

Week 9

2 Kings 16-21

Today we're going to open up with the fall of Israel.

What's interesting to note is that it's likely the Kingdom of Israel was the stronger, superior power to the kingdom of Judah. Yet, Israel falls first. If there's one thing we'll see time and again is that Israel, the northern kingdom, is the first to divert from God's laws and his principles. They're the first people group to move away from God's temple. So their empire doesn't last on strength alone. They fall first and Judah will outlast them another 135 years. This isn't about strength and armies and chariots and kings. This is about the one king who rules them all.

The kingdom of Israel lasts around 250 years. About the length of time of the United States to now. Washington to Trump, and the kingdom is conquered by the Assyrians. In the northern kingdom of Israel, 10 of the 12 tribes are represented and after this invasion of

Assyria, those 10 tribes will be lost to history without much of a paper trail to follow.

In 721 B.C., Israel is conquered by Assyria. 2 Kings 17:1— Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. 2 And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. 3 Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered 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. 5 Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Just like that, 250 years of rebellion and trying to make their own way, trying to be their own rulers, following in the sins of Jeroboam who built the idols in Bethel and Dan, 250 years of trying to make the word of God fit inside their world instead of the other way around, 250 years of child sacrifice, sexual sins, famines, words from God's people, blatantly ignoring the commands of God. And he lets their enemy conquer them, consume them, and they disappear.

2 Kings 17:7 – And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods 8 and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced.

So we see in scripture, first they sinned against the Lord who had rescued them. They forgot their redemption. They forgot they were purchased and ransomed and redeemed by the Lord. They forgot

the work God did on their behalf. How they were helpless and he heard their cries and rescued them from a life of death and slavery. They forgot that they were called to be citizens of another country, set apart as different people amidst wayward nations. God gave them laws, rules, culture, and they ignored it and followed the laws, rules, and culture of the people who God had protected and preserved them from.

They forget God, and do not do what he reminded them to do again and again in Deuteronomy 8:11-20 —

“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, **12** lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, **13** and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, **14** then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, **15** who led you through the great and terrifying

wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, **16** who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. **17** Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ **18** You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. **19** And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. **20** Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

See the Lord knows. We will forget. Deutereonomy 11:18-20 — You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. **19** You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and

when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 20 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,

He tells them — write these words from me everywhere. You know when I lived in Texas, I used to roll my eyes at houses that had scriptures everywhere. On every wall in script or lettering or pillows, bible verses. i was like, y'all settle down. This is too much.

But everytime i read this passage in Deut I think Z__ maybe the'yre on to something. God is like...store these oword sin your heart, write them with sharpie on your hands, hang them over your eyes, talk about them at the breakfast table, when you're walking to work, when you're driving to school, when you're waking up in the morning, when you're falling asleep, in fact...write them down and hang them all over your walls in handlettering and put them everywhere...

Why?

Because we forget. When we do not fix our gaze on him, we wander. This is why we sing every week of what he did for us. When we take communion, we remember. When we share our testimonies of how he saved us, we remember. When we pray, we remember our dependence. When we tithe, we remember his sufficiency. When we study the word, we remember who he is. When we repent, we remember his grace.

Again and again and again, we strive to remember. We know our own hearts. We know how temporal our desires are. We know how fickle we are with earthly loves. How quickly we move on from our first passions. Don't lie to yourself — you forget and so do I.

And that's what happened to his people.

Then it continues in verse 9 –

9 And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 11 and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them.

So not only do they forget and intentionally not remember the work of God in their midst, they establish within their midst the love of other gods. See, I think we think that they just didn't worship God and went on their merry way watching Netflix and working 9-5 and just numbing themselves with mindless things. They worshipped. Don't get it wrong. They worshipped and they built altars and they put reminders everywhere. They put reminders where they walked, and talked, ate, lied down, slept. They remembered ...a different god. A different love. They worshipped gods who didn't ask anything of them. Who didn't call them to live differently. Who didn't set them apart. Who didn't confront their sinful hearts.

Verse 11 — And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, 12 and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, “You shall not do this.” 13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets.”

They did the very thing that God commanded and warned them not to do...and he didn't strike them down. No, he warned them by what verse 12 says — every prophecy and every seer — turn. repent. come back. I'm right here. Like a faithful spouse who is watching his wife cheat again and again, sleeping around with every person who arouses their desire, the faithful spouse chases her down into the dark corners and says “Stop! I'm here! I love you!”

Verse 14

14 But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.

They would not listen. They didn't just ignore and forget his statutes and his covenant...they despised it. They hated it. They spit on it. They went after false idols and they became false. They became the lie.

In C.S. Lewis' book "The Great Divorce" the reader learns about a woman who dies and had spent her whole life complaining and grumbling. When she gets to heaven, the question arises if there is anything left of her soul or if she is just a grumble, as Lewis writes "just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine."

And that is what has become of the people of Israel. They worshipped false gods and became false. They were grumbling and became a grumble. Nothing left of who they were. Just the falsehood.

Verse 16

16 And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. **17** And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. **18** Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.

They abandoned all the commandments.

They worshipped false gods.

They sacrificed their children.

Used divination, which is to say they practiced witchcraft. No doubt, they tapped into the darkness of hell for their own pleasure and power.

They practiced fortune-telling and sold themselves to do evil.

God, who is real and true, promised abundance for their children.

Who gave them a hopeful future, who gave them all his knowledge, who asked nothing of them and no money from them to uphold his end of the covenant...and they rejected this.

AND God isn't provoked to anger like a curmudgeonly librarian who just wants everyone to be quiet and sit down. God's anger is just.

It's slow. It's toward wickedness, sin, and blatant disobedience. As J.I. Packer wrote in *Knowing God* "God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil."

And here's the thing — God's wrath should make you uncomfortable. His anger should make you shift in your seat a little bit. His wrath and anger is real toward sin. It's justifiable. In Christ, his wrath was satisfied. It was appeased. So we hide in Christ, knowing that when we are under the cross, with the work of salvation happening within us and to us and for us, we are safe from this wrath that we see in the Old Testament.

This doesn't mean we won't experience suffering. This doesn't mean God stops disciplining us or that we stop training in righteousness as 2 Timothy talks about. The curse of sin is still in this world. The work of sanctification might still be painful and much like a good parent disciplining a child, it will be for our good and growth and maturity. But this anger of God, which we will witness again in the day of judgment, is assuaged in the cross of Christ.

The love and mercy and grace of God is only more beautiful because we know what his love, mercy, and grace is protecting us from.

But the Israelites didn't have a savior. They didn't have a great high priest in Christ interceding for them. They didn't have a mediator. They had their sin and wickedness before a holy God. And so chapter 17:23 says this – “So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.”

Now Judah was just as wicked. But the Lord is dealing with Israel first.

The King of Assyria resettles the land with his own people groups and verse 24 tells us that just because a new king decides to claim the land, it doesn't mean God can be evicted.

24 And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities. **25** And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD. Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. **26** So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not

know the law of the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.” 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there, and let him go and dwell there and teach them the law of the god of the land.” 28 So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

..verse 41 41 So these nations feared the LORD and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children’s children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

So it continues, the northern kingdom is conquered, lost to other nations, and while they might fear God, they don’t worship him. And the rut of sin and worshipping false gods is further driven into the ground. The same path. The same sin. To them, their children, their children’s children, to when they read this book in exile, and even to now.

In Chapter 18, we see that Hezekiah becomes king of Judah. And he is a king who strives to serve the Lord. Verse 5 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. 6 For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses. 7 And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. 8 He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

His is king when Israel is conquered and he witnesses the downfall of his neighboring country. Which we're reminded, again, this happened "because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed."

After Israel is conquered, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, turns his gaze on Judah. They're a smaller nation. You can imagine that to Hezekiah, this appears that his death and their downfall is imminent. Assyria conquers the fortified cities. These are cities and forts really that sit as military protections, border protections, guards against outside enemies and Assyria takes all of them. Sennacherib demands a payment of silver and gold from Hezekiah, which he pays, but this doesn't stop Assyria.

Sennacherib and the army of Assyria rides to the gates of Judah. The Rabshakeh, who is the chief cup-bearer or the vizier of the Assyrian court, brings a message to Hezekiah's men.

His warning is this: Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? **20** Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? **21** Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of

Egypt to all who trust in him. 22 But if you say to me, We trust in the LORD our God, is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? 23 Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. 24 How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25 Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up against this land and destroy it.

He says – you think Egypt is going to help you now? You think you have enough men to even ride 2000 horses? You think God is going to help you? What makes you think God isn't with us?

It's inflammatory and inciting. Hezekiah's men respond with – hey, can you say this all in your language, which we understand but the rest of the city doesn't? Don't let them hear what you're about

to do to us.

But the cup-bearer from Assyria says – no. This is for them too.

The warning isn't just for a select few. It's for the entire nation. And he repeats it all again, except louder this time. He even promises things that sound good — Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, **32** until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die.

Ironically, this is the promise of God for his people if they were to simply obey him and worship him alone. This promise is a lie. It's not true. Sennacherib has no intention of providing this for the people of Judah, but the enemy loves to make his kingdom sound as good as God's. It's an illusion. It won't happen, but it sure sounds good versus the alternative right now. The Rabshakeh says “YOU

think your God will save you? Did the gods save anyone else?” The reputation of Assyria has gone before them. They destroy everything in their path. And now the people of God are left to wonder if God is going to protect them.

But Isaiah tells Hezekiah — pray with the remnant, and God will take vengeance on Sennacherib for his mocking of the Living God.

This is what Isaiah prophesies and what occurs — “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. **33** By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. **34** For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” (emphasis mine)

35 And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. **36** Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at

Nineveh. 37 And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat.

God fights for his people. He strikes down Assyria. God does this for his glory, his sake, and for the line of David. God will not be mocked. He isn't fighting for Assyria. He may have used Assyria as a tool of judgment against the northern kingdom, but they are not his hand.

God has spared Judah from terrifying destruction and exile.

Hezekiah falls ill not longer after this and Isaiah tells him – get your house in order. You're going to die. Hezekiah turns and prays to the Lord and asks him to heal him...

“Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: 5

“Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, 6 and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David’s sake.”

So God relents and adds 15 years to Hezekiah’s life. We don’t really know why. Scholars have debated this text and you’re more than welcome to study it and discuss it with your group, but it could be a number of things happening. God could be generous and miraculously giving him more time. It’s possible that Isaiah’s call to Hezekiah included an implied “Repent or you’ll die.” Hezekiah’s response is one of turning his heart toward the Lord. And the Lord relents. He confirms this through a miraculous moving of the shadow to give Hezekiah a sign. God is immensely generous toward Hezekiah. Read Isaiah 38 to see a full picture of Hezekiah’s response to the Lord. He writes in Isaiah 38:17-19 —

“Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness;

but in love you have delivered my life
from the pit of destruction,
for you have cast all my sins
behind your back.

18 For Sheol does not thank you;
death does not praise you;
those who go down to the pit do not hope
for your faithfulness.

19 The living, the living, he thanks you,
as I do this day;”

So Hezekiah is better and people hear of this. He was on his deathbed and now he's back on his feet.

A faraway nation, Babylon, hears of Hezekiah's illness and comes to visit by sending envoys and a present. Babylon is moving in strategy here but Hezekiah is naive and foolish and doesn't realize what is happening.

Hezekiah does something foolish. This is like if a stranger came to

your house and you were like “Here’s where we keep my mother’s rare jewels, our stack of \$1,000,000 that I keep stashed in this mattress, and these gold bars in the basement freezer.” It’s just foolishness. And it’s boastful. Hezekiah isn’t bragging on the faithfulness of God. He’s not telling them how the angel of the Lord slayed the Assyrians or how God gave him 15 more years to his life. Hezekiah shows them everything of earthly value and hopes to win their affection and praise and allegiance through that.

verse 13 “And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

Isaiah asks him about this –

verse 14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to

you?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” **15** He said, “What have they seen in your house?” And Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: **17** Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. **18** And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” **19** Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

Just when you thought good ole King Hez was in the clear, he goes and does something stupid like this...and brings on the judgment of God. Why does God get mad about this? It's likely because Hezekiah revealed his trust in riches and his armies in hopes of establishing an alliance with Babylon. This reveals that Hezekiah didn't trust the

Lord for Judah's safety or provision, even after God had protected them from Assyria. When it comes down to it, Israel again and again proves that they trust more in their alliances and the power of other nations instead of God's hand of salvation. God's judgment is that nothing shall be left and his sons will be eunuchs, who are castrated in the house of Babylon.

Surprisingly, Hezekiah doesn't seem too disturbed by this since he thinks, well at least not in my lifetime. Hezekiah dies, Manasseh becomes king at 12 years old. I can't imagine any 12 year old who would make a good king. 12 year old boys still think potty humor is peak humor, are the most likely to start a Lord of the Flies storyline, and their brain hasn't yet matured with their body. A 12 year old boy becomes king of Judah, and we see immediately, I'm right —

Chapter 21:2-9 And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. **3** For he rebuilt the high places

that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. 4 And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. 7 And the carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever. 8 And I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander anymore out of the land that I gave to their fathers, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the Law that my servant Moses commanded them." 9 But they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel... later the scripture

says “Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

The Lord says in verse 12 — Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. **13** And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. **14** And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, **15** because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.”

The end is coming for Judah. Swiftly, rapidly, with the envoys of Babylon already counting up their spoil, the end is coming. God’s judgment is final and strong. His hand is swift and fierce. But God

isn't done with his covenant. He isn't done working on behalf of his people. Soon his people will be in exile, wondering when a king will unite them and save them again. When they're in exile, reading these stories of their kings asking "When will we have a home again? When will our true king come? When will God dwell among us again?" The Lord remembers. While we wander and forget, he does not. He has a plan. He's coming.