

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 9A

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

God had been patient with Israel and Judah by giving them time and opportunities to repent. But the kings of these two kingdoms, particularly, the northern kingdom, Israel, had not heeded the warnings of God. In the previous two chapters, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Jeroboam II, the sons of Jehu, the Kings of Israel continued to do evil in the sight of the LORD. They sinned with impunity.

Judah, on the other hand, did not fair much better. Amaziah, the King of Judah, started well. He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD but was not perfect because he allowed the people to worship in the high places in the land.

The present study shows that the two kingdoms were getting from bad to worse. In Judah, King Amaziah's son, Azariah, became one of the kingdom's illustrious kings. He started well like his father, but rebelled against the LORD later in his life. In Israel, five kings, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah took the throne in quick succession; each one of them

did evil in the sight of the LORD. Time was running out for them and the LORD'S judgement upon them was coming soon. God continued to demonstrate that He is faithful to His Word and is patient and merciful. Disobedience against Him would result in His punishment and chastisement. On the other hand, obedience would result in His favour and blessing. There is a limit to the long-suffering and patience of God. This truth has been taken for granted by both Gentiles and believers alike. Failure to repent from sin is one such sign that God's patience has been taken for granted

OUTLINE

1. Azariah reigned in Judah (vv.1-7);
2. The Five Kings of Israel (vv.8-32);
3. Jotham succeeded his father Azariah as king of Judah (vv.33-38).

COMMENTARY

Azariah Reigns in Judah—15:1-7

Azariah, the son of King Amaziah of Judah, ascended the throne when his father was slain in Lachish by some conspirators (2 Kings 14:19). Azariah ["Yahweh has helped"] was only sixteen years old when he began to reign. He took the throne name of Uzziah ["Yahweh my strength"] (15:13; 2 Chronicles 26:1). He had a very long reign of 52 years. The period of his rule included the

years of his co-regency with his father, Amaziah, when the latter was held captive in Israel (2 Kings 14:13); and also his co-regency with his son, Jotham, when he was stricken with leprosy. His mother, Jecholiah, is mentioned and as in the lives of all the other kings, shows the important role mothers play in moulding the character of their children. Unlike career mothers of today, mothers in those days exerted the greatest influence in the upbringing of their children. Obviously, Jecholiah had been a godly mother for Uzziah did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, following his father's footsteps. However, he too was not perfect in that he did not remove the high places. He still allowed the people to sacrifice and burn incense in these places. The kings should have removed them from Jerusalem.

When King Uzziah began to rule in Judah, the condition of the land was not good. Jerusalem was in disarray. His father, Amaziah, was taken captive. A major part of the protective wall of Jerusalem had broken down. The treasures of the Temple and the palace were taken away and some Judeans too were taken to Israel by King Jehoash. The writer of Kings did not single out any of his accomplishments, but Ezra, the writer of Chronicles in the parallel account detailed many of King Uzziah's achievements (Chronicles 26:1-15). In his reign, he raised the influence and power of Judah to great heights. He was successful in waging wars against the Philistines, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and his fame spread

even as far as Egypt. He was not only a good military commander, but also a capable nation builder. He rebuilt the broken walls of Jerusalem. He built strong watchtowers in the desert areas and dug many wells for the agriculture of the land. He maintained a well-trained army of 375,000 soldiers, and he made sure that they were equipped with enough weapons of war, and even invented "war-machines" which were capable of shooting arrows and stones.

Religiously, Uzziah did well as long as Zechariah was his spiritual mentor, just like Jehoiada was to the young Joash (2 Kings 12:2). The identity of Zechariah is unknown. He was not the high priest. But he was a godly man who had understanding in the ways of God.¹ As long as Uzziah sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

But at some time in Uzziah's reign, the LORD smote him with leprosy (2 Kings 15:5). He transgressed the law of God. Like his father, he let his successes and prosperity go to his head. He became proud and arrogant. He wanted to burn incense at the altar of incense in the Temple. No one except the priests was allowed by God to perform this offering of incense upon the altar in the Temple. Uzziah's action was a blatant violation of God's law. The chief priest, whose name was Azariah, and eighty other priests blocked his path prohibiting him from burning the

¹ 2 Chronicles 26:5 And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

incense on the altar. It took a great deal of courage for them to stand up to the king, who was very popular with the people and who did so much for the kingdom, materially speaking.

They could have compromised and won the king's favour. But their first loyalty was to the LORD. They had but one desire and that was to obey and glorify the LORD. Uzziah was angry with the priests. He had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense. There was a stand off and the priests refused to move. At that time, the LORD smote Uzziah with leprosy which appeared on his forehead before the priests. At that moment, the priests thrust the king out of the Temple, and realising that he was stricken with leprosy, he hastily left the Temple on his own accord.

Uzziah from then onwards was relieved from all his royal duties until the day he died. The phrase "dwelt in several houses" alluded to the fact that the king lived separately by himself. He had to be isolated.² He could not attend to his duties and meet his officials and the people. Therefore, his son Jotham "was over the house", meaning that he ruled Judah as co-regent. Uzziah died in the year 740 B.C.

The Five Kings of Israel—15:8-32

In the 38th year of the reign of King Uzziah in Judah, **Zechariah, the**

² Leviticus 13:46 All the days wherein the plague *shall be* in him he shall be defiled; he *is* unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp *shall* his habitation *be*.

son of King Jeroboam II, began his reign in Israel (753 B.C.). Zechariah ruled only for six months whereas his father ruled Israel for forty-one years. So, Zechariah hardly ruled Israel. However, his six-month's reign was enough for the writer to record that he did evil in the sight of the LORD as his forefathers had done. Zechariah was the fourth generation of the dynasty of Jehu. As promised by the LORD to Jehu, his dynasty lasted for four generations (2 Kings 10:30). Zechariah's reign was the last of Jehu's royal line. God kept to His Word even though his sons who ruled Israel were bad kings. In one of his public appearances, he was assassinated by Shallum ["retribution"], the son of Jabesh.

Shallum made himself the King of Israel in the 39th year of the reign of King Uzziah in Judah (752 B.C.). Shallum slew Zechariah "before the people". This indicates that he had a strong popular following in Israel to enable him to carry out his plan in public. Nothing further is said about him. He ruled only for one full month because Menahem, one of his military generals, staged a *coup d'etat* and assassinated him.

Menahem was a capable ruler and he reigned in Israel for ten years (752 – 742 B.C.). Within one year, Israel had three kings in quick succession — Zechariah, Shallum and Menahem. Now Menahem was a ruthless and cruel king who did evil in the sight of the LORD. He perpetuated the sins of Jeroboam I. When he ascended the throne, the people in

Tiphseh opposed him. He killed the men and destroyed the city. He cruelly ripped the babies off the wombs of pregnant women. Meanwhile in the south, there was relative calm and peace in Judah.

At this time, Assyria had become a great power and its king had aspirations to expand his territories. Pul, the King of Assyria, also known as Tiglath-Pileser III (the throne name), marched his armies against Israel. King Menahem of Israel quickly sent a huge amount of gifts to Tiglath-Pileser.³ Menahem taxed all the wealthy men of the nation to give to Tiglath-Pileser III. So, the King of Assyria left Israel for the time being.⁴ Menahem died a natural death and his son Pekahiah succeeded him.

Pekahiah (“Yahweh illumines”), the son of Menahem began his reign in Israel in the 50th year of King Uzziah of Judah (742-740 B.C.). He reigned over Israel for two years. It is amazing that the kings of Israel took the names of the LORD (YAHWEH), intimating their devotion to the LORD but in reality their hearts were far away from Him! There was nothing to record about Pekahiah except that he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. His father, Menahem, a military commander assassinated Shallum to

become the King of Israel; and now Pekahiah was assassinated by a military commander in his army who had the same name as he, Pekah, a shortened form. Pekah marched to the royal palace in Samaria, killed the king and even two of his loyal servants, Argob and Arieah.

Pekah (“opened”) was the son of Ramaliah, and he most likely served as a military captain in the east of Jordan judging by the fact that he was supported by fifty Gileadites (Gilead is the land east of Jordan). He ruled Israel for twenty years (752-732 B.C.). He too did evil in the sight of the LORD and perpetuated the sins of Jeroboam I.

In the 17th year of Pekah’s reign, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria came again to attack Israel. Ahaz, the King of Judah, was under attack by King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Syria (16:5). The reason of the attack by Israel was most probably territorial expansion and economic greed. Under pressure, Ahaz sought military aid from King Tiglath-Pileser III. In spite of the appeasement made by Menahem with Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III came to the aid of Judah and attacked Israel. Tiglath-Pileser III captured a number of important cities of Israel and even parts of the Gilead and Galilee and Naphtali in the north of Israel. He also took captives some of the Israelites and deported them to Assyria. This event which took place around 733 B.C. looks like a dress rehearsal of the greater invasion which would take place in 722 B.C. Pekah was

³ “A thousand talents” is equal to 844, 800 ounces of silver. At a price of \$5 an ounce, the tribute would be equivalent to \$4,224,000. At an assessment of fifty shekels per man, about \$100, it would require 42,000 men to meet such an obligation. In that case there were that many “mighty men of wealth” in Israel (Russell Dilday, 1 & 2 Kings, page 440).

⁴ Twenty years later, in 722 B.C., they came back and sacked the whole nation.

assassinated by Hoshea, the son of Elah, who conspired against him.

It is a sad history for the northern kingdom Israel. These were dark days for Israel. Her land now largely reduced and became a much smaller kingdom. Israel was now down to its last king, Hoshea. The history of Israel is not just its ancient history. It illustrates the consequences of sin. God is faithful to His Word and is equally patient and gracious to Israel. Many times the kings and the people of Israel were given the opportunity to repent of their sins and turn back to God, but they would not. Roger Ellsworth rightly observed the spiritual principle which is clearly spelt out: "Those who continue long in sin and disregard God's calls to repentance will eventually experience His judgment."⁵

Jotham Reigns in Judah— 15:33-38

King Uzziah of Judah who was stricken with leprosy died. His son, Jotham ["YAHWEH is perfect"], who was co-regent during the time his father was quarantined, now ascended the throne as the 11th King of Judah. He began his reign in the second year of King Pekah of Israel (752 B.C.). King Jotham was twenty years old when he began to reign in Judah; and he ruled for sixteen years (750-735 B.C.). His mother was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD. However, he too was not perfect in that he did not remove the high places

in the land where the people sacrificed and burnt incense. But he repaired the walls of Jerusalem and the Upper Gate of the Temple. Like his father, he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and castles and towers in the forests. In the war against the Ammonites, he won a decisive victory and imposed on them a large annual tribute to Judah. He became strong and well-known because he prepared himself before the LORD before he acted (2 Chronicles 27:4-6). King Jotham died and his son, Ahaz became King of Judah.

PRACTICAL VALUE

King Uzziah was a good king. He must be commended for doing what is right before the LORD, when he began to reign. God blessed him and he achieved many things raising the nation to great heights of glory and power. Similar to the sin of his father, Amaziah, Uzziah's successes went into his head and heart. His father wanted to be a great military general and he challenged Israel to war, presuming that he was invincible. Uzziah was not satisfied to be a king only; he also wanted to be a priest who could burn incense at the altar of the Temple.

The law of God prohibited him from doing this. He persisted in carrying out his intention although Azariah the priest forbade him. He should have turned around and left. But he did not. He was angry with Azariah. The LORD smote him with leprosy which appeared at first on his forehead in clear sight of the priests.

⁵ Roger Ellsworth, **Apostasy, Destruction, and Hope**, page 175.

Azariah then drove him out of the Temple. He could no more serve as a king because of his leprosy. God took away all the privileges which he had enjoyed and experienced.

Today, it is also true of many Christians who start well in their walk with the Lord. God blesses them; they increase in position, power and possession in the world. Then they gradually stay away from worship services, prayer meetings, studying of the Word and witnessing to others. God, who is faithful to His Word, will punish or chastise them if they do not heed the call to repent and turn back to God. God could take away all that they have. A good beginning is no guarantee of a successful ending. Many a life has been ruined by pride and unholy desire and ambition.

Azariah, the priest, and the eighty priests set a great example for many today. How often many in the church today are beholden to a leader who has the power of the pen, pulpit, purse and popular support, and when such a leader does not do what is right in the sight of God, he is not taken to task. How we should all be like Azariah and the eighty priests. It was easy for them to let the king do what he wanted to do even though it was clearly transgressing the law of God. But they did not. They put God first. Their allegiance and loyalty was to God first. They were prepared to be severely punished by the king, and to die. God was honoured and He protected them. Stand up for what is right before God and give Him the honour and glory.

The lesson of the five kings of Israel teaches us that sin against God will eventually be met with God's judgement and punishment. When we have sinned against God, remember always to confess and repent and we will be reconciled to God as He has promised. Or else judgement will befall that sinner. There is no exception. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 2 Kings 15:1-15; Proverbs 26:27.

TUESDAY: 2 Kings 15:16-31; Galatians 6:7-9.

WEDNESDAY: 2 Kings 15:32-38; Proverbs 14:34.

THURSDAY: 2 Kings 15:1-38.

FRIDAY: 2 Kings 15:1-38.

Discussion Questions

1. Was it wrong for Uzziah to maintain a well-equipped army coupled with modern military armaments?

2. Why did the LORD afflict Uzziah with leprosy? What was King Uzziah deprived of when he sinned against the LORD?

3. What example did Azariah and the eighty priests set for us?

4. What is the point of recording the life and reign of King Zachariah when he reigned for only 6 months and then was killed?

5. How would you sum up the deeds and life of King Menahem? Are there leaders in the church today who could be compared to King Menahem?

6. What lesson/s could we learn from this chapter that can help us live a more godly Christian life today?
