

June 28

2 Kings 15, 16, 17; 2 Chronicles 27 & 28

Unfortunately for Judah, Jotham's son did not think or live as his father did. He was a thoroughly bad king. It will be easy for you to remember him because you already know that the most evil king of Israel was Ahab. Now you also know that the worst king Judah ever had was Ahaz -- Ahab in Israel, Ahaz in Judah.

The accounts of II Kings chapter 16 and II Chronicles 28 complement each other by filling in details and facts that we didn't understand. Ahaz was installed as the king and he was a thoroughly bad king. He was so wicked and evil that he put his sons through the fire. There is some debate among Bible scholars about whether or not that means that Ahaz actually sacrificed his sons or whether it was some kind of fire ritual that was borrowed from one of the heathen religions of the day. There does not seem to be much evidence of child sacrifice in the religions around Israel at this time period. But it may have been borrowed from the religion of Molech, the God of Moab, in which child sacrifice apparently was practiced.

There was idolatry and immorality in the worship of Israel and Judah borrows it completely during the reign of Ahaz. At some point during his reign, because he failed to trust God and because he walked not in the ways of his father, but in the ways of the kings of Israel, Judah begins to lose its political power and prominence. God allows other kingdoms to judge Judah for their sin. They are attacked by Rezin the king of Damascus and by Pekah who was the king of Israel at that time. They besieged Jerusalem but do not overpower it. Elath at that point is taken back by Rezin. It had been recovered for Israel during the time of Uzziah and Jotham and rebuilt. It was an important port city on the gulf of Aquaba. We are told in the II Chronicles account that the Arameans took many captives from Judah and that on one day Pekah, the king of Israel, killed 120,000 Judean soldiers, including the king's son and two of his highest court officials and took 200,000 captive. Those prisoners were sent back but Judah had been humiliated. Ahaz is thoroughly frightened. The Edomites and the Philistines are now also attacking his kingdom because he has been so weakened by the Israelites and the Assyrians.

Ahaz is so thoroughly evil that we are told in Chronicles he closed the doors of the temple in favor of altars in the streets of Jerusalem. The most telling verse in the Kings and Chronicles account is found in II Chronicles 28:19. It says, "The Lord had humbled Judah because of Ahaz the king of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the Lord."

When we rebel against God, when we refuse to worship Him as He has called upon us to worship, we bring His disfavor upon us and we bring His displeasure upon all whom we represent. If we are kings, our disobedience affects whole nations. As a wife and a mother, the implication of my disobedience could be quite clear as well.

Today as we read 2 Kings 17, we passed a milestone of another sort. We came to the sad end of the Northern Kingdom. There was a paragraph in the middle of chapter 17

that said it all. "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. The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them 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."

The specific sins recounted were the worship of other gods and the practices which were associated with those religions -- the worship of the calves Jeroboam set up, the practice of passing their sons and daughters through the fire, divination and sexual immorality. For all of these sins the anger of the Lord burned against a nation that would not listen and would not repent of their evil.

The book of 2 Kings tells us that because of their persistent rebellion, the people of Israel, over a 200 year period that saw nine dynastic lines and 19 kings, consistently refused to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. The ten tribes passed into captivity and out of existence as far as anyone have ever been able to trace them. God "cut them off."

The Assyrians were the first nation to deport whole populations from one conquered nation to an entirely different part of the empire to repopulate another land which had been similarly decimated. The people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim who were settled in the land of Israel became known as Samaritans. Their practices, mixing the pagan religions of the their homelands with the religions of Israel became a huge stumbling block between them and the Jews who later returned to Judah from the 70 year captivity in Babylon. The Samaritans and Jews came to hate each other passionately and continued to do so through the New Testament period up to the final destruction of Judah by the Romans.

Well thanks for joining with me today as we dug deeper into our text. I hope you join us again tomorrow as Gavin Johnson will take us back to the book of Isaiah.