

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 25, Part 3

2 Kings 15-16, Part 3

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Ahaz, king of Judah. We've got a whole chapter given over to him. He ruled for about 20 years.

Uzziah ruled for 52 years and received 7 verses, while Ahaz received 20 verses. Hmm, I wonder why.

I wonder what we are to draw from this. So, as your chart shows, it's pretty clear that in 735, Ahaz was forced upon his father Jotham as a co-regent. Almost certainly, it's at that point that the Pekah and Rezan forces, oops, not that way, came south against Judah.

And very possibly, Ahaz is forced upon Jotham precisely because of these events. So, Isaiah tells us that the house of David was terrified. So, what do you do? Ahaz, you've got these two kings from the north who are coming and who are apparently going to put an end to the Davidic dynasty.

They're going to take Jotham and Ahaz off the throne and put their own man on. Wow, what are we going to do? He did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God. That's 16.2. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire.

Engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at high places on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

Oh, my goodness. Have we in fact come to the place where the fourth board is an inch shorter than the first board? As we have been told all the way through the kings of Judah they didn't remove the high places. Now as I've argued, I think for the good kings of Judah that indicates that Yahweh was worshipped at these high places not idol gods.

But now Ahaz quite clearly has reinstated idol worship on these places. Once again, it's the question of a bit of a divided heart. If they had really paid attention to Deuteronomy, they would have gotten rid of those high places.

And Ahaz wouldn't have had any high places to worship. So here you are with your existence threatened. What do you do? You go pagan. I look at the United States, and the Lord is standing with his arms outstretched, and we say no.

No, I'll try this God and that God and the other God. The big blue nation will save me. So, in 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.

And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. I've often said this is like three mice having a fight, and one of them hiring the cat. He is not your friend Ahaz.

I hope there are instant replays in heaven. I want to see this one. Here comes the guy, the messenger into the court of Tiglath-Pileser, and he says well, that little king over there in Judah, he's sending you a king's ransom to attack Syria and Israel.

And Tiglath-Pileser says what? Is he going to pay me to do what I was planning to do anyhow? Cash the check, cash the check. Yes. He would trust his worst enemy before he would trust God.

This, of course, is what we find in Isaiah chapter 7 when Isaiah meets Ahaz out at the waterworks and says trust the Lord. Ask for a sign as high as heaven or deep as hell. And Ahaz said oh, I wouldn't want to put the Lord to the test.

Piety is a wonderful cover-up for unbelief. So, how does this relate to you and me? Let's stop talking about ancient history. We're seeing this all the time with pastors.

It's unbelievable. Trust our worst enemy in place of God. Who's our worst enemy? Number one, number one.

I can take care of me. I can accomplish my goals. If you can dream it, you can do it.

What other enemy do we trust? Money, money. Now, I'm so grateful to God to be living in this wonderful land, which has made it possible for me and Karen at our age to live comfortably. Thank you.

But ultimately, that's the work of God. And if we shoot holes in the umbrella that has been over us for 200 years, we ought not to be too surprised when we start getting wet. What else? Myself, my money.

What else? The enemies that we trust in place of God. Political correctness. Friends.

Trusting in institutions. Anything that will alleviate our fears. Yes, yes, yes.

Karen and I are reading a book right now about a house in the outskirts of Berlin and the history of that house over the hundred years from 1890 up to the present and the people who lived there. And of course, that's the history of Germany. But it's

really a bit unsettling because, again, I see so many parallels to the people who were afraid and voted for a tyrant who would take care of them, who would protect them.

So, what then does Ahaz do? Verse 10. He went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. And yes, in 732, Tiglath-Pileser destroyed Damascus.

This was part of Isaiah's prophecy. He said if a baby were conceived today, before he's able to say, Mama and Papa, these two nations you're so terrified of are going to be gone. You don't have to send any money to Tiglath-Pileser to get that done.

So, Tiglath-Pileser has captured Damascus, and Ahaz goes to see him. What does Ahaz see there? An altar. The narrative is interesting.

He sent Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar with detailed plans for its construction. And we've got another 10 verses here about what follows from that relating to the temple. Now, what do you think is going on here? Why does the narrator give this much attention to this action? Why did Ahaz do this? He goes to meet Tiglath-Pileser in Damascus.

He sees an altar there. And he says we got to have one like that back home. Why? Exactly, exactly.

Oh, well, Tiglath-Pileser is winning the world. So, he's obviously figured something out here. So, we need some of that back home.

He hasn't built an idol. I think that's kind of interesting. But what has he done? He's worshipping the idea that ritual can bring about magical results.

If I do this kind of religious, spiritual, whatever action, I can get what I want. The rituals we've been doing back home haven't worked very well for us. So, we'll get some new rituals that will accomplish the purpose.

Is the problem the rituals? No, it's the problem is the heart with which you are performing the rituals. I've talked about this before, and as long as you stick around with me, you'll hear it again. But this is so very significant in the Bible and its approach to worship.

On the one hand, the symbols of worship mean nothing without the heart. If your heart is not right, if your heart does not belong to him, then you can do these worship things till you're blue in the face, and they're not going to do a thing for you. So, what, then, is the tendency? Oh well, it doesn't matter what we do.

Our hearts are right, and God says, you are body and spirit. You need to physically represent what your heart condition is. And so, on the one hand, he says and you see

it in the book begins as I noted there in chapters 5 through 8 with that long detailed description of the temple.

Then, in 2 Kings 12, we see a pretty long description of how Joash rebuilt the temple. And this to telegraph where we're going, when we get to Josiah in chapters 22 and 23, we're going to see Josiah renewing the temple. And then in chapter 25, we're going to see the temple destroyed stone for stone.

And a lot of the descriptions of the materials in the temple are going to be just like we had back here. What is God saying? He is saying, I don't want your symbols if your heart is rotten. Forget it.

I don't need this golden house. But what is he saying? He's saying, I'd love to have beautiful symbols that represent who you are in relationship to me. So the symbols in and of themselves accomplish nothing.

But if our hearts are truly his, then the ways in which we express that physically and materially are important to him. You see that in the return from exile. The people are saying that that old temple didn't do us any good. Did it? So why should we spend any time rebuilding it? It's not going to be as big as the other one was, anyhow.

Forget it. And I love Haggai. He says, you know why your pockets have holes in them? Because you're building your house and not paying any attention to mine.

Build my house out of a heart of love and you're going to find your pockets sewn up. There's truth to this. When we preachers say to people, you ought to tithe because God will bless you.

We ought to be fined for spiritual malpractice. No, sir. You ought to tithe because God is good enough to let you keep 90% of his money.

And then, guess what? You're going to find your money goes farther. It's very bizarre. But again, do you see it? If I'm trying to manipulate God with symbols, with things, it won't work.

On the other hand, if I say, I love you, Lord, and here's a nickel. He says, you lie. So, I think that's the reason so much attention is given here.

Here, we are on the way to the ultimate destruction of the temple. Here we are on the way to believing that I can make it up as I go. I'll decide what symbols work.

God says, no, I'll decide. Coke and doughnuts will not work for communion because they are, though the kids may think so, they are not the staples of life. Yep.

Yep. It's finished in 516. Oh, OK.

That's before that destruction. Yeah, the destruction. Solomon's temple was destroyed in 586.

Ezekiel is speaking about this between 593 and 586. So, he's talking about this temple, and he's saying I have no reason in the world to preserve that thing. It is full of filth.

Well, I'll let you go. But these days, I hear people saying, oh, the pandemic has taught us that places don't matter at all. I can't go there.

I think places do matter. Do they matter in place of our heart? Absolutely not. But as physical, spiritual beings, we need to represent with material things where our hearts are.

That's the difference between the pagan understanding of sacrifice and the Hebrew understanding of sacrifice. Pagan says, I do this, and it will automatically accomplish good results in the heavenly realm. The Bible says not on your life.

Well, why do we do it then? To represent where your heart is. And when you truly represent where your heart is, God is pleased. His olfactory nerves work differently than mine because he says that a burnt offering is a sweet savor in his nostrils.

I've never yet smelled burnt meat that smelled very good to me. But there it is. Why? Because he likes burnt sheep? No, because it represents a whole heart.

Anything more you want to say before I let you go? Yes, yes. Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman. He doesn't care about here.

He doesn't care about that temple in Jerusalem. He wants the worship that's here. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And I really think it's fascinating that across the centuries, there's been this instinct to build beautiful places for God. Now, the tragedy is they become idols. So, how much of Britain's national income is spent maintaining cathedrals where nobody worships? There is something wrong there.

On the other hand, I want to make something beautiful for God.

Alright, let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for this chance to gather around Your Word. Oh,

have mercy upon us, O Lord. We see ourselves reflected in these pages. We see ourselves worshipping dead symbols.

We see ourselves trusting our worst enemies. We see ourselves trying to find security in this world. Have mercy upon us, O Lord.

You are our security. Our only security. We say that so easily. Teach us to believe it. Teach us to live there so that we can hold things lightly, knowing that it's You we want and not all this stuff. Thank You for these brothers and sisters.

You know where each one is walking tonight. Be with each one. Bless them. Encourage them. Lift them up. Enable us together to go forward for You in You, in Your name, we pray. Amen.