

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

### Week 21, Chapter 15

It might surprise you to know that 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14 and 15 are some of the most extensively covered and minutely dissected chapters of the 2 Books of Kings by Bible scholars and by historians. There is more here to know and understand than a casual reading of these passages might imply, so we'll be in this chapter a couple of weeks. And I touched on the reason for that last week; it is that right about here in our Bibles there is a turning point in redemption history, and thus in world history, which can be obscured by all the information that comes flying at us fast and furiously. It doesn't help that we also get bombarded with all of these strange Hebrew and Syrian and Assyrian names of kings; names that are as difficult to pronounce as they are foreign to our ears. In some cases a particular king goes by 2 or 3 different names, and in other cases we have 2 separate kings who have the same name, ruling adjacent kingdoms at the same moment in time. In addition a son and his father often share the rule of a kingdom (sometimes for several years) but the Scriptural passages don't explicitly tell us that. And I want to state right now that while it is helpful, there is no reasonable way for most Bible students to remember all of these names, place them in time or sequence, or even necessarily connect them with the correct kingdom the first or even the second time through studying this section of the Old Testament. Fortunately there are charts of these kings available as a study aid and I highly recommend that you keep one in front of you as we continue examining this time period, otherwise one gets overwhelmed and fixated on the names instead of seeing the overall picture of what is happening from both an earthly and heavenly standpoint.

As most Hebrew Roots adherents are asked incessantly by skeptical traditional Christians, why do we bother to stick our noses in such an irrelevant and obsolete section of the Bible as the Book of Kings, let alone the entirety of the mostly unfathomable Old Testament? The learned Jewish/Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim, who had no idea that he would someday become the father of the Hebrew Roots perspective of Bible study, says this about that in his wonderful work Bible History of the Old Testament:

***“The history of the Old Testament in its progress to the New (Testament) is that of widening the idea of the servant of the Lord, into that of the Kingdom of God. Lastly, its realization and completion is in the Christ and the Church of God. Unless, indeed, the Old Testament had this higher meaning and unity, it could not possess any permanent or universal interest (to Christians) except from a historical point of view. It would not permanently concern mankind; no, nor even Israel (at least in its present relation to the world). On the other hand, without it (the Old Testament) the New Testament would have***

***no historical basis, and the historical Christ would only offer what would seem to be an absolutely unintelligible problem.....”***

What this learned and revered man is saying is that the only way to legitimately understand the New Testament is by first understanding the Old Testament. But if a Christian decides that the Old Testament is no more than a brief history of a vague and ancient people called the Israelites, and offers nothing more important for a modern Believer than it would if we studied the Incas or the Mayans, then the truth is that Jesus Christ, the man, His mission and His divine purpose, cannot even be understood let alone interpreted. He even goes so far as to explain that modern Jews would have little to gain by reading the Hebrew Bible about their earliest origins if the only purpose was history. Such a study might be interesting, even pleasurable, but beyond that it would otherwise have no significance.

And, I would add, that the very thing that Edersheim was cautioning against is what has happened especially over the last 300 years. For the average mainstream Christian today, the Old Testament is not only merely irrelevant history, it is nearly unintelligible, it is boring, and perhaps even a threat to our faith. Therefore the Church is taught to understand Christ as though He were a European; and to interpret and apply His message and His divine purpose based upon Roman church doctrine that has been adapted and modernized to fit western culture, rather than to see Him through the true lens of the inherently Hebrew Scriptures, where exists the only prophecies there are about His advent and why His coming was so important for mankind.

But as regards our study of the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, first among the enormous changes that have arrived is that the long slide of Judah and Israel down the mountain of their rebellion and unfaithfulness towards Yehoveh has become a free fall; and this is especially so (for the moment at least) pertaining the northern kingdom of Israel. Some of that reality is reflected in the utter chaos of governance of these 2 kingdoms of the Hebrews. In the 13 year interval between the reigns of King Jeroboam II and King Uzziah (aka King Azariah) no fewer than 4 kings took their turns on the throne, each one murdered by his successor.

In Chapter 15 alone we will deal with the reigns of 7 kings: 2 Kings of Judah and 5 Kings of Israel. And while the stories are told in condensed fashion here, there is some enlightening additional information in the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, and we'll incorporate that information as we proceed. History is moving rapidly towards the exile of Israel, first, and then a bit more than a century afterwards, Judah.

A second significant change is the rise of Assyria as an undisputed Super Power. Assyria was as much the driving dynamic of world events that every nation that was even remotely nearby paid close attention to, as the United States was in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though we've not mentioned it up to now, even North Africa (Egypt in particular) was in Assyria's

empire building plans and Egypt fully understood that. I can't stress enough that Assyria broke all the historical paradigms of great kingdoms and hoped-for empires to this point in history. They redefined the notion of an empire. Certainly they had no knowledge of continents beyond Asia and Africa; to them that was the extent of the known world. But equally certain their intent was to dominate all that was the known world. So just as the modern world of the past 70 years has tended to generally ally itself with either the United States (on the one side) or Russia (as the opposing side), the kingdoms and nations of Asia and North Africa tended to ally themselves either with Assyria or with a few other smaller kingdoms in an effort to try and fend off Assyrian aspirations. And Israel and Judah were squarely in Assyria's crosshairs during the time we are now studying, and God would use that to exercise His judgment upon His people.

A third change is more what I prefer to call a transformation, and it involves prophets and prophecy. Most of Israel's and Judah's kings had prophets assigned to bring God's oracles to them, and among the most famous were ones like Natan (David's primary prophet), Elijah, and Elisha. But notice that the only record we have of their prophecies and interactions with the kings is but a few sentences recorded among the Books of the Kings (and of course it's parallel in Chronicles). Apparently in the long lost documents that are constantly referred to in the Books of the Kings, the documents usually translated into English as the annals of the Kings of Judah and the annals of the Kings of Israel, there were more recorded words of some of these prophets than are available today. But unless those are discovered, the Books of Kings and Chronicles are all we know of those prophets.

But now things transform; suddenly several prophets become far more significant in God's plan and they even have their own named books that appear in our Bibles. In addition to warning the Hebrew people about the judgment that is coming (and unlikely to be averted), and explaining why it is that God has finally retracted His holy hand of blessing and protection upon His people, and in some cases is advising the people what they ought to do now that exile is upon them, hope for a new and better future after the exiles is predicted. But most of the people then living will never get to see or enjoy that future, although their descendants will have an opportunity to do so provided they have contrite hearts.

Thus my job of teaching you about this period of time, and your job of learning about it, becomes much more complicated. Up until the Books of the Kings, we could study one Bible book at a time and not have to look elsewhere. But upon the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings we have had to intertwine the parallel Books of Chronicles. Now, starting with King Jeroboam II, we have to add the Books of the Prophets to the mix; prophets such as Isaiah, Amos, Jonah, and others. So be prepared to do more Scriptural reading, and for us to have several detours into the books of these various prophets. This is much more important than merely getting history right; this is about putting the writings of these familiar prophets into their proper context for correct understanding. And why is that so important? Because, as I mentioned a couple of lessons ago, all the prophecies concerning Messiah and the End Times were written during the era of the Kings. So for a so-called New Testament Believer to hope to grasp what is intended by

these End Times prophecies that are all the rage today (beyond some fanciful and dramatic and often wrong depictions of what is in our near future) the era of the Kings, attendant with their prophets, is the key to unlock the treasure chest of knowledge.

Let's re-read all of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15 to get started.

### RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS 15 all

We are told that in the 27<sup>th</sup> year of King Jeroboam of Israel's reign that the son of King **Amatzyah** of Judah came into power at the tender age of 16. I won't spend much time with it, but it could not have been the 27<sup>th</sup> year that it happened and has to be a copyist error. The confusion comes in that King **Amatzyah** and his son **Azaryah** (also alternately called **Uziah**) were co-regents for an extended period of time before **Amatzyah** died and the throne was left exclusively in **Azaryah's** hands. It is believed that **Azaryah** and his father reigned together for about 13 years, so it was actually that **Azaryah** started the co-regent aspect of this kingship at 16 years old in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> year of Jeroboam of Israel's reign. Thus **Azaryah** started ruling on his own, he was around 29 or 30 years old.

Thus in verse 2 the 52 years that he reigned consisted of about 13 years as a co-regent with his father and 38 or 39 years thereafter. On a timeline he began to rule with his father about 785 B.C. and died about 733 B.C.

**Azaryah** was considered a generally righteous king in God's eyes, except that (just like his father) he didn't do anything to actively stop the people of Judah from using their own family **bamot** (high places) to do their sacrificing upon. It needs to be said that we have been reading about this issue of Judahites using their own high places for sacrifice for many chapters, now, and it had become so ingrained in their culture that no doubt the thought of giving it up was considered pure heresy. The use of **bamot** was untouchable and so we don't even hear of the Priesthood protesting against it. Over and over God makes it clear that this is wrong in His eyes, it is sin, it is directly against His Torah Law that there is to be but one place for all Israel to sacrifice and that is the brazen altar in Jerusalem. Yet, He doesn't seem to take any identifiable direct action against the people for this.

This ought to be well noted as part of God's character. His people are not punished for **every** sin (at least not in this life and not on this earth); yet those sins are not overlooked nor forgotten by the Lord. So we should soberly grasp that the indication that what we are doing must be right in God's eyes is NOT the absence of any punishment that we can reasonably attach to it. I'm not going to list the many troubling observances and icons and doctrines that modern Christianity has adopted that are clearly outlawed by Holy Scripture but have become

the heart of church worship and tradition in modern times; things that for anyone to even suggest might be wrong and thus be done away with are met with everything from an eye roll, to condescending amusement, to downright anger. But I think you know what these things are, just as the Hebrews knew full well what they were doing was not right in God's eyes (according to His Torah), but they did it anyway because everybody else did it too. It was so pleasant, so accepted, so much a part of their culture, seemed to them so benign and even in some strange way had become a sign of their Hebrew religion, that to change was unthinkable.

Verse 5 gives us a rather brief and cryptic remark about how **Azaryah's** reign tragically ended, and thus how his son **Yotam** (Jotham) came into power. It is interesting that we find no special deeds or accomplishments attached to Azariah's reign in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15. But when we go to 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26, we get some additional information. Let's go there now.

### READ 2<sup>ND</sup> CHRONICLES 26: 1 – 15

Keep your finger in this page as we're going to come right back to it shortly.

Here we find that the names **Uziah** and **Uziahu** are substituted for the name **Azaryah**. The only difference between **Uziah** and **Uziahu** is that **Uziah** means "God is my strength" while **Uziahu** means "Yehoveh is my strength". Why this substitution of names we don't know. And we see that this king consulted God regarding his decisions and actions as long as **Z'karyahu** (Zechariah) was living and counseling the king. Zechariah is a bit of a mystery; this is probably not the prophet Zechariah that the Bible book is named after, and it's not the Zechariah who succeeds King Jeroboam of Israel for short time. It's just another man with the same name. And as long as King **Uziah** was faithful to consult the Lord before he acted, the Lord gave the king great successes, and several of those successes are listed.

He defeated the Philistines and attacked and captured the cities of Gath and Ashdod, as well as Yavneh. He defeated the Arabs. The king of Ammon submitted to **Uziah** as a vassal and paid tribute. He expanded the walls of Jerusalem and built more gates and defensive towers that protected the gates. He had wells dug in the desert regions, but he also hired farm and vineyard workers to expand his own personal fields because he liked owning and farming the land. He built up a standing army (a full time professional army). However that is in addition to 307,000 militia that had gone through some formal field training no doubt at the instruction of the standing army. The militia was supplied with its weapons by the government, which was quite a shift from when these men had to supply their own weapons.

The designs of the defenses for the City of Jerusalem were highly advanced, and as a result of all these deeds and more, his fame spread far and wide. But as verse 15 makes clear, it was

not by his own intelligence or strength but by the miraculous hand of God that these great achievements occurred, even though he was far from a perfect man, let alone a perfect king.

Yet something happened to **Uziah** later on in his reign, after his trusted advisor Zechariah died. Most Bibles say that he contracted Leprosy and spent the rest of his days in a place of asylum, separated from everyone. In fact it says that the Lord smote the king with this disease. But the disease was not Leprosy but rather it was Tzara'at. Tzara'at was always a divine punishment of a skin disease but it most definitely was not Leprosy. And that is because Tzara'at is not some specific skin disease, but could have been any one of several. The idea was that the Lord was exposing a person's inner unclean condition by having him or her wear it on their outside. But what caused the Lord to give **Uziah** Tzara'at? Again we find our answer in the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles.

### READ 2<sup>ND</sup> CHRONICLES 26:16 – end

So here we have it. As happens to many of us at one time or another, God has favored us and caused wonderful and perhaps prosperous things to happen for us. But eventually we stop praising Him for the blessing and decide that it is our intelligence, cunning and hard work that is at the root of it. We become arrogant and pretty soon step over some line in the sand that the Lord has drawn, and down we go! **Uziah** could be used as a good example of many fallen Pastors whose success went to their heads. He was apparently a good and decent man who determined to follow God and to listen to Him and do His work on earth on behalf of the Lord's Kingdom. But he was uncommonly successful and as the adulation of the people grew, and as his victories and accomplishments piled one upon the other without loss, something happened in his heart and he decided that he was privileged enough (unlike all others) to be able to depart from strict obedience to the Lord and do whatever he felt was good. It seemed to him that the Lord's laws and commandments somehow no longer applied directly to him and he was the exception to every rule. And what he felt like doing was entering the Holy Temple and offering incense; something that was strictly reserved for Yehoveh's Priesthood. I hope you can picture this; this was not a man who thought, "Now I shall do something wrong and evil". Rather this was a man who had some mistaken unction deep down inside to do something VERY pious and highly spiritual; something special and unique. He felt so good about it all, excited and so very righteous. But all it turned out to be was emotion and pride.

We get the story of how as he was doing this unauthorized act, inside a place he was specifically prohibited from EVER entering, he was bravely and rightly confronted by the High Priest **Azaryahu** (interestingly, the High Priest's name was essentially identical to the King's name) who told him that he has trespassed against God. **Uziah**, burning censor in his hand, became livid at the High Priest. Who among us hasn't seen or heard of what, up to now, was a decent Pastor or teacher or politician who suddenly began to do what was blatantly wrong and when taken to task for it, vehemently denies it and asks how anyone would dare to speak to him or her that way. Instantly **Tzara'at** broke out on the king's forehead indicating where, from

God's perspective, the blame lay. The words state that the High Priest and the other priests who were there with him were startled and utterly speechless when it happened, and couldn't stop staring at him.

Quickly the priests physically tossed the unclean king out of the Temple. All we know beyond that is that the **Tzara'at** never left him, and it meant that he would have to be segregated from his family and from everyone else until the Tzara'at went away; it never did. He could not live within the city walls, and never again could he even visit the Temple grounds. This meant that his sins could not be atoned for, and he would die an unclean sinner. From the penthouse to the outhouse, as they say, with but one unguarded moment. Yet, it wasn't so much what he did as it was who he had become, even though he had been able to hide it from everyone (including himself) for quite some time. What a timeless lesson for us all.

2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26:21 explains that it was because of this that **Uziah's** son **Yotam** became co-regent with his father. King **Uziah** did not give up the throne; instead **Yotam** became the visible and public part of the tandem. But we also have to take this into account when figuring **Yotam's** time on the throne.

When the king died, he was not permitted burial in the royal burial caves of King David's family (even though he was legitimately a descendant of David). Rather he was buried in the ground, in a graveyard set aside for royal family members. This was because he died with **Tzara'at** meaning he died in an unclean state.

Back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15. In verse 8, Jeroboam II, King of Israel, dies and his son Zechariah replaces him. This occurred fairly late in the reign of King **Uziah** of Judah, about 14 years before he died. But Zechariah lasted for only 6 months. He is described as being an evil king, behaving just like those who came before him. And as had become typical of all the kings of the northern kingdom, Zechariah's chief sin was the continuation of the Golden Calf cult. This resulted in the Lord not protecting the king and so he was murdered by **Shallum** son of **Yavesh**.

We're going to make one of the detours now, which I spoke of at the beginning of today's lesson. It was during this time that Hoshea and Amos were prophesying and so much is said in their books about the condition of Israel at this time. We cannot bypass them because they fill in many blanks and give us much food for thought. So we're going to stop and read Hoshea chapters 4 and 5 in one reading. Again: the entire context for what we're about to read takes place in the northern kingdom at the time of Zechariah and then **Shallum**, and thus this is precisely who Yehoveh is addressing through Hoshea.

**READ HOSHEA CHAPTERS 4 AND 5 all**

We won't spend much time with these passages in Hoshea; I'll only comment briefly. Notice that Israel and Judah are addressed separately. Thus when in chapter 5 the **cohanim** (the priests) are spoken of, it is referring to the Hebrew priests (many who were Levites) who were part of the Golden Calf cult, not the priests who served at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Further, the mention of Ephraim is as essentially a synonym for Israel, the northern kingdom, since Ephraim by now was so dominant among all the northern tribes.

God's accusation against Israel is that they have betrayed Him, turned their backs on Him, refused His chastisement, and consorted with foreigners and their false gods; even making alliances with these pagan nations and adopting their false gods for themselves. And finally, in the last 2 verses of Hoshea 5, God says He is going to have them carried away and they are going to stay gone from the land until they admit their guilt. He will allow no one to rescue them.

We'll continue with this next week.