

2 Kings 15: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 15 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah king of Judah began to reign. He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Jekeliah of Jerusalem, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

And the Lord touched the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and he lived in a separate house. And Jotham the king's son was over the household, governing the people of the land.

Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Jotham his son reigned in his place.

In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done.

[1 : 07] He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. Shalom the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down at Ibrahim, and put him to death, and reigned in his place.

Now the rest of the deeds of Zechariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. This was the promise of the Lord that he gave to Jehu, Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.

And so it came to pass. Shalom the son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned one month in Samaria. Then Menahem the son of Gadai came up from Terza, and came to Samaria, and he struck down Shalom the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and put him to death, and reigned in his place.

Now the rest of the deeds of Shalom, and the conspiracy that he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. At that time Menahem sacked Tifsa, and all who were in it, and its territory from Terza on, because they did not open it to him.

Therefore he sacked it, and he ripped open all the women in it who were pregnant. In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadai began to reign over Israel, and he reigned ten years in Samaria.

[2 : 20] And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. Paul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Paul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power.

Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

Now the rest of the deeds of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Menahem slept with his fathers, and Pekahiah his son reigned in his place.

In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned two years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty men of the people of

Gilead, and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house, with Agob and Uriah. [3 : 28] He put him to death and reigned in his place. Now the rest of the deeds of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twenty years.

And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-Beth-Meaca, Gena, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali.

And he carried the people captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

Now the rest of the acts of Pekah and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign.

He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha, the son of Zadok, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah had done.

[4 : 47] Nevertheless, the high places were not removed. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

In those days the Lord began to send Rezan the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah. Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

2 Kings chapter 15 covers a period of over seventy years, the reigns of Uzziah, or Azariah, and Jotham in Judah, and then the reigns of Zechariah, Shalom, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah in Israel.

After the death of Jeroboam II, the northern kingdom is sliding down towards exile. Azariah's regency probably begins with a co-regency, and his sole regency comes from the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam II.

He reigns for fifty-two years in total. He acts righteously like his father Amaziah, however once again he fails to take away the high places. While 2 Chronicles chapter 26 records the events in which Uzziah is struck with leprosy, nothing of that is recorded here, just the fact that he was struck with leprosy by the Lord, after which he lived in a separate house.

[6 : 06] Like the reference to Asa's diseased foot in chapter 15 of 1 Kings, the ailment gives a sense of the decline of the king into unfaithfulness or failure. Some shadow of unknown origin lies over his reign.

As a result of his leprosy, Jotham his son takes on responsibilities of rule and office. In 1 Kings chapter 15-16, we saw a succession of conspiracies overthrowing kings of Israel, Nadab, Elah, Zimri, Tibni.

Now we have another flurry of assassinations and conspiracies. Zechariah, Shalem, Pekahiah and Pekah. Zechariah is the last king of the line of Jehu.

He only reigns for half a year, in stark contrast to the lengthy reigns of his predecessors. Some have suggested tribal rivalries behind some of the assassinations of this chapter, although Lyssa Rae Beale notes some of the problems with these arguments.

It seems more likely that most of them were due to foreign policy. While some wanted to take a posture of appeasement towards Assyria, others wanted to stand up against them in resistance. Zechariah was killed by Shalem, who reigned in his place.

[7 : 13] There is no reference to Zechariah's burial here. The Lord had promised four generations of Jehu's sons on the throne, but by Zechariah in the fourth generation, they were swiftly removed.

Zechariah doesn't even have a full year upon the throne. However, if Zechariah's reign was short, Shalem's was even shorter, only one month before he was killed by Menahem. He doesn't even reign for long enough to merit a mention of the way he continued in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

Menahem is from Terza, Israel's early capital in Manasseh, before Amri moved it to Samaria. Menahem, around the same time as he killed Shalem, sacked Tifsa and judged its territory. Tifsa is in the very far north of the land, and it might be coming under Assyria's sway. The refusal to open up to Menahem may be a result of the fact that its allegiances have switched. Menahem uses the most extreme cruelty and terror to subdue them.

This is the way of the pagan nations that we see elsewhere. It's also a sign of a fracturing kingdom, a kingdom that needs to be kept together by great fear. Once again, in the case of Menahem, the beginning of a king of Israel is dated relative to the reign of Azariah and Judah, a sign of just how destabilised the northern kingdom had become by this point.

[8 : 24] Menahem reigns for longer than his immediate predecessors, ten years, but while he is not assassinated by an internal coup, during his reign the threat of Assyria to the north begins to be more powerfully felt.

Pul, or Tiglath-Pileser III, comes against Israel, and Menahem has to pay tribute. Beal notes the way that Assyria could begin by requiring tribute, before gradually taking away nations' independence, absorbing them into Assyria as provinces under Assyrian governors.

These are all ominous signs of what is to come. Menahem is just buying time at this point. It is worth noting that Menahem's payment is recorded in Assyrian annals. After Menahem's death, he was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who also did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam. His reign was a short one, only two years in length, before he was killed by Pekah, the son of Remaliah, his captain, and by some men of Gilead, in yet another conspiracy. All of these conspiracies and short reigns are a sign of the rising power of Assyria, and how Israel is panicking and falling apart as a result.

Pekah's conspiracy was likely designed to reverse Menahem's policy towards Assyria, intending to form an alliance with Assyria, and bring Judah under their sway to resist the tide of Assyria together.

[9 : 42] The dating of Pekah's accession to the throne, connected with the 52nd year of Azariah, causes problems, as it would mean that he ruled past the time when Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BC.

It's possible that Pekah was an internal rival, who had ruled over parts of Gilead before becoming the king over the whole of Israel, some time into his reign. To get a sense for the complexity of the dating of some of these kings' reigns, it's worth thinking back to the example of David.

David ruled for seven years over Judah in Hebron, and 33 years over the whole land in Jerusalem, and then Solomon was enthroned as his successor while he was still alive. How long did David reign for?

40 years, the seven years in Hebron, and the 33 years in Jerusalem put together? Or was it only about 39 years? 40 years minus a year or so of a co-regency with Solomon?

Or maybe only 32 years if you exclude the time when he was king over only part of the land, and the time of the co-regency? When did his reign begin? When did it end? Thinking about the example of David can give us a sense of how difficult these questions can be to answer, when many of the kings seem to have been co-regents with their predecessors for some period of time, before they became the king in the sense of sole regency.

[10 : 56] Pica allied with the Syrians or Arameans against the Assyrians, and sought to bring Judah into their alliance by force, but a large swath of Israel fell to Assyria, who took the people captive.

Tiglath-Pileser's approach of displacing large numbers of people, cutting them off from their lands so that they would vanish as people, lacking all roots, was a very effective policy for destroying nations, and under Pica large parts of Israel suffered this fate.

Once again his reign comes to an end in a conspiracy. Hoshea conspires against Pica, seemingly with the support of the Assyrians. Meanwhile, down south, Jotham has become king of Judah, replacing his father Uzziah.

Like Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah his forefathers, he is a righteous king, although, like them, he fails to remove the high places. The Lord sends the Syrians and Israel against Judah during his days, a threat, as it's worked out in the days of Ahaz, that will provide the backdrop for key passages in the book of Isaiah.

A question to consider. Israel and Judah are twins. What lesson should the southern kingdom have learned from its northern sister during this period?