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2 Kings 17 - 18



2 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses the events detailed in 2 Kings 17-18. He begins by touching upon the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and their worship of the god Molech. Gregg highlights that Israel had turned away from Yahweh God and built high places and watchtowers for themselves, ultimately rejecting the statutes and covenant made by their fathers. Lastly, the speaker delves into the story of Judah's kingdom and how the decisions made by their kings were not necessarily directed by God's hand as some may interpret.

Transcript

In 2 Kings 17 we have the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This kingdom began, of course, the generation after Solomon in the reign of his son Rehoboam. The ten northern tribes, as they are usually regarded to be, the count is kind of strange, but the ten northern tribes became an independent nation and had a series of 20 kings over a period of roughly two centuries.

And they came to their end because all their kings were wicked. They all worshipped idols and that God would tolerate them as long as he did without destroying them is the amazing thing. I mean, the grace of God in the Old Testament is so evident to anyone who's looking for it.

People sometimes think, well, the Old Testament God is just a God full of wrath. The New Testament God, he's a merciful God, so how come God changed so much? He didn't change. If you really read the Old Testament, you'll see God's amazingly merciful.

He puts up for 200 years with 20 bad kings, or 19 bad kings, and does not destroy them immediately. He puts up with them and they're, you know, worshipping Baal. They're offering their children to Molech.

I mean, this is the kind of thing, if I were God, I'd step in earlier. But he's more patient than we are. And so we have the end of the Northern Kingdom described in chapter 17.

In the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah, Hosea, the son of Elah, became king of Israel in

Samaria, and he reigned nine years. And he did evil in the sight of Yahweh, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Not quite as bad, but not enough of an improvement to really save the nation from its inevitable doom.

Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, this is another king, not Tiglath-Pileser, this is a later king, came up against him and Hosea became his vassal and paid him tribute money. And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hosea, for he had sent messengers to sow the king of Egypt and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria as he had done year by year. Therefore, the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

Now, this shutting up of Hosea, the king, in prison is mentioned here, but it may be mentioned by way of anticipation. It's probably after the city of Samaria fell to Shalmaneser that he captured the king and bound him up in prison. This would simply be a summary of what was about to be reported in greater detail.

Now, the reason that Assyria came down and did the damage they did and didn't tolerate Samaria anymore was because Samaria had been under tribute to Assyria and every year they paid their tribute money, but then they decided they were tired of doing that, and so they wanted to withhold their tribute money. Well, they wouldn't do that, of course, without some strong backup, because Assyria could easily destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, and so they had made some kind of an agreement with the king of Egypt, whom they thought might be strong enough to help them against Assyria if there was any repercussion from their withholding tribute money. You know, in the Bible, in the Old Testament, the kings of Judah and the kings of Israel often were tempted to try to get Egypt on their side against the northern aggressors, both Assyria and Babylon.

It was a temptation to these kings of Israel to get Egypt as an ally, but Egypt never helped anybody. Egypt was worthless, and that is actually what one of the Rabshikas, the guy who besieged Jerusalem at a later time, the Assyrian general Rabshika, he said, if you're thinking about trusting in Egypt to help you, forget it. They're worthless.

That's like leaning on a broken reed that's going to break and pierce your hand, because he said Egypt is worthless, and that's truly the case, and even the prophet Isaiah said the same thing in Isaiah chapter 30, warning Hezekiah not to put his trust in Egypt and not to listen to those counselors who were suggesting that he should, because Egypt, he said, is a do-nothing nation. They never have helped anyone that was looking to them to be an ally. And so Hoshea decided he was going to stop paying tribute to Assyria, but he needed an ally to protect him from an invasion from Assyria over this offense.

So he had made a conspiracy, sending messengers to the king of Egypt. Now, we don't read here that the king of Egypt made any agreement with them, but they sent a request that the king of Egypt would stand by them if they got into a problem with Assyria, and the Assyrians found out about these messengers and therefore came down and attacked. Now, the king of Assyria went throughout all the land and went up to

Samaria.

Remember, Samaria is the capital now of the northern kingdom, and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria and placed them in Hala and by the Hebor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. That is, he took the native people of the northern kingdom of Israel out of the country and beyond the Euphrates and distributed them throughout the fertile crescent up there, away from their home.

This was, of course, to prevent there from ever being an uprising against Assyria again. You know, if you conquer people and keep them in their land, they can always have aspirations of independence again. Well, we're in our land, but we're paying tribute to this guy.

We may be able to overthrow his yoke. But if they're all taken out of the land and none of the native people are there anymore, the idea of winning back their country from the oppressor is kind of out of the question. The people are scattered around.

And that was the strategy that the Assyrians followed. It's known from history that in all of their conquests they did that. They depopulated the regions that they conquered, and then they would repopulate them with other people of other races.

And that's what happened in Israel also. We shall see. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

And they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel which they had made. Also, the children of Israel secretly did against Yahweh their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. Apparently from watchtower to fortified city means that almost any place there was a lofty perch to build on, they built a high place, even if it was just a watchtower and not much of a city there at all, just a lookout city, or if it was a fortified city, they built high places wherever there was a mound.

They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree, and there they burned incense. Now this is really just a summary of the sins that they committed for which this judgment came. The writer of 2 Kings wants to go into this and preach a little bit and point out that, you know, these are all the things they did to deserve what they got.

So they set up sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree, and there they burned incense in all the high places as the nations had done whom the Lord had carried away before them. And they did wicked things to provoke the

Lord's anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, You shall not do this thing. Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah by all his prophets, namely every seer, saying, Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments, and my statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

Now basically it's saying all the prophets had the same message. Obviously each of the prophets had certain unique things about their ministries, about their emphasis and so forth, but this is a pretty good summary of the message you find in all the prophets that God sent. Basically, turn from your evil ways, turn back to God, and keep his commandments, and keep the covenant.

Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks like the necks of their fathers who did not believe in Yahweh their God. And they rejected his statutes and his covenant that he had made with their fathers and his testimonies which he had testified against them. They followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them concerning whom Yahweh had charged them that they should not do like them.

So they left all the commandments of Yahweh their God made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshipped all the hosts of heaven, that is the stars, the astral deities, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, of course to Moloch. They practiced witchcraft and soothsaying and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger.

Therefore Yahweh was very angry with Israel and removed them from his sight. There was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of Yahweh their God but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made.

And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers until he had cast them from his sight. For he tore Israel from the house of David and they made Jeroboam the Son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit a great sin.

For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did and they did not depart from them until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria as it is to this day. Now the writer is writing at a time where they were still there.

And if he was writing today he could still say that as it is to this day. These people never came back. They didn't even continue to be a people because as they were distributed among the nations they typically intermarried.

They obviously had never been zealous for Yahweh or for the law that God had given so why abstain from intermarrying with pagans? And they did not abstain from intermarrying with pagans and basically their tribes got all diluted until there really wasn't much of a Israel left. Now remember though that those ten tribes all had representatives or remnants of them that had previous to this had immigrated to the south to the kingdom of Judah. So that even though the northern tribal territories were depopulated by Assyria some members of each tribe had already escaped sometimes generations earlier into Judah and were living along there.

So the survival of the tribe of Judah was really the survival of a remnant of all the twelve tribes. Pretty much all of the tribe of Judah was left untouched and Benjamin too because they were confederate Judah but the other ten tribes were represented in smaller numbers in the kingdom of Judah. So we lose the kingdom of Israel and the people who were depopulated did never come back.

The land was never restored to them. This is different than how God dealt with Judah at a later date because later on the Babylonians carried off Judah but they came back and rebuilt their city and their kingdom again. Not their empire but their kingdom.

So here we have a reference to the fact that the Israelites had gone away out of their own land and this is an abiding circumstance. Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Ava, Hamath and from the Sefer Vahim and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. So now we have a non-Jewish population brought in and they are now occupying the land.

So you've got the true Israelites have been removed, pagans have been brought in so the land is pretty well established as a pagan territory now. And it was so at the beginning of their dwelling there that they did not fear Yahweh because they were pagans. They didn't fear Yahweh.

Therefore Yahweh sent lions among them which killed some of them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria saying the nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the god of the land. They considered Yahweh to be a territorial god and therefore they figured we need to learn how to avoid angering the local god in this new area where we've been relocated.

Therefore he has sent lions among them and indeed they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the god of the land. Now this was of course the interpretation that the pagans put on it. And there is some truth in it because the author himself said the lord sent lions among them because of their paganism.

The author himself commits himself to the fact that it was the lord sending such a judgment upon them. But they thought it was because they didn't know the rituals of the

land. They didn't know what foods were clean or unclean and so forth.

And so they wanted to be taught those things. Obviously it was the worshipping of other gods that God was offended by. Not the neglect of the rituals of the land.

The Gentiles were never required to keep the rituals of Judaism. The rituals of the temple and so forth were only given to Israel and people who would become proselytes. And remember a proselyte would be a Gentile who converted to Judaism.

These people were not converting to Judaism. They just wanted to not do things that were overly offensive to the local god Yahweh. And the king of Assyria commanded saying send there one of the priests whom you brought from there.

Let him go and dwell there. And let him teach the rituals of the god of the land. Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel.

And he taught them how they should fear Yahweh. Now this is a curious thing because the priests in Samaria were not Levites. Jeroboam had removed the Levites from being priests years earlier and had established a priesthood of other people from other tribes.

Anyone who could pay enough money to buy a position got to be a priest. And of course the priests in Samaria were priests of a country that officially worshipped golden calves in Bethel and in Dan. These were not exactly priests who had a background of serving Yahweh with all their heart.

However, it may be that this priest and others had learned their lesson. Even though they weren't real priests, they weren't Levites, but they were perhaps trained in the religion of Israel and maybe they at this point realized that Yahweh is the one I better teach them about. And they did have access to the Law of Moses, no doubt.

I mean, there's no reason why they couldn't get a copy and check it out. So some priest was sent back to teach the people the ways of Yahweh so that they could stop having these lions come and eat them. However, every nation continued to make gods of its own and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt.

The men of Babylon made Sukkoth, Benoth. The men of Kuth made Nergal. The men of Hamath made Ashima.

And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak. And the Sefervites burned their children in the fire to Adremalek and Anemalek, the gods of Sefer Veyim. By the way, these gods are not known from other records.

These are such obscure gods that commentators don't even know who these gods were. But they were apparently local deities of some of these captive peoples who'd been

repositioned, relocated into the land. So they made temples and shrines for these gods.

They even burned their children. But these were not Israelites doing it. So God doesn't expect pagans to follow him like he expected Israel to do.

But he didn't like them neglecting his land completely. So it says in verse 32, So they feared Yahweh, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places who sacrificed for them. In the shrines of the high places they feared Yahweh, yet they served their own gods according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

Now these people learned some of the rituals of Yahweh out of fear of lions. But they did not learn to be monotheists. They did not learn to worship Yahweh as the supreme god or even as the only god.

They still worshipped their pagan gods and they just sought to placate this Yahweh, the local god, so he wouldn't send lions. The Jews of later generations referred to these people as proselytes of the lion. It's very similar to what missionaries call rice Christians.

You ever heard the expression rice Christians? Rice bowl Christians? Missionaries who first went to Asia found that they could get a lot more people to come to church if they served meals. And people were drawn to the meals, just like in Jesus' day that people were drawn to his feeding the multitudes. They wanted free food.

And so early missionaries in Asia found that lots of people would come and profess Christianity as long as the rice was served. But when they stopped having the meals, these people fell away. And so they were obviously not true converts and missionaries referred to such people as rice Christians.

And the Jews referred to these people as proselytes of the lion. Rice Christians are drawn to religion for the sake of getting rice. These people were drawn to Yahweh for the sake of avoiding being eaten by lions.

But it's clear they had no real reverence for Yahweh. And we read further, verse 34, To this day they continue practicing the former rituals. They do not fear Yahweh, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances or the law and commandments which Yahweh had commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel, with whom Yahweh had made a covenant and charged them, saying, You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them.

But Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, him you shall fear, him you shall worship, and to him you shall offer sacrifice. And the statutes, the ordinances, the law and the commandments which he wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever, you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other

gods.

But Yahweh your God, you shall fear, and he will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies. However, they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. So these nations feared Yahweh, yet served their carved images.

Also their children and their children's children have continued doing so as their fathers did even to this day. Now these people, it sounds like what we've been talking about here in verses 34 through 39 may be a reference again back to the Israelites who were carried away in captivity. They didn't follow their God.

They didn't follow their rituals and God had warned them about that. But then it comes back in verse 40 it says now these nations that came in to occupy the land, they also of course worshipped their own gods, although they did fear Yahweh. It's in contrast to apparently the Israelites who did not fear Yahweh in verse 34.

To this day they continue practicing the former rituals. They do not fear Yahweh. That is apparently a reference to Israel, but the pagans who came in feared Yahweh at least enough to avoid the lions, not enough to give up their their idolatry altogether.

Now this next chapter 18 and the rest of the book of 2 Kings deals obviously with only the kingdom of Judah. We're not going to be bouncing back and forth anymore between the north and the south. There's no north.

And so the rest of the history is going to take us through the decline and fall of the southern kingdom of Judah. There will be a repeat in this chapter of what God did to the northern kingdom. No new information, just a repeat of it.

But we're going to be looking at this point at the refreshing reign of Hezekiah. Now Hezekiah was a good king. His father Ahaz was a bad king, but his grandfather Jotham and great-grandfather Uzziah were good kings.

So in the case of the godliness of Jotham, it skipped a generation to Hezekiah. And in between there was Ahaz who was as wicked as Judah ever probably had in a king, which is discouraging and encouraging in a sense. Those of us who are grandparents, it's good to know that if your grandkids have a bad father, they might still be influenced by a good grandparent like yourself.

Of course, nobody wants their own children to be bad. But if your own children do go bad and they have children, then you worry about your grandkids. And here Jotham's son Ahaz went bad.

But Jotham's grandkid Hezekiah went good. And I'm not really sure whether that was because of the influence of the grandfather. But certainly having a few good kings in Judah meant that they didn't go very many generations in a row without someone

remembering Yahweh and deciding to serve him.

And it was no doubt the residual influence of Uzziah and Jotham in the kingdom despite Ahaz's evil rule in between that allowed at least Hezekiah to be mindful of Yahweh and to make a decision whether he would serve him or not. I was asked during the last break whether there's any pattern to why one king is good and another one's bad. And it doesn't seem to be a pattern.

You've got a couple good ones in a row, then a few bad ones in a row, and then a good one, then a bad one, and so forth. And I think it just reflects free will. I think that every king has his own choice.

And history takes its turns according to the free choices of rulers. Now, the Bible does say in Proverbs 21.1 that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. And as the rivers of water, he directs it whithersoever he will.

But while some persons would take that to mean that every decision a king makes, God is directing it like a puppet, like a hand puppet or something. I don't believe that's necessarily what Solomon means. I believe that what he's saying is God, whenever he wishes, can step in and direct a king to make a decision that's according to what God's purpose will be.

He doesn't necessarily mean that every time a king makes a horrible decision that God made him do it. When these kings turned against God and worshiped Baal and so forth, there's no reason to believe that God put it in their hearts to worship Baal, or else why would he punish them for it? You know, it wouldn't make any sense. These people made their own choices.

True, in the course of a king's reign, God can tweak or direct decisions he'll make, as when he, for example, hardened Pharaoh's heart. Or he might put it in another king's heart who's a good king to do a certain thing that's good. I think it's just everyone has their own free will.

There certainly is not a pattern that we see in the Southern Kingdom of what some people think of as generational sin. It's true. Sometimes a son goes bad like his father, but then his grandson goes good.

There's really no pattern to it. It's just random. People choose what they choose.

Now, it came to pass in the third year of Hosea, the son of Elah, so we're stepping back now before what we just read. We just read about the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in the reign of Hosea, in the ninth year of Hosea. But now we're going back to the third year of Hosea, six years before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, picking up the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abbi, the daughter of Zechariah.

Probably yet another Zechariah that we don't know anything else about. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done. That is his ancestor David.

Now, we are going to read a little bit here about the good things he did. But there's a lot recorded about the good things he did. In 2 Chronicles, a rather lengthy section, 2 Chronicles 29, 30, and 31.

And with this many chapters devoted to his good deeds, you can see that he's regarded to be one of the best kings. If you look at 2 Chronicles 29, you see that verses 1 and 2 are pretty much what we just read in Kings. And then it says, in 2 Chronicles 29, 3, In the first year of his reign, this is Hezekiah's, in the first month he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.

Apparently, because of Ahaz's rebellion and apostasy, the temple had been closed up and apparently fallen into disrepair. And so, right at the very beginning of his reign, Hezekiah repaired the doors, opened them up, and made the temple accessible and useful to be used to worship Yahweh again. Then he brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them in the east square.

And he said to them, Hear me, Levites, now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord your God, of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. So, apparently it just became a place in the days of Ahaz, the evil king, where they threw rubbish, like a dump, in the holy place. Obviously, that would have only been done as a means of showing contempt to Yahweh.

For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of Yahweh our God, and have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the habitation of Yahweh, and turned their backs on Him. They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to God of Israel. Therefore, the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to astonishment, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes.

This was because in the day of his father Ahaz, that's when Syria and Israel had come down and slaughtered so many of them, over a hundred thousand of them slaughtered in one day, and also two hundred thousand women and children carried away, although they were returned. But there was a lot of bloodshed in the days of Ahaz. He says that was the wrath of Yahweh upon Judah and Jerusalem.

For indeed, because of this, our fathers have fallen by the sword, our sons, our

daughters, and our wives are in captivity. Some of them apparently stayed in captivity. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with Yahweh, God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us.

My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him to burn incense. You know, there is maybe a possibility, I'm not sure if there's any merit in this suggestion, but maybe, you know, when we read that those two hundred thousand women and children were taken into captivity in Samaria, and then we read that the prophet Obed rebuked them and they sent them back, it may be that their stay in Samaria was a while before the prophet Obed got through to these people. But I don't know.

It sounds to me from reading it earlier that they never really brought them into Samaria. But the fact that Hezekiah said our women and children are in captivity makes me wonder if maybe they weren't all sent back, maybe they hadn't been sent back yet. We've read about it, because it was part of the story that had been taken away, that they were eventually sent home again.

But I wonder if they were sent back in the days of Hezekiah rather than in the days of Ahaz. I don't know. I'm not sure if the information is adequate to say.

But there were some of the women and children in captivity at least, apparently, when he gave this speech. And he says, I want to enter into a covenant with the Lord and our people to reestablish our relationship with Him. That His fierce anger may turn away from us.

My sons, do not be negligent now, for Yahweh has chosen you to stand before Him, he's talking to the priests, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense. Then these Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites, and of the sons of the Merari. Now these were two of the branches of the Levitical tribe, Kohath and Merari.

Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehaiel, of the Gershonites. Now the Gershonites were the third branch of the Levites. Joah the son of Zima, and Eden the son of Joah.

Of the sons of Elezathan, Shimri, and Jioh. Of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah, and Mattathiah, another Zechariah. Of the sons of Heman, Jehil, and Shimei.

And of the sons of Zedathan, Shemiah, and Uziel. And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord, and the Levites took it out

and carried it to the brook Kidron.

Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord. Apparently it took them about seven days or so to empty the trash out of the holy place, and then they began to work on the vestibule. Then they sanctified the house of the Lord in the eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

Then they went to the king Hezekiah and said, We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering with all its articles, and the table of showbread with its articles. Moreover, all the articles which king Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified, and there they are before the altar of the Lord. So remember Ahaz had set up a pagan altar there and set aside the bronze altar.

They've now rectified that situation. And other things that Ahaz had set aside apparently were still available in storage or something, and they brought them back out. So now it was pretty much set up to do the normal procedures that it originally was set up for in the days of Solomon.

Then king Hezekiah arose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of Yahweh. And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. Then he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord.

So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. Likewise they killed the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar. Also they killed the lambs and sprinkled the blood on the altar.

Then they brought out the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the congregation, and they laid their hands on them, and the priests killed them, and they presented their blood on the altar as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel. For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offerings be made for all Israel. Then he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals and stringed instruments and with harps according to the commandment of David.

Now remember that David was the one who innovated this musical instrument aspect of worship of the temple. David, actually the temple wasn't standing, but the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem in the days of David, housed in a tent. And David had set up priests and Levites who were trained as musicians to surround the Ark of the Covenant and to sing his own compositions, and those of the sons of Asaph and others, and the sons of Korah, psalms.

They sang psalms around the Ark day and night. Now this apparently had been

discontinued along with other aspects of worship. Moses did not ever ordain any use of music in the worship at the tabernacle.

The first things they restored were what Moses had done, but then now they restored what David had innovated also, and that is the musical instruments to be worshipping God with music in the temple. In the middle of verse 25, it says, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet, for thus was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets. So not only David, but the prophets of his day, Nathan and Gad, confirmed by the word of the Lord that they should use music in their worship.

This was not something God revealed in the days of Moses, but apparently a progressive revelation through his later prophets, Gad and Nathan, and David, who is also a prophet, that these musical instruments should be used in worship. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offerings on the altar.

And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, and with the trumpets and with the instruments of David, king of Israel. So all the congregation worshipped. The singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded.

All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshipped. Moreover, king Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer.

These were the principal writers of the psalms. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the Lord.

So the congregation brought the sacrifices and thank offerings, and as many as were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. This is not compulsory. And the number of the burnt offerings which the congregation brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, 200 lambs.

All these were for a burnt offering to the Lord. The consecrated things were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep, but the priests were too few, so that they could not skin all the burnt offerings. Therefore their brethren, the Levites, helped them until the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves.

For the Levites were more diligent in sanctifying themselves than the priests. Now remember the difference was that the Levites were the whole tribe of Levi who were set aside in Moses' day for working at the tabernacle. The priests were one of the families within that tribe.

Aaron and his sons and descendants were the priests, and they were Levites also. But apparently the Levites as a tribe were tending to get ready to re-enter the service faster than the priests were. Maybe more motivated.

Maybe because the Levites whose support came from tithes might have been having some lean years. Back when people were not tithing, when they were worshipping other gods, the Levites might have been having a hard time making a living because they had to live on tithes. Whereas the priests in the days of Ahaz were probably paid to offer on the pagan altar that he'd set up and so forth.

I mean he probably was using priests in some cases. I don't know. But for some reason the Levites were more in a hurry to get sanctified and get back to work than the priests were.

Also the burnt offerings were in abundance, and the fat of the peace offerings, and with drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order. Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people since the event took place so suddenly.

It was rather short notice, but still the Lord moved the people to respond quickly. Chapter 30. We're not going to read this entire chapter for the simple reason that it's a detailed description of the keeping of Passover.

Hezekiah sent out runners to all the land to invite people to come and keep the Passover again, something that had been neglected also. So the restoration of the Passover is recorded in some detail in chapter 30, which we will not at this time take the time to read, but only to summarize in that way. But in chapter 31 then, of 2 Chronicles, now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh until they had utterly destroyed them all.

Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession. So it seems like Hezekiah was not alone in his zeal for God, but the people themselves bought in to his zeal, and they all went out and they destroyed every relic, a remnant of paganism out there. Even threw down the high places and the altars, which is very unusual to see happen in verse 1 there.

And it seems like we've got a general revival in Judah. And it starts to look encouraging. Maybe this nation can redeem itself.

Maybe this nation can stop being so corrupt. Unfortunately, Hezekiah ended up having a son, Manasseh, who was the worst king they ever had, and reestablished all this idolatry again. Verse 2, Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according

to their divisions, each man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to serve to give thanks and praise in the gates of the camp of the Lord.

The king also appointed a portion of his possessions for the burnt offerings, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, the burnt offerings for sabbaths and the new moons and the feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord. Moreover, he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord. As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field, and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

And the children of Israel and Judah, who dwelt in the cities of Judah, brought the tithe of oxen and sheep, also the tithe of holy things, which were consecrated to the Lord their God, they laid in heaps. In the third month they began laying them in heaps, and they finished in the seventh month. So the tithes were collected over a period of about four months, and they had these big mounds, big heaps of grain and other stuff for the Levites and the priests to live on.

Apparently this had not been done for a while, and so they had some back taxes to pay to God. And when Hezekiah and the leaders came and saw the heaps, they blessed Yahweh and his people Israel. Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps.

And Azariah, the chief priest from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings unto the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed his people, and what is left is this great abundance. So apparently the Levites and priests had taken home to their dwellings all the things they needed, and there were still lots of heaps left over. There was too much.

Now Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them. Then they faithfully brought in the offerings, the tithes, and the dedicated things. Conaniah, the Levite, was ruler over them, and Shimei, his brother, was the next.

Then we have the names of some other guys, hard to pronounce, who were overseers from the hand of Conaniah and Shimei, his brother, at the commandment of Hezekiah, the king of Azariah, the ruler of the house of God. Cori, the son of Imnah, the Levite, the keeper of the east gate, was over the freewill offerings to God, to distribute the offerings of the Lord and the most holy things. And under him were Eden, Menaimon, and some other guys whose names will not be on the text.

These were his faithful assistants in the cities of the priests, to distribute allotments to

the brethren by divisions to the great as well as the small. So they, I guess, divided up a lot of this food beyond the Levites, because they had enough already. Besides those males from three years old and up, who were written in the genealogy, they distributed to everyone who entered the house of the Lord his daily portion for the work of his service by his division.

And to the priests who were written in the genealogy according to their father's house, and to the Levites from twenty years old and up, according to their work by the divisions. And to all who were written in their genealogy, their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters, the whole company of them, for in the faithfulness they sanctify themselves in holiness. These people had to prove they were Levites by their genealogy.

that's why it emphasizes that and others were not really supposed to eat of the tithes. Also were the sons of Aaron, the priests, who were in the fields of the common lands of their cities. In every single city, there were men who were designated by name to distribute portions to all the males among the priests.

And we are spared a list of their names. And to all who were listed by genealogies among the Levites. Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah.

He did what was good and right and true before the Lord is God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment to seek God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.

So he wasn't just trying to put on a good show for God. He did this with all his heart. He really cared about seeing revival and seeing God turn away His wrath from the land.

So he did what he could. He cleaned up. He cleaned up the temple.

He re-sanctified the priests and the Levites, got them back to work, held a Passover, which hadn't been done for a long time. Re-instituted the tithes to support the priests and the Levites. They tore down images and so forth.

And basically did what he could to try to put things on a proper footing again. So back to chapter 18 of 2 Kings then. In speaking of Hezekiah's rule.

2 Kings 18.4. It says, He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images, and broken pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made. For until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it and called it nehushtan. Now nehushtan just as Hebrew means a piece of bronze or a piece of brass.

And you remember that back in the book of Numbers, the children of Israel because of their grumbling and rebellion against God had been bitten by venomous snakes and were dying. Moses interceded for them and God said make a serpent out of bronze or brass and put it up on a pole. And when people look at it they'll be healed.

Well, that had happened and apparently they preserved the serpent as a relic. Sort of like the Roman Catholic Church likes to preserve what they consider to be splinters from the cross and things like that. It became as in the case of the Catholic relics an object of worship for people.

They began to burn incense to it as if it was a god. People are incurably superstitious. And so Hezekiah seeing that this object which Moses had made, and what a valuable museum piece that would be for Israel to have something that goes back to the time of Moses.

Actually crafted by Moses a thousand years earlier among them and yet he destroyed it. He said this is, no, this is you people are worshipping this thing. We're not going to have that anymore.

I'm going to destroy the temptation. This thing is just a nehushtan. It's just a piece of brass.

It's not a god. And so he destroyed that image of a serpent and called it a piece of brass. Then he trusted in the Lord God of Israel so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah nor any who were before him.

Now, actually Josiah was a lot like him before but this is that typical that typical hyperbole that we find in the Old Testament. None like him before or after. Well, that's almost true at least but there were some certainly Jehoshaphat, Josiah and a few others were very much like him in these same respects.

The Lord was with him. He prospered wherever he went and he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory from watchtower to fortified city.

Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah which was the seventh year of Hosea, the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria and besieged it. So we're telling us, we've already read about that. We're going to read again about the destruction of the northern kingdom but it's here being placed within the chronology of Hezekiah's reign.

We had it told to us in chapter 17 without reference to Hezekiah and now we're going to get the same information pretty much but connected to how that stands with reference to Hezekiah's reign. It was in the fourth year of King Hezekiah that Shalmaneser came up and besieged Samaria and at the end of three years they took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hosea, the king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

Then the king of Assyria carried away Israel captive into Assyria and put them in Hallah and by the Habor and the river Gozan and in the cities of the Medes. Because they did not obey the voice of Yahweh their God but transgressed his covenant and all that

Moses, the servant of Yahweh, had commanded. And they would neither hear nor do them.

And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah. Now this is ten years later. We read about the fall of Israel actually in the seventh year or sixth year of Hezekiah.

And now we skip up to the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah. Another Assyrian ruler now and this is going to be Sennacherib. Now after Shalmaneser, the Assyrian ruler who conquered Israel, there was a Sargon the second.

He is not mentioned but once in the Bible. In Isaiah chapter 20. In Isaiah 20 and verse 1 it says, In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and took it at the same time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz and blah blah blah.

Now not to disregard what he said but the point here is that Sargon the king of Assyria would be the second Sargon chronologically. There was an earlier Sargon. And for many years, many decades critics of the Bible said that this Sargon the second did not exist.

That Isaiah must have been mistaken. Because there was only one Sargon who lived much earlier. And so they thought this was an error in Isaiah's writing that there was no Sargon living at that time.

But indeed they later excavated Sargon's palace. Which was at Ur I believe if I'm not mistaken. And Sargon there was indeed a second Sargon.

He was the son of Shalmaneser. He was the one who, actually not the son of the brother of Shalmaneser. Shalmaneser was the Assyrian king who conquered Israel.

Sargon his brother ruled after him. In fact, in the secular records, which we now have about Sargon the second, he claimed that he conquered Israel. In the secular records, Sargon says he conquered Samaria.

But scholars think perhaps when his brother Shalmaneser was king, Sargon might have been the head of the armies. And that might be why he succeeded Shalmaneser as the next king of Assyria. He might have been a military hero.

If so, he might well have been the leader of the armies that conquered Samaria and thus he would see fit to take credit for that. Although the Bible says Shalmaneser did that. Anyway, it was after Sargon was gone that we now have Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and he now comes against Judah.

Shalmaneser didn't do that. Didn't come against Judah. Not against Jerusalem anyway.

But this later king has decided to expand his territory as far as Judah and Jerusalem. And

it says he came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish saying, I have done wrong.

Turn away from me. Whatever you impose on me, I will pay. You see, we're told back in verse 7 that he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

That probably just means he didn't send tribute to him. And now Assyria comes down to penalize him and he says, I'm sorry. I did the wrong thing.

Tell me how much I owe. What are my back taxes? Let me know and I'll pay it up best I can. Just don't destroy us here, please.

He says, and the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah, king of Judah, 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold. So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time, Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Now, there's no great sin in doing this, but it certainly shows his priorities that he's willing to strip down the temple of a lot of its ornaments in order to keep it standing. No doubt he thought, this is how I'm going to save the temple from being destroyed by the Assyrians. Yet, he no doubt could have trusted the Lord and not had to do this.

Verse 17, and the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabserus and the Rabshika from Lachish. And with a great army against Jerusalem, apparently they took the money, but they decided to come against him anyway. Against Hezekiah.

And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they came and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, which was on the highway to the fuller's field. And when they had called to the king, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to them.

That is, three messengers from the king Hezekiah went out of the city to negotiate with the besieging army of Assyria. Then the Rabshika, who was the general over the Assyrian armies, said to them, Say now to Hezekiah, thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, what confidence is this in which you trust? You speak of having counsel and strength for war, but they are vain words, and in whom do you trust that you rebel against me? Now look, you are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who trust in him.

But if you say to me, we are trusting in Yahweh our God, well, is it not he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, you shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? The Rabshika was not very familiar with

Yahweh, and he thought that the high places in Israel were for worshipping Yahweh. And so he said, well, you trust in Yahweh, but haven't you offended Him by taking down the high places and worshipping only here in Jerusalem? Obviously this man needed to do more research. Now therefore I urge you, give a pledge to my master, the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to put riders on them.

How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? In other words, you want to fight me? I'll even provide the horses. I'll give you two thousand horses. If you can find two thousand guys who can ride a horse in your city, then let them come after.

We'll provide the horses. And let's fight. You will not be able to repel even one of our captains.

He's boasting. Have I now come up without Yahweh against this place to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, go up against this land and destroy it. Now he's just using intimidation techniques.

Of course Yahweh did not tell him to do that. He's just claiming, well, you think you can trust Yahweh? Well, guess what? He told me to come and destroy you, so he's not going to be on your side. You better just surrender.

Then Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to Rabbi Sheker, please speak to your servants in Aramaic language, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall. In other words, we know your language, Aramaic.

Why don't you negotiate that? You're speaking in Hebrew and you're going to we don't want the people on the wall to hear what you're saying. Well, of course not. They didn't want the people on the wall to be intimidated.

So they said, let's not use Hebrew here in our conversation. But the Rabbi Sheker said to them, has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words or not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you? In other words, you're going to be starving and then you'll be eating your own waste, your own excrement. Then the Rabbi Sheker stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew and spoke to the people on the wall saying, hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria.

Thus says the king, do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand. Nor let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us. This city shall not be given to the hand of the king of Assyria.

Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, make peace with me by a present and come out to me. And every one of you eat from his own vine and every one

from his own fig tree. And every one of you drink from the waters of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread vineyard, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die.

But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Conquered territories already. Where are the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Iva? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand? What he's saying to them is this, yes, I'm going to conquer you.

Yes, I'm going to deport you. But make it easy on yourselves. I don't have to kill you.

I don't have to destroy Jerusalem and kill you all. Just come out and surrender. For the time being, I'll let you go back to your farms.

You can be in your homes. Drink from your own cisterns. Till your own fields.

Feed yourself and your family. And later, I'll come and I'll deport you. But I'll deport you to a land that's not different than your own.

You won't feel so out of place. It's not like an awful place to be. You'll just be out of Israel.

You won't be here anymore. That's what he's saying. Better to let me deport you peaceably to a place that's not really that bad to go, he's saying.

Then to have a war and have me wipe you all out. But the people held their peace and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, Do not answer him. Then Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shibnah, the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, because they were grieved at these words, and they told him the words of Rabshicah.

And the story continues, and it takes a very positive swing upward with the appearance of Isaiah, the prophet, who gives counsel to Hezekiah by which the nation is saved. Isaiah was an important person in Jerusalem. Apart from being a prophet, he was of the royal family himself, or the noble family related to kings.

And his counsel to Hezekiah on this occasion is what saved that nation from an early demise. So the prophet of God was a very useful man at this particular time, which we'll read about next time.