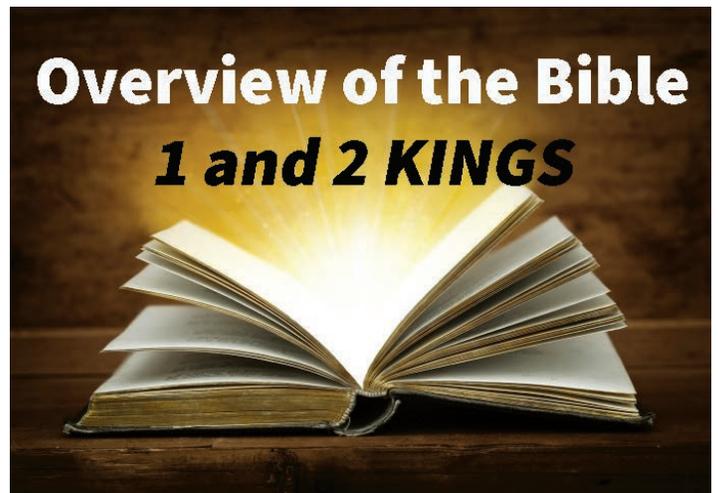


2 Kings 15-16

Lesson 114

Wednesday, January 11, 2023



AZARIAH'S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH (15:1-7)

15:1-4. **Azariah** ("Yahweh has helped") is also called Uzziah ("Yahweh is my strength") in the Old Testament (cf. vv. 13, 30, 32, 34; 2 Chron. 26; Isa. 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5; etc.). **The 27th year of Jeroboam II's** coregency with Jehoash was 767 B.C. In that year Azariah **began to reign over Judah** as sole ruler. He had previously served as **king** in his father's place while Amaziah was imprisoned in Israel and as coregent with him after Amaziah returned to Judah. Azariah **was 16 years old when he** began his coregency (in 790 B.C.) **and he reigned** a total of **52 years** (790-739 B.C.) **in Jerusalem**. Up to that time this was the longest reign of any king of Judah or Israel. Azariah was a good king like **his father** (cf. 2 Chron. 26:4-5), but he too failed to remove **the high places** (cf. comments on 1 Kings 22:43) where the people worshiped Yahweh in disobedience to the Mosaic Law (cf. Deut. 12:2-7, 13-14).

15:5. The writer of 2 Chronicles gave a fuller explanation of the sin that led to Azariah's becoming a leper (2 Chron. 26:16-21). When Azariah became a leper (in 750 B.C.) he shared the throne with his son **Jotham** as coregent until **he died** in 739. Azariah **lived** a life of limited seclusion as required of lepers in Israel, but still played a part in leading the nation, with his son Jotham serving as executor of **the palace**.

15:6-7. In addition to **Azariah's** history being recorded **in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah**, the chronicler added that Isaiah wrote his story (2 Chron. 26:22). Perhaps Isaiah wrote the annals of some of Judah's kings, or there may have been two separate documents.

When the king died, he **was buried ... in the City of David**, undoubtedly in the royal tombs, **and Jotham his son** continued reigning in his place.

Azariah was one of Judah's most effective and influential kings. He expanded Judah's territories southward to Elath (2 Kings 14:22), eastward so that the Ammonites paid him tribute (2 Chron. 26:8), and westward by defeating the Philistines (2 Chron. 26:6-7). He fortified Jerusalem and other parts of Judah (2 Chron. 26:9-10, 15), and reorganized the army (2 Chron. 26:11-14). The combined territories of Azariah and Jeroboam II approximated those of David and Solomon. After Jeroboam II's death Azariah became even more powerful and was looked to for leadership by his neighbors who formed a coalition with him to resist the threat of Assyria. Unfortunately, he became proud, intruded into the priest's office, and was tragically humbled by God (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

ZECHARIAH'S EVIL REIGN IN ISRAEL (15:8-12)

15:8-12. **Zechariah** succeeded **Jeroboam II** in Azariah's **38th year** (753 B.C.), but **he reigned** only **six months**. Like all his predecessors in Israel, he continued the worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel that **Jeroboam I** had begun. He was **assassinated** publicly by **Shallum**. The fact that Shallum was allowed to assume the throne suggests that Zechariah did not enjoy strong public support. Zechariah's death fulfilled God's **word to Jehu** that four generations would succeed him on Israel's **throne** (10:30). Thus Israel's fifth dynasty came to an end.

SHALLUM'S EVIL REIGN IN ISRAEL (15:13–16)

15:13–16. Shallum's **one-month** reign in 752 B.C. was the second shortest in Israel's history (after Zimri's seven-day reign, 1 Kings 16:15–20). **Menahem** was the commander in chief of Jeroboam II's army (Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* 9. 11. 1). He was stationed in **Tirzah**, the former capital of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 15:21, 33; 16:6, 8–9, 15, 17, 23). Menahem, who regarded Shallum as a usurper to the throne, believed that he as commander of the army should succeed Zechariah. Menahem apparently **attacked Tiphseh**, perhaps near Tirzah and Samaria, **because** its inhabitants, who **refused to** acknowledge him as king, shut **their gates** against him. His violent destruction of the city, even down to murdering **all the pregnant women**, was probably intended to intimidate other Israelite towns into supporting him.

MENAHM'S EVIL REIGN IN ISRAEL (15:17–22)

15:17–18. **Menahem** began ruling **in the 39th year of Azariah** and **reigned ... 10 years** (752–742 B.C.). Menahem instituted Israel's seventh dynasty. His apostasy was as bad as that of many of his predecessors.

15:19–22. **Pul** has been identified from Assyrian inscriptions as Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.; cf. v. 29; 16:7, 10; 1 Chron. 5:26). This is the first mention of **Assyria** in 2 Kings. Pul was one of Assyria's strongest rulers. This invasion of **Israel** took place in 743 B.C. and resulted in Menahem's paying tribute to Pul. In return for the **1,000 talents** (ca. 37 tons) **of silver** Menahem raised from the **wealthy** men of Israel, the Assyrian **king** gave Menahem **his support** and helped him retain his crown.

After **Menahem** died, he was **succeeded** by his son **Pekahiah**.

PEKAHIAH'S EVIL REIGN IN ISRAEL (15:23–26)

15:23–26. **Pekahiah ... reigned two years** in **Samaria** (742–740 B.C.). He too followed Jeroboam's apostate ways. His reign ended when **one of his** military **officers, Pekah**, led **50 men**, under his command from **Gilead** in Transjordan to Samaria and there **assassinated** the king. **Argob and Arieah**, possibly princes, were also **killed**. This took place **in the citadel**, the most secure part of the **palace**, in **Samaria**. **Pekah** then assumed the throne of Israel.

PEKAH'S EVIL REIGN IN ISRAEL (15:27–31)

15:27–28. The **52nd year of Azariah** was 740 B.C. (His 52nd year, his last, extended into part of 739.) At this time **Pekah** began to rule over **Israel** from **Samaria**. However, he had apparently never accepted Menahem's claim to the throne and had set up a rival government east of the Jordan River in Gilead. There Pekah lived as a military officer under the Samaritan government, till the time was right for him to assert himself. His **20-year** reign means that he began ruling in Gilead at the same time Menahem took the throne in Samaria (752 B.C.). His reign overlapped Menahem's and Pekahiah's (752–740 B.C.). In 740 B.C. he assassinated Pekahiah and started ruling in Samaria where he remained until he was overthrown in 732 B.C.

Pekah continued in the sinful ways of his predecessors on the throne of **Israel**.

15:29. Part of Pekah's reason for opposing Menahem and his son Pekahiah seems to have been a different conviction regarding Israel's foreign policy toward **Assyria**. Menahem was conciliatory and willing to submit to Assyrian control (cf. vv. 19–20). **Pekah** apparently favored a harder line of resistance. Popular reaction against Menahem's taxing of the people may have encouraged Pekah to make his move. When Pekah had taken power in Samaria he made a treaty with Rezin, king of Damascus, against Assyria. This resulted in **Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul)** leading a campaign into Philistia, Israel, and later Aram in 734–732 B.C. (cf. 2 Chron. 28:5–8). In these battles he **took Ijon**, a town in Naphtali, **Abel Beth Maacah**, just south of Ijon, **Janoah**, another neighboring village, **Kedesh**, just west and north of Lake Huleh, **and Hazor**, south of Kedesh. **He took** all of **Gilead** east of the Jordan River and **Galilee**, the northern portion of Israel, including the territory **of Naphtali**, and he **deported the people to Assyria**.

This first deportation of the Israelites probably took place in 733 B.C. A second deportation followed 11 years later in 722 B.C.

15:30–31. As a result of Israel’s defeat **Hoshea ... conspired against Pekah ... assassinated him, and ... succeeded him as king** of Israel in 732 B.C. On one of the Assyrian inscriptions Tiglath-Pileser III claims to have had a hand in establishing Hoshea on the throne (James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 284). Evidently Hoshea submitted to being a pawn of Assyria as Menahem and Pekahiah had done.

JOTHAM’S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH (15:32–38)

15:32–35. The **second year of Pekah** was 750 B.C. when **Jotham ... began to reign** as coregent with his father Azariah (**Uzziah**). Jotham’s **16-year** reign was from 750 to 735 B.C. Actually, Jotham continued as coregent with his son Ahaz until 732 B.C., but during this time Ahaz was regarded as the official king.

Jotham was a good king, but he did not remove **the high places**.

Only one of Jotham’s accomplishments is recorded in 2 Kings. He **rebuilt the Upper (north) Gate of the temple**, perhaps to encourage the worship of Yahweh. Jotham’s other building projects and his subjection of the Ammonites are recorded in 2 Chronicles 27:3–5. The reason he became a powerful king is that “he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God” (2 Chron. 27:6).

15:36–38. **Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah**, king of Israel, united **against Judah** to force Jotham and Ahaz to join with them in taking a hard line of resistance against the Assyrian threat. **In those days** refers specifically to the time when Jotham and Ahaz were coregents (735–732; see comments on 16:1). This pressure was from the Lord and proved to be a test of faith for the Judean king (cf. 16:5–8; Isa. 7:1–17). **His father** (2 Kings 15:38) may refer to Jotham’s father Azariah who had controlled Jerusalem for 52 years, or to his ancestor David.¹

Ahaz’s Evil Reign in Judah (chap. 16)

AHAZ’S ASSESSMENT (16:1–4)

16:1–2a. **The 17th year of Pekah** was 735 B.C. It was not until 732, however, that **Ahaz ... began** his **16-year** reign, which continued to 715. As shown on the chart “Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets,” near 1 Kings 12:25–33, the reign of Ahaz’s father Jotham was 16 years (2 Chron. 27:1), 750–735. But Jotham did not die until 732. Apparently, then, in the four years from 735 to 732 neither Jotham nor Ahaz was credited with independent rule; they were coregents. In another sense Ahaz’s rule began in 744 (see 2 Kings 17:1 and comments there). Therefore, he may have been a vice-regent under his father Jotham from 744 to 735.

16:2b–4. **Unlike** his ancestor **David**, with whom many of the Judean kings were compared, Ahaz **did not do** the will of **God**. Instead, he followed the examples of the wicked **kings of** the Northern Kingdom. He went so far as to sacrifice **his son** (obviously not Hezekiah who succeeded him as king) as a burnt offering to an idol. This heinous sin (cf. 17:17) was a common practice of the Ammonites and the other native pagan Canaanite nations that Israel under Joshua **had** partially **driven out** of the land. Ahaz also promoted worship **at the high places** (cf. comments on 1 Kings 22:43), on **hilltops and under** large trees. These places of worship were so numerous that the writer said hyperbolically that they could be found **under every spreading tree** (cf. 2 Kings 17:10).

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “2 Kings,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 566–568.

AHAZ'S ENEMIES (16:5–9)

16:5–6. **Rezin ... and Pekah** had formed an alliance to resist Assyrian aggression and they wanted Ahaz to join them. Ahaz, however, did not feel Assyria's threat as keenly as did his neighbors who were situated between Judah and Assyria. Ahaz preferred a conciliatory policy with Assyria. Consequently, Rezin and Pekah attacked **Ahaz** hoping to force him to join them. **But they** were unsuccessful in this attempt for reasons stated in verses 7–9.

The writer inserted parenthetically here (v. 6) that **Rezin** was successful in taking **Elath** at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba which Azariah had recently made a Judean city (14:22). This important port town thus passed into Aramean control. Judah never was able to recapture it. It later fell to the **Edomites**.

16:7–9. Rather than joining Rezin and Pekah **Ahaz** appealed for help to **Tiglath-Pileser III**. Ahaz voluntarily submitted as a **vassal** to Assyrian control and sent a gift of **silver and gold** from **the temple** and **palace** in Jerusalem to encourage Tiglath-Pileser to get his harassing neighbors away from his walls. Tiglath-Pileser obliged **by attacking** and **capturing** Rezin's capital **Damascus**.

This diverted the Arameans from besieging Jerusalem; they had to return home to defend their own territory. Damascus fell to Assyria, **Rezin** was executed, and many of the Arameans were **deported ... to Kir**, an area of Assyria, in keeping with the Assyrians' policy of relocating conquered peoples (cf. 15:29; 17:23). Ahaz's decision to appeal to Assyria for help was a foolish one (cf. Isa. 7). Besides losing many of his people to Pekah in the siege (2 Chron. 28:5–8), Ahaz encouraged further Assyrian advancement into Palestine. The chronicler also recorded successful invasions of Judah by the Edomites and the Philistines at that time (2 Chron. 28:17–19). All these losses resulted ultimately from Ahaz's apostasy (2 Chron. 28:19).

AHAZ'S APOSTASY (16:10–18)

16:10–14. **Ahaz** traveled to **Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser III**. There **he saw an altar** (a large one; cf. v. 15) which was Aramean or, more likely, Assyrian. Ahaz sent **Uriah the high priest** in Jerusalem a **sketch of this altar** with instructions to have one **built** just like it. The apostasy of the priesthood at that time can be seen in Uriah's speedy acquiescence. When **Ahaz returned** home, he had **the Lord's bronze altar** of burnt offering moved aside to give a prominent place to **the new altar**. On it he offered the traditional **offerings** of Judah.

16:15–18. **Ahaz then** commanded that all regular **offerings** be made **on the ... new altar**. He would **use the bronze altar** only **for seeking guidance** probably from the Lord. **Uriah** cooperated with the king's wishes.

Ahaz also **took the basins from the 10 bronze movable stands** (cf. 1 Kings 7:27–40), **removed the massive bronze ... base** from under **the Sea** (cf. 1 Kings 7:23–26) and substituted a **stone** stand. He also **took down the Sabbath canopy** (evidently a covering erected in the courtyard to shade the king and his retinue when they visited the temple) and **removed the royal entryway outside the temple** (a special ramp or stairway that only the king used to enter the temple). What Ahaz did with the pieces of furniture he removed is not explained. It is clear, however, that he willingly disobeyed God who had approved the use and arrangement of the bronze altar and the other furnishings and deferred to Tiglath-Pileser III in order not to offend or anger the Assyrian ruler. Ahaz's other acts of idolatry are recorded in 2 Chronicles 28:2–3, 22–25.

AHAZ'S DEATH (16:19–20)

16:19–20. **Ahaz ... was buried** in Jerusalem, but not laid in the royal sepulchers with the other godly kings of Judah (2 Chron. 28:27). This shows that here were influential people in Judah who did not approve of Ahaz's policies.