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Evil Kings And A Good God

I Kings 15:25-16:30

Intro: Last time, we stopped well short of the end of **ch15**. The reason for that is because, starting in **v25**, the writers focus is exclusively on the kings of the northern kingdom and the vast majority of the text, from **16:28** to **22:40**, is a recounting of the miserable life and reign of king Ahab, an evil man with the notorious distinction of doing more evil than all the evil men who came before him. I guess he was an over-achiever of sorts. But, Ahab didn't just burst onto the scene in Israel. There were quite a few miscreants who came before him, wicked kings and some regular men who would be king, wicked men on whose shoulders Ahab was able to stand and excel. So, before we get to Ahab, we need to look at those who came before him and in the midst of all this evil, let's take note of God's presence.

15:25-16:7 – Our text deals with the reigns of 2 evil kings and yet there are 3 statements nested in the prose that dominate the text (**15:29-30; 16:1-4; 7**), showing us that God is at work in the midst of it all. What is a holy God doing in the middle of all that evil? He's not there because He enjoys it – clearly, He abhors it. He is there because He is simply that sort of God. He is sovereign and at no moment in the history of the world or the life of His people is He ever come up missing. Evil does not stop the work of God, in fact, it oftentimes reveals it.

So Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, finally bought the farm and Jerry Jr. takes over. His name was actually Nadab but as far as his official religious policy went, he was just a chip off the old block, which is all that mattered to God. So, while Nadab was off doing what kings did back then, take back real estate, Baasha assassinated him and made himself king. Not that Baasha was planning any wide spread reforms in the realm. He took over Jeroboam's throne and continued practicing Jeroboam's religion. What we have here is just one evil king knocking off another evil king.

Where is God in all of this? Right there in **v29-30**, Yahweh's there by His word. Baasha not only eliminated Nadab, he also took out all of Jeroboam's descendents, just as Ahijah had prophesied (**14:10-11, 14**). Baasha the butcher was just a servant of Yahweh's word. This is basic biblical theology:

God uses evil men to punish other evil men and later judges the evil instruments He used for their own evil. He will do this with individuals as well as nations. God will eventually use the wicked Assyrian empire to punish Israel and then turn around and punish Assyria for the evil they would perform on His people. All this was prophesied in [Isa 10:5-19](#). He will do the same with Babylon and Judah.

So, Baasha takes out Nadab. An evil upstart eliminates an evil dynasty. Yahweh uses evil men to remove their own kind. Wicked Baasha is merely a unwitting servant carrying out Yahweh's good word. This text makes a profound point: that evil really is subservient to a holy God. What a put-down for evil and all those who seek to propagate it through the history of the world up to today. Through all their sin-crazed, rebellion-fueled attacks against God's order, God's will and God's people, they are simply used by God to carry out His judgments, refine His people and reveal His strong right arm on behalf of His people. Even in their hot rebellion, they serve God's purposes.

Of course, there's no point pinning our hopes on Baasha. He's proven himself to be an evil man, so it's no surprise that his reign was just more of the same. "Political change did not signal a change in spiritual outlook." This point is usually lost on God's people today. Consider how often believers fall for the "if only" heresy. If only we could get another regime into power; another administration elected; another party in control... Then what? More likely as not, it would just be more of the same. As responsible, voting citizens, we are often slow to realize the point that our help is in the name of the Lord, not in the next election. The western church constantly practices the idolatry of change.

Baasha was just like Jeroboam and Nadab. Now, the writer does tell us there was war between Asa and Baasha but gives us not war stories, no anecdotes of heroics or the struggle of 2 nations in conflict; nothing. Just the same banal formulas: Baasha became king...He did evil...blah, blah, blah. Yawn! Ever wonder why parts of the Bible are dull, like this one? It's because they're recording the lives of sinful men who simply repeat the sins and evil of those who came before them. Sin is never creative – it just imitates and repeats. You might be able to sin with a flair but you can't sin with freshness. You can only ape what's already been done and, more likely, done better.

Goodness is inherently original and creative; evil can only distort, ruin and corrupt. Sin can only do re-runs, it can't be original. It carries a built in yawn! If this text is boring, blame Baasha! As it stands, the implication of this text is that monotony is the trademark of evil. You don't have to wait until you get to Ecclesiastes to learn that life apart from the living God is futile (vanity). Baasha teaches us this right here that godlessness is dull.

We're not given much information of Jehu the prophet but his prophecy is all that keeps Baasha's boring life from running from his inauguration straight into his obituary (16:2-4). This is not a pleasant prophecy – unless you're a hungry dog or bird but the message couldn't be clearer: you walk in the same way of Jeroboam; you meet the same end as Jeroboam. Still, isn't Baasha a privileged man? Between his entrance and exit stands the word of God. One could do worse! What's one good thing we can say about Baasha's reign? That Jehu son of Hanani spoke the word of Yahweh to him. Yet, as severe as it was, wasn't this his opportunity? He was tripping on the very edge of blessing!

How do we know Yahweh wanted to bless evil Baasha? A little later we will hear Elijah announce God's scathing judgment on wicked Ahab (ch21). But when Ahab showed signs of visible remorse, God moderated His judgment, tho He didn't cancel it. Does this not show how eager God is to extend mercy when there is the slightest response to His threats? Baasha wasn't spiritually adept to recognize that he was standing right next to the gracious kindness of a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but is pleased when they turn from their ways (Ez 18:23).

Instead of blessing, Baasha chose to walk in the ways of Jeroboam and thus, chose judgment. But notice, his judgment includes his annihilation of Jeroboam's dynasty. "But God said it would happen!" Yes, but that doesn't excuse the wickedness of Baasha in fulfilling God's word. Yahweh declared that Jeroboam's dynasty would be completely eliminated and Baasha wickedly carried out what Yahweh had determined showing that God's word is totally true and Baasha was a murderous power grubber. Is this a mystery? Maybe. Is it a problem? I don't think so.

Again, this "problem" is basic biblical theology – Mk 14:21. Clearly, the delivering up of Jesus was not just an act of Judas, but part of a bigger purpose than his. He is actually being used for the fulfillment of God's grand

purpose of bringing salvation to the world. Nevertheless, it is still his act and he is responsible for it. The fact that God turns the sinfulness of man to His praise and purposes does not excuse the sinfulness of man. Time and again, in the Bible, we see God bring judgment on the instruments that carry out His judgment. He will judge nations or individuals for the unjust way they carry out His just judgment. It is possible to inflict God's judgment and incur God's judgment at the same time; there is no automatic exception. This truth should have a sobering effect on all who serve the Lord.

The rest of ch16 has it all: carousing and conspiracy; assassination and civil strife – all the things that give the news media a reason to exist. The northern kingdom appears to be shooting down the waterslide of history, bashing along to its own self-destruction when it suddenly levels off on the hill of Samaria and enjoys a bit of stability under Omri. There are 3 kings in our text and each one has their own interests. One prefers to drink himself into oblivion; another practices treachery and then commits suicide while the 3rd struggles for dominance and then builds himself a new capital city. Though their all different men with different stories, they all have one thing in common: they each stand under divine judgment.

8-10 – Not much is said about Elah, son of Baasha, but what we are told is rather disappointing. It appears that his goal in life was to pickle his own liver. Now, this text isn't a sermon on temperance; it's not teaching that Elah should have been a teetotaler. The author does seem to write this with a sigh of disappointment, tho. Is this what leadership in the kingdom is supposed to be about? Isn't it a disgrace when the most responsible person in the realm is busy drinking himself silly? Is this the legacy a ruler should leave- that he could really party? Isn't that a perversion of his calling as an official authority under God? How damaging it is when rulers turns a diversion into an occupation.

Sadly, this is not just a problem for monarchs. This title has long been earned by any number of professing believers who populate our churches over the years. How would their lives be summarized? He really loved...football, cars, stock market, etc. It sad to think that in many evangelical churches in South Louisiana, there are probably more people who can name the players on LSU's offensive line than can name the original 12 disciples. There are believers who know quite a bit about sports, business, politics or world events and yet never teach simple Bible truth to

their children. How foolish our diversions are! How easily we corrupt our calling. We better not get too self righteous when we see Elah crying in his beer (wine).

11-20 – Zimri was ruthless and efficient. After he murdered Elah, he wasted no time in wiping out all vestiges of Baasha's house, whether relative or friend – no one was spared. Zimri reigned in Tirzah while the army was off fighting against the city of Gibbethon, trying to wrest it away from the Philistines. Zimri was a military man but he wasn't with the army. Not surprising, the army wasn't with him either. The army in the field was pro-Omri, their CO. Zimri learned a little too late that it was unwise to carry out a coup without the support of the army. When news of Zimri's treachery reached the troops at Gibbethon, the army decided that one good coup deserved another so they proclaimed Omri king. Then they marched on their own capital (Tirzah) and took the outer city. Zimri retreated to the safety of the king's house and promptly went out in a blaze of despair and utter disappointment.

So much for Zimri! Yet, there are 2 arresting statements in his story: 1) he reigned in Tirzah 7 days (**15**); 2) because of the sins which he had committed...(**19**). What? How much sinning can one person do in 7 days? It wasn't just his sins but the fact that he reigned 7 days and had made no change in religious policy. We might argue: what's 7 more days of Jeroboam's bull cult? Yet, Yahweh seems to regard this continuance of perversion so wicked that He judges a man for not making a change within his 7 day reign. 7 days is a short time; it's also enough time to be responsible. It's long enough time to show your colors. If it had been 70 days, or 70 yrs, the result would have been the same.

But, 7 days! How fleeting was Zimri's success! His news cycle was shorter than Hunter's laptop story! He scarcely had time to wash Elah's blood off his hands before he became toast himself. Is this not a clear lesson on how fleeting, how empty our greatest successes can be? It took Zimri 7 days to realize his status was worthless. We are sometimes slower to realize just how flimsy our greatest achievements are (**Ps 39:6**). Zimri's ashes assure us that our finest hours are but momentary. Zimri needed only 7 days to prove he was a "week" king.

21-28 – v21-22 describe a period of political turmoil and social chaos in

Israel. The army made Omri king but there was a large portion of the population that wanted Tibni to be king. Tibni may have had more social clout than Omri but Omri had the army. Initially, their backing parties were evenly matched but eventually, Omri's crew prevailed and Tibni was pushing up daisies. Was there a major battle or did he die of natural causes: poison, blade between his ribs, straight razor across his throat, the usual sort of thing. Of course, we don't know because we aren't told. All we know is that Tibni had his funeral (God rest his soul) and Omri had his coronation (God save the king!).

The official entry of Omri's reign covers 6 verses (23-28). Omri is no hapless boozier like Elah and no flash in the pan like Zimri; he establishes a bona fide kingdom with a stable 12 yr regime. But, the author only gives him 6 verses of press and most of that consists of the usual formulas used in royal entries. Only v24 highlights something special Omri did – his purchase, building and naming of Samaria, his new capital. So, Omri built Samaria and did evil. That's all we get but do we get the picture?

Omri actually left his mark on the history of the day. He built Samaria in a hill overlooking a wide plain for defensive purposes but also economic reasons. It controlled the trade routes of the area. It was also a message to Israel of Omri's break from the past and the start of a fresh, new regime that was going somewhere. Omri threw his military weight around northern Moab, subduing them for many years. Diplomatically, he engineered an alliance with the Phoenicians of Tyre by marrying his son Ahab to king Ethbaal's daughter Jezebel. This spelled commerce and an upswing in Israel's economy. Politically, for the next century, the Assyrians referred to Israel as the house of Omri. He was a king on the make, an achiever; he made things happen. Omri was something of a military, cultural, commercial and political powerhouse.

Yet, we hear nothing of that in our text because that's never the emphasis of the Bible. The author is not overly impressed with Omri – he bought a hill and did evil. Here's a king that packs substantial historical significance that the Bible merely assumes his life story can be told with the same old formulas. He reigned; he did evil; he died. Want to know more? Go to the library and look it up! The Bible's account of Omri's life is as exciting as an obituary. For good reason – Omri did evil, more than all who preceded him, etc. we've heard it all before. The writer's not saying he's ignorant of Omri's

achievements – he’s saying that they don’t matter. He doesn’t call Omri’s pursuits foolish like Elah’s debauchery or fleeting, like Zimri’s success; they are just inconsequential. When the first 2 commandments are despised, nothing else matters.

Omri’s pursuits held great weight for the world but to God they were trivial. What does this say about our pursuits, our preoccupations today? We all have responsibilities, we have jobs, we have passions and pursuits that give us reason to wake up in the morning and hit the ground running. But, if the things that drive us on a daily basis are not focused on advancing the kingdom of God on this earth then they will also ultimately prove to be trivial. Do the passions that drive your life elicit a shout of praise or a yawn from heaven?

A cursory reading of our text might lead you to believe the kingdom of Israel was determined to self-destruct. There’s nothing here but chaos, conspiracy and disorder. No one seems to be in control but contrary to the helter-skelter record of royal activity the word of God rules over all. The word of God controls Israel’s history just as it does ours today. The word of God not only controls history; it defines sin and condemns those who persist in it. It is said of each of these kings that they provoked God with their idolatry. Again, that word means **to** exasperate, to push one over the edge. The warning here is that it is possible for idolatry to push God beyond the limits of His patience.

This is no trivial matter. Living in the age of God’s grace, we often assume that it will never end but that is clearly not the case. The Book of the Revelation describes in shocking detail a point in the history of the world when God’s grace has reached its limit and is removed. Then, wicked humanity will be given free reign to do whatever wicked humans want to do. That is what it will look like to live in a world without God’s grace. That is what makes John’s Revelation so horrible – God will still deal with humanity, His offer of salvation will still stand but the grace and mercy we so wonderfully enjoy today will not be present in such abundant measure.

29-30 – If the last few kings weren’t already bad enough, along comes Ahab the scoundrel. He seeks to distinguish himself in some way from all the others who had come before him. Sadly, he chose to excel in wickedness and as such, did more evil than all the kings before him, if that’s even

possible! We'll look at Ahab's life in more detail next time but we must stop and consider our text today. This is what happens when evil men are in the hands of a good God. There is grace, forgiveness and blessing available but God isn't going to force you to accept it. It is a gift that must be willingly received to take affect in your life. 😊