

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Mad Rush to Ruin II Kings 15:1-38

Intro: The first thing we should notice about our text is that the pace of the narrative has quickened. It seems as though the author has his finger on the fast-forward button all through the chapter. No sooner had all the solemn eulogies been given at Jeroboam II's funeral in 14:29 then we are thrust upon a literary roller coaster and rushed at lightening speed through the last 30 years of the northern kingdom. The text anticipates the final overthrow of the kingdom of the northern tribes and records the moral corruption and social disorganization that made them easy prey for the taking. Within 30 years it would all be over for Israel as they are flushed down the sewer pipe of history, a pipe operated and maintained by the wicked Assyrian Empire.

The chapter is bracketed front and back by 2 Judean kings: Azariah (Uzziah) and his son Jotham. In between the 2 kings of Judah the author rapid-fires through 5 kings of Israel. It's clear he wants to run us through this period quickly – not because it is boring or unimportant but because he is trying to make a specific impression on us. The last days of Israel are upon her and she doesn't even realize it. She goes about her life, socially and personally, as if nothing has changed but the truth is, she's in a mad rush towards ruin. But, instead of stopping the trend, instead of looking around and perceiving the signals Yahweh graciously provides her, she ignores them and dashes towards her death.

1-7 – The author doesn't seem too interested in Azariah (Uzziah). He gets 7 verses, yet all but one (5) are the usual formulas. Azariah was more-or-less orthodox in his religious policy in Judah but the author here treats him much like Jeroboam II of Israel. The Chronicler will devote an entire chapter to Azariah (II Chron 26) and will carefully trace his great success and sad pride. Surely the writer of II Kings knows about Azariah's attempt to burn incense in the temple and he assumes his readers know about it too; but he doesn't describe it. He only mentions the stroke of Yahweh's judgment that fell on him. It was a fearful stroke! Azariah's crime was punishable by death and that's what leprosy was – a living death, prolonged and intensified.

But, we're not given any of those specifics here. Our author is currently

more interested in Israel than in Judah. Still, his mention of Azariah's reign is a hint that it represents a bastion of stability for 5 Israelite kings come and mostly go during Azariah's tenure as king of Judah. The contrast is clear: one, long reign of stability in Judah versus chaos and coups in Israel. The same ethnic people, the same covenant God – 2 completely different situations.

8-12 – Zechariah ascends to the throne of Israel after the death of his father, Jeroboam II, but only for 6 months! His reign was short but wicked; he continued in the state-sponsored idolatry begun by Jeroboam so long ago. Shallum conspires against him and assassinates him in front of the people (**10b**). Apparently, Zechariah was so despised by his own people that Shallum was able to do this without fear of reprisal. His death was the end of Jehu's dynasty, which began with such potential but ended in great darkness.

Was this a surprise? No, as **v12** explains. The word of the Lord refers to **10:30**, where Yahweh promised Jehu a 4- generation dynasty and that's what he got. Now, it's not as though it couldn't have been more. If Jehu's sons turned to Yahweh in obedience and faith and had walked in His Law then I would think that the God of Elijah and Elisha would have extended their family tenure on the throne. But they didn't and He didn't. Shallum brought it all to an end! Does that mean God approved of Shallum's tactics? Not at all! He simply used Shallum's evil deed to bring His sure word to pass. God's not above using thugs for His own purposes. If that truth offends you, just remember that none of God's instruments are pure.

It's the last phrase of **v12** that's so fascinating...and so it was. This phrase appears 6 times in **Gen 1 (7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30)** and 5 of the 6 occur immediately after God speaks. The implication of the phrase in **Gen 1** is that what God spoke actually came into being and remained that way. What could be more natural and obvious than when God promised Jehu a 4-generation dynasty and that's exactly what happened? Walter Cronkite used to sign off from his news broadcast with a certain consistent phrase, "And that's the way it is." The author's saying the same thing about Zechariah's end – and that's the way it was because it could be no other way. Yahweh's word is that certain.

The Scriptures are literally littered with the predictive word of Yahweh that

comes to exact fulfillment. There are dozens of prophecies and predictions in the OT that concern the 1st Advent of Jesus Christ – His birth, life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection. The odds of only 8 of these predictions coming to pass are astronomical, yet all of them were fulfilled. The only predictions or prophecies that haven't yet been fulfilled are those concerning His 2nd Advent, His return to this earth in power and great glory. If God's prophecies are so exact then so are His promises. What about [Jn 14:3](#) or [II Ptr 3:10-13](#)? The day will come when we will be able to say, "And so it was!"

13-31 – In this section of the text we have both internal and external signs of the coming judgment. Let's start with the internal signs. As mentioned, the primary focus of ch15 is on the 5 Israelite kings. Among these 5 kings, what jumps out at us is all the conspiracies. Some of these kings have very short reigns: Zechariah – 6 mo; Shallum – 1 mo; Pekahiah – 2 yrs. Time wise, we're only dealing with a period of scarcely more than 20 yrs in which there are 5 kings and 4 conspiracies. The prophet Hosea alludes to this yo-yo kind of political turnover ([7:5-7](#)). Anarchy and political rivalry led to extensive bloodshed which would fulfill Hosea's prophecies. Israel seems to be in a race to her ruin, running headlong into her own destruction. If civil stability is a gift from God ([I Tim 2:1-2](#)) then it has been withdrawn from Israel. Her own chaos is a sign that God is in the process of destroying her.

There are also external signs of the coming scourge. These arrive in the form of the Assyrians. The appearance of Assyria in [v19-20](#) does not constitute an invasion. Rather Menahem pays the Assyrian king a substantial pile of ill-gotten gain in exchange for Assyrian support of his ill-gotten reign. But by the time Pekah comes on the scene ([29](#)), silver was no longer a suitable stop-gap for Assyrian aggression. More likely, Pekah was an anti-Assyrian agitator who threw his lot in with the Syrian king. This gave Tiglath-Pileser all the excuse he needed to put the squeeze on Israel - taking 5 towns in the north of Israel in his invasion.

But it was worse than that. Old Tig also took Gilead and Galilee - all the land of Naphtali! Assyria dominated all of Israel's territory east of the Jordan River and north and west of the Sea of Galilee and the current king (Hoshea, [v30](#)) is left with little more than an area of influence around Samaria: a tiny kingdom measuring 30 ml wide and 40 ml long. But it was even worse than that! The writer says that Tig exiled Israelites from Gilead

and Galilee to Assyrian provinces. There's quite a bit of suffering and heartache nested in that phrase "carried them captive." The Assyrians are infamous for their cruelty to their captives. I would imagine that the level of treatment would depend on the level of submission by the captives.

There was a new twist to Tig's deportation scheme at this time. It became a 2-way exchange: Israelites from the newly acquired provinces would be transferred to Assyria proper while other conquered peoples would be resettled in the recently vacated Israelite provinces. This radical procedure of population exchange was meant to make the uprooted ethnic groups totally dependent on the central Assyrian government, forcing them to assimilate much more quickly so that they would become Assyrian themselves.

The presence and constant pressure of Assyria during Menahem's reign should have served as an unnerving sign to those who had eyes to see it but no one saw; no one cared to see. The great prosperity and expansion that occurred under Jeroboam II's reign appears to have corrupted the people of Israel and caused them to give free reign to their evil desires and violence. Those in authority, instead of halting and correcting this spirit of lawlessness, actually found pleasure in it. "They make a king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies ([Hosea 7:3](#)). Manahem's policy with Assyria was to compromise and conciliate. David would have trusted the Lord and resisted their incursions but Menahem didn't want to rock the boat or ruffle any feathers – just let the good times continue to roll. This approach resulted devastating consequences for Israel later under Pekah. Israel is one slight push away from total disaster but they are content to live in wicked oblivion.

There were plenty of internal and external signals of the judgment that is coming. In fact, these signals seem to be part of that judgment. But Israel paid no attention to these preliminary signs of ruin to come. They were too busy living the high life to notice that they were too poor to pay attention. God in His grace gave them clear signals but there were no eyes to see them and no ears to hear them. The signals were there but they were ignored by all and so disaster would come.

We mentioned last time how Israel's morality parallels that of our own nation but the same holds true for the church. If a main-line denomination waffles

on and refuses to affirm biblical moral standards, is this not a real sign that God is giving over His own “professing” people to follow their own authority? If a church or denomination refuses to discipline ministers who deny the clear doctrines of Scripture but allows them to serve in all their unbelief, is this not a sign that God has already written Ichabod (the glory has departed) over that congregation or denomination?

Of the 5 kings listed for Israel, you can't help but noticed the oft-repeated “sins of Jeroboam” formula. It appears 4 times. It doesn't occur under Shallum's reign; most likely because he only reigned 1 month so he didn't have much time to show his true colors. All the rest sure did! Each of the other 4 did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam. Of course, this was the bull cult instituted by the very first king of Israel but get this; 200 years has passed since this devious cult began and its grip over Israel hasn't diminished one bit. Its poison was still lethal. This was the original sin – and apparently, the tenacious sin – of Israelite royalty. Seeing it repeated 4 times in 1 chapter only increases the sense of the tragedy and ruin such misguided worship is bringing.

Israel's religious problems didn't develop over time; they stemmed from the very onset – this bug in their system of worship was factory installed! Thus, Israel's ultimate ruin was factory installed as well. When her first king instituted that perverted bull worship, it ate the fidelity right out of her innards. She was rotten to the core from the very start and here in [ch15](#) we have come down within an inch of Israel's doom and the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat are still strangling the life out of her.

This shows us the shelf-life that infidelity has; whether it's in doctrine, worship or living. In 318AD Arius espoused and promoted the idea that the Son of God was merely a created being and not equal with the Father and today, the Jehovah's Witnesses propagate the same belief in a Son of God who is not God and a Savior who cannot save. How critical, how crucial is it then for not only Christian leaders but also individual believers to take heed to yourself and to the doctrine ([I Tim 4:16a](#)). The spiritual destiny of those who come after us may very well depend on it. We don't gather here on Sunday morning to pass the time; we are here to pass on an accurate faith to the next generation. To not just rightly divide the Word but also to then faithfully disseminate it. What we do here matters; it matters a great deal to God and it will matter a great deal to those who step up to replace us.

32-38 – Jotham was the 11th king of Judah and it is said of him that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Sadly' this is said of no king of Israel and very few kings of Judah. In keeping with his Israelite focus, the author gives scant details on the reign of Jotham but he does provide the odd pearl in the last sentence of **v35**: He built the Upper Gate of the house of the Lord. This was always a positive sign in Judah. When kings and leaders were concerned for the house of the Lord, it reflected some measure of spiritual revival.

In particular, it seems that Jotham rebuilt the link between the temple and the palace. He desired free access from his own house to that of the Lord's. His effort here was to strengthen the link between the 2 houses – to keep his line of communication open with the source of his supplies of strength and wisdom. He correctly surmised that these things were gracious gifts from Yahweh and he made sure there was no spiritual hindrance to their provision. This is one of the secrets to his prosperity and power as king of Judah.

His father, Azariah, misunderstood the link between the royal house and the house of the Lord, in that he presumed to demand priestly authority to his hurt. Many of the kings that came before Jotham wanted no link between the royal palace and the house of the Lord. Jotham understood that he was a king and not a priest and yet, he wanted a good, open link between the palace and the temple. **II Chron 27:6** says, "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his way before the Lord his God." The establishing of this open link between the palace and the temple was one of the chief ways he prepared his way before the Lord. This high gate was better than having the Great Wall of China around his small kingdom because it is in true communion with God that real prosperity and power are found.

It is no different for us today. The source of our strength and our provision is Jesus Christ. It would behoove us to take the initiative and build that high gate – that access point between ourselves and Jesus Christ. Jotham knew the Lord was in His temple and he wasn't going to wait around for Yahweh to come to his house; he made a way to meet with Him on His turf. Jesus wants to meet with each one of us on His turf but remember, that gate works both ways. Our pursuit of His presence will ensure the regularity of His presence in our lives and that is the greatest provision a believer can hope to receive.

And we need His presence because life isn't always roses and clover.(37). Even though Jotham had open access to Yahweh's presence didn't preclude him from having trouble in his kingdom. On the contrary, his open access to the Lord gave him strength to face the difficulties of life; which is the true value of His presence for believers today. It gives us strength and it facilitates the work of transformation, sanctification, in our lives. 😊