

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 26, Part 3

2 Kings 17, Part 3

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The results of Israel's fall chapter 17 verses 24 to 41. Now I've got the RSV, excuse me. I've got the NIV here, and there's a word that shows up very, very often in the NIV.

It's the word worship. You see in verse 25 that when they first lived there, they did not worship the Lord. These are the people that the Assyrians brought in to replace the ones they'd taken out.

As I've said to you multiple times, this was the Assyrian policy. How are you going to govern a huge empire of different cultures, different languages, different religions, different people groups? Well, you put them in the mix master. You move them all around.

You mix them all up. Number one, it keeps them off balance. So, they're unlikely to start a revolution.

But number two, it creates a whole new imperial culture. So, verse 25, when they first lived there, these incoming people, they did not worship the Lord. Well, I don't think it's a wrong interpretation, but that's not the word in Hebrew.

What's yeah? Mark fear, fear. The fear of the Lord appears in this section.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 times between verses 32 and 39. It occurs in every verse. I think they may be trying to make a point.

These people did not fear the Lord. That's more than they did not worship the Lord. In fact, I rather suspect they did worship him.

Because we're going to be told later they didn't fear the Lord. Oh, I think they worshiped him. All right.

And forgive me. There are a whole lot of American Christians like that who don't fear the Lord. "They may worship him."

But they don't build their lives on an understanding that there is an all-powerful being who holds our lives in the palm of his hand and who one day will ask for an account. That's the fear of the Lord, and I've talked to you lots of times about it.

And as long as you let me be here, I'll keep talking about it because it is so important. When 1 John says perfect love casts out fear, he's not talking about the fear of the Lord.

He's talking about the fear of judgment. Oh, man, he's out to get me. And I'm going to die and go to hell.

Perfect love delivers you from that. He's not out to get you. He loves you.

And you love him with all you are. And you don't have to be afraid of hell. That's what 1 John's talking about.

But the idea that we build our lives on the realization of who he really is—that's the fear of the Lord. To live, and the term that's often used, is not a bad one, to live in reverent awe, to live until we feel like we're prepared for life.

An effective life comes from always taking care of yourself. Look on God in that sense; the Lord is God. I always get angry with people who say God is not God.

When they say God is not God, it's evil. When they say that God isn't God, it's bad. And Walmart has a deal on fire this week.

I know God said do it that way, but that's too difficult. That's not convenient. It's not easy.

It's just God. So these people, these incomers, they didn't fear the Lord. So lions came along.

That's my picture there. And began to eat them up. And the people sent to the Assyrian king and said, wait a minute, wait a minute.

Something's wrong here. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off because the people do not know, the English Standard Version says, do not know the law of God. NIV has got it better.

NIV says he does not know what he requires. Because we're not talking about Torah here. We're not talking about God's covenant stipulations.

We're talking about the, as I've said here, pattern or preference. Actually, the King James is pretty good. Manner.

Yeah, could be. NLT has really got it right. I didn't have anything to do with this.

Religious customs. We don't know the practices that this God wants us to engage in. Now, we're out of time here, but here's another important question.

Did God say, I want to get those people eaten up? I think I'll send a few lions on them. Well, the text says, they did not worship, they did not fear the Lord, so he sent lions among them.

Well, think about this. The land is desolate. The people who really know what they're doing have all been dragged off.

And the only people left are the people who don't know what they're doing. What happens in that kind of situation? The country goes wild. And as late as this, there were lions down in the Jordan Valley.

People didn't go there to bring a little vial of water back to the United States with them. It was a jungle. A nasty jungle.

And there were wild animals in there. Now, the land is desolated. It's wild.

What happens? You got wild animals roaming around. Now, did God, and I think you know what answer I'm fishing for. Did God say, I'm going to get those people?

I believe I'll send some lions to eat them up. I don't think so. That's not the God that the Bible depicts for us.

Did God cause those lions to multiply? Yes, He did. The whole historical situation resulted in that. And so, the people said, Whoa, God's out to get us.

We must be doing something wrong here. That's been religion for about 50 centuries. God's out to get us.

We must be doing something wrong. Let's figure out what He wants. Let's give Him a sacrifice.

So, what happens? The Assyrian king says, Well, have one of the priests that you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the God of that land requires. What do you think an Israelite priest from the northern kingdom taught those people? Did he teach them the word of God? No. He taught them a mishmash of religious behavior.

With a little Yahwism thrown in? Oh, sure. With a little paganism thrown in? Sure. Just enough to get by.

Oh, my. Human religion of the best sort.

So, one of the priests came. One. And he came to live where? I'm looking at verse 28.

Bethel. What was Bethel? It was where one of those gold idols was. It's where Jacob had seen God.

So, I think he had a wonderful mishmash. Some historical traditions. A little Yahwistic idolatry thrown in.

So, look at verse 29. 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 their high places. Yeah.

They said, oh, fine. Fine. They called him Baal.

We'll call him Nibhaz. And over here, they called him Yahweh. We'll call him Tartac.

And over here, yeah, everything is right in order. Set and ready to go. Verse 31.

The Avites made Nibhaz and Tartac. The Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adramelech and Anamelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. Now look.

Look at verse 32. They feared the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high place. They feared the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs.

There's the same word. The customs of the nations from which they'd been brought. Now, how do you make sense of that? What's that saying? They feared the Lord, but.

They feared the Lord, but. What's that saying? A very limited homage. We'll do the minimum that we think we have to keep that god happy.

But hey, we're going to worship our own gods that we like and are familiar with and love. And that we're there... Cover their bases. Cover their bases, exactly.

Exactly. We don't want any more of those lions around here. Yeah.

What's the minimum we have to do to keep from being eaten? Yes. That's called appeasement. Yes.

Yes. To appease him. Again, I look in the mirror, and I say dear God, does that describe me? Oh, I fear the Lord.

And am I worshiping the work of my hands? Am I trying to gain power so that I can be successful? Am I trying to manipulate the forces of this world to make myself comfortable and secure? I dare say that's a question that all of us need to ask regularly. Do I really fear the Lord? Now, hear me. Again, we have a very difficult time.

Well, fear... Where is He going to get me next? But that's not the sense of the Hebrew word. It is this idea of reverent awe. Conduct your life with the knowledge that there is a God, and He's not you.

That's the fear of the Lord. Well, before I let you go, let me turn to verses 35 to 39 in that 17th chapter—a beautiful summary of what God had done for them.

But the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must fear. To Him, you shall bow down. To Him offer sacrifices.

You must always be careful to keep the decrees and regulations, the Torah, the instructions, and the commands He wrote for you. Do not fear other gods. Do not forget the covenant I made with you.

Oh yeah, I remember it. I just don't do it. You've forgotten it, then.

Do not fear other gods. Do you think He's trying to make a point? All the forces of the world, all the forces of humanity, all the forces that press in upon us, don't be afraid of them. Don't order your life on the basis of what they might be able to do to you.

Rather, fear the Lord your God, and here it comes. It is He who will deliver you from the hand of your enemies. Yeah.

You're not paranoid if they really are out to get you. And they are. They are.

But thank the Lord. Remember Him. Fear Him.

And you don't need to fear anything else. That's the good news.

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, as we read and think about this sad, sad chapter in your word, we say, Oh God, don't let this be said of us. Don't let it be said of us that we gave you lip service while serving all the gods of this world. Don't let it be said of us that we have forgotten what you have done for us.

Don't let it be said of us that we have followed the ways of the nations. Let it be said of us, Lord. They are people who remembered their covenant, who remembered

their God and feared Him and therefore lived with clear commitments, with confident trust, and with joyous abandon.

Thank you, Jesus. In your name, Amen.