

2ND KINGS

Week 22, chapter 15 continued

As we continue in 2nd Kings 15, let's briefly review. First recall that while 2nd Kings has relatively few details regarding some of the Hebrew kings, the Book of Chronicles adds more. Thus in order to properly apprehend the deteriorating spiritual condition of Judah and Israel and their kings we must incorporate Chronicles. So we find in 2Chronicles 26 that King Uzziah of Judah began as a relatively good and righteous king, and so the Lord supernaturally intervened on his behalf and gave him great military victories as well as great political successes. He reclaimed some land that previous Kings of Judah had lost (Edom being the most significant conquest), and built up Jerusalem's defenses with the most modern and advanced innovations in armaments and fortress designs. Uzziah also created a significant standing professional army, and used them to train civilian reserve forces of over 300,000 fighting men. And we are told that he had a God-fearing advisor named Zechariah whom the king used regularly to consult God on matters of state.

But upon the death of **Z'kharyah** Uzziah lost his balance. He had no one to hold him to accountability, or to help him check his pride. The King began to think of himself as holy, pious, and almost infallible. So one day he got the bright idea that he wanted to burn incense on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place (the front compartment) of the Temple. This seemed like quite a righteous thing to him, and a way that a man of his stature could come near to God. Needless to say, it was more than wrong minded; it was a high-handed sin and was instantly punished.

As he entered the Temple, smoking fire-pan in hand, and approached the Golden Altar of Incense, the High Priest and some of his lesser priests rushed in to confront King Uzziah telling him in no uncertain terms that he had no authorization to enter the Temple and was forbidden to perform such a ritual by the Torah commandments. The King responded with indignation and anger, and immediately **Tzara'at** appeared on his forehead. The presence of this abominable uncleanness first alarmed and then emboldened the High Priest and his cohorts such that they physically grabbed the King and threw him out of the Temple.

By the Law of Moses and according to Hebrew tradition, the King was now barred from entering the City of Jerusalem, and even from approaching the Temple grounds until and unless his **Tzara'at** disappeared, indicating that his gross impurity had been divinely forgiven and cleansed. The King had to vacate his palace and live in a regular house outside the city walls. He couldn't personally attend to the matters of state, nor could he hold staff meetings

with his royal court. Thus his son **Yotam** was anointed co-king, and acted as the visible presence of Judah's monarchy. King Uzziah wore his **Tzara'at** until his death (he did NOT die from **Tzara'at**, as it is not a deadly disease), where upon his son Jotham (**Yotam**) became the sole King of Judah.

However up in the north, in Israel, Jeroboam II was reigning at the same time that Uzziah was on the throne in Judah. But he suddenly died and his son Zechariah took his place. Zechariah was a chip off the ol' block; God declared him to be a wicked king for continuing in Golden Calf worship, and in a matter of but 6 months Zechariah was murdered by a fellow named **Shallum**. And it is here that in our previous lesson we turned to one of the great biblical prophets, **Hoshea**, and read **Hoshea** chapters 4 and 5, which spoke primarily of the darkening spiritual condition of the northern kingdom and her kings. I mentioned that it would now be necessary to incorporate the Books of certain of the Prophets to help us round out what we need to know about this era; but that doing so also gives us the greater benefit of helping us to set the context of the writings of these Prophets. And why is that so beneficial? Because these are the writings that form what we call the End Times prophecies, and it ought to be quite important for us all to want to understand what is ahead of us, as opposed to accepting as truth quite a significant volume of fanciful and flatly inaccurate predictions from Christian novelists and prophecy teachers who regularly take the Books of the Prophets out of context in order to arrive at their dramatic conclusions.

Briefly, **Hoshea** 4 and 5 made it clear that exile was now unavoidable. The judgment against Israel had already been pronounced in heaven, and soon would take place (physically) on earth. And one of the reasons for this end of patience on God's part was that many of His Levite priests in the north had become willing officiators of the Golden Calf cult. Remember that the Golden Calf was not seen as some pagan god, but rather as an image of Yehoveh. So here were Levite priests, who supposedly were knowledgeable and wise teachers of the Torah, finding it acceptable to worship a graven image, and doing all manner of other abominable practices in God's name, and so leading the common people into sin as well. But on the political side, the kings of Israel had made alliances with pagan nations; nations that the Torah said they were to have nothing to do with. In addition, in order to have harmony with those allies, Israel also embraced the worshipful respect of their gods. The Lord calls all these activities betrayal.

Let's re-read part of 2nd Kings 15.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 15: 11 -18

So as of now, **Shallum** of **Yavesh** is King of Israel. We don't know anything definitive about this man, and the only hint of where he was from or which tribe he belonged to is in the reference to **Yavesh**. **Yavesh** is a clan name; and the use of the name in his identification is being tied to a place (**Shallum OF Yavesh**). **Yavesh** (or Jabesh) is a condensed Bible name for the city of **Yavesh-Gilead**, which is located in the Trans-Jordan. Gilead is the hereditary tribal territory of Gad. So while it is not certain, it is reasonable to speculate that **Shallum** was of the tribe of Gad, who at this time was indeed a member of the northern alliance of Hebrew tribes and made up one of what we typically think of as the 10 northern tribes.

Verse 12 records the fulfillment of a prophecy made many years earlier regarding the Israelite King Jehu, and the dynasty he hoped to form.

^{CJB} **2 Kings 10:30** *ADONAI said to Jehu, "Because you did well in accomplishing what is right from my perspective, and have done to the house of Ach'av everything that was in my heart, your descendants down to the fourth generation will sit on the throne of Isra'el."*

King Zechariah of Israel was that 4th and last generation of Jehu's descendants to sit on Israel's throne, and he was murdered by a man (**Shallum**) from the tribe of Gad and so ended Jehu's dynasty. It is amazing to me how God keeps His promises, even though it may seem from an earthly standpoint almost unjust for the others who are adversely affected by it. This succession of wicked kings stemming from Jehu (**Y'ho'achaz**, **Yoash**, **Yarov'am**, and **Z'kharyah**) were all wicked, they all led the people of Israel ever closer to exile, and they even directly affronted Yehoveh by their insistence on worshipping a graven image, the Golden Calf. But God did not change His mind, because His promise to Jehu that if he rid the land of Ba'al worship (which he did) he would be a legitimate King of Israel in God's eyes was written in stone. What a hope that is for us both as individuals and as members of the Body of Christ; because His promise to us is that if we place and maintain our trust in Him we will have an eternal position in His Kingdom. And He will not retreat from that promise no matter what we might fear or how many life failures we might commit, or how badly things might go for us.

Shallum was obviously but a tool of judgment in God's hands, whose only purpose was to end Jehu's 4-generation dynasty, as after murdering Zechariah he himself was murdered in only 1 month by another member of the tribe of Gad, **Menachem**. The reality is that after Zechariah almost all the following Kings of Israel were **not** anointed by God by rather seized power through violence and homicide. And by no coincidence, since they attained power by the sword, they ruled in brutal fashion and most died brutally.

Menachem apparently had control over the city of **Tirzah**, which at one time was the capital of the northern kingdom until Omri moved the capital to Samaria. And so it was from there that he launched his attack on Samaria and killed **Shallum**. But verse 16 also tells us about what a

monstrously violent man **Menachem** was, in that he also attacked a city called **Tiphsach** and there literally ripped open the wombs of pregnant women just because they didn't immediately surrender to his authority when he arrived with his army. The cruelty was that a pregnant woman would live just long enough to see her unborn child die before she then bled to death. The Torah gives no quarter for this kind of atrocity, even though **Tiphsach** was a Syrian city and the people **Menachem** killed and the unborn babies and their mothers that he murdered were not Hebrews.

Menachem proved to be somewhat of an exception to the rule as he reigned for 10 years and then died a natural death, rather than being assassinated. Verse 17 puts **Menachem's** reign in sync with the reign of the then current King of Judah, **Uzziah**, who was in his 39th year of ruling. But it also explains that **Menachem** was just like all the other previous kings of Israel (beginning with the very first one, Jeroboam, after the split of Solomon's Kingdom into two) who willingly and enthusiastically supported the Golden Calf cult. And it's not just that these Calf worshipping kings were themselves being unfaithful, it's that because they were leaders they were leading their people to be unfaithful. And this is why leaders are held to a higher level of accountability before the Lord than others who are not in leadership.

It is here that we reach a pivotal moment in Israel's history, and therefore in redemption history. And it is ushered in with just a few words that on the surface seem so innocuous. Vs 19 says: "**Pul the King of Ashur invaded the land.**" The moment of reckoning has arrived; the end of the northern kingdom is here.

Let's read a few more verses together.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 15: 19 - end

Ashur is the Hebrew word for Assyria. And here we find that after numerous failed attempts by Assyria to conquer Israel, but they were thwarted in a number of ways including Syria battling Assyria, which had the effect of curtailing both Syria's and Assyria's desire to acquire Israel for themselves, Assyria finally succeeded. And in order to try and save his monarchy King **Menachem** offered **Pul** 33 tons of silver so that even though the northern kingdom would now become but a vassal state under Assyria's control, at least **Menachem** could retain his title of king and rule over his people as Assyria's stooge. And how did he come up with so much money to buy off a foreign government so that he could retain his own personal power? He taxed the more well-to-do Israelites; he took their money from them to pay to stay in office. The offer worked; **Pul** had accomplished what he wanted to for the time being; he now controlled Israel and tapped into their economy to fund his empire building aspirations. It wouldn't

remain that way for very long.

As a bit of a study help, we're going to see the King of Assyria alternately called **Pul** and **Tiglath-Pileser**. **Pul** is a formal name, while **Tiglath-Pileser** is a royal title. So we could say that **Pul** was the current **Tiglath-Pileser** of Assyria at this time.

I told you earlier, and in the previous lesson, that if we want to get more information on Israel at this time, we need to turn to the Books of the Prophets. And by doing so we get the added benefit of better understanding the context of those Prophetic books. Here is a case in point.

Open your bibles to Isaiah chapter 7. If that has a familiar ring, it ought to; and you'll see why in a few minutes.

READ ISAIAH CHAPTER 7 all

Just as in 2nd Kings 15, here in Isaiah we are bombarded with lots of names. So let's sort them out. The person that the Lord told Isaiah to go and confront was named **Achaz**; he was the King of Judah. He was Uzziah's grandson, and **Achaz** had taken over the throne from his father **Yotam**. As we just read in 2nd Kings 15, **Menachem** had submitted to **Pul** King of Assyria, and Assyria now controlled Israel. But more than that, willing or unwillingly Israel was now an ally of Assyria. This made them a dual threat to Judah, and King **Achaz** of Judah knew that he was in big trouble and that there was no feasible way that he or Judah could survive the coming onslaught. Thus through the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord seeks to assure Judah that they would survive; NOT because they remain righteous in God's eyes (because that is not how He views Judah), but rather it is not yet Judah's time for exile, it is Israel's.

Thus in the opening words of Isaiah 7, while Syria (who is now also a vassal state belonging to Assyria) is thus an ally of Ephraim (an alternate name for Israel at this time), they are together threatening to invade Judah. They are boasting that they will tear Judah apart, and divide it among themselves, and appoint a new king over Judah. And while it doesn't say so here, the point of removing **King Achaz** (rather than offering to allow him to remain in power if he submits) is that he is a member of the House of David, God's promised royal line of kings. And naturally they (and Satan) will do anything to thwart God's promise plan.

But in Isaiah 7:7, Yehoveh says this without equivocation: "It won't occur, it won't happen". Despite the overwhelming strength of Syria (Aram) and Israel, backed by the Assyrian Empire, they will not be able to overcome Judah. HOWEVER.....what will happen (vs. 8) is that in 65 more years Israel (here called Ephraim) will be broken and cease to be a people. What it more

correctly says in Hebrew is that Ephraim will be **chathath** (shattered) from being a cohesive people. The mental image that is intended is like a bowl being dropped and shattering; even though all the parts of the bowl are still there, they are so scattered and separated from one another that the pieces no longer are useful to form a bowl. And this is precisely what would happen to the northern kingdom; Assyria would disassemble Israel tribe by tribe and even clan by clan, and send them in groups to far flung places throughout the vast Assyrian Empire. Thus they would no longer be a cohesive and identifiable people.

But then the tone of the chapter shifts in verse 13, and the Lord addresses the House of David. And here we have one of the most exciting prophecies about a future mysterious member of the House of David that begins in verse 14:

^{CJB} Isaiah 7:14 *Therefore Adonai himself will give you people a sign: the young woman* will become pregnant, bear a son and name him 'Immanu El [God is with us].*

The Hebrew word that our CJB translates as “young woman” is **almah**; it means young woman in the sense of a young unmarried woman. It was a presumption in Hebrew society that this **almah** would not become pregnant since to do so as an unmarried girl would bring the greatest shame upon her, her father and her father’s household. Such promiscuous girls were often stoned to death in order to restore honor to the family. This is the reason that in English we substitute the term “virgin”, and in practical terms virgin is a good translation.

When will this boy child of the House of David be born from a girl who has never known a man? It will be sometime after Judah has been exiled. And this is taken from verse 16.

^{CJB} Isaiah 7:16 *Yes, before the child knows enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be left abandoned.*

To put a finer point on it, the prophecy is that before this special child (who we know to be the Messiah) reaches the age of accountability (13 years old), the land (referring to Judah) that these two kings covet (**Retzin**, the king of Syria, and the son of **Remalyah**, who is **Pekach** the King of Israel) will indeed become abandoned by the Judahites. This is of course speaking of the Babylonian exile of Judah, and then later still the Roman occupation of the Holy Land. So for a person hearing Isaiah tell his divine oracle, there isn’t a great deal of information, just this tantalizing tidbit of knowledge that at some point the tribe of Judah will no longer possess their land, and sometime after that this special child of the House of David will be born to a virgin. So no one in modern times ought to be hard on any Israelite of that day or even the next few centuries for not understanding that this cryptic passage was a prediction for a future deliverer of the Hebrews, who we now know was Yeshua of Nazareth.

The remainder of Isaiah reverts to speaking of what will happen to Ephraim, who will be taken beyond the Euphrates River. The men will have their beards shaved, we're told. While likely literal to some degree it is mostly symbolic, because verse 20 tells us that the razor that does the shaving is the king of Ashur. A beard was a necessary part of a man's Hebrew identity; but in other nations men were often going without facial hair. So the shaving of the beards from the men of Israel meant that the King of Assyria would shame them by stripping them of their Hebrew male identity. And, again, that is exactly what happened, and why in time those Hebrews from the northern kingdom became known as the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Most of who assimilated into the many gentile cultures of the Asian continent.

Let's get back to 2nd Kings 15.

Verses 21 and 22 introduce the new King of Israel, **Menachem's** son **P'kachyah**; he managed to stay alive for all of 2 years. When the verse tells us that King **Menachem** died and was buried with his forefathers it can only mean that he was buried in the territory of Gad, his homeland.

King P'kachyah was assassinated by his trusted bodyguard **Pekach** and he replaced the former king on the throne of Israel. This occurred in the 52nd year of King Uzziah of Judah. But what we find next is that the vast amount of silver that **Menachem** had paid several years earlier to Assyria (and no doubt Israel also paid ongoing tribute to Assyria) was but a delaying tactic, and now Assyria attacks a number of cities in the Trans-Jordan and in the northern kingdom, especially the territory of Naphtali (the Galilee region where eventually Christ would be born). Israel had dealt with attacks from Assyria in prior times, but this time it was different. Assyria wanted more than a vassal relationship where only tribute was involved; this time they wanted to annex Israel to help form a Greater Assyria; thus the Hebrew people from the captured cities were taken away captive.

Not long after that a fellow named **Hoshea** (not the prophet of the same name) murdered **Pekach** and he became the new king of what remained of Israel. **Hoshea** was in power barely over a year when Uzziah King of Judah finally died and his son **Yotam** took control of Judah. **Yotam** generally followed his father's ways by being a fairly good king but at the same time allowing the private altars called **bamot** to remain in use. He was credited with building a gate into the Temple area called the Upper Gate. However this was not a new gate per se. This was probably the same gate that Solomon had built more than 2 centuries earlier, and either **Yotam** had it enlarged and strengthened or he merely repaired it and brought it back into service.

As the chapter comes to a close we learn that "in those days" the Lord Himself began to incite the King of Aram (Syria) and the King of Israel against Judah. "In those days" is a general term and the point is that beginning while **Yotam** still ruled these 2 kings of Syria and Israel

stepped up their hostilities against Judah; but it would be under **Yotam's** son **Achaz** that an actual attack occurred.

Jotham finally died and was given an honorable burial in the royal tomb of the House of David, as he was a legitimate descendant of David. So as we prepare to leave chapter 15, **Achaz** was now on Judah's throne, and Judah would find itself on constant war footing against several formidable enemies including their own Hebrew brothers from the north: Ephraim/Israel.

We'll begin chapter 16 next week.