

SUMMER 4 - God's Kingdom Plunging into Apostasy

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[0 : 00] Drunkenness, conspiracy theories, wars, rumours of wars, treaties, alliances and frequent leader changes, that's the news tonight surely.

Well, it's certainly the news in 1 Kings 15 and 16. All the sorts of things that we keep hearing about, it's all here in these two chapters. In one sense they're slightly tedious chapters, there's elements of repetition, names, places, length of reigns and dates and so on.

It's not everybody's cup of tea. I remember when I was in primary school learning, by choice I think, all the names of the kings and queens of England from 1066, or a little bit before that in fact, and the dates of their reigns.

I don't remember them all anymore, but I used to know the whole lot, all off by heart when I was in primary school. And then I remembered when I got to the middle of senior school or secondary school, discovering that history was more than just names and dates and places, but that history was full of issues and thoughts and movements.

And moreover, as I did further history in year 10, 11, 12, discovering that it wasn't quite as clear-cut as A did this and B did this and C did this and then the next king and queen came.

[1 : 23] But there are whole lots of competing issues about whether this really happened the way that people think it happened or what was behind what happened, and competing viewpoints. And that every history book was written at an angle, for a particular purpose and so on.

That it wasn't just a simple matter of telling the story as it happened, but that every history book had a particular point of view. And I remember discovering and thinking what I thought was quite radically, that as I'd done history at primary school and learning about bad Oliver Cromwell and good King Charles I, who was beheaded in 1649 in Whitehall at the end of January.

That one I do remember. It was 1647, maybe. And thinking that he was a goodie and Oliver Cromwell was a baddie, he then began to find that being challenged with different perspectives and beginning to appreciate, only as at the end of secondary school and then later on doing church history, rethinking in a sense some of the issues that were completely hidden from us when I first studied, at least in primary school, some of those issues.

Of course, all history is told from a perspective. Every biography is written from a perspective. There's no absolutely impartial writing of history or biography. Whoever's writing believes such and such about a person or a sequence of events.

And so they highlight things that perhaps interest them or they want to push their agenda at the exclusion sometimes of other things. The Bible's no different from that. Not saying, therefore, that we should find it just as pure propaganda.

[2 : 58] Not at all. It's God's Word to us that selects very clearly and very ruthlessly, really, key things for us. We're dealing tonight with a history of 60 to 80 years, I suppose, more or less, in just a couple of pages.

So it's very ruthless in what it leaves out and highly selective in what it keeps in because God's got his agenda for us to learn from and grow from. And it's not just a list of names and dates.

There's more going on than that. It's not just a sequence of leaders one after the other, a bit like the ALP. The difference is that no one comes back here in 1 Kings 15 and 16.

For all the issues of politics, economics and social conditions and so on, most of that is left out. There is very clear agenda in what is recorded in these books for us.

So let's see in segments through these two chapters what's going on and as we do, trying to see a slightly bigger picture beyond these two chapters and seeing where this whole series from chapter 11 fits in.

[4 : 05] Chapter 15, 1 to 8, that segment or paragraph, deals with the reign of Abijam of Judah, son of Rehoboam, who we dealt with a couple of weeks ago and saw again last week as well.

He's dead. We saw that at the end of chapter 14. And now we read in verse 2 that this man, Abijam, reigned for three years in Jerusalem. Probably actually the way the numbers and years were recorded, lots of work has been done on this because if you add them up, they don't all fit.

And the commonly acknowledged theory is that if you became king, let's say the equivalent of December 2003, and you died or were assassinated today, you've reigned three years.

That is 2003, 4 and 5. They don't mean complete years, but you've reigned in part of three years and one of them, of course, will be complete. So three years, in effect, could be just over one 12-month period or it could be almost up to three-year period, depending on when in the year you became king and you stopped being king.

So it's a short reign, really, three years. It may be, on average, 18 months, I guess. And that's the way the numbers and things are reckoned in ancient Hebrew and ancient writings.

[5 : 21] It's a bit like the third day that Jesus rose. It counts the Friday, the Saturday and the Sunday, in our language, even though it's not really a 72-hour period. What's the summary of this man's reign?

Short though it is, no doubt you could say quite a deal about it, really. But really only one thing's highlighted, of course. If we read verse 3, firstly, he committed all the sins that his father did.

That's quite a good effort, because his father reigned for quite some time. He reigned for a short period, but in a short period he committed all the sins that his father did before him. His heart was not true to the Lord his God like the heart of his father David, meaning ancestor David in this context now.

That's great-grandfather, I presume. And there is one other thing about this man Abijam that is recorded. Sometimes what we've just read is the sum total of the assessment, but down in verse 6, the war begun between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued all the days of his life.

That is, he did nothing to stop it. It just kept continuing. It wasn't just the personal animosity of two kings. It's actually two groups fighting. But of course the crucial issue of why it's selected there, because no doubt there are other wars going on as well, is that this is the people of God fighting against the people of God, the North and the South.

[6 : 35] Now that's significant. It's really a fratricidal war in effect. So that's the summary, if you like, the assessment of this man Abijah. He might have done lots of things that the Jerusalem age would have recorded in his obituary at the end of his life.

No doubt there would be people who'd write opinion pages saying what a great man he is and all the good things that he's done. The Bible's view is none of that is worth mentioning. You can read about it elsewhere, but we're not worried about it here.

The summary is what really matters. And what really matters is his stance of morality or worship of God or idols.

Verse 7 says there's lots of other stuff in the annals. The Bible says, but don't bother reading it in effect. This is what matters. At the sum total of this person's life, this king's life, what really matters is that he did evil like his father did in the eyes of the Lord.

So why isn't his dynasty expunged like that of the northern kingdom as we saw threatened last week and we'll see happen this week? Because in verses 4 and 5 we read, nevertheless for David's sake, the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him and establishing Jerusalem.

[7 : 56] Because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Last week we saw that same sort of summary without mention of Uriah.

Uriah the Hittite, if you go back to 2 Samuel 11, you'll remember Uriah was the husband of Bathsheba with whom David committed adultery and then David organised the murder of Uriah in effect being a murderer himself.

An adulterer and a murderer and yet we're told that his heart stayed true to the Lord. It's not a statement of perfection as we saw last week. It's a statement of, in a sense, the general orientation of his life towards God, the righteousness that is his through faith in God and in Christ ultimately.

So that's what matters. But it's not just because David was faithful. Actually the bottom line when it says for David's sake is really the faithfulness of God is at stake.

Because what those two verses is really pointing back to are the promises God made David back in 2 Samuel 7, promising him an eternal dynasty and Jerusalem as the capital where the house of God would be, referred to at the end of verse 4 there, establishing Jerusalem.

[9 : 11] That is, it's God's faithfulness rather, not David's faithfulness. That is the bottom line for the preservation of the kings of Judah. Sinful though they are, little better though they are than the northern kingdom of Israel.

And because it mentions not only David's general faithfulness but refers to his incident with Uriah the Hittite, it makes us realise that even David's faithfulness was flawed but he was the recipient of the promises by God's grace.

It is God's grace that is at work here. It's not the achievement of David when it says for David's sake. Ultimately, it is God's faithfulness to his promise.

So there's Abidjan. Short reign, covered in a few verses. That's all the Bible really wants to tell us about it, at least in Kings. There's parallel sorts of accounts in the books of Chronicles as well but here, that's what this writer wants us to remember and know.

And we move on now to his successor, Aza. Aza, we read about in verses 9 through to verse 24. A long reign now, we're told.

[10 : 22] In verse 10, he reigned 41 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Markah, daughter of Abishalom and that's the same name as the mother of Abijah who is the father of this man, Aza.

It could well be, as some commentators think, an implication of some form of incestuous relationship between his father and, in a sense, his grandmother or it may be that it's saying he's the granddaughter because often when you say son of somebody, the term can be used to also refer to grandson just like we saw Father David before he's actually his great-grandfather.

It's the way the Hebrew language worked. We shouldn't think it's strange use of language. It's the way their language worked. So, either way though, the reference to the same mother and the badness of his father in a sense alerts us to expect here comes another baddie but actually not so.

Verse 11, Aza did what was right in the sight of the Lord and I think we're meant to be agog, surprised, even at this early stage really in the kingship because we've only seen David as a good king so far.

Saul before him was bad, Solomon went astray, Rehoboam and Jeroboam both have gone astray, Abijam the same, now and Nadab we saw last week briefly. Here too we find Aza and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as verse 11 says and models that on David as his father David had done.

[11 : 53] That's the standard by which the kings of the south are measured. When we get to the kings of the north they all fall in line basically with the first of their kings Jeroboam who's bad.

David in the south is meant to be the model of kingship and only a few of the kings over this 300 year and 350 year period actually come close to the standard of David as a king of Judah.

Again the assessment of this king is theological. We're not really worried about his economics, we're not worried about his political strategies, we're not worried about who his cabinet ministers are, we're not worried about his social institutions or anything like that really.

It's basically a theological assessment and you can see that very clearly in the following verses. Verse 12, he put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land. We saw that in chapter 14 verse 24 at the end of last week's passage.

They were put in place, now he removes them, the work undoing if you like, the work of his grandfather. Secondly, in verse 12, he removed all the idols that his ancestors had made.

[12 : 59] There could be a whole range of things that are included in that. No doubt some of them borrowed from Canaanite and Baal type worship as well. All the things that were feared in Deuteronomy 29 that might ultimately lead to exile, he removes.

Verse 13, he also removed his mother from being queen mother because she made an abominable image for Asherah, one of the Canaanite female goddesses, a goddess of fertility.

It's quite a strong move. I'm not sure that I dare move against my mother like this. I have to be careful what I say tonight. But it's a strong move. Some say that because his father reigned for such a short period of time, after three years, he may well have been a junior, a minor, when he became king and maybe after some period of time when he became an adult, maybe that's when he removed his mother.

But it could well suppose then he's no doubt a young man at least and maybe therefore his mother's actually exercising quite significant influence and given the tradition we've already seen of the foreign women that Solomon married, carried on to the next generations, this is quite a significantly bad influence perhaps in his life and in the nation's life as well.

The seeds sown by Solomon, we keep seeing bearing fruit, if I can put it like that, throughout the subsequent history of Judah and Israel, the bad seeds sown by Solomon. Asa cut down the image of the Asherah, that is the pagan worship, and he burned it at the Wadi Kidron, the same Kidron Valley Jesus crossed to and fro over, especially in that last week of his life going from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem and back out again, the same Kidron Valley you can cross over today in several places.

[14 : 41] But, for all the good things that are listed for Asa here, this good king, his goodness is qualified. And we find that all the time with the very few good kings that are mentioned, there are eight in total, four particularly good, this being one of them, they always have a but.

There's always something that doesn't quite go right. And here in verse 14, but the high places were not taken away. That probably means tops of hills, certainly places where the Canaanites worshipped in the land, something that's prohibited time and again in Deuteronomy, mentioned in Joshua and so on.

But they keep coming back to plague Israel and Judah and he didn't take them away. They were instituted, of course, by Solomon going back a few years now.

Chapter 3 of 1 Kings makes mention of that. But though he himself in a sense eschewed idolatry, that's what is implied, I think, by his heart not turning away in end of verse 14, he didn't get rid of the high places in the land.

That's worth a brief comment about reform at this point. See, Asa's a reformer. He's cleaning up most of the bad things, not all, but most of the bad things. What we find is that later on his son is Jehoshaphat and he cleans up some of the bad things as well.

[16 : 02] His father's done it. But a generation later when Jehoshaphat, the good son, is king, he has to do it all over again. Like Asa, not quite as strongly a reformer and not cleaning it up totally.

That is, in a sense, the weeds of sin keep coming back. Later on again, I've skipped over a bit, a fair bit, 100 and, well, 200 years nearly later, Hezekiah, king in about 700, he does it all over again.

The best king since David, Hezekiah is. But then another 50, 60 years after Hezekiah, Josiah, an even better king, the best one apart from David. He has to do it all over again as well.

He goes the furthest, but even then it doesn't stave off the exile that comes just a generation after the life of King Josiah at the end of the 600s BC. You see, sin is so easy to commit but so hard to undo, so hard to eradicate.

It's a bit like gardening, for which I have very little time indeed, as those belonging at Holy Trinity know. What's the point? They're just going to grow back. You pull out a weed and they just keep coming back.

[17 : 10] Now, people tell me he's supposed to take the roots as well. But in a sense, there's a bit of an analogy there because all this cleaning up is just like chopping the tops off. The reform of the king doesn't change the hearts of people.

It might chop the tops off the sin, but they just keep growing again, even within the next generation. See, one of the things that this history is telling us, and I don't mean the history just of one king's but the whole Old Testament really, as well as the new for that matter, is how strongly gripping sin is on individuals and on the community of God's people and how radical the rescue must be.

For in the Old Testament we keep seeing rescue figures reforming kings in this place, great kings like David and here Asa, great prophets coming to the fore preaching the word.

Elijah comes on the scene right at the very end tonight. But in the end the hearts are unchanged, the roots are not dealt with and the Old Testament itself keeps looking forward to that root surgery to remove or eradicate the root of sin in somebody's life.

It doesn't come in the Old Testament. Indeed, this very analogy is used in Deuteronomy 29. See to it that a root of sin does not spring up amongst you and take grip and will lead you to exile is the end of chapter 29 of Deuteronomy.

[18 : 27] And of course, Jesus, when he comes, does that on the cross. That is, the Old Testament is in one sense exposing the depth of sin so that we understand better the depth of salvation and rescue.

When Jesus eventually comes. Well, in the next paragraph, verses 16 through to 24, we get, relatively unusually, a sort of extended comment about the politics of King Aza.

He's engaged still in this ongoing war with the northern kingdom, Israel. Basha is now the king. He hasn't been mentioned to this date. He'll come in and be introduced later on. And what happens through this book of Kings is that you get a sequence of narrative about Israel in the north, but then it'll jump back a bit and give you a bit of Judah in the south and then it'll jump back to where it left off in the north and then back to there and so on.

So, you keep getting slightly a-chronological episodes, if I can put it like that. If that's too confusing, forget what I just said. We haven't met Basha, simply.

He'll be introduced later. But he's now the king of the north and there is war with the south, with Aza. The north looks strong. You see that, for example, in verse 17.

[19 : 41] King Basha of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah and that's only five miles from Jerusalem, eight kilometres to the north of Jerusalem to prevent anyone from going out or coming into King Aza of Judah.

That is, it's like a blockade town. It's on the main trade route and it's stopping it. It's like New South Wales invading Victoria and building a sort of blockade route at Kilmore to try and stop anyone getting to Melbourne via the Hume Highway, if you can sort of understand what I mean.

Slightly poor analogy, perhaps, but anyway. So, it looks like the north has the upper hand. That means the promise of Davidic dynasty is surely under threat here if the north actually conquers the south.

What will that mean to the promises of God? So, Aza now, the king of the south, Judah, in Jerusalem, he goes to the king of Aram. Aram is ancient Syria in effect.

Damascus was its capital. It's where we get the language of Aramaic ultimately from. And he turns to him and he buys him or buys his alliance in effect. That is, as you see in verses 18 and 19, Aza took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house and gave them into the hands of his servants.

[20 : 54] Aza sent them to King Ben-Hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hesion, of Aram who resided in Damascus saying, Let there be an alliance between me and you like that between my father and your father. I'm sending you a present of silver and gold.

Go break your alliance with King Bashar of Israel so that he may withdraw from me. And he wins the king of Aram over. Very shrewd politics. Very clever indeed. And so, what happens is that the king of Syria, who's further north, not all that far really from ancient Israel, Damascus is within sight of the border of Israel today, Galilee, he comes and he attacks around the Galilee area.

Kinnareth is the ancient name for the Sea of Galilee up in the north. And so, therefore, Bashar's got somebody attacking him up north so he abandons his southern route and stronghold at Ramah.

He turns back to fight off King Aram and that gives Aza down south the opportunity to go into Ramah, clean it up and rebuild some of his own towns and avert the threat. Clever politics.

It works. Judah is safe. Are we meant to applaud Aza for this great strategy or not? A bit hard to tell here in Kings.

[22 : 07] If you read the account in Chronicles it's very clear that what he does is wrong. But there are enough hints here I think for us to draw the same conclusion and I think that's the deliberate intention of the author. For example, in verse 19 when it says he sent a present to King Ben-Hadad of Aram, the word literally as a bribe and every time that word is used in the Old Testament it's with negative connotation.

He's bribing him. Moreover, by making a political alliance he's doing something that the people of Israel are told not to do. Don't make treaties or alliances with other peoples and certainly that's something that later prophets are stinging in their rebuke about.

Furthermore, elsewhere in the Bible pagan nations are actually rebuked for breaking their alliances with other pagan nations that is for their deceit and dishonesty.

So for him to bribe a pagan nation to break his alliance with somebody else to make on with him is again I think implicitly the wrong thing. Moreover, when they clean up Rama he uses forced labour of his own people to do the job in verse 22 and perhaps there's a hint in verse 23 we're told that he ended up with a foot disease and therefore there might be a hint there that that's also the wrong thing.

All of those are hints. The account in Chronicles makes it clear he's a baddie. This is politically shrewd humanly speaking but theologically devoid of trust in God.

[23 : 32] That's the issue. He's trusted his naus. He's trusted his gifts. He's trusted a pagan king. It's won the day though. You see God hasn't punished him by making Ben-Hadad of Aram not make an alliance with him.

His shrewd politics have won the day but the cloud hangs over him of lack of trust in God. There's lots of discussion as you can imagine about his foot disease. This is an incidental comment.

Some say that it's gout but apparently that's very rare in those places in those times. It's probably a vascular peripheral vascular disease I think is the expression that I read and it may well have taken his life within the year or two later that he actually dies.

Well now at the end of his reign we go back to the north. So today so far we've dealt with successive kings in the south and now we're heading back north again. We're jumping back a few years because Aeser's long reign actually envelops five kings of the northern kingdom and we now go back to the summary of the end of Nadab before we get to Beishah the one that we've just been referring to in this political intrigue.

The end of Nadab's mentioned in verses 25 and 26 he only reigned two years indeed that could just be a week or two or a couple of months. If he started reigning on Christmas Day and finished on the 6th of January for example that's two years in this reckoning.

[24 : 58] Maybe it's probably on average we'd expect 12 months but who knows but it's a short period of time. It's the instability that was threatened last week when Israel was promised to be a bit like a reed blowing in the water or whatever unstable in its leadership and his assessment simply is that he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord verse 26 and it parallels his father ancestor rather Jeroboam as well.

That is it's just more of the same and what was there was bad. Beishah takes the crown in verses 27 to 30 through bloodshed assassination. This is quite exciting stuff really.

There are a few murders today as in a bit of drunkenness. It's just like the TV news. Beishah of the house of Issachar conspired against him. He struck him down at Gibethon which belonged to the Philistines for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibethon.

So Beishah killed Nadab in the third year of King Azar of Judah and succeeded him. So there we are the assassinator becomes the king. Not a dynastic continuity so we've lost the dynasty now of Jeroboam in the north.

New dynasty with Beishah now the king of the north. And as soon as he was king verse 29 says he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed until he had destroyed it according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite because of the sins of Jeroboam that he committed and that he caused Israel to commit and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord the God of Israel.

[26 : 35] Now there's a few things there that need a bit of unpacking. Certainly in the 200 year period of the northern kingdom there are several assassinations and dynasty changes. This is one of several.

Secondly in the ancient world it was very common that if one dynasty was succeeded by another through an assassination in particular you would also kill off all the other remaining male heirs or pretenders to the throne.

That is so that there would be no blood revenge and so there'd be no threat of an uprising from the previous dynasty. So that's why they're all being killed off here. In that I'm not excusing the action I'm just saying what was typical of the times.

Remember when Saul died David was under pressure to kill off all Saul's house but he showed mercy on it. I think again a high mark of his character at the end of 2 Samuel. Here we see again the instability of the reed something mentioned back in chapter 14 verse 15 last week.

There's certainly nothing to commend Basha as king. There's no hint of God anointing him as king or anything like that. He's just claimed the throne through his own greed and violence really.

[27 : 44] But his action in killing off Nadab and the dynasty of Jeroboam then we're told in verse 29 is according to the word of the Lord.

We're not meant to read there that Basha was given a word to go and kill these people rather that word is something we saw last week in chapter 14 verse 10 and 11. Basha is the instrument of God fulfilling his word but it does not condone his actions in killing off the dynasty of Jeroboam.

He's culpable for bloodshed for murder and all his other sins as well. So often you see God uses evil people to defeat other evil people. It's actually a shock.

It's one of the things that in the time of the exile troubled Israel and indeed some of the prophets Habakkuk I think as well. And in a sense it's just like Judas in the New Testament bringing about the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose in delivering Jesus to be betrayed so that he dies on a cross and yet woe to the man who did this it's better that he not be born.

But in all of this in all this murky stuff and politics and intrigue and bloodshed and sin and evil God's word is being fulfilled. God said it would happen and it happens.

[28 : 59] Chapter 14 he promised it now in chapter 15 it happens. It happens probably unwittingly. Basha may not even have known the prophecy and yet God's word is always fulfilled.

A summary of this man Basha occurs at the end of the chapter. Verse 34 almost really a repeat of verse 26 he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

He was king for quite some time 20 odd years probably a lot of things that could have been said there may even been a lot of good things that he did but the writer's telling us here it doesn't matter at the end of his life one thing matters and he failed dismally he did what was evil he's just more of the same.

All you know all you need to know for the whole of this 24 year reign is that little summary at the end of chapter 15. It's a fairly pathetic summary of someone's life isn't it?

Very sad. Well chapter 16 I'm afraid to say is also more of the same. We shouldn't be surprised about that. In some ways it would be cleaner and easier if the writer just got to the beginning of chapter 16 and said look let's skip over the next few hundred years it's just more of the same you don't want to hear it.

[30 : 13] But we need to hear it. That's why God records it for us. So as it was with Jeroboam and Nadab and Basha so it is with Elah the son of Basha chapter 16 verse 8 he becomes the king.

I've skipped over a bit sorry. The beginning of chapter 16 is another prophetic oracle that comes through a man called Jehu son of Hanani and it's against Basha. Since I exalted you verse 2 says out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel and you've walked in the way of Jeroboam and have caused my people Israel to sin provoking me to anger with their sins therefore I will consume Basha and his house and I'll make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat.

Anyone belonging to Basha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the air shall eat. And if you were here last week you might well remember those very same words in effect back in chapter 14 about the dynasty of Jeroboam.

Now here's an acknowledgement that God has actually exalted Basha to be king even though at another level and completely truly we can say Basha wanted to be king he did the assassination. It's not that he was acting under divine orders I think would be fair to say.

That is God's superintendence and sovereignty of these events is often without the knowledge of people like Basha raising him up to be king in the way that he did.

[31 : 37] But God is sovereign is what this prophetic word is saying and Jehu is bringing this word of condemnation against Basha as for Jeroboam so with you. You walked in Jeroboam's sins what happened to him will happen to you your dynasty will end the bodies won't be buried they'll be just devoured by scavengers birds and dogs is in effect what's being said and it happens as we'll see.

But his son becomes king firstly Elah not for a long time he's we're dealing here with about 880s BC so we're about 40 years after the death of Solomon thereabouts and Elah doesn't have much to commend him we're told that he reigned two years at the end of verse 8 again that could be as little as a few weeks and again we're seeing hints of instability most countries when they have quick successions of kings or rulers often you find instability behind it in some form or other that's certainly the case here for we're told in verse 9 that his servant Zimri commander of half his chariots one of his leading army commanders conspired against him didn't take long for this to happen and when he was at Terzar that's the capital city that we've seen already mentioned last week and this week drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza whoever he or he's in charge of the palace of Terzar Zimri came in and struck him down it's fairly opportunistic he might as well pick on him when he's so drunk that he can't defend himself but the portrayal of the king being so drunk in effect that he gets killed it doesn't say much to commend him as a person of high moral repute or anything like that and so he's assassinated and killed in the 27th year of

King Azar again it's fulfilment of the word it's the end of the dynasty what the prophet had said comes true and again there's no indication I think that Zimri might have known this in advance not that Zimri is acting in order to bring about a fulfilment of God's word it's God saying what will happen it happens in a sense unwittingly in the mind of Zimri but God's word again is sovereign and comes true so we come to Zimri verse 15 of chapter 16 and oh I should have mentioned in verse 11 he kills off the rest of the house of Bashar just like we saw Bashar doing to the house of Jeroboam or Nadab or they're all killed including friends this time as well he's not leaving any stone unturned in verse 11 through to 14 but in verse 15 now we come to the reign of Zimri Zimri we're told at the beginning of verse yeah first half of verse 15 reigned seven days in Terza a seven day wonder in both senses you could say truly a weak king what a pathetic reign and see the instability of the country now as assassination after assassination this disregard for dynasty though God's word is still sovereign here there's elements of righteous judgment and the wrath of

God against these people and yet their sin continues unabated and so what do we see about Zimri well right from the start there are troops elsewhere and we're told that Omri in verse 16 is the commander of the army and all Israel made him king of Israel that day in the camp so from the start Zimri has got a threat and Omri goes up from Gibethon where they're still besieging the city 24 years later at least it seems and all Israel with him and they besiege Terza the capital and Zimri this great brave man that he is what does he do but he kills himself he sets fire to the citadel and burns himself up in its midst an act of suicide most likely is the way to read this and yet verse 19 says that all of this happened because of the sins that he committed doing evil in the sight of the Lord walking in the way of Jeroboam for the sin that he committed causing

Israel to sin that is not only has this man taken his own life in burning down the palace citadel over him but that it is also at the same time an act of God's judgment not that Zimri decides God's judging me therefore I'll help him and commit suicide but rather two things are happening at the same time in a sense unwittingly Zimri killing himself is God's judgment on him and what's his judgment on him for continuing the sins of Jeroboam he's only had seven days as king and from day one that was under threat but it's enough time one week to be able to say he was just like Jeroboam you see the assessment of all these northern kings they walk in the sin of Jeroboam more of the same generation by generation king by king by king seven days is all you need to sum him up and so we come to Omri from verse 21 he was king for 12 years mid 880s through to the earlier 870s now Omri is a very interesting example

[36 : 58] I think here Omri was a great man Omri was a powerful king in his reign he unified the country from civil war because after Om Zimri suicide the country was in civil war with a rival claimant to the throne for three or four years thereabouts he ended that civil war he unified northern Israel under his leadership in addition in his 12 year reign he conquered Moab one of the leading enemies and neighbours of Israel in the ancient world and we know about that not because we're told it here but because there is an actual inscription the Misha inscription of a few years only after Omri's reign that tells us exactly that that Omri defeated Moab moreover the mighty empire of Assyria which in the mid 800s is going through a renaissance they paid great respect to Israel and all the way through to 730 BC 150 years later nearly they call

Israel the house of Omri even though they're not the descendants of Omri on the throne it's like calling England still the house of Tudor even though the Tudors died out in 1603 if you remember that is Omri was so powerful that the Moabites refer to him in an inscription the Assyrians refer to him in an inscription and keep calling Israel the house of Omri thereafter for another 150 years more or less to the time that Israel is destroyed by the Assyrians themselves he brought political and economic strength and wealth to the nation he rebuilt a new capital city and he brought about peace with Judah and not one of those things really is mentioned here in 1 Kings all of it's true it happened but 1 Kings says go and read the annals what really matters most of all is not that he was politically strong that he unified the nation that he had peace with Judah that the Assyrians respected him or anything like that what matters is that he kept walking in the sins of Jeroboam it's the same assessment we've seen all along you see the author of Kings is unimpressed by political power or by international prestige it doesn't matter in the end he might well have had great obituaries written in the

Moabite times as well as the Jerusalem age who cares God doesn't is what he's saying here what matters is that he walked in the sins of Jeroboam seven verses are given to one of the great rulers politically speaking of the 9th century BC but the book of Kings says more of the same more of the sins of Jeroboam admittedly though the one thing that is mentioned here in verse 24 is that he builds a new city now remember that Terzar's palace at least has been burnt down by the suicide of Zimri so there's an element in which something needs to be rebuilt for a king but here we read in verse 24 that he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemur for two talents of silver he fortified the hill and called the city that he built Samaria after the name of Shemur the owner of the hill isn't it intriguing that this man Shemur who is completely unknown in history apart from the fact that he happened to own a hill is where we get the name Samaritans from good Samaritan Samaritans purse and all these charity agencies and so on all come back to this obscure man

Shemur now it is actually a very politically shrewd move because the hill of Samaria which I've been to is quite distinct hill that is it's separate from other hills around about it's quite steep up and rounded at the top and so you get a 360 degree view it's very well defended and that's why he chose it because it's a safe capital you can defend it easily and today if you want to go what is it 12 kilometers out of Shechem or Nablus as it's called today the Arabic town so long as they're not shooting people at the time you can go to Samaria still to the archaeological site and see quite stunning ruins not all from the time of Omri some later it was a wealthy place a strategic place a capital city from which the name of the area Samaria ultimately derives but the emphasis in all of this verse 26 and 27 he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in the sin he caused Israel to commit provoking the Lord the God of Israel to anger by their idols more of the same more of the same when I was in Scouts

I think there was a little chorus that we sang that was pretty inane and it had a little line between the verses next verse same as the first a little bit louder and a little bit worse and now we get that because it's not just more of the same it's actually a bit worse because in verse 25 Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord but notice that the second half of the verse says he did more evil than all who were before him now there's a decline it's not just more of the same he's got worse whatever that is and now we come to his son Ahab from verse 29 to the end of the chapter Ahab was king for 20 odd years mid 870s or early 870s to the early 850s BC thereabouts more of the same but a little bit worse verse 30 Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him even more than his father who did more than all of us before him we're beginning to plunge we're beginning to plummet now down into a cesspit of immorality and idolatry and apostasy and why is his worse it's made very clear verse 31 as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of

[42 : 46] Nebat that is that's trivial I'm going to show you what really bad is he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ephbaal of the Sidonians Sidon is in Lebanon on the coast or up the north part of Lebanon Syria on the Mediterranean coast he went and served Baal and worshipped him now the tape's being changed at this point in effect all now as part of the plunge but it's institutionalised by his choice of a wife a foreign woman the seeds sown by Solomon keep on coming up again and again and again he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria politically that might have been wise put a religious place in your new capital to give it some sort of authority validation but of course theologically it's completely apostate Ahab also made a sacred poll Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord the God of Israel than had all the kings of Israel who were before him pretty dire assessment of King

Ahab given how bad his predecessors also were and then the last verse of the chapter in his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho now don't get puzzled here Jericho has already had its walls fallen down at the trumpets of Joshua five six hundred years before presumably for some time at least it's been a derelict city so now it needs rebuilding he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his first born and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segur now that's a puzzling statement it's a little bit obscure quite possibly though abhorrent though this is it is implying that he built this city with what's called a foundational sacrifice of his own son that is you kill your son and you place its body in the foundations of the gate or of the wall as a way of dedicating the city now not every scholar agrees that it's gone that bad but it could well have done it could be that they're already dead and that's how they were buried but the implication seems to be more horrific than that it's awful but that's where apostasy and idolatry ends up it has no moral guard to it if you don't worship the true

God of the Bible whatever God you worship has in the end no moral limits and in the end goes to depravity and apostasy we know how fickle the human heart is and how we as Christians with God's spirit struggle against sin but for those worshiping empty and false gods without any restraint of God's spirit this is the sort of thing we ought not be surprised about at all but notice that the end of verse 34 says according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun I must confess that when I read that I thought what did Joshua say I'd forgotten after all it's over 500 years ago well at this point of time but when Jericho was destroyed in chapter 6 verse 26 Joshua cursed it cursed the person who'd rebuilt it in effect a word of the Lord a word of the Lord that had lain dormant presumably forgotten maybe not forgotten all these decades and now this apostate king goes against that curse and what happens God's word comes true and maybe that's the death of the two children is what's being intended perhaps whether they were deliberately sacrificed for the building or whether they were in a sense killed in judgment by God is fulfillment of the curse or both see this God's word from 1400 BC maybe forgotten maybe being deliberately defined here but now in the 850s or 60s or thereabouts whatever it is 550 years later that word's not lost any of its power it's still sovereign and it comes true Israel is plummeting here you can see this decline getting steeper and steeper as it goes over the precipice into immorality depravity and apostasy and yet through it all we also find whilst

Israel is unstoppable in its pursuit of sin God's word is unstoppable in bringing about fulfillment even when you least expect it for immediately after reading this Elijah the Tishbite of Tishba in Gilead said to Ahab as the Lord the God of Israel is before whom I stand there shall be neither dew or rain these years except by my word out of the blue a prophet of God could not be too surprised because we've seen a few already in the chapters we've looked at and we've seen the importance of God's word but at the point where Israel seems to be the lowest morally and spiritually God's not abandoned it yet totally he's in the middle of it speaking by his word as the famous prophet Elijah comes there and we're not going to continue with the story of Elijah we haven't of course time for that but we know well that his word is not heeded despite the clear signs the encouragement every encouragement to get Ahab to respond with repentance and faith you see the obstinacy against the word of God runs deep in the human heart we saw that with Jeroboam a couple of weeks ago it's the same with Ahab in his confrontation with

Elijah as well but we see it all through the scriptures preeminently of course and the obstinacy of people as they put Jesus Christ to death you see the word of God that charts its course through one kings keeps going we're just seeing a segment of one book but the word of God charts its course from page one to page end throughout the whole of the scriptures but we're just seeing one segment of one book of that word of God charting its course to fulfillment and through the mire of this world God's word remains always and unchallengingly sovereign you see history is on track despite all the human sin that can be thrown at it history is on track to see the fulfillment of God's word despite human ignorance of God despite sin despite rebellion despite idolatry depravity immorality apostasy despite the worship of other gods the disobedience of God's word despite all of those things and all of human powers and nations rising and falling waxing and waning God's word is unstoppable towards its ultimate fulfillment the time when a perfect king will come over all of

[49 : 40] God's people uniting them all under one king and one head greater than even David who is the standard of kings in Judah though he fell the one who is morally perfect whose heart was totally devoted to his heavenly father without any compromise without any lapse morally perfect whose kingdom was not of this world a perfect kingdom without wars without challenges and yet with open gates for people of any nation to stream into and a kingdom that has a perfect capital city that is beautiful built by God not human hands that is glorious and he's not going to be ransacked by a pharaoh of Egypt its treasures won't be taken out of it by a human king and given to Syria to make an alliance with it'll be preserved perfect for eternity and there will not be high places and shrines and idols there but there will not be a temple there either because God himself dwells in the midst of that city in the midst of that kingdom perfectly face to face with his people you see as

God's word is unstoppable for its fulfillment God is resolutely faithful to everything that he says he will do and the scriptures keep testifying about that that even on the incidentals God keeps his word even after 550 years God keeps his word even after thousands of years God keeps his word it's 4,000 years since those promises to Abraham and God is still keeping them it's 3,000 words since the promises to David and God is still keeping them it's 2,000 years since the promises that Jesus Christ made and God is still keeping them and for all the mess that our world is in for all the sin and depravity for all the political intrigues and the rises of isms and ologies and all sorts of other things God's word and God are unstoppably sovereign and bringing about the fulfillment of everything that God has promised and we might look around with frustration and think that there is an apparent absence of God here why doesn't he act quicker against some of these nations in the Old Testament time why doesn't he act now why doesn't he bring down some of these false religions this idolatry this apostasy but God's patience may look long to us but in the scale of eternity is also fleeting and brief

God's apparent silence or absence is in fact his patience being hidden he's present his word is sovereign and it will be fulfilled in his time see no mere human king not even David no one even striving to be like David could rescue God's people from their plight they were too deeply in it the roots needed to be removed and only the power of perfect blood does that you see inherent sin catapults us to catastrophe it catapults the people of God to catastrophe its grip we cannot break but the power of the cross breaks it that's why Jesus came in fulfillment of God's word descended from David great David's greater son no mere human king but the perfect and divine king whose kingdom is not of this world and whose perfect kingdoms we are citizens of by grace grace through faith in him come Lord Jesus we pray amen

I'll prove that he is as to speak about everything he andams who shall not fight us I service that might be by■■■■ the people of God indistinguishable lanjutamt