southern Kingdom suffered from attacks of Assyrian Empire, but it didn't end that kingdom as we'll discover in the next lesson.
  - b) In the meantime, it's time for us to start the verse-by-verse commentary and read just how our own lives are parallel to the good and bad news of these two chapters. Ok, let's begin:
4. Chapter 17, Verse 1: In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. <sup>2</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him.
  - a) To remind us again, the focus of Chapter 17 is on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Now for some more good news: This is the last chapter where we go back and forth between the Northern and Southern kingdom. This Northern one ends with this chapter. The bad news is we still have to get through this chapter.
  - b) To remind us of more key but relatively easy facts to remember, there were no good kings in the Northern Kingdom. Therefore when you read of any of these kings, just remember that all of them got failing grades from God. With that said, we now read of the last one, Hosea. There is a book in the Old Testament called Hosea. This is not that Hosea. I find it interesting that Verse 2 says this king was in effect still bad news but not as bad as some of his predecessors.
    - i) So if this king was not as bad as the others, why did God pick him to be the last one of the group? I don't think it was him, as much as it was God saying there is a limit to my patience. Again it's not a salvation issue, but about being a witness to Him when we are called to be that witness. My personal view here is not that God punished Israel because of Hosea in particular, but more like God saying, "I've had enough. You people refuse to turn to trust in Me, and now I'm turning from you."
    - ii) The life of this king goes downhill from here as we'll read in the next few verses.
5. Verse 3: Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser's vassal and had paid him tribute. <sup>4</sup> But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison.
  - a) The story here is the king of Northern Israel got tired of having to pay tribute money to the Assyrian Empire every year. That king tried to appeal to the other great power of the region, the Egyptians. When the Assyrians found out the Israelites had stop sending the big check every year, the "mob moved in". The Assyrians did what they did to all nations that refused to obey them: attacked. The Assyrians had the king of Israel put in prison.
  - b) A pattern to see here that applies to us is when we give in to the world around us, that world "always demands more of us" until finally it takes over our lives. In other words, we are seeing an example of the danger of when we turn from God with our lives.

6. Verse 5: The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. <sup>6</sup> In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes.
  - a) Here we read of the end of the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians spent three years trying to capture and starve out the capital city of that kingdom and finally did so. The reason it took so long was that Samaria had its own internal water source and food supply. After three years, that too ran out and to keep it fairly clean, the Assyrians starved out most of the inhabitants until the rest of them surrendered.
  - b) There are ancient writings preserved about the Assyrians. One thing mentioned is that as they took people captive, they would place fishhooks in their lips and tie them to the one in front of them to keep them moving. These prisoners would then have to walk over 500 miles to where they would be relocated. The point being that when one has turned from God with their lives, one will pay through death or at the least bad suffering. As to why all of this had to take place, the next 10 verses or so talk about that issue. Here we go:
7. Verse 7: All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods <sup>8</sup> and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. <sup>9</sup> The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns. <sup>10</sup> They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. <sup>11</sup> At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>12</sup> They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, "You shall not do this." <sup>13</sup> The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."
  - a) Let me make this simple: From God's perspective, it has now been about 700 years since the Israelites had left Egypt if I guessed right. Yet during most if not all of that time, the residents who in the Northern part of Israel ignored God. They worshipped other deities that existed in that area at that time. Despite the fact that God had sent prophets into that area (think Elijah, Elisha and many other unnamed ones we're read about), the Israelites still refused to collectively turn to God to be a witness for Him.
  - b) This commentary says in effect, the Israelites were acting no better than the residents of the same land who lived there before them. Therefore, God had "had enough" and made the decision to turn His back on them, which allowed the Assyrian Empire to overthrow them and end that empire.
  - c) Ok John, too bad for them. However, they lived millennia ago. As best as I can tell, I don't worship any false gods and I go to church regularly. Why should I care what these people did so long ago? I am reminded of a story I heard about an African woman who left a land where the locals sacrificed chickens to their gods and visited the United States. Her great comment in effect was, "I can't stand this place, too many false idols". She was referring to the great sports stadiums and all the attention paid to those in entertainment.
    - i) The point is not that a sporting event or an entertainment event is bad. The point is people make those things the center of their lives. To quote a late pastor, I once heard him say, "Everybody has a god. Find out where they spend their time or see where they spend their money and you will find their god." My point is that idols were not just a problem millennia ago. They exist all around us today and any and all things that turn our focus away from God are such idols. The related point is that God has a limit to His patience when we decided to turn from Him if we've been called to be a witness for Him in this world.

- d) With that guilt ridden speech out of my system, back to the text itself. Remember that the writer of Kings is not commenting about life under the last king of Israel, but under all of the kings of the Northern Kingdom. Ever since Israelites started living here collectively they made the decision to turn from God to worship other deities. Finally God said, I've had enough. This group is beyond help. The best thing I can do for them is to put them out of their misery. Kind of like shooting a horse that broke its leg. Yes it was painful to watch as many of them died and the rest were painfully dragged away. It's more painful to let them keep living like they were living as they were wasting away the valuable time that God had given them in order to make that difference for Him.
  - e) Bottom line is after over 200 years since the kingdom split in two, it came to an end. In the meantime, the author of Kings is not finished lecturing us yet about their mistakes:
8. Verse 14: But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God. <sup>15</sup> They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, "Do not do as they do," and they did the things the LORD had forbidden them to do.
- a) The short version here is that God held them to their commitments. The forefathers who came to Israel made a commitment to follow God and teach His laws to their children. That's why God held the present generation accountable for the sins of past generations.
  - b) Stop and consider the book of Revelation for a moment and all of the horrible things that say will occur one day. Why does one generation have to suffer for all of the sins of past generations if the bad stuff of Revelation is a future event? The answer is effectively the same as what we are reading here: it is God saying there is a limit to My patience and we all have to realize God has a limit. But if the bad stuff of Revelation is future, and the bad stuff here in Kings is past, why should I care about any of this? To remind ourselves that our time on earth is short and we don't know the future. All we can do is use the most valuable thing God gives us, our time in order to make a difference for Him. To ignore that plea is in effect to serve the type of punishment being dished out here in Kings. That is why we pray for His mercy on our life and use whatever time we have left in order to make a difference for Him in the world around us.
  - c) With that said, it's time to get back to the specifics of what the Israelites did wrong here. To put it simply, they focused on things that didn't make a difference eternally. In our vocabulary, it would be like people who only care what is the last game score or latest entertainment gossip. The issue is not the statues that the Israelites worshipped; it is the "statues" that you or I can just as easily focus upon. With that said, let's get back to the writer's commentary on the fall of the Northern Kingdom:
9. Verse 16: They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. <sup>17</sup> They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.
- a) Here we get into some of the specific sins of the Northern Kingdom. When the first king started there, he didn't want Israelites to travel south to Jerusalem to the Temple. So he set up calf statues in northern Israel. Before we laugh at that, those calf gods were one of the main gods of Egypt. It would be like thinking, the god who ruled over Egypt is the same god who lead us away from them and now rules here. It is a mixture of true God worship with some idolatry. Next there are references to an Asherah pole and Baal. They go together as they are part of the same religious system that existed in Israel before the Israelites showed up. If that wasn't bad enough, they offered up their children to these gods to show their loyalty to them. Then they practiced divination and sorcery, which is essentially about trusting in demonic based feelings to guide one's decisions.

- b) I could probably spend a good page or so on each of these specific sins. Here is what we do need to know: God forbid all of those practices specifically in the five books of Moses, or "the law" for short. God had placed judgment on the original inhabitants of the land of Israel for practicing this same sort of demonic practices. God said the Israelites in effect what He is saying to us, "Because I care about you, here is the best way for you to live out your lives. Therefore avoid these things not to earn points with me, but because that's the best way to again live out your lives. I've (God) have called you to be a witness for Me in the world around you and we can't do that if we are practicing any of these sins."
  - i) You might say, I don't offer my children up in a fire and I don't practice sorcery. I don't even know what that Baal god looks like. So why should I worry about any of this ancient stuff? The classical lesson here is that those who fail to learn from history will repeat its mistakes. The issue for us about examining our own lives and pondering if we are using them for His glory or just seeking our own glory.
    - a) I'm not saying, "try harder". I'm saying we only have a fixed amount of time to live and the best purpose of that time is to use it for God's glory.
  - ii) By the way, that's one reason why God didn't wipe out the Southern Kingdom at this time, hoping they would learn from these mistakes made up north.
- 10. Verse 18: So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left,<sup>19</sup> and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.<sup>20</sup> Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.
  - a) Speaking of the Southern Kingdom, they are mentioned here in these verses. The text is essentially saying now that the Northern Kingdom is dead, there is only the Southern Kingdom left, which is effectively the tribe of Judah.
  - b) It's time for my short lecture on the "12 tribes of Israel". To keep it simple, when the land of Israel was first allocated, there were 12 separate territories, one for each of the families of the 12 sons of one man: Jacob. As I like to say, imagine if there was a man named the United States of America and he had 50 sons. Each son got his own territory and all the descendants of each son lived in each territory. That's how it started. With a short time span, people started moving to different territories and not everyone in territory "x" were descendants of the same family. I say all of that just to point out there are no lost tribes of Israel. When idolatry started in the Northern Kingdom, those who Israelites who wanted to seek God probably moved south and the "party animals" moved north. That fact was implied in 2nd Chronicles Chapter 11.
  - c) The reason I'm stating all of this here is that when the text says only "Judah" was left, it is not referring to the tribe of Judah but the territory of Judah. I speculate that after several hundred years, a mixed multitude of Jews lived here and not Judah descendants.
  - d) By the way, at the time of Jesus, which was still another 700 years (or so) later, the land of Northern Israel was still a land of mixed multitude of Jewish and non-Jewish people. That is why the term "Samaritans" is a dirty word in the New Testament. It is associated with idolatry and Jewish people that have turned away from God. The fact that Jesus and the disciples reached out to them shows how no one is beyond God's reach.
- 11. Verse 21: When he tore Israel away from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam enticed Israel away from following the LORD and caused them to commit a great sin.<sup>22</sup> The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them<sup>23</sup> until the LORD removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.
  - a) Bottom line: This is the end of the writers commentary about how the Northern Kingdom made the decision to turn from God and now they suffered eternally for that sin.

- b) I'd like you to think about this whole commentary section this way: Do you think God was pained by the Israelites being removed from that land? First I hold the view that if God is perfect, He knows all things and doesn't feel pain. Second He knew before time began that this was going to happen. The reason God allowed all of this history and yes failure to occur is to teach us what is the cost of turning from Him. This is God reaching out to us and saying, "Learn from history. I exist and I want to be in charge of your life. You (that's us) can worry about your future or trust that I am guiding you. Now stop worrying about what we don't know about our future and trust Me to guide it for you."
  - c) The Israelites who lived in the North were now either killed or taken hundreds of miles away painfully as prisoners. The joke goes, and you thought you were having a bad day. Living our life for God begins with our attitude. We can chose to live in misery based on our circumstances of the moment or realize that God is in charge and go forward making the best decisions possible realizing that He is guiding our lives. That's the lesson that the Israelites ignored for centuries and hopefully we learn from observing their mistakes.
- 12. Verse 24: The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns.<sup>25</sup> When they first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people.<sup>26</sup> It was reported to the king of Assyria: "The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires."
  - a) The practice of the Assyrians is that they didn't want rebellion against their empire. So they split up families and had their prisoners resettle all over their territory. That means here that non-Israelites were relocated in Northern Israel along with some Israelites who were left to live there. The next thing to keep in mind is that people thought that gods are "localized deities". When it was reported to the king of the Assyrian Empire that lions are attacking those living in Israel, the king sent back a priest to teach the residents the laws of the god of Israel.
  - b) Next, a word about lion attacks. What I suspect is that as that territory became empty by all of the dead bodies from the wars, scavenger animals became common and no one was taking the effort to kill those scavenger animals. I can't prove it, but I suspect that is why lion attacks were getting common in that area. God allowed it in order for He to still be a witness to those living in the land associated with His name.
  - c) With that said, we're ready to move on to the next few verses:
- 13. Verse 27: Then the king of Assyria gave this order: "Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires."<sup>28</sup> So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the LORD.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places.<sup>30</sup> The men from Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men from Cuthah made Nergal, and the men from Hamath made Ashima;<sup>31</sup> the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.<sup>32</sup> They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places.<sup>33</sup> They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.
  - a) My first thought as I read this passage was "what kind of priest was sent back?" In other words, some sort of priest of the Northern Kingdom was sent back to Israel and yet all of the residents now living there still worshipped the gods they were accustomed to serving and not the God of Israel. It's kind of like the idea of giving God "lip service". I compare it to those who think, "I did my Sunday duty, now I can do whatever I want".

- b) Remember that the reason this one Israelite priest was sent back was to cut down on the lion attacks. Those who lived there, who I'm sure were still scared of the lions, turned to what they were used to turning to for their own protection. Change is hard. I also think that since those who lived in the Northern Kingdom were not accustomed to worshipping God the way He desired, how effective or knowledgeable was this priest who was sent back? Based on all the comments of the last paragraph of text, I would say that he didn't make much of a difference at all. The writer of this book is making the comment here that everyone living in the Northern Kingdom pretty much lived however they liked despite the lion attacks that occurred there.
  - c) Ok, and the point here is? There are those God has called to serve Him and then we have people who can be placed right in the middle of where God reigns and not care. All I can think of as I read this is a famous quote (I believe) by Dwight Moody who stated that I wish that everyone who was saved had a large mark on their body so I don't waste my time preaching to those who will never get it. That leads to the classical question, why did God create people who He knew would spend eternity in hell? The answer is free will. He gave us the freedom to choose to serve Him or the freedom to choose to turn from Him with our lives. Surprisingly that leads me back to the text. Here are a whole group of people now living in the land of Israel, attacked by lions because they chose to ignore God and they still went about serving whatever god they were used to and even as shown in Verse 31, that some of them offered their children in fire to the gods they worshipped.
    - i) So why don't we read of God punishing these people? The answer is in effect, that He did. Such people had the opportunity to learn something of God from a priest that was sent back there. The fact that they ignored that message from God is the evidence of the eternal judgment they received.
    - ii) To put that in our vocabulary, God holds us accountable for what we know about Him or what we should know based on what is available to us. Living in a time of information readily available to us whenever we want should scare us compared to what information was given to these people but ignored by them.
    - iii) Speaking of those who chose to ignore God, let us read on:
14. Verse 34: To this day they persist in their former practices. They neither worship the LORD nor adhere to the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands that the LORD gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel.<sup>35</sup> When the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, he commanded them: "Do not worship any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them."<sup>36</sup> But the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must worship. To him you shall bow down and to him offer sacrifices.<sup>37</sup> You must always be careful to keep the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands he wrote for you. Do not worship other gods.<sup>38</sup> Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods.<sup>39</sup> Rather, worship the LORD your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."
- a) It's interesting to consider this chapter from the perspective of all of "Kings". Israel started off as a nation at its peak and conquering all of its enemies around it. Now after several hundred years of essentially ignoring God, most of Israel is now a conquered, scattered group of people because they choose to collectively ignore the commitment they made to serve Him throughout their generations. In effect, the Israelites got what they deserved. They knew of God, and willfully chose to ignore Him. That is why we read the fate that we read here and hopefully learn from that fate. Everything I just said is summarized in Verses 38 and 39 where it reads that the Israelites should not forget the promise that God made to them, that if they seek Him, He will protect them and deliver them from any and all enemies who would try to hurt them.
  - b) The point for you and me is simply that there is a big price to be paid if we willfully chose to ignore the God that we have made the commitment to serve eternally.

- c) Ok John, God is a God of Judgment as well as a God of Love. We get that. How do you reconcile those two? The only way God can be perfect in judgment and perfect in love at the same time, is for God Himself to pay the price for our sins. That's the gospel message.
    - i) Over and above that, for the Christian it is to realize that God has called on us to be a witness for Him with the time He has given us. It's not a matter of trying our hardest. It's a matter of trusting in His power to make that difference. How we do that is coming up as we discuss Chapter 8. First we still have two more verses to discuss in the death in the Northern Kingdom.
15. Verse 40: They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. <sup>41</sup> Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did.
- a) Speaking of accountability, the text doesn't let up on as we finish this chapter. There is a responsibility to pass on our values to the next generation. As parents I believe God holds us accountable to pass on "right from wrong" to the next generation. Yes once children do reach an age of accountability (whatever that is) God holds them accountable. Still, until they reach that age, one responsibility we have is to pass on what we know about God to others younger than us. Hopefully I'm doing that here in this lesson as well as with my own children. To state the obvious, that bit of guilt is preached right here as one reason God wiped out the Northern Kingdom is the Israelites failed to do this for generations.
  - b) Before I move on let me explain the Jewish ritual of a "Barmitvah". I'm convinced most Jewish people don't even know the significance let alone us non-Jewish people. The key point is not a party, it is the parents declaring that they are no longer responsible for the sins of their child as now they are at an age where they should know right from wrong. Again the key is accountability and that is the issue as we wrap up this chapter.
  - c) OK, I said this lesson was bad news and good news. I've now beaten the bad news over our heads for pages, let us now turn and read the good news of the next chapter.
16. Chapter 18, Verse 1: In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. <sup>3</sup>He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. <sup>4</sup> He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)
- a) The first bit of good news is that we read of a king that was pleasing to God in all that he did. This current king of the South named Hezekiah not only sought God, but removed all the places where people sought God wherever they felt like it. Does that mean that Hezekiah was sinless? Of course not. It just means that like his ancestor King David, he sought God all of his life and trusted in Him based on the decisions that he made.
  - b) Speaking of decisions made by this king, we get a few of those in Verses 4 and 5. Note that here in the Southern Kingdom there were statues made to the god associated with the worship of Baal (a foreign god discussed in previous lessons). That is the "Asherah poles" referred to in Verse 4. To keep it simple, the point is that the Israelites living in the South were worshipping gods other than God Himself. As I stated earlier in the lesson, there are those who come to the United States and think, "I can't stand it here. Too many idols to false gods around here". (References to sports and entertainment gods). The point is that like the Israelites living back then there are always alternatives available for those who choose to turn from God and this king did what he could to change his life and the lives of those under him to only worship the true God.
  - c) Speaking of doing things to encourage people to only worship the true God, I'd like to spend a few moments discussing the last part of Verse 4. It refers to a "bronze snake" that Moses had made (roughly 700 years earlier) that was worshiped at this time.



- i) Let me make this brief. Way back in Numbers Chapter 21 the Israelites were still in the desert and not in the land of Israel yet. They were complaining about only having "manna" to eat and generally in a bad mood. God got their attention by having snakes bite them. The strange cure for the snakes was that Moses made a brass snake and put it on a stick. The cure for the snakebites was that one had to now go look at that snake on a stick. Yes it's strange. The point is sin was judged by placing that "sin" on a stick to be seen. The idea is sin is judged by God taking that sin upon Himself and yes it is a blatant tie to what Jesus did.
    - ii) The problem is now we are about 700 years later if my math is right. Many of the Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom were worshipping that bronze snake as if alone was something special. Yes it is a relic that belonged in a museum. What people were doing was looking to the bronze snake for help and not God Himself.
    - iii) Bottom line is Hezekiah had it destroyed as he did the other places of worship all around his kingdom as give your message of "Focus on God, and do what He has called us to do and not rely upon how He has worked in the past nor on seeking Him any old way you want to."
    - iv) The end of verse 4 is an untranslated word: Nehushtan. That just means "a thing of brass". Hezekiah was insulting the brass snake that people were worshipping.
  - d) One last thing about the opening four verses and I'll move on. This king started to reign when he was 25 years old. I started thinking about the decisions I made when I was that age and I can just imagine how hard that was to try to do the right thing at that age. The text also mentioned that the king's mother was the daughter of Zechariah. If you recall, he was one of the Northern Kings back in Chapter 15. My point being is despite the fact that Hezekiah had a father who turned away from God and part of his heritage did come from the Northern Kingdom, the key point is this guy did what was right in God's eyes. It just shows that neither background nor age are an excuse for doing the right thing.
    - i) With that bit of optimism stated, its time to move on to the next set of verses.
17. Verse 5: Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. <sup>6</sup> He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. <sup>8</sup> From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory.
- a) Verse 5 gives a wonderful bit of praise. One has to read it carefully. It does not say that he was greater than David. It says of all the kings that reigned in the South since Israel split into two kingdoms, Hezekiah pleased God more than any of them. Although it is not stated in the text, my speculation is this king studied Gods' laws and lived them. The clue is the reference to "keeping the commands of God given by Moses".
  - b) Now comes the tricky part. If one is trusting in God, then one has to expect resistance in terms of enemies and the demonic forces behind that resistance. Think about the situation this way: Satan knew at this point in history that a descendant of King David was going to rule forever and effectively end his reign. Therefore, Satan wanted to do all that he can to prevent that from happening. Having a godly king in charge is not what he wanted.
  - c) I state all of that because the Assyrian Empire is still "knocking on the door". They have conquered the Northern Kingdom and I'm sure they have their eyes on now going after the Southern Kingdom with the goal of wiping them out. One has to see is the spiritual forces behind that enemy trying to neuter God's plan working out through these kings.
  - d) So what does that have to do with this king defeating the Philistines as it says in Verse 8? Let's just say it is part of the Assyrian Empire and Hezekiah was now "poking his finger in the eye" of that empire by attacking and defeating a traditional enemy of Israel. In fact if you want proof of my theory, that is coming up in a few verses later in this chapter.

18. Verse 9: In King Hezekiah's fourth year, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria marched against Samaria and laid siege to it.<sup>10</sup> At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel.<sup>11</sup> The king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in towns of the Medes.<sup>12</sup> This happened because they had not obeyed the LORD their God, but had violated his covenant--all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened to the commands nor carried them out.
- a) Before we get to the current king of the South and his battle with the Assyrians, we first get a repeat of the facts of the last chapter of 2nd Kings. OK John we just spent a whole chapter discussing the fall of the Northern Kingdom, why repeat the key facts here in this chapter? To see if from Hezekiah's perspective. To understand that Hezekiah now has to face this same enemy that just wiped out most of the Israelites. Think of the rest of this chapter as a test of Hezekiah's faith. Let's face it; it's easy to say I trust in God. The trick is to say I trust in God when a very real threat is facing our lives. The big question for this king is will he learn from the mistakes the Northern Kingdom made, or will he trust in God to see him through the problem of the moment. We will spend the rest of the chapter answering that question and even parts of the next chapter.
    - i) To give a quick peak into the next lesson, the prophet Isaiah (yes that one) comes on the scene and helps the king deal with the Assyrian Empire. In the meantime we still have to get through a lot of text in this chapter, so let's move on.
19. Verse 13: In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.<sup>14</sup> So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.<sup>15</sup> So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace.
- a) The first thing I want you to notice is the time lapse. It's been about 10 years since the end of the Northern Kingdom. Hezekiah had time to digest all the events that has happened and how he could possibly deal with the growing threat of the Assyrian Empire.
  - b) Speaking of which, that empire was now attacking the Southern Kingdom and had taken over parts of it. The Assyrian empire was now demanding in order to spare Jerusalem, a total (in English) of one ton of gold and 11 tons of silver. Like I said, it is one thing to trust in God when life is relatively going well. It's another when one's life is being threatened.
  - c) In Verse 15 we read of Hezekiah taking whatever gold and silver was found in the temple and in Verse 16 whatever gold was part of the structure itself and giving it to the enemy.
  - d) As we go through the rest of this chapter, consider this from a demonic perspective: The goal is always to turn people's hearts away from God. Even if they or us can't lose their salvation, they can fail to be a witness for God. Losing the land of Israel to an enemy is in effect the same as God's promise can't come true as the Messiah can't come through a long line of kings. As we'll read in about ten chapters, this kingdom eventually did fall as they refused to turn from God. Still the point here is about how God tests our trust in Him as dark forces work to draw us away from God with our lives.
  - e) So did Hezekiah fail to trust God by giving the Assyrians the gold and silver here? The short answer is yes. That's why the good news is coming up in the next chapter as Isaiah is going to help this king restore his trust in God and deal with this enemy. To say all of this another way, we are reading of God trying to build up the king's faith when life is falling apart. In effect we are reading more of the bad news of saying, "Yes we are going to die, but the good news is that God resurrects us to give us a second chance." That is the message of these two chapters as I hope you see by now. In the meantime we still have to read about how the king handles the growing threat of losing his kingdom to this empire.

20. Verse 16: At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the LORD, and gave it to the king of Assyria.
- To pick up where we left off, the king not only gave whatever gold was in the temple, he also stripped whatever gold he could off of the structure itself.
  - My question of the moment is why was Hezekiah considered such a good king if he took all the gold and silver in the temple and part of the structure itself and gave all of that to an enemy? The answer is we have to read the whole story of this king (covering a total of three chapters) to understand why. If we just read verses like this, we don't get it.
  - To put this in Christian vocabulary, God does not consider us perfect because we are sin free. Yes the king did have a lapse of faith in this section of the story. The king was given high grades is that he trusted in God despite the problems of the moment. That's the test. Yes we all face times where we don't know what to do next. Yes we may have to sell off whatever assets we have just to survive. The real question for us is are we still going to trust God through whatever we are going through, or just give up and say, "Here is all I've got, now I'll turn from God to avoid all of this spiritual fighting?" That's the test we each face as believers as we continue to trust God through our problems of the moment.
  - Speaking of problems, we need to get back to Hezekiah here:
21. Verse 17: The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.<sup>18</sup> They called for the king; and Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to them.
- The scene switches here from the king to "messengers" and people working for either the king of Israel or the king of Assyrians. The Assyrian Empire's top commander is talking to some of the top people under Hezekiah. There, that should keep it simple.
22. Verse 19: The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: " `This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? <sup>20</sup> You say you have strategy and military strength--but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? <sup>21</sup> Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. <sup>22</sup> And if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"--isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?
- A few lessons back I talked about taunting in professional sports, especially boxing. That is when one fighter tries to intimidate his opponents with threats. Well, as we see here, as the old expression goes, "There is nothing new under the sun" and those types of threats are in the bible and not just in our world of sports entertainment today.
  - As to the specifics of the threat, the Assyrian officer effectively said, why is Hezekiah not submitting to our empire? Egypt who was a rival power to that empire was getting weak at this point in history. Then the officer commented on how Hezekiah had removed all of the places that the Israelites worshipped other than the temple. The threat in effect is, this king won't let you do whatever you want! Egypt is no help, so come surrender to me and we will let you do whatever you want. In Christian speak, it would be like saying, "Just surrender now and you won't have to face any spiritual resistance in the first place."
  - The taunting will continue for a bit, before life is going to get better:
23. Verse 23: `Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses--if you can put riders on them! <sup>24</sup> How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? <sup>25</sup> Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.' "
- You know you're in trouble when you invoke God's name to discourage God's people.

- b) As to what happened to the Assyrian leader who made this threat, we'll find out in the next lesson. For the moment, just trust me when I say to use God's name in order to turn people away from God is a violation of one of the 10 Commandments to "use God's name in vain". That is what that principal is about far more than straight cursing.
  - c) To say it even another way, in effect we don't have to worry about people who threaten God's chosen. They will suffer a far worse and eternal fate despite whatever damage they think they are doing in this lifetime. Our job is to be a good witness for God despite what is happening all around us. Yes we need to fight against what is evil but at the same time realize the eternal difference between those who seek God and those who make the effort to turn people away who are seeking Him. Speaking of those who cause trouble to God's people, time to get back to the story.
24. Verse 26: Then Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall."
- a) Time for a few words about the language spoken in Judah. Yes it was Hebrew. When it came to the issue of trade, the common business language of that region was Aramaic. The point being that most of the Jewish leaders spoke Aramaic, but the rest of the country only spoke Hebrew. This leads me back to the leader of the Assyrian empire who was in the palace of the Jewish king making threats. I assume he brought a translator with him. The point is this foreigner was making verbal threats in Hebrew so that everyone within shouting distance could hear the threats of the Assyrian empire against Jerusalem.
  - b) By the way, I love to share the fact that in the history of civilization, there has never been a dead language that came back into everyday use. The exception is Hebrew, which is now the common language spoken in Israel today. Meanwhile back to the story:
25. Verse 27: But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the men sitting on the wall--who, like you, will have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine?" <sup>28</sup> Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! <sup>29</sup> This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. <sup>30</sup> Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'
- a) Remember what I said earlier about boxers and "trash talk"? We'll we're back to that here in this text. To put it simply, the Assyrian leader was translating into Hebrew threats that if the Israelites don't surrender, they will soon be eating their own "dung" to say it nicely. This guy then goes on to insult King Hezekiah to say in effect he's no match for the large Assyrian Empire who has destroyed the Northern Kingdom and lots of other ones as well.
  - b) OK John I should care about all of this ancient history because? The point is we will each face our own demonic sources that say to us, "Don't bother being a good witness for Jesus. Just go enjoy the time you have on earth and don't worry about God. After all, life would be a lot more pleasant if we didn't have to deal with that spiritual resistance." As I love to say, if you don't believe Satan is real, try resisting him for a while and watch what happens to your life. Meanwhile, this guy is still trying to discourage the Israelites:
26. Verse 31: "Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, <sup>32</sup> until I come and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death! "Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' <sup>33</sup> Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? <sup>34</sup>Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? <sup>35</sup> Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

- a) One of the first things one has to learn about studying the bible is not every word in it is desired to inspire us to be a good person. Sometimes like here it is giving us a warning of the danger of turning from God. What we have here is a speech given by a king's servant who doesn't in effect care a single bit about God. This man is trying his best to discourage any and all Israelites from not only defending King Hezekiah, but to be a good witness for God in their lives.
  - b) Let me paraphrase what this man is saying: Look at all the damage the Assyrian Empire has already done to the world around you. Where were their gods to help them? Let us go relocate you throughout the Assyrian Empire. Then you will live out a happy life and not have to face the threat of death as you are right now.
    - i) Believe it or not, that is Satan's message to Christians as well. Hey, stop trying to live a life for God. It's not worth the suffering. I can give you all you want to enjoy your life right here and now. Just abandon your effort to make any difference for God and I'll make you happy right here and now.
    - ii) Yes of course this text is the lie of Satan himself and that's the point. That's why I say that not every word in the bible is designed to be "God centered" in the sense that some text is designed to show us the consequences of turning from Him. That is what we get here in effect to end this chapter.
    - iii) Now for the good news:
27. Verse 36: But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him." <sup>37</sup> Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said.
- a) The good news is the people of the Southern Kingdom respected their God-fearing king more than the messenger who is seriously threatening their lives and has the army to back up those threats. We will read in the next chapter how God will reward that faithfulness and wipe out this army.
  - b) The good news for you and me is that there are eternal benefits to saying no to the idea of giving up now of whatever it is we have to face in life. It's really easy when life gets hard to say, I can't handle this. I've done all I can do. That's usually when God says to us, "OK, now that you've let go of your worries, it's time for me to take over and show the benefits of Me being in charge of your life. On that positive thought, I'll bring it to God in prayer.
28. Father, may You provide my joy in whatever it is we have to deal with today, good or bad. Help us to be a good witness for You. Don't let those forces who want us to just enjoy our life and not try to please You, realize that our eternal destiny means far more that whatever this life can offer all by itself. Help us to rely upon Your power to make that difference and not live based on what we can accomplish based on our willpower. May we use the most valuable gift You give us, our time, to make that difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.