

Thursday, July 1, 2021—2 Kings 15-17

Amaziah, also known as Uzziah, became the king of Judah at the age of 16. He reigned for 52 years, one of the longest tenures for a king. He did what was right before Yahweh, but he did not remove the high places where people brought sacrifice. He was an effective king, yet God struck him with leprosy. The passage does not make clear whether this was judgment from God or a condition God used to draw Uzziah into daily dependence like Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (see 2 Corinthians 12). What is clear is that he struggled for 52 years without wandering from God.

While Judah had stability for more than five decades, the northern kingdom of Israel began to descend into complete chaos. Kings were on the throne for short reigns. Assyria eventually invaded and took some of the people of Israel into captivity. The sin and consequences of Israel were not instructive or a warning, so when Ahaz began to reign in Judah, he followed in Israel's sinful ways (16:3). During his rule, he gave away treasure, sacrificed innocent life, and promoted idolatry in the land.

Things in the northern kingdom went from bad to worse, and the nation fell completely to Assyria. The people had sinned, and the consequences finally caused their collapse (16:7-23). The land reserved for God's people alone was now the home for a variety of pagan peoples.

Thank God for His faithfulness in good and bad situations. Pray for personal faithfulness and the desire to walk in holiness every day.

Wednesday, June 30, 2021—Amos 7-9

"A picture is worth a thousand words." That image of a moment frozen in time spurs conversation that can last for hours. God gives at least three images in this passage to spur the thoughts and actions of Israel.

Builders in that day would use a plumb line, a weighted string that would allow them to determine whether the wall they constructed was straight. To be out of plumb would affect the integrity of the entire structure. God said He was using a plumb line (7:8) to compare the uprightness of His people compared to His

standards. Compared to others they might have passed the test. Compared to Him, they weren't straight.

From their inner integrity, He moved to their outward appearance. Amos saw a basket of fruit (8:2) which represented the actions of their lives. What had God gathered from the orchard of their lives? Hypocrisy and injustice filled their lives, so God was going to bring judgment on them.

Finally, God used the picture of a sieve. He would sift the people of Israel, punishing the guilty (those useless husks) and restoring the righteous (even to the smallest kernel). Generations had neglected His word and His ways, and the time had come for the judgment He promised.

Ask God to give you clarity about how your righteousness compares to that of Jesus and no one else. Pray for the leadership and the power of the Spirit to lead you into fruitful living. Thank Him for being able to use even the smallest kernel of faithfulness for His glory.

Tuesday, June 29, 2021—Amos 4-6

Parents of toddlers often employ a countdown in their disciplining process. They tell the child to pick up the toys or to stop misbehaving. When the command is not obeyed, they repeat it. When it is still not obeyed, they make the command again and then begin the countdown to punishment. 3. 2. 1. The child is always surprised when judgment arrives.

God was warning Israel of their coming judgment. He had sent a famine that did not stir their repentance. He caused a drought that did not move them to return to Him. Plagues and misery barely bothered them. They were more concerned with their cultural pursuits and their personal pleasures. There was a coming day when a foreign power would invade.

In His mercy, God called them once again to seek Him and live (5:4). Their sins were many, and He knew it, but it was not too late to change their mind and change their direction. There were many who were waiting on the judgment of God against His enemies who didn't realize that their lifestyles made them enemies of God as well. He hated their religious festivals and spiritual practices because they

were meaningless.

The countdown had begun. An army was assembling to come destroy this rebellious people, and they were completely unaware. God sent Amos to plead with them to return to Him.

Ask God to show you the areas in your life that lack authenticity. Pray for a heart that longs to live in righteousness and in justice.

Monday, June 28, 2021—2 Kings 14:26-29; Amos 1-3

Students in class on the day of oral reports pray for the clock to move faster than normal. They hope, as the teacher calls names randomly, their name will not be called. Time will run out, and the report will wait.

Israel listened as Amos spoke words of judgment from God. He began a roll call of the nations around them, and they likely agreed with much of what he said. The peoples around them weren't Jewish. They weren't God's chosen people. They deserved punishment. With every name, Amos drew closer to Israel. Was Amos going to mention them?

Surely, he wouldn't. What could be wrong with Israel? They were God's people. Their king, Jeroboam II, had made them prosperous and strong (14:28). God never said He would destroy Israel (14:27).

God was concerned about the sins of Israel's neighbors. They were unjust, they were unfaithful to their promises, they fought with their brothers, they devalued human life, and they rejected the teachings of Yahweh. From Damascus to Judah, God was drawing a bullseye that centered around Israel. They, too, were sinful. They sinned in the same ways but were even more guilty. They were God's people, and He had given His instruction to them, yet they disregarded it. They were incapable of doing right (3:10), so an enemy would deliver God's punishment.

To be an expert in other people's sins but unaware of one's own is the height of hypocrisy. Pray for an awareness of your own sin and struggles. Repent of those and walk in holiness for His glory.

Sunday, June 27, 2021—2 Kings 14:21-25; Jonah 1-4

Appearances can be deceiving. Jeroboam II expanded the borders of Israel

in obedience to a command from God through the prophet Jonah. On the surface, this snapshot shows a nation with an active prophet and an obedient king. Below the surface, things were wildly wayward.

Jeroboam II led the people in the same way of his namesake, the original king of Samaria. He promoted all manner of spiritual disobedience. Jonah, the prophet who should have been calling them to repentance, was running away from God's call on his own life. Jonah could not stomach the idea of sharing the truth of God with Israel's primary enemy. Why would God care about them? Why would God welcome them? These people wanted Israel destroyed, so Jonah went in the opposite direction.

Jonah boarded a ship toward Nineveh, and the men on board soon threw him into the sea. Michael Packard, a commercial lobster diver off the coast of Massachusetts, said on June 11, 2021, he was about 30 feet below the surface when a whale unintentionally swallowed him. For about 30 seconds he was in complete darkness in the mouth of the whale before he spit him out. Imagine the three days Jonah experienced. His contemplation in the dark led him to personal repentance and to share the light with his worst enemies. He obeyed God, but he did not enjoy God's mercy.

Pray for a heart that knows the grace and mercy of Jesus and a life that calls everyone to experience it. Obey His call no matter the cost.

Saturday, June 26, 2021—Joel 1-3

Parents tell their children their expectations repeatedly. They urge them to obey but find resistance. Then, an outside influence—like a teacher, coach, friend, or minister—gives them the same encouragement, and they obey as if it were the greatest truth they ever heard.

God gave His expectations for His people through Moses in His Law. He used Joshua, the judges, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha to call people back to this truth. The kings were supposed to be the standard bearers, but most were woefully inadequate, so God sent other spokesman, the prophets, to repeat what He had been saying to every generation.

Joel was one of the first to record his prophetic words in text. The land had been devastated by insects (1:4). Drought had laid the fields to waste. This visible devastation was nothing compared to what was going to happen when an invading army came against God's people to judge their sin (1:6). Their spiritual brokenness required repentance (1:14, 2:12-13).

From the high priest to the simplest child, the nation needed to come together and collectively admit their wandering ways. Then, God would be able to restore all that was lost, spiritually and physically (2:12-27). He looked toward a day He could pour out His Spirit on His people (2:28).

God wants to be the hope and strength of His people (3:16), but He cannot dwell with them and enrich their lives when they openly rebel against His standards and ignore His holiness. Evaluate your walk with Him each day to repent of sin and embrace His righteousness.

Friday, June 25, 2021—2 Kings 11-14:20

God is at work in the darkest of situations. Athaliah had taken the throne when her son Ahaziah died. She murdered all of Ahaziah's sons except one. A sister of the dead king saved his son Joash. For seven years, nothing changed. Then, Jehoida the priest, put everyone on alert. The time had come to anoint the boy as king. Restoring peace required removing the evil queen. This was not a simple procedure, but it was necessary.

The spiritual fog that enveloped the land under the previous leaders led to neglect in the upkeep at the Temple. The revival under Joash led the king to instruct the priests to repair the Temple. The work was done with financial integrity and personal accountability. Sometime later, the king of Aram threatened the land, and Joash offered a vast number of sacred articles to convince the invaders to leave. Joash was not faithful enough to trust God and retain these dedicated items. The spiritual growth in the land had likely been the result of the influence of Jehoida, the priest.

In contrast to Joash's reaction, the king of Samaria, Jehoahaz, cried out to God when threatened by a foreign king (13:4). Jehoahaz and his predecessors

were notorious for their idolatry, yet God was willing to listen and to rescue when the king came to him. The people, however, were not genuinely repentant and returned to their idolatry after God delivered them.

Pride leads to destruction (14:1-14). Repentance leads to restoration. Pray for a life of true faith and repentance.