

## Kings and Prophets 15-01-02b

Let's resume our study, I'm going to ratchet back just slightly on the force of my delivery and hope I don't blow my throat out again. Sorry about that. But we're looking in 2 Kings chapter 14 and reminding ourselves of the career of the king in the southern kingdom, the son of Joash, Amaziah.

He reigned a total of 29 years, he is called a good king but not a great king. He didn't get rid of the high places, he worshipped other gods, he got a bit too big for his britches and went up there and was defeated by Joash of Israel who conquered him and took the vessels out of the temple. And he is eventually assassinated.

Between him and his son Azariah who is going to begin reigning at age 16 and remember there is some co-regency involved there. And Azariah is going to be crowned during the 27th year of King Jeroboam II. So we've looked at, last time we met, the end of the career of Amaziah and the end of the career of Azariah.

But in the meantime up in the north there has been a change and Joash has died and Jeroboam II his son takes over. Joash reigned for 16 years, Jeroboam II, remember the first Jeroboam is the first king of the northern kingdom. So this is Jeroboam II, he is going to be around a long time, 41 years up in the north.

Well, as I mentioned in the introduction, we're at something of a turning point here and the reason is that during this particular period, the reign of Amaziah into Azariah down in Judah and the death of Joash in the north and the accession of Jeroboam II, this is when the writing prophets and the record of some of these prophets picks up. So far our study has pretty much been kings and we have had the non-writing prophets Elijah and Elisha and some men of God who have spoken. But we're going to get into our canonical prophetic books at this point.

Now I ask myself, why is it that there hasn't been writing prophets previous to this? And the suggestion that I've given to you over the preceding weeks is that there is a graphic presentation of truth that travels by word of mouth through the kingdoms, especially in the north. When a king stretches out his hand and it's withered, when the altar is shaken and crumbles, when axe heads float, when fire comes from heaven and devours the top of a mountain, when poison is made fresh, when salt is made fresh in terms of water supplies, when these miraculous things take place, this verbally telegraphs all over the kingdom. And it's a very simple message.

It's like a cartoon and it's a very simple message. There is a God in Israel who holds his people accountable, who holds the kings accountable. And he demonstrates his presence through these episodes.

They may be separated by many years, but just about the time people become complacent and begin to think that, well, the God of Israel is just like all these other gods of the nations. God

does something that the gods of the nations never do. He intervenes.

He violates the laws of nature. And people are raised from the dead. The laws of physics are suspended and controverted.

And God makes his presence felt and known to his people. A second question that we can ask ourselves is, in the great scheme of things, God permits the kingdom to be divided after the days of Solomon. There is a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom.

Why? Why doesn't it fragment? Why doesn't each tribe kind of have its own little, why couldn't it be the United States of Israel with 10 or 12 states there corresponding to the tribes, right? But there is this division. There is this split. There is the north and the south, 10 tribes in the north, Judah and Benjamin in the south.

Of course, a couple of those are across the river in Gilead and that. But you have the half tribe of Manasseh and that on the other side. But generally speaking, you've got the north and the south.

Why? And we ask this not so much a historical why as an interpretive question. What significance do we find in that as we seek to observe, interpret, and apply the word of God for ourselves? And I think the answer starts to clarify when we think about the nature of these two kingdoms. Who is on the throne in the south? Every single king, you have a little hiatus there with Athaliah and the king is in hiding.

And that's got some prophetic significance of its own. There is a living heir of David, but he can't come to the throne because Athaliah is seated in his spot. But God promised David that he would not lack a man to sit on his throne throughout the national life of Israel.

And this has been the case down in Judah. Up in the north, somebody's general, somebody's assassin, some strong guy comes in. They get together and rally and make a guy king.

And these guys are just cats and dogs. There's hardly a dynasty that lasts more than two or three generations up there. A guy might get his son on the throne pretty soon.

He's assassinated. Somebody else comes in. It's all cats and dogs.

So you have a spiritual element. And generally speaking, you have somewhat better kings on average down in the south than you do in the north. The south is where the priests function.

The south is where the presence of God dwells between the cherubim and the temple. And there is a different sense of responsibility in the southern kingdom. It's an entirely different dynamic.

So in terms of application, in terms of interpretation and application, as we see these two accounts interwoven in both Kings and Chronicles, what significance does this have for us? I would suggest, first of all, that there is an applicability in the southern kingdom, more so to

believers who are making an effort to live in a way that pleases God. This is where David dwelt. David had his problems.

David made his mistakes. He had his great lapses. But his heart was always toward the Lord.

He returned. He was a man after God's own heart. And his name is attached to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, son of David.

And with his faults and with his failures, David ends as he began. He has some missteps. He stumbles.

He falls. But he gets back up. And David ends well.

You read that Song of David that we studied, and his heart is toward the Lord at the end just as it was at the beginning. And we find generally that this is the case down in Judah. You have these kings that are endeavoring in a little bit different plane, a different environment.

The presence of God is so immediate and so felt that you don't have a lot of prophetic activity. Elijah, Elisha are not in the south. They're in the north.

Why is that? Because God himself has a presence in the south. And you get the impression that the kings and the people in Judah are dealing more directly with God. There's not really the need for this intermediary the way there is in the north.

The north is constantly being called to God. There are demonstrations that God is who he says he is, that he is the God of their fathers. He's the God of the covenant.

He's the God of promise. And in the north, there is a greater distance. So as we look at these books of Kings and Chronicles for instruction, we examine ourselves, and we inevitably look around us at believers in our sphere, our field of view, and we say the illustrations and the truths that are communicated about the northern kingdom pertain and apply more so to believers who, in this age, are headed for the darkness which is outside, who are being called, Why will ye die, O house of Israel? Turn ye at my reproof.

These are those who need to turn, who need to return, who need to heed the call and begin to walk in the way of the Lord. And once they do that, to persevere in it to the end. When we look at Amaziah and Azariah in Judah, they are kings who begin well and then fail.

You don't typically see a king in the north beginning well. It's a rare thing. There's a couple of half-wities and kings up there, but in the main, they're far from God.

They don't take away the idolatrous calf worship in Dan and Bethel. They tolerate the existence of all of these other gods. So there's a different sphere of application, shall we say.

So if I am a believer trying to live my life to please the Lord and I want to try to fortify my soul against failure and against distraction and against the kinds of things that can happen if I am

not careful, I would study the southern kingdom of Judah. I would look at the typification, at the illustration, at the amplification of what can go wrong with someone who is close to God and yet isn't diligent, doesn't watch and pray, doesn't constantly seek God's face, doesn't ask those questions at decision points. Should I go? Where is the man of God? Let's consult the Lord before we decide to fight this battle, before we decide to attack this entity outside our borders, before we decide to attack our brothers to the north.

You notice that that never ends well and you get the idea that they have this grand idea that I'll reunify the kingdom and it isn't God's desire that they be unified. He wants those kingdoms divided. He is the one that divided them.

In the mouth of the prophet Samuel, the kingdom is torn and I'm going to give it to others. And we have to recognize that things that may seem ideal are not necessarily God's will at the present time. Let me say that again.

Things that seem to us and perhaps are ideal may not be the will of God at the present time. There are times when there is a situation such as the division of the kingdom and God wants it that way. We live in a fallen world with a corrupt nature and God designed it that way.

Ideally, at salvation we would be cleansed and purified and holy like the unfallen angels, but we're not. Why? God wants it this way. God is using our journey through the fallen world, fighting our fallen nature, relying on Him and the resources and the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit and the word to teach us so that we can learn.

We can't learn those things in a perfected state. We're learning things the unfallen angels have never had a chance to experience. They look, they watch, they learn by observation.

We are learning by experience. So this is the patience of the saints. It's a verse in Revelation.

This is the perseverance of the saints and this is a part of our perseverance. You have need of patience so that after you have endured, after you have suffered, you receive the promises, you inherit. Unideal, non-perfect circumstances and situations are often God's will.

Instead of trying to pray our way out of them or ask God for deliverance from them, look at these kings and see that in many cases this is the means for us to learn. Instead of asking for deliverance out, maybe we should be praying, Lord, help me to learn the lessons and grasp the truths that you have for me in this situation. Deliver me through it rather than out of it.

Let me grasp and learn what I need to know. Once we learn those lessons, that situation will end. When God takes out Israel's heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh, how many kingdoms are there in the millennium? Northern and southern or just one? Why is that? Lessons learned.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. You will have no need that any man teach you. Your young men will see visions.

Your old men will dream dreams. The lion will lay down with the lamb. It's going to be a whole different situation because the lessons that Israel had to learn under the law and in that non-spirit filled existence, that phase is complete.

We want to complete our phase. We all experience the non-ideal, the tough, the I wish this wasn't happening. But if there is a purpose in it from God, then instead of seeking to escape it and solve it, we want to look at these kings and say, let's learn the lesson, so that when it ends, it accomplished its purpose.

And the sooner we learn the lessons, the more quickly God can end that phase. If Israel had learned the lessons that God had for them in these days of the kings and prophets, when Jesus came, what would they have said? Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. When Jesus went to the temple on tragic entry day, there would have been people who had learned the lessons of these days.

Had learned the lessons of their captivity. Had learned the lessons of their return. Had learned the lessons under the Romans.

Had learned the lessons of what happens when you ritualize and legalistic eyes, make things legalistic in the law and try to do righteousness by works instead of righteousness by faith. If they had learned those lessons, the kingdom could have come when Jesus offered it. But they didn't avail themselves of the opportunity to learn in these bad circumstances.

They just bemoaned it and bewailed it, but they didn't let it turn them to God. They didn't respond. All day long I have held out my hands, God says, to a disobedient and stiff-necked people.

So what we want to look for is in this situation that I don't find to be conducive, that I don't think is great, that I wish wasn't here, where is my opportunity for obedience? Where is my opportunity for repentance? Because that is the true key to moving on. I will keep putting you in this situation until you learn to solve it. I will keep presenting you this story problem until you learn to apply the formula and get the right answer.

I will give it to you three times. I will give it to you five times. I will give it to you seven times, saith the Lord, until you learn.

Well, if we figure out, as they could have done here, that this is the real test and this is the real task, it's the old strategy of the indirect approach. You don't try to solve the problem, you try to learn the lesson and let God remove the problem. It's focusing on the goal and the purpose, not trying to remove the circumstance.

So, at this time now, thinking about that, in the Northern Kingdom and in the Southern Kingdom, there are different dynamics at work, different lessons being learned. The lessons in the North, this is the paradigm for those who are far from God, those who aren't interested in obedience and yet have a relationship with God. They are His people.

All day long, I have held out my hands to my people. They are disobedient and they are stiff-necked, but they are mine. They are still in covenant relationship with God.

God is not dealing this way with the Philistines or the Hittites or the Moabites or the Edomites or the Ammonites or any of the other ites that live at that time. He is dealing with and sending prophets to these individuals in the Northern Kingdom. They are idolatrous, they are disobedient, they are arrogant, they are recalcitrant, they are incorrigible, and yet God continues to deal with them.

But He works with them differently because of their attitude than He does in the South, generally speaking. There is a bit of a higher standard. There is a greater expectation in the South because that's the presence of God.

That's where the temple is. That's where the glory of God is. That's where the priests are functioning.

By the way, where is the high priest? Where is the opportunity to consult? It's in Jerusalem. Urim and Thummim. The king at any time can call the high priest and say, I'm considering going to battle.

What saith the Lord? Entirely different. They don't have that opportunity up in the North. He can't call the high priest.

He can call a priest of Baal. He can call that gaggle of priests that all tell him what he wants to hear. The opportunity for direct appeal to God is in the Southern Kingdom.

It's just a stone's throw from the palace of the king to the whereabouts of the high priest. The very presence of God. But you've got to do it in the right way.

What is Azariah's great mistake? Well, I'm this close, why don't I just do it myself? There is a protocol. There is a way. A right way.

And there is a wrong way. And if you get full of yourself, there are so many applications to the modern church today in terms of there are good goals and worthy aspirations. Great to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people.

But there is a right way and there is a wrong way. There is a way to promote Christian growth. Christian growth is a good thing.

Edification and the building up of the body of Christ is a wonderful thing. But there is a right way and there is a wrong way. Just because your goal... Well, I want to hear from the Lord.

I want to honor the Lord. I want to come in and worship Him, says the king as he approaches with his torch. My heart is pure.

I'm coming before God. Hey, you're not a Levite. Get out.

Go away. Do it the way God... Well, but I just want to honor, I want to worship Him. I mean, wouldn't God be pleased if the king himself came before Him and did obeisance? No.

And this is the problem in so much of our modern Christianity. People say, well, but my heart's in the right place and my purpose is good. So what does it matter how I do it? That's a different dynamic going on in the southern kingdom and the lessons that we learn as we watch these kings.

Here's what's interesting, though. As I said earlier, in this time, and we are circa, we're just under 800 BC now, in the reign of Amaziah. And of course, he and Azariah overlap.

And in the midst of that, this is when Jeroboam II appears in the northern kingdom. It is at this time that we find the beginning of the written prophets. If you keep your finger in place, if you're at 2 Kings 14, then you're in a good spot.

Just turn forward a bit to verse 23. You'll notice all the beginning of that is the Acts of Amaziah. Verse 18, the Acts of Amaziah are written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah.

They formed a conspiracy. They killed him at Lachish, brought him on horses, and our horse theme that we've seen so many times, brought him to Jerusalem, buried him with his fathers in the city of David. The people of Judah took Azariah, who was 16 years old, made him king instead of his father, Amaziah.

He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king rested with his fathers. And this is an oblique reference to the fact that there was this long co-regency. But he waited to build Elath until his father was actually off the scene.

Now look at verse 23. This is Jehoash in the north. King of Israel became king in Samaria.

He reigned 41 years. He's like a namesake. Who had made Israel to sin.

This is the Jonah of the book of Jonah fame. Jonah the son of Amittai. He is alive.

He made an otherwise unrecorded prophecy about Jeroboam II that he would accomplish this victory and restore this territory. However, he's a bad king. He does what is evil in the sight of the Lord, and yet he gets a victory.

Now, thinking about Christians, thinking about churches, thinking about believers in our time, in the church age, in the present day, who are far from God, who are doing evil in the sight of the Lord because they are embracing the social gospel, they are embracing political correctness, they are doing all kinds of things that are in direct violation of the word of God, and yet they score big in terms of size of congregation, in terms of budget, in terms of visibility, in terms of supposedly spreading the gospel far and wide, and sending missionaries overseas, and enhancing the visibility and the communication power of their church. They're everywhere. They've got media.

They've got resources. They've got websites. They've got videos.

They've got TV shows. They've got huge venues. They've got all kinds of active ministries to every different category and class of people, and they look like they have restored the territory that the church lost.

You know, here the churches are getting smaller. We've got a mega church. Look at us, how prosperous and how much ground we have gained.

That's why we have these things in the word of God. Do not be fooled. Material success doesn't equal spiritual success.

Next time, we're going to be looking at the three prophets that pertain to this time. Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. Jonah, Amos, and Hosea all minister at this time.

So this seems like a good place to put a comma in our study, but we're not going to do an extended verse-by-verse discussion of these prophets, but we will cover them comprehensively. Why does Jonah, the book of Jonah, and Jonah's story appear during this time? What is the prophecy of Amos? What is its content? Why does he address all of these different nations with these predictions and condemnations from the Lord? Why does Hosea prophesy at this time, circa 750, 755 B.C.? We will begin much more of the prophetic side of our study in the next few weeks. In closing, keep in mind, all these things are written for our instruction.

If you think, well, it just seems like a lot of names, a lot of episodes, think big picture. What's going on in the Northern Kingdom? God is dealing with believers who are far from Him, but who belong to Him. In the Southern Kingdom, God is dealing with believers who are close to Him, but are still having problems of various kinds.

What kinds of problems? If we consider ourselves to be believers that are close to God, we want to pay especially close attention to what goes on in the Southern Kingdom. Amaziah, Azariah, who begin well and end badly. I can't think of a worse epitaph for you and for me than that we ran well and then we stumbled and fell.

We didn't finish the race. We didn't fight the good fight all the way to the end. These are helpful illustrations of what can deflect us, what can deceive us, what can divert us, what can be a way that seems right to us, and the ends thereof are the ways of death.

It is a fruitful section of scripture to meditate upon and then ask ourselves the hard questions. Examine ourselves. Am I in the faith? If we genuinely desire for God to purge us with hyssop and wash us so that we are whiter than snow, if we have a Psalm 51 attitude, God will not let us remain in self-deception.

Ask, seek, knock. This is what is missing in these failure kings. They stop asking.

They stop seeking. They stop availing themselves of the presence of God that is so close. It's

literally just a few yards across the courtyard there on Mount Zion.

They don't avail themselves. Look at the presence and the power of God that is available to us. But as with so many worthwhile things, we have to want it.

We have to pursue it. We have to seek it. Jesus said, strive to enter by the narrow gate.

It takes effort. It takes desire. It takes dedication.

It takes persistence. It takes endurance, and it takes patience. These are the people we want to be.

These illustrations of failure are the warning posts. It's like in the mountains when you're driving, and it says, Be careful. Narrow shoulder.

Be careful. Sometimes this part of the road is underwater. Be careful.

These are signposts. These are warning passages for us. And if you genuinely desire to live a life that please God, these kings, especially in the southern kingdom, are the ones that we want to muse on and meditate on and reread their career because this is gold in terms of preventative medicine for us.

We're going to see the second perspective. This is going to make these things pop out in 3D when we look at the side view that we get from the prophets, both Amos and Hosea, and the story of, not the prophecy of, but the story of Jonah. And these three are really going to cast a wonderful illuminating sidelight on the study of this particular time in the history of Israel.

But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you that you have not left us orphans even with the departure of the Lord Jesus.

We have your Holy Spirit. We have the presence of the Lord Jesus in the power of the living word that counsels us, that encourages us, that comforts us, that illuminates for us the bright hope we have of being gathered to the Lord Jesus and being brought into your presence to dwell and to live and to learn throughout the eternal future. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.