

2 Kings 14: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 14 In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Jehoadin of Jerusalem, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done.

But the high places were not removed. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. And as soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand, he struck down his servants who had struck down the king his father.

But he did not put to death the children of the murderers, according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, where the Lord commanded, Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin.

He struck down ten thousand Edomites in the valley of salt, and took Selah by storm, and called it Jokhthiel, which is its name to this day. Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face.

[1 : 14] And Jehoash king of Israel sent word to Amaziah king of Judah, A thistle on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, Give your daughter to my son for a wife. And a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle.

You have indeed struck down Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be content with your glory, and stay at home, for why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?

But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel went up, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah.

And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his home. And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim gate to the corner gate.

And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

[2 : 19] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash that he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place.

Amaziah the son of Jehoash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

And they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish, and put him to death there. And they brought him on horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.

And all the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers.

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Jehoash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Jehoash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[3 : 30] He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel, from Lebo-Hamath as far as the Sea of the Araba, according to the word of the Lord the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant, Jonah the son of Amittai the prophet, who was from Gath-hefer.

For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Jehoash.

Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, the kings of Israel, and Zechariah his son reigned in his place. Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam the second of Israel are the subject of second kings chapter 14.

At several points in these parts of first and second kings, we might find our eyes glazing over, as one king blurs into another, and the two nations are increasingly difficult to tell apart, not least due to the fact that their kings so often share the same name.

[4 : 44] One after another with intermittent exceptions, the kings in both the northern and the southern kingdoms are described as not having departed from the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. At times we might feel that we are fast forwarding through a boring movie, with the scenes becoming indistinguishable from each other, occasionally pausing to get a sense of our bearings with a small episode.

Israel and Judah's history is an almost continual narrative of sin and failure. The text can seem more plentiful in problems for the reader than in rewards. The chronological details are complex and confusing.

Many elaborate theories have been put forward for how to harmonise them. While promising explanations can be advanced, the reader might be forgiven for often feeling that they are chewing gristle rather than enjoying meat.

This might indeed be part of the point that the text is communicating. There is a sterility, a monotony, and a futility to sin. The ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat are a seemingly interminable wandering in the wilderness of sin, leaving the reader longing for the relief of some divine act to interrupt the desperate tedium.

Amaziah the son of Joash of Judah became king during the reign of Joash king of Israel. He does what's right in the eyes of the Lord, but in a way that follows Joash rather than David. In particular his failure is to remove the high places.

[6 : 04] One of the key tasks of the king is to order the worship for the people and to ensure that it is centralised in the temple in Jerusalem, and he fails to do this. Joash, Amaziah's father, had been killed as a result of the conspiracy, and as soon as Amaziah gets the power of the kingdom firmly in his grasp, he kills the conspirators who were responsible for his father's death.

While Athaliah and Jehoram had both tried to wipe out families who were a threat to their reign, Amaziah is a righteous man, and he kills the conspirators responsible for the death of his father, without avenging himself upon all of their families.

And the text applauds him for his adherence to the law of Moses on this point. He also has military success against the Edomites, striking down 10,000 of them in the Valley of Salt and taking Selah.

This victory seems to give Amaziah confidence as he faces the northern kingdom, a confidence that proves misguided, as we'll soon find out. Sending messengers to Jehoash, the king of Israel, he says, Come, let us look one another in the face.

Whether this is an invitation to battle, or an invitation to deal as peers, Jehoash is having nothing of it. He sees Amaziah as an upstart, a king who has ideas well above his station, and who thinks that his nation is fit to stand against Israel when it is really not.

[7 : 20] In a parable that might remind us of the parable that Jotham gives to the leaders of Shechem, back in Judges chapter 9, Jehoash compares Amaziah to a thistle on Lebanon, a small thistle that could easily be trodden underfoot, that sees itself fit to stand against a great cedar of Lebanon.

Jehoash thinks that Amaziah is delusional in his sense of his power, but Amaziah is not to be dissuaded, and when Amaziah goes and faces Israel in battle, Israel completely crushes the southern kingdom.

Amaziah himself is captured, Jerusalem has large stretches of its wall broken down, and the gold and silver of the treasuries of the king's house and of the temple are raided. Jehoash returns to Samaria with all of this spoil, and also with many hostages, presumably hostages of the royal household, that will ensure that Amaziah is compliant from that point onwards.

After the death of Jehoash, the king of Israel, Amaziah, the king of Judah, lives for 15 further years. It is interesting to note that we're told that he lived, we're not told that he reigned.

The knotty chronology of this passage has been discussed at length in the works of people such as Edwin Teeler, and in many commentaries on the books of the kings. Co-regencies and other explanations have been given for the mismatch between the chronological details of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

[8 : 36] Totting up the years of the kings in the south leads to a much higher number than totting up the years of the kings in the north. If Azariah was made king after the capture of Amaziah, this might relieve some of our chronological problems.

The reign of Azariah, or Uzziah, is described in a great deal more detail in the book of 2 Chronicles. In chapter 26 of 2 Chronicles, Uzziah, or Azariah's power, rises to a considerable height.

He has military success against the Philistines, the Ammonites pay tribute to him, his fame spreads to the border of Egypt, he develops an army of over 300,000 men, and builds towers and war machines on the walls of Jerusalem, walls which had been broken down under the reign of his father.

Beyond his building of Elath and restoring a bit to Judah, though, we do not read any of this in 2 Kings. During Amaziah's reign, Jeroboam II becomes king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and he reigns in Samaria for 41 years.

Like his namesake, Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, he continues in the sinful ways of idolatry that had defined the northern kingdom. However, under his reign, the nation prospers, and its borders are greatly extended.

[9 : 46] During this period of time, the threat of the Syrians and the Assyrians in the north is greatly relieved, and so Israel was able to retake land that it had formerly lost. All of this is said to occur according to the prophecy of Jonah, the son of Amittai the prophet, who is, of course, the protagonist of the book of Jonah in the Minor Prophets.

In that book, in the symbols of the big fish and the gourd, we can see God's dealing with the nations round about Israel, raising up and bringing down empires and kingdoms in order to deal with his people.

God sees that the affliction of Israel is bitter, and he saves them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. Jeroboam is, of course, another contender for the saviour that was anticipated by Elisha back in chapter 13.

The restoration of the border of Israel from Libo-Hamath as far as the Sea of the Araba, or the Dead Sea, suggests the recapture of the Transjordan, and not just a diminished region of the Transjordan, but well up into formerly Aramean territory.

With the threat of the Aramean or Syrians quelled, and Assyria focused on issues on its own borders and within itself, and with Judah more quiescent under Azariah, Israel can expand considerably to its north.

[10 : 55] Together the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Judah being victorious over the Edomites, and having built Elath in territory that seems to reach down to the Gulf of Aqaba, now control an expansive territory with borders similar to those under the reign of Solomon.

Discussing this passage, Peter Lighthouse observes some of the larger patterns that we can see replaying here. He writes, 2 Kings chapter 14 offers several examples of this parabolic or allegorical style.

As Israel begins to wind to a close, for example, history begins to repeat itself. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom was divided in two. Jeroboam I established a separate kingdom.

Rehoboam planned an attack, but refrained because of a prophet, and Shishak of Egypt plundered the temple. Joash was a new Solomon, which, if the pattern holds, makes his son Amaziah a new Rehoboam.

The pattern holds. Like Solomon's son, Amaziah goes to fight in the north, and a prophet intervenes. But unlike Rehoboam, Amaziah refuses to hear the prophet, and is defeated by the northern king Jehoash.

[11 : 59] In retaliation, Jehoash plunders the temple, and breaks down the walls of the city of Jerusalem, as Shishak did during the reign of Rehoboam. Idolatrous Judah ultimately returns to where it began.

The parallels between beginning and end are not confined to Judah. By the end of the chapter, another Jeroboam is in Israel, and the following chapters point to a providential, chronological, and historical symmetry between the beginning of the northern kingdom and its closing decades.

Lighthouse unpacks the pattern. Jeroboam I, then there are seven kings, then the seventh king is Ahab, and then Jehu destroys Ahab's house. The pattern is then repeated.

There's a Jeroboam II, then there's seven kings, the seventh king is Hoshea, and then he is defeated in the Assyrian invasion. Even as the northern kingdom prospers in a great many ways, it is fatefully returning to the place where it first started.

A question to consider. Within this chapter, Amaziah, a righteous king, suffers a terrible defeat, and Jeroboam II, a wicked king, experiences amazing success.

[13 : 08] How is the reader of the books of the kings to see God's hand in these events?