

Message #10
Lessons from the Kings of Judah

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JOTHAM, AHAZ, AND SEEKING HELP
IN THE RIGHT AND WRONG PLACES
2 CHRONICLES 27-28

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

When we visited my family in Wisconsin in October, my boys expressed interest in seeing the original Hedlund family farm about 150 miles away from my hometown. My Swedish grandfather originally established that dairy farm in northwestern Wisconsin. He passed it on to his oldest son, who passed it on to his oldest son, my cousin. My cousin is in the process of turning over the farm to his son.

So we had a delightful visit with my cousin, who gave us a tour of this 900 acre operation. His son was around. We saw him driving tractor and cleaning out the dairy barn. But he stayed away from us, because he had not been feeling well. They were suspicious that he might have the corona virus. He had chosen not to get the vaccine.

After we returned to Nevada, I learned that he got sick enough that he had to go to the hospital. He got sicker and was flown to a regional hospital. Then he was medevacked by helicopter several hundred miles to Milwaukee. There he was put on a ventilator and a blood oxygen machine. Adam has been in the intensive care unit ever since. The medical people caring for him this week said that he has a 50-50 chance of surviving.

This sudden health crisis has created all kinds of needs for help. The farm is a small business operation in which Adam is the key. So there is a need for help in running daily farming operations. Adam and his wife have two small daughters. His wife just discovered that she is pregnant. So there are family needs for help. Adam does have health insurance, but the medical bills will be huge, and there will probably be financial needs for help. Then there is a need for help in terms of spiritual and emotional support.

We humans are needy critters. We don't always consciously realize how much help we need. But there are crises like this that occasionally come across our paths where we are reminded of our mortal vulnerability, like the tornadoes in the Midwest this weekend. We are reminded of our need for help. The key issue is where we seek help. What is the source of our ultimate hope?

In our story today we encounter two different kings who turn to two different sources of help. They experience two different kinds of consequences. In their respective life journeys they have lessons to teach us.

In recent weeks we have been looking at the kings of Judah. (PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM TIMELINE) The time setting is roughly 900 to 600 BC. After King David came his son King Solomon. There was a split in the kingdom of Israel after

Solomon died. (DIVIDED KINGDOM) The northern part of the kingdom retained the name Israel. The southern part was named after the dominant tribe of Judah.

We are now in the 700s BC. Judah is surrounded by hostile neighbors. All of the kings of Israel are described in the Bible as being evil. The last three kings of Judah whom we have studied started out well but ended up straying from the Lord. Next up is King Jotham.

I.

In 2 Chronicles #27 (which is p. 378 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we are going to look at **JOTHAM AND SEEKING HELP IN THE RIGHT PLACES** (I. JOTHAM AND SEEKING HELP...) The story begins in vv. 1 & 2: **“Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok. 2 And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the Lord. But the people still followed corrupt practices.”** Jotham's rule is usually traced to 750-735 BC.

His father ruled for 52 years. He followed the Lord for much of his life. But later King Uzziah became prideful and tried to take on the priest's assigned role of offering incense in the temple. He resisted the priests and was struck by leprosy. He then had to live the rest of his life in a separate house and was restricted from performing many of his kingly responsibilities. So he made his son Jotham co-ruler for the last ten years of his life.

In God's eyes Jotham did well as king. The one cautionary note is that his citizens were engaged in corrupt practices. The implication is that they were allowing other gods and idols into their worship.

According to vv. 3 & 4, **“He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord and did much building on the wall of Ophel. 4 Moreover, he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and forts and towers on the wooded hills.”** (OPHEL) The Ophel was the area between the temple mount and the original city of David where the king's palace was located. For the author of Chronicles building projects are regarded as evidence of the blessing of God upon the kings of Judah. Good kings of Judah seem to have successful building projects.

Verse 5: **“He fought with the king of the Ammonites and prevailed against them. And the Ammonites gave him that year 100 talents of silver, and 10,000 cors of wheat and 10,000 of barley. The Ammonites paid him the same amount in the second and the third years.”** Military victories are also a sign that the Lord approves of the king and his behavior.

Ammon (AMMON MAP) was to the south and east of Judah. Ammonites were long time enemies of the Hebrews. One authority says that this tribute, or tax, amounted to five tons of silver and 62,000 bushels of barley and wheat.

The next verse explains the source of Jotham's success (PROJECTOR OFF): **“So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the Lord his God.”** Jotham became mighty like his dad, but he seemed not to have been ensnared by pride. To take office as a twenty-five year old would be overwhelming to most individuals. But Jotham established a solid foundation. He clearly sought help from the Lord. He picked the right place to find help in all of his endeavors. Thus he had worthwhile building projects and military successes.

Verses 7-9 add, **“Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. 8 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9 And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.”**

Jotham did have challenges. Having a right relationship with the Lord and seeking help from Him did not mean that life was easy. In 2 Kings #15 v. 37 (PROJECTOR ON--- 2KINGS 15:37) we are told, **“In those days the Lord began to send Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah.”** Pekah was the king of Israel. Syria and Israel tried to overrun Judah and capture Jerusalem. They did not succeed.

The overall evaluation of King Jotham is that he did well. He had an honorable burial. He was recognized as having sought help in the right places. In times of need that is what we should do as well.

II.

Then comes Jotham's son Ahaz. He is the moral and spiritual opposite of his father. We might wonder how a godly king could produce such an ungodly son. We are not given enough information to figure that out. But in #28 (II. AHAZ AND SEEKING HELP IN...) we do learn about AHAZ AND SEEKING HELP IN THE WRONG PLACES.

A.

In the first four verses of #28 we find out that King Ahaz is SEEKING HELP FROM IDOLS. (II. AHAZ AND... A. SEEKING HELP FROM IDOLS) We read in v. 1, **“Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done...”**

Ahaz has the same length of rule as his father Jotham did. But he does not do right. For the first four years of his rule, he shares the throne with his father. Yet somehow he does not develop the same spiritual commitment that his father did. He sought for help in the wrong places.

According to v. 2, **“...but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals...”** Baal was a Canaanite god worshipped in various forms

in the surrounding countries. Baalism had a central role in the surrounding culture. Buying into the standards of the surrounding culture is always a danger for God's people. The negative effects are multiplied when it is the nation's leader who is not only tolerating false worship but promoting it.

Verses 3 & 4 provide a further explanation: **"...and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. 4 And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree."**

The Valley of Hinnom (HINNOM VALLEY) was on the south side of Jerusalem. It would eventually serve as the garbage dump for the city. Some early sources reported that fires burned perpetually there. In the New Testament this place was referred to as Gehenna. It was a term adopted in some places in the Bible to describe hell, the abode of evil spiritual beings and people who have rejected the true God.

At the time of our story the place was associated with child sacrifice. There is a further description of this evil activity in 2 Kings #23 v. 10. (2 KINGS 23:10) Describing the administration of a later king, the author writes, **"And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech."**

Molech was a god worshipped by the Ammonites. So we know that this child sacrifice has ties to Ammonite worship. We don't know the exact details. Some scholars think that children were laid in the outstretched arms of a brass image which was heated to high temperatures. The implication in our passage is that King Ahaz offered some of his own sons as child sacrifices. What a horrible thing to do. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There is archaeological evidence that this was done in other parts of the Mediterranean world. At Carthage in North Africa archaeologists found a burial site containing funeral urns from this same time period and several centuries afterward. The remains were of babies mostly between one and two months old. (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 2014)

This strikes us as barbaric. We are more sophisticated in our era. Our idol is personal autonomy. Our culture believes that we are in charge of our lives. We can do with our bodies what we want. We are not accountable to a Creator God. So inconvenient pregnancies can be sacrificed to the god of personal autonomy and freedom. Thus it is that we have had 62.5 million abortions in the US since 1973.

B.

While King Ahaz may have been seeking help from other gods, in vv. 5-15 we find that he is GETTING HELP FROM UNEXPECTED PLACES. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. GETTING HELP FROM UNEXPECTED PLACES) In vv. 5-7 of #23 we are told, **"Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who**

defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force. **6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. 7 And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the commander of the palace and Elkanah the next in authority to the king."**

God's judgment for the waywardness of Ahaz is swift and harsh. In #27 v. 2 we were told that the people were acting corruptly during the administration of good King Jotham. Now the current king of Judah is promoting corruption.

From this passage, other Biblical references, and historical records outside of the Bible we know that King Rezin of Syria (or Aram) teamed up with King Pekah of Israel to invade Judah. They were unable to capture Jerusalem, but they inflicted heavy casualties upon the people of the southern kingdom. The casualties included three top officials in the administration of King Ahaz. This is a very bad defeat.

Verse 8: **"The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria."** Besides the high casualties inflicted upon the south, Israel takes a lot of women and children captive. Biblical scholars have a hard time figuring out these large numbers. In earlier passages some of them claim that the Hebrew word for "thousands" should be understood as a reference to military units. That is difficult to understand here, since women and children are being described. Some scholars think that the author is using hyperbole and is not intending that the numbers be taken literally. The other option is that we can take them literally.

The main point is that the king's disobedience to God has led to a bad defeat. Many vulnerable Judeans are hauled off to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The story continues in vv. 9-13: **"But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, 'Behold, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. 10 And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the Lord your God? 11 Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.' 12 Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war 13 and said to them, 'You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.'"**

The Old Testament law handed down to Moses at Mt. Sinai prohibited the Hebrews from subjecting fellow countrymen to “a slave’s service,” which is what was happening here. Bankrupt Jews could be taken in as hired servants to pay off their debts, but they were not to be treated as slaves.

One of the fascinating things that we find here is a national role reversal. Until this time it has been Israel which has been portrayed as evil and refusing to listen to the Lord and His prophets. But now it is Judah which is disobedient, and Israel which is listening to God’s prophet. Leaders of Ephraim, which is apparently the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom, feel guilt for their many sins, including the mistreatment of the Judeans. The king of Israel is not mentioned. But the view of these other leaders prevails.

Thus we read in vv, 14 & 15, **“So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. 15 And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.”**

These undeserving Judeans, who have turned for help to false gods, get help from an unexpected place. They get help from their enemies to the north. This help is the result of the intervention of a gracious God who speaks through His prophet.

Sometimes we sinners likewise look for help in the wrong places. Nevertheless God sometimes shows up. He provides help or relief in unexpected ways. He brings unexpected people across our path who deliver genuine help.

C.

In vv. 16-21 we find that Ahaz is SEEKING HELP FROM PAGAN KINGS. (II. A. B. C. SEEKING HELP FROM PAGAN KINGS) According to vv. 16-18, **“At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. 17 For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah and carried away captives. 18 And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Bethshemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages. And they settled there.”**

(EDOM MAP) While Judah was faced with enemy pressure from the north from Israel and Syria, or Aram, Edom and Philistia to the south and west made incursions into Judah. So where does Ahaz turn for help? He turns to Assyria. (ASSYRIA)

Assyria was a rising power to the north. We have seen in 2 Chronicles that whenever the king of Judah forms alliances with other countries, it meets with disapproval from

YHWH, the God of Israel. The consequences of these foreign alliances are always bad for Judah.

Thus in v. 19 we are told, **“For the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the Lord.”** Judah is in a bad situation. Ahaz and Judah do need help. But Ahaz turns only to pagan kings.

Verses 20 & 21: **“So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the Lord and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, but it did not help him.”**

From Assyrian historical sources we know that in 734 BC King Tiglath-Pileser III undertook a campaign down the Mediterranean coast against Philistia. The next year the Assyrian king invaded Syria, or Aram, and captured Damascus, its capital. He proceeded further south against Israel and against the nations to Judah’s east. But Tiglath-Pileser also forced Judah to become subject to Assyria. Thus King Ahaz’s appeal to Assyria did not really help Judah or the king in the end.

D.

In vv. 22-27 the situation deteriorates even further. We find King Ahaz **REJECTING HELP FROM THE TRUE GOD**. (II. A. B. C. D. **REJECTING HELP FROM THE TRUE GOD**) Verse 22 says, **“In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord—this same King Ahaz.”** Sometimes the Lord uses difficult times to turn people toward Him. Some still remain resistant. Here King Ahaz doubles down on his evil ways.

Verse 23: **“For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, ‘Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.’ But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.”** At the point when the Syrians were having some success in attacking Judah, King Ahaz embraced the Syrian gods. Earlier he was adding Canaanite gods to his worship list. But it gets worst.

We find out in vv. 24 & 25, **“And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger the Lord, the God of his fathers.”**

It was common practice among countries in the Ancient Near East to add gods to their national worship schedule. People tended to be polytheistic, to worship many gods, to have a certain respect for the gods of other countries. But King Ahaz now is flat out rejecting the God of his own country’s tradition. In a similar way, in our country we are seeing an increasing number of people, especially among our cultural elites, rejecting

the Christian tradition which was largely responsible for establishing the political freedoms and legal rights which we enjoy.

Verses 26 & 27: **“Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 27 And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.”** A significant sign of dishonor in that culture was to have a disrespectful burial. In this case Ahaz was buried, but not in the tombs of the kings of Israel. He was disrespected by his own people.

It was a sad outcome for King Ahaz. He failed to learn from his nation’s history. He failed to listen to the testimony of his own ancestor King David. For these are the things which King David wrote about in his Psalms about the proper source of help for people in need, especially for kings. (PSALM 27:9) In Psalm 27:9 David wrote, **“Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!”**

In Psalm 40 v. 17 (PSALM 40:17) David wrote, **“As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!”**

In Psalm 63 v. 7 (PSALM 63:7) he wrote, **“...for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.”**

In Psalm 70 v. 5 the testimony of King David is this: **“But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!”** How interesting that the most powerful king in the Ancient Near East at the time describes himself as poor and needy. Perhaps that is the true state of affairs for all of us. Perhaps we are all poor and needy and in need of divine help. How sad it is when we reject His help!

III.

We come then to AHAZ AND PROMISED HELP FROM THE RIGHT PLACE. (III. AHAZ AND PROMISED HELP FROM THE RIGHT PLACE) The prophet Isaiah was a contemporary of King Ahaz. He confronted the king at the point of the latter’s rule when Israel and Syria were attacking Judah and threatening to capture Jerusalem. The year was 734 BC.

The incident is described in Isaiah #7 vv. 1-16, which is found on p. 571 of the black Bibles. In the first four verses we read, **“In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. 2 When the house of David was told, ‘Syria is in league with Ephraim,’ the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. 3 And the Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out to meet**

Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. 4 And say to him, "Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.""

Two years later both of these kings would be dead. Isaiah is offering help to calm the fear of Ahaz and his people. Jerusalem will not be captured, and the enemy kings will end up dead. But Ahaz is not inclined to believe it.

Isaiah continues his message to the king of Judah in vv. 5-9: **"Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, 6 'Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,' 7 thus says the Lord God: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. 8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. 9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.""** The reality is that the northern kingdom of Israel will be overcome by Assyria. If King Ahaz does not believe the word of God, if he does not trust in YHWH, he will suffer an ignominious death. In 2 Chronicles #28 we learn that he continues to reject the God of Israel and the words of His prophet. So Ahaz has a short life and is buried apart from his ancestors.

Verses 10-16: **"Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 11 'Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.' 12 But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.' 13 And he said, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.'"**

There is debate about the implication of this prophecy for the time of Ahaz and Isaiah. But it is clear from the New Testament that Isaiah's words find ultimate fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ. So here is the tie of our lesson to the Christmas story.

(MATTHEW 1:22-23) The gospel writer Matthew writes in #1 vv. 22 & 23 of his gospel, **"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."** The God-man Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem on that Christmas day to a virgin, became the fulfillment of mankind's deepest need for help, the deliverance from the power and the consequences of sin. At the end of His earthly life this Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. When we put our trust in Jesus, when we embrace Him, when we welcome

Him into our lives, we receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

My relatives testify that my cousin's son Adam has trust in Jesus. So whatever happens, his deepest need for help will be met. His church and extended family are providing the need for emotional and spiritual support. A GoFundMe page has been set up to help meet the family's financial needs. Many people are praying for him and his family.

Though we may not always be consciously aware of it, we all have a need for help in many areas. The right place to find the source of greatest help is in the God who created us and in the Son of God who became a man and who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.