

CHAPTER 15

In this chapter,

I. The history of two of the kings of Judah is briefly recorded: —

1. Of Azariah, or Uzziah (v. 1-7).
2. Of Jotham his son (v. 32-38).

II. The history of many of the kings of Israel that reigned at the same time is given us in short, five in succession, all of whom, except one, went down slain to the pit, and their murders were their successors.

1. Zachariah, the last of the house of Jehu, reigned six months, and then was slain and succeeded by Shallum (v. 8-12).
2. Shallum reigned one month, and then was slain and succeeded by Menahem (v. 13-15).
3. Menahem reigned ten years, or tyrannised rather, such were his barbarous cruelties (v. 16) and unreasonable exactions (v. 20), and then died in his bed, and left his son to succeed him first, and then suffer for him (v. 16-22).
4. Pekahiah reigned two years, and then was slain and succeeded by Pekah (v. 23-26).
5. Pekah reigned twenty years, and then was slain and succeeded by Hoshea, the last of all the kings of Israel (v. 27-31) for things were now working and hastening apace towards the final destruction of that kingdom.

<1250> 2 KINGS 15:1-7

THE REIGN OF AZARIAH

This is a short account of the reign of Azariah.

1. Most of it is general, and the same that has been given of others; he began young and reigned long (v. 2), did, for the most part, that which was right, v. 3 (it was happy for the kingdom that a good reign was a long one), only he had not zeal and courage enough to take away the high places, v. 4.

2. That which is peculiar, v. 5 (that God smote him with a leprosy) is more largely related, with the occasion of it, ~~1436~~2 Chronicles 26:16, etc., where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign, as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it. He did that which was right, as Amaziah had done; like him, he began well, but failed before he finished. Here we are told,

(1.) That he was a leper. The greatest of men are not only subject to the common calamities, but also to the common infirmities, of human nature; and, if they be guilty of any heinous sin, they lie as open as the meanest to the most grievous strokes of divine vengeance.

(2.) God smote him with this leprosy, to chastise him for his presumptuous invasion of the priests' office. If great men be proud men, some way or other God will humble them, and make them know he is both above them and against them, for he resisteth the proud.

(3.) That he was a leper *to the day of his death*. Though we have reason to think he repented and the sin was pardoned, yet, for warning to others, he was continued under this mark of God's displeasure as long as he lived, and perhaps it was for the good of his soul that he was so.

(4.) That he *dwelt in a separate house*, as being made ceremonially unclean by the law, to the discipline of which, though a king, he must submit. He that presumptuously intruded into God's temple, and pretended to be a priest, was justly shut out from his own palace, and shut up as a prisoner or recluse, ever after. We suppose that his *separate house* was made as convenient and agreeable as might be. Some translate it a *free house*, where he had liberty to take his pleasure. However, it was a great mortification to one that had been so much a man of honour, and a man of business, as he had been, to be cut off from society and dwell always in a *separate house*: it would almost make life itself a burden, even to kings, though they have never any to converse with but their inferiors; the most contemplative men would soon be weary of it.

(5.) That his son was his viceroy in the affairs both of his court (for *he was over the house*) and of his kingdom (for he was *judging the people of the land*); and it was both a comfort to him and a blessing to his kingdom that he had such a son to fill up his room.

~~<215>~~ 2 KINGS 15:8-31

THE REIGNS OF ZACHARIAH, SHALLUM, ETC.

The best days of the kingdom of Israel were while the government was in Jehu's family. In his reign, and the next three reigns, though there were many abominable corruptions and miserable grievances in Israel, yet the crown went in succession, the kings died in their beds, and some care was taken of public affairs; but, now that those days are at an end, the history which we have in these verses of about thirty-three years represents the affairs of that kingdom in the utmost confusion imaginable. Woe to those that were with child (v. 16) and to those that gave suck in those days, for then must needs be great tribulations, when, for *the transgression of the land, many were the princes thereof*.

I. Let us observe something, in general, concerning these unhappy revolutions and the calamities which must needs attend them — these bad times, as they may truly be called.

1. God had tried the people of Israel both with judgments and mercies, explained and enforced by his servants the prophets, and yet they continued impenitent and unreformed, and therefore God justly brought these miseries upon them, as Moses had warned them. If you will yet *walk contrary to me, I will punish you yet seven times more*, ~~<212>~~Leviticus 26:21, etc.

2. God made good his promise to Jehu, that his sons to the fourth generation after him should sit upon the throne of Israel, which was a greater favour than was shown to any of the royal families either before or after his. God had said it should be so (~~<210>~~2 Kings 10:30) and we are told in this chapter (v. 12) that so it came to pass. See how punctual God is to his promises. These calamities God long designed for Israel, and they deserved them, yet they were not inflicted till that word had taken effect to the full. Thus God rewarded Jehu for his zeal in destroying the worship of Baal and the house of Ahab; and yet, when the measure of the sins of the house of Jehu was full, God avenged upon it the blood then shed, called *the blood of Jezreel*, ~~<2104>~~Hosea 1:4.

3. All these kings did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord, for they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat*. Though at variance with

one another, yet in this they agreed, to keep up idolatry, and the people loved to have it so; though they were emptied from vessel to vessel, that *taste remained in them*, and *that scent was not changed*. It was sad indeed when their government was so often altered, yet never for the better — that among all those contending interests none of them should think it as much their interest to destroy the calves as others had done to support them.

4. Each of these (except one) conspired against his predecessor, and slew him — *Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea*, all traitors and murderers, and yet all kings awhile, one of them ten, another twenty, and another nine years; for God may suffer wickedness to prosper and to carry away the wealth and honours awhile, but, sooner or later, blood shall have blood, and he that dealt treacherously shall be dealt treacherously with. One wicked man is often made a scourge to another, and every wicked man, at length, a ruin to himself.

5. The ambition of the great men made the nation miserable. Here is Tiphseh, a city of Israel, barbarously destroyed, with all the coasts thereof, by one of these pretenders (v. 16), and no doubt it was through blood that each of them waded to the throne, nor could any of these kings perish alone. No land can have greater pests, nor Israel worse troubles, than such men as care not how much the welfare and repose of their country are sacrificed to their revenge and affectation of dominion.

6. While the nation was thus shattered by divisions at home the kings of Assyria, first one (v. 19) and then another (v. 29), came against it and did what they pleased. Nothing does more towards the making of a nation an easy prey to a common enemy than intestine broils and contests for the sovereignty. Happy the land where that is settled.

7. This was the condition of Israel just before they were quite ruined and carried away captive, for that was in the ninth year of Hoshea, the last of these usurpers. If they had, in these days of confusion and perplexity, humbled themselves before God and sought his face, that final destruction might have been prevented; but when God judgeth he will overcome. These factions, the fruit of an evil spirit sent among them, hastened that captivity, for a kingdom thus divided against itself will soon come to desolation.

II. Let us take a short view of the particular reigns.

1. Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign in the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah, v. 8. Some of the most critical chronologers reckon that between Jeroboam and his son Zachariah the throne was vacant twenty-two years, others eleven years, through the disturbances and dissensions that were in the kingdom; and then it was not strange that Zachariah was deposed before he was well seated on the throne: he reigned but six months, and then Shallum *slew him before the people*, perhaps as Caesar was slain in the senate, or he put him to death publicly as a criminal, with the approbation of the people, to whom he had, some way or other, made himself odious; so ended the line of Jehu.

2. But had Shallum peace, who slew his master? No, he had not (v. 13), one month of days measured his reign and then he was cut off; perhaps to this the prophet, who then lived, refers (~~<XIII>~~Hosea 5:7), *Now shall a month devour them with their portions*. That dominion seldom lasts long which is founded in blood and falsehood. Menahem, either provoked by his crime or animated by his example, soon served him as he had served his master — *slew him and reigned in his stead*, v. 14. Probably he was general in the army, which then lay encamped at Tirzah, and, hearing of Shallum's treason and usurpation, hastened to punish it, as Omri did that of Zimri in a like case, ~~<IIII>~~1 Kings 16:17.

3. Menahem held the kingdom ten years, v. 17. But, whereas we have heard that the *kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings* (~~<IIII>~~1 Kings 20:31), this Menahem (the scandal of his country) was so prodigiously cruel to those of his own nation who hesitated a little at submitting to him that he not only ruined a city, and the coasts thereof, but, forgetting that he himself was born of a woman, *ripped up all the women with child*, v. 16. We may well wonder that ever it should enter into the heart of any man to be so barbarous, and to be so perfectly lost to humanity itself. By these cruel methods he hoped to strengthen himself and to frighten all others into his interests; but it seems he did not gain his point, for when the king of Assyria came against him,

(1.) So little confidence had he in his people that he durst not meet him as an enemy, but was obliged, at a vast expense, to purchase a peace with him.

(2.) Such need had he of help *to confirm the kingdom in his hand* that he made it part of his bargain with him (a bargain which, no doubt, the king of Assyria knew how to make a good hand of another time) that he should

assist him against his own subjects that were disaffected to him. The money wherewith he purchased his friendship was a vast sum, no less than 1000 talents of silver (v. 19), which Menahem exacted, it is probable, by military execution, *of all the mighty men of wealth*, very considerably sparing the poor, and laying the burden (as was fit) on those that were best able to bear it; being raised, it was given *to the king of Assyria*, as pay for his army, fifty shekels of silver for each man in it. Thus he got clear of the king of Assyria for this time; he staid not to quarter in the land (v. 20), but his army now got so rich a booty with so little trouble that it encouraged them to come again, not long after, when they laid all waste. Thus was *he* the betrayer of his country that should have been the protector of it.

4. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, succeeded his father, but reigned only two years, and then was treacherously slain by Pekah, falling under the load both of his own and of his father's wickedness. It is repeated concerning him as before that he *departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*. Still this is mentioned, to show that God was righteous in bringing that destruction upon them which came not long after, because they hated to be reformed, v. 24. Pekah, it seems, had some persons of figure in his interest, two of whom are here named (v. 25), and with their help he compassed his design.

5. Pekah, though he got the kingdom by treason, kept it twenty years (v. 27), so long it was before his violent dealing returned upon his own head, but it returned at last. This Pekah, son of Remaliah,

(1.) Made himself more considerable abroad than any of these usurpers, for he was, even in the latter end of his time (in the reign of Ahaz, which began in his seventeenth year), a great terror to the kingdom of Judah, as we find, ^{<2300>}Isaiah 7:1, etc.

(2.) He lost a great part of his kingdom to the king of Assyria. Several cities are here named (v. 29) which were taken from him, all the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, and Galilee in the north containing the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulon, were seized, and the inhabitants carried captive into Assyria. By this judgment God punished him for his attempt upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was then foretold that within two or three years after he made that attempt, before a child, then born, should be able to cry *My father and my mother*, the riches of Samaria should be *taken away before the king of Assyria* (^{<2300>}Isaiah 8:4), and here we have the accomplishment of that prediction.

(3.) Soon after this he forfeited his life to the resentments of his countrymen, who, it is probable, were disgusted at him for leaving them exposed to a foreign enemy, while he was invading Judah, of which Hoshea took advantage and, to gain his crown, seized his life, *slew him, and reigned in his stead*. Surely he was fond of a crown indeed who, at this time, would run such a hazard as a traitor did; for the crown of Israel, now that it had lost the choicest of its flowers and jewels, was lined more than ever with thorns, had of late been fatal to all the heads that had worn it, was forfeited to divine justice, and now ready to be laid in the dust — a crown which a wise man would not have taken up in the street, yet Hoshea not only ventured *upon* it but ventured *for* it, and it cost him dear.

2 KINGS 15:32-38

THE REIGN OF JOTHAM

We have here a short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah, of whom we are told,

1. That he reigned very well, *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 34. Josephus gives him a very high character, stating that he was pious towards God, just towards men, and laid out himself for the public good, — that, whatever was amiss, he took care to have it rectified, — and, in short, wanted no virtue that became a good prince. Though the high places were not taken away, yet to draw people from them, and keep them close to God's holy place, he showed great respect to the temple, and built the higher gate which he went through to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do so much the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue, and the bringing of them into reputation. If they cannot pull down the high places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high gate of God's house.

2. That he died in the midst of his days, v. 33. Of most of the kings of Judah we are told how old they were when they began their reign, and by that may compute how old they were when they died; but no account is kept of the *age* of any of the kings of Israel that I remember, only of the years of their *reigns*. This honour God would put upon the kings of the house of David above those of other families. And by these accounts it appears that there was none of all the kings of Judah that reached David's

age, seventy, the common age of man. Asa's age I do not find. Uzziah lived to be sixty-eight, Manasseh sixty-seven, and Jehoshaphat sixty; and these were the three oldest; many of those that were of note did not reach fifty. This Jotham died at forty-one. He was too great a blessing to be continued long to such an unworthy people. His death was a judgment, especially considering the character of his son and successor.

3. That in his days the confederacy was formed against Judah by Rezin and Remaliah's son, the king of Syria and the king of Israel, which appeared so very formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz that, upon notice of it, the heart of that prince was moved and *the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind,* ~~Isaiah~~ Isaiah 7:2. The confederates were unjust in the attempt, yet it is here said (v. 37), *The Lord began to send them against Judah,* as he bade Shimei curse David, and took away from Job what the Sabeans robbed him of. Men are God's hand — the sword, the rod in his hand — which he makes use of as he pleases to serve his own righteous counsels, though men be unrighteous in their intentions. This storm gathered in the reign of pious Jotham, but he came to his grave in peace and it fell upon his degenerate son.