

## 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS

### Week 20, Chapters 14 and 15

As we ended our lesson last week in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14 yet another Hebrew king looted the Holy Temple in Jerusalem for the sake of its valuable silver and gold articles. This time it was Joash, King of Israel, who not only took the Temple's holy furnishings and ritual implements but also plundered the royal palace of King **Amatzyah**, King of Judah, as well as demolishing a 200 yard long section of Jerusalem's city walls. This was in consequence of King **Amatzyah** having foolishly challenged King Joash to a battle, and losing.

**Amatzyah** had recently won a decisive victory over Edom, and it seems to have inflated his ego to the point that he thought that he was undefeatable. This led to him wanting to take on King Joash and Israel, probably with the goal of re-uniting the two kingdoms under his own monarchy. And, in truth, he did have a king-sized bone to pick with the monarch of the northern kingdom as **Amatzyah** had given 7000 pounds of silver to Joash as payment to rent 100,000 of his crack troops in his war against Edom. But when **Amatzyah** heeded a prophet's warning that God would not be with **Amatzyah** and Judah if he added these godless men to his own already formidable forces consisting of 300,000 soldiers from Benjamin and Judah, he released the 100,000 troops before they ever went into battle. But Joash kept the payment of silver, which infuriated **Amatzyah**. Further, the 100,000 disgruntled Israelite troops apparently received permission from their king to loot and pillage many of Judah's towns and villages because they had been denied an opportunity to acquire the hoped-for spoils of war from Edom.

It is shocking to see how divided the Hebrew people had become. Truly the formerly united Kingdom of David and Solomon was now a divided kingdom not of merely separate families, but of adversaries. And this hostile division came as a result of the loyalties demanded by Israel's and Judah's earthly kings; one Hebrew king ruling over 10 Hebrew tribes in the north and another Hebrew king ruling over 2 Hebrew tribes in the south. But beginning with Jeroboam, who ruled some 150 years prior to **Amatzyah** and Joash, religion and politics became enmeshed. Thus what began as a singular and unique Torah-based religion originated by Moses and operated by Priests and shared by the 12 tribes, it was now hopelessly fractured mostly because the kings controlled it and that's how the kings wanted it. The northern kingdom had generally abandoned the Torah altogether, and the southern kingdom had greatly watered it down with their doctrines and traditions, even though outward appearances made it seem as though they were maintaining obedience to God's laws and commandments.

At every turn these Scriptural passages we have been reading scream to us, "Warning! Stop

and think! Examine yourselves!” At times I feel like a broken record and I often wonder if the true prophets of the Bible must have felt like that as they brought God’s warning to His people, along with the Lord’s plea for them to return to the Holy Scriptures for their guidance in worship and behavior before He had no choice but to take drastic action against them. But most of the time the prophets were vilified and hated for their message. The political leadership threatened and imprisoned them, the local religious leadership wanted little to do with them and usually saw them as unwanted rivals. The common people often laughed at them, called them names, charged them with fomenting trouble and disturbing their otherwise self-satisfied lives. But as always, there was a remnant with open ears and minds that accepted God’s Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit and responded to His call. They, of course, were the odd balls of Hebrew society who were considered the exception to the rule; out of step and therefore out of the mainstream. How dare they question what the majority of Hebrew society valued and practiced as their religion of choice!

To put a finer point on it, here is the only substantial difference between what was happening in this regard in the times of the Kings, versus what is happening now in Christianity in general: the word from the Biblical prophets was a direct oracle from God in that ancient era and the people and their leaders heard it directly from the prophets mouths. It was a more-or-less new word that the prophets were pronouncing and it was eventually written down and archived for the benefit of future generations. Not only the divine oracles themselves, but the various responses of the people and the leadership to those oracles, along with the various consequences (or blessings) imposed by Yehoveh for those responses, were recorded for us. Thus since the Bible was written and closed up all those centuries ago, today what Bible teachers such as myself present to you is still God’s divine oracle; it’s just that it is not by means of direct revelation, and its not a new word. It is an established word that we speak; a word that is timeless in its relevance, yet easily forgotten and set aside, and often disparaged as no longer useful or applicable.

What is the same, however, is the response of the people to the teaching of God’s divine oracle and the admonitions and warnings they contain. Now, as then, some followers of God will hear it, heed it, repent and change; while the majority will shut their ears to it, deny it, and cling to the ways and doctrines that they have grown comfortable with. And now, as then, the mainstream religious leadership calls the pronouncing of God’s established Scriptural oracles a danger to the modern fellowship of Believers. Stay away from such teaching they say; stick to the good ol’ doctrines and customs that we have given you, ones that have come from intelligent and spirit-filled men and women who formed our denominations. Be careful they warn; obedience to God’s Word is actually bondage to the old; be free and know that however you wish to perceive God, or to worship Him, or to interpret His Word, or to live your lives is now fine with Him as long as you do it in the name of His Son Jesus.

You see mankind, gentile or Hebrew, has always searched for ways to rationalize our rebellion **against** God, by concocting new and pious sounding doctrines and commandments and attributing them **to** God. Satan in the Garden of Eden showed Adam and Eve just how easy it

was to take the divine truth, add a little bit of a beautiful sounding lie, and make it into a much more preferable and freeing doctrine that appeals to our evil inclinations and insatiable desires for personal liberty and pleasure.

From where we are now in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Israel is less than 3 generations away from God ending His patient and merciful attempts to bring them to their senses. Exile was only a little more than 50 years into their future. And they never suspected it, so sure they were that they had it right, and God's goofy and troublesome prophets had it wrong.

Let's re-read a portion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14.

### RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS 14:15 – end

**Amatzyah** was held captive up in the northern kingdom capital of **Shomron** (Samaria) for some unknown amount of time. However since we have notice of the death of his captor, King Joash of Israel, and then the announcement of Joash's son Jeroboam II as the new King of Israel, it is likely that shortly after Joash's death **Amatzyah** was released (a rather typical gesture by a new king who wants to show mercy and to reset his relationship with a neighbor that he has been warring with), and so **Amatzyah** was allowed to return home and resume his reign over Judah. Most scholars think that Joash didn't live very long after looting the Holy Temple, destroying a large section of Jerusalem's defensive walls, and exiling King **Amatzyah**. So since verse 17 tells us that **Amatzyah** lived for another 15 years after the death of King Joash, it is probable that he lived most of that time back in Judah, actively ruling over his kingdom. But he seems to have learned nothing from his misadventure and subsequent captivity.

Verse 19 explains that "they" (meaning his royal court) conspired against **Amatzyah** and so he fled to **Lakhish**. But they of course knew where he went and were able to follow him there and kill him. We get no reason for this conspiracy here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14, but thankfully we get substantially more information in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 25. Let's turn there now to read just a few verses.

### READ 2<sup>ND</sup> CHRONICLES 25: 14 – 16, 27 – 28

So what we learn is that the conspiracy against **Amatzyah** (Amaziah) was probably the result of a mixed bag of unhappiness and revulsion among Judah's leaders and the king's royal advisors that had built up over time. It had some to do with political considerations; it also had some to do with a humiliating defeat in a completely unnecessary war with Israel that he had

arrogantly started. But it had mostly to do with his turning away from Yehoveh, and no doubt the Temple Priesthood was quite vocal in its disapproval and the people of Judah would have been greatly swayed by the priests. We need to grasp that this wasn't merely a failure to properly or faithfully follow God's Torah. **Amatzyah** openly and unapologetically began practicing the worship of other gods; specifically the gods of Edom. And the passages make it clear that it wasn't that he only included the gods of Edom along with the worship of Yehoveh (something that probably wouldn't have bothered his royal court all that much), rather he abandoned YHWH and turned himself completely over to the gods of Edom.

Understand something about this that can be very helpful to know; in the ancient world your gods, your culture, and your national loyalties were inseparable. One was indicative of the other. Thus it was one thing to be tolerant politically and religiously by incorporating a number of gods in your worship (the oriental mind easily accepted this); but it was quite another to dedicate yourself to one particular god or cohesive national pantheon of gods. That choice dictated your national loyalties. After the war with Edom **Amatzyah** adopted the national pantheon of Edomite gods (for what reason is very difficult to fathom), and he also rejected the Hebrew god Yehoveh. Thus he no doubt saw himself as more Edomite in culture than Hebrew, and no doubt so did his royal court. To his Judahite citizens, his allies, his family and his inner circle he had committed high treason and essentially become an Edomite.

So in verse 19 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14 we see **Amatzyah** learn of the conspiracy, react by fleeing to the walled city of **Lakhish** in Judah, and there being assassinated. There is no way that those pursuing him could have killed him unless there were those inside of **Lakhish** who were in sympathy with the conspirators, as the city walls were quite formidable and it would have taken a siege to get inside. **Lakhish** is located about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, or about 20 miles southeast of Ashdod.

We read that his corpse was taken by horse back to Jerusalem and buried in the City of David in the royal burial ground. This doesn't mean that his body was thrown over the back of a horse, cowboy style. It means that he was not carried on a bier upon the shoulders of his royal guard as would have been customary. Instead he was put into either a chariot or a horse-drawn cart of some sort. However, he was NOT buried in the catacombs (the rocky tombs) of Judah's revered kings, even though he was a legitimate descendant of King David. While there is no way to know for certain, I can imagine that there was much debate on just what to do with his body and that burying him in the ground in the royal graveyard was above what most would have agreed with.

Verse 21 makes a quick turn on us, and explains that the people of Judah wanted **Amatzyah's** son **Azaryah** to succeed him. He was a lad of only 16 years old. While our chapter discusses him only briefly, much more is said about him in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26. And for some reason, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles refers to him as **Uziyahu** (Uziah); it means **Yehoveh** is my strength. **Azaryah** is similar but means God has helped.

We are told that this new king of Judah is lauded especially for returning the city of **Elath** (today called Eilat, an Israeli port city on the Gulf of Aqaba) to Judah, and for building it up. While there's no consensus on exactly what this intends to communicate, at the least it seems to mean that after **Azaryah's** father **Amatzyah** conquered Edom and the Edomite city of **Elath**, that it was either largely destroyed or it had become once again under the control of an Edomite prince. Either way, **Azaryah** recaptured it, and then repaired it, strengthening its defenses. It was as important a port city then as the modern Eilat is today, and so it was definitely worth fighting for.

Next we learn that a fellow name Jeroboam II succeeded his father Joash, King of Israel. By synchronizing the reigns of the kings of Judah with the kings of Israel we learn that Jeroboam II became king of Israel when **Amatzyah** was in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of his reign over Judah. And Jeroboam II was just like his much earlier ancestor Jeroboam I, who was the first king of the newly formed northern kingdom immediately following the civil war and split of David and Solomon's Kingdom into 2 kingdoms. It was the first Jeroboam who instituted Golden Calf worship in the northern kingdom of Israel, claiming that the Calf was a graven image of the God of Israel, YHWH. And apparently Jeroboam II just continued in the well established Calf cult.

Now the good news about Jeroboam II is that he was apparently a fierce warrior king. He reclaimed the land that the Syrians (Aram) had taken over time in their several invasions of Israel. However there must be something missing in the historical timeline between the reign of his father Joash and Jeroboam II because Joash is also said to have reacquired most of that lost land from Aram. However these statements about territory and land being lost or taken back are imprecise by nature, and so while a city might be lost, the outlying villages might not be, and vice versa. Likely Jeroboam II merely added to Israel's holdings in the same general area that Joash conquered some areas but not all.

The "entrance of Hamath" is speaking of land to the north, and the Sea of the Arabah is just another name for the Dead Sea in the south, in what at one time was part of Judah's kingdom. So his military victories over foreign powers in this large swath of territory turned out to be some benefit for Judah, even though these wars were really intended to bolster his own kingdom, Israel. This gesture led to a much more peaceful situation for a time between Judah and Israel.

In the Reuben edition of the Artscroll commentary on the Prophets, there is an interesting gloss that seeks to explain why it is that God would choose to make the Jeroboam II reign one of great conquest and wealth accumulation even though he was such a wicked king from God's perspective and his people were not much better. I'd like to merely quote it:

***“Scripture explains why God conferred such success and prosperity on Jeroboam and his kingdom even though they were continuing in a spiritual decline that led to the foreign conquests. God has mercy even on sinners. One the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is Slow to Anger, which means that God withholds retribution to give sinners an opportunity to repent and He may even bestow generosity upon sinners to ease their suffering. This is what happened under Jeroboam. .... Perhaps such mercy could influence the people to repent. Israel’s suffering had not prodded it to repent, so perhaps gratitude to God would do so. Tragically it did not, and before long not only Jehu’s dynasty, but also the kingdom of the Ten Tribes would be destroyed.”***

Besides being right on in this assessment, it sounds as though this statement was written by a Christian, doesn't it? But it wasn't. It was written by an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi. And I point this out due to the very many mistaken beliefs that are taken as unassailable fact among gentile Christians about the nature of Judaism, and about the nature of God in the Old Testament. Judaism sees the God of the Old Testament as bestowing grace and mercy at every opportunity upon His people, and reserving judgment for only the most severe cases or upon the most intransigent of sinners. Most modern Christians think that grace and mercy only began when Christ was born, and is reserved primarily for gentiles while the curses of the law are left to be heaped upon misbehaving or unfaithful Jews. Not only is this doctrinal mindset completely unbiblical, it also slanders the Jewish viewpoint entirely. By now, if you've been studying with Torah Class very long, you know that the Hebrew Bible is full of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. And the same unmerited mercy that Christians receive in our trust in Messiah is what these citizens of the northern kingdom were receiving from Yehoveh when Jeroboam II was their king.

The chapter ends with the death of Jeroboam II and the rise of his son **Z'kharyah** to the throne of Israel.

Let's move on to chapter 15.

### **READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS CHAPTER 15 all**

The first verse of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15 as usual gives us a means to date the various kings of Judah and Israel by synchronizing their reigns. And here we learn that Jeroboam II had been on Israel's throne for 27 years when **Azaryah** became the new King of Judah.

As we move into this chapter and hear much about **Azaryah** (called Uzziah in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles), King of Judah, I would like to take a few moments to expand on that wonderful gloss from the Artscroll commentary that I quoted to you.

We don't have to look very far under the surface at what is going on with Israel and Judah to realize that from a spiritual standpoint, and as regards the plan of God's redemptive process for mankind that will be brought about through the Hebrews, that a new era has dawned at this point in the Book of Kings. Our focus up to now has been drawn to the terrible, faithless slide of both kingdoms, the disappearance of morality, and what we know (because we can read ahead) is to be the coming divine judgment of exile of Israel to Assyria and then Judah to Babylon.

But what we have found since Genesis, and is especially highlighted in these chapters we're been reading for the past many weeks, is a great God-principle that we ought to fall on our faces in gratitude over. And it is that God's wrath and His judgments are always accompanied by unmerited mercies. Never is it only wrath, but rather a combination of wrath plus mercy. And despite the great destruction wrought by the Lord upon the kings, kingdoms, and people of Israel that would seem to mark an enormous failure and an end of a grand cosmic experiment in hopes of establishing a pure Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in fact every one of these tragic events moves the ball forward towards the ultimate goal of universal redemption and peace with God.

Even in this disgusting condition that is Israel and Judah at this time (a condition that they would continually, vehemently and irrationally deny at every turn), the preparation for their soon-coming exile is (ironically) going to become life for a world that didn't know it was dead. The Apostle Paul picked up on this theme in his famous epistle to the Romans, chapter 11:

**CJB Rom 11:7-12**

**<sup>7</sup> What follows is that Isra'el has not attained the goal for which she is striving. The ones chosen have obtained it, but the rest have been made stonelike,**

**<sup>8</sup> just as the Tanakh says, "God has given them a spirit of dullness- eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear, right down to the present day."**

**<sup>9</sup> And David says, "Let their dining table become for them a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a punishment.**

**<sup>10</sup> Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can't see, with their backs bent continually."**

**<sup>11</sup> "In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?" Heaven forbid! Quite the contrary, it is by means of their stumbling that the deliverance has come to the Gentiles, in order to provoke them to jealousy.**

***<sup>12</sup> Moreover, if their stumbling is bringing riches to the world- that is, if Isra'el's being placed temporarily in a condition less favored than that of the Gentiles is bringing riches to the latter- how much greater riches will Isra'el in its fullness bring them!***

Here, at this point of about 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14 and 15, the purpose and plan of prophesy makes a dramatic transformation. And therefore the message and focus of God's oracle through his prophets transforms. Up until now, the prophetic message had been one of teaching, admonishing and warning to His people about their current condition. Now suddenly there is decided shift of focus from the present circumstances to a glorious future. A hope for a Messiah and a Messianic Kingdom emerges. That is certainly not to say that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and others of this new breed of prophets didn't also teach, admonish and warn the people to whom the message was brought. But instead of only despairing about the present hopeless situation and explaining the wickedness of the people's hearts and actions that brought them to this point, the vision of a new and happier future is also presented. And in some strange way, the seeming failures of God's chosen people are going to be used by the Lord to achieve this coming kingdom of light, truth, life and joy.

And all the stranger yet is that a long forgotten part of the Abrahamic Covenant would come about in the process. Up to now, the Hebrews' entire focus on God's promise to Abraham had been the land inheritance they were given: Canaan. But now another element of the promise begins to emerge; the sprouting of the seed.

***<sup>CJB</sup> Genesis 12:1 Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you.***

***<sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing.***

***<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.***

The Apostle Paul verifies the meaning of this when he says to the Galatians:

***<sup>CJB</sup> Gal 3:29***

***<sup>29</sup> Also, if you belong to the Messiah, you are seed of Avraham and heirs according to the promise.***



So as we proceed through these last few chapters of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, and the times get darker and darker, the reality is that God is only preparing the world for new light. This was just as it was at Creation when first darkness had to be established, and only afterwards was there light. Why? Because this is His divine pattern.