

Three Bad Kings of Israel and One Good King of Judah

2 Kings 15:16-38

2 Kings 15:16-22 - *“Then from Tirzah, Menahem attacked Tiphshah, all who were there, and its territory. Because they did not surrender, therefore he attacked it. All the women there who were with child he ripped open.*

In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.

Now the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Menahem rested with his fathers. Then Pekahiah his son reigned in his place.”

Background Notes

The second half of 2 Kings 15 is the record of the reigns of three bad kings of Israel and the reign of one good king of Judah. We begin with the reign of King Menahem of Israel (v16-22). Most likely, Menahem was a military commander under King Shallum, stationed at the military garrison in Tirzah. In our last Talk we saw that Menahem came up from Tirzah to Samaria and assassinated King Shallum. 2 Kings 15:14, *“For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place.”*

Menahem was a bad king who didn't remove the two golden calf idolatrous shrines that were set up by King Jeroboam I. He was also a cruel and ruthless king. When he defeated Tiphshah, he ripped open all the pregnant women (v16). This cruel and barbaric procedure of killing all the children, including the unborn, was to prevent any uprising in the future by the defeated enemy.

Verse 19 says that Pul, king of Assyria, came against Israel. Pul is another name for Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrian ruler (also mentioned in verse 29). The Assyrian empire was on the rise at this time, and it would eventually conquer the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, as we'll see in 2 Kings 17.

During Menahem's reign, the Assyrians were exerting pressure on Israel. In about 743BC, the Assyrians invaded Israel and demanded tribute (v19). In order to appease them, King Menahem gave the Assyrians 1,000 talents of silver, an enormous sum in those days. In today's standards, this would be millions of dollars. To pay this huge ransom, Menachem extracted heavy taxes the very wealthy people in the northern kingdom of Israel at this time (v20). Many of

these men would have gained their wealth during the reign of King Jeroboam II, when the northern kingdom experienced considerable material prosperity.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is impossible to avoid the consequences of God's moral laws.

2 Kings 15:23-31 - *"In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house, along with Argob and Arieah; and with him were fifty men of Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place. Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.*

In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria."

These verses contain the records of two more bad kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, Pekahiah and Pekah. Both of these kings *"did evil in the sight of the Lord"*, and *"did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin."*

Pekah was one of Pekahiah's officers, but at an opportune time, along with fifty men of Gilead, he assassinated King Pekahiah and took the throne. But Pekah reaped what he had sown. He in turn was assassinated as a result of a conspiracy organized by Hoshea. And Hoshea reaped what he had sown – he was the last king of the northern kingdom.

As we read the records of the bad kings, so often we see that they reaped what they had sown. *This is a moral law in God's moral universe.* In verse 16 we saw Menahem's cruelty in his massacre of the city of Tiphshah. Listen to the words of the prophet Hosea, who was preaching God's judgment in the northern kingdom at this time. Hosea 13:16: *"Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword. Their infants shall be dashed in pieces and their women with child ripped open."* And that is exactly what happened in 722BC when the Assyrians conquered Samaria and defeated the northern kingdom of Israel.

One of **God's moral laws is that you will reap what you sow** - and it is impossible to avoid the consequences of God's moral law. For example, Romans 1:27 says, *"Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."* It is impossible to avoid the consequences of God's moral laws.

Another of God's moral laws is that **partial obedience leads to loss**. When we only partially obey God's laws, we will suffer loss in some way. Where do we see that lesson in 2 Kings 15? Look at verse 29. When Tiglath-Pileser again invaded the land in about 733BC, he captured a number of cities on the east side of the Jordan River, including all of Gilead.

A summary of this defeat is found in 1 Chronicles 5:26: *"So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh into captivity."*

Do the names of those tribes ring a bell in your memory? It was the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh who practiced partial obedience back in Numbers 32. God wanted all twelve tribes to cross the Jordan River and possess the Promised Land, but those 2 1/2 tribes liked the grazing land on the eastern side of the Jordan. They wanted to be part of God's people, but they didn't want to fully obey the Lord. They practiced partial obedience, and here we see their loss. They were less protected on the east side of the Jordan, and they were the first tribes to be taken into captivity when the Assyrians attacked.

There will always be loss when we fail to fully obey the Lord, then and today. There will be in some way: loss of protection, loss of reward, loss of fellowship with the Lord... It is impossible to avoid the consequences of God's moral laws.

2. It is possible to do what is right in the midst of moral and spiritual decay.

2 Kings 15:32-38 - *"In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the Lord. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"*

In those days the Lord began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah. And Jotham rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. Then Ahaz his son reigned in his place."

Verses 32-38 contain the record of good King Jotham of Judah. Jotham was one of the eight good kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, even in the midst of moral and spiritual decay in Judah.

We know that spiritual conditions were bad in Judah, because Micah and Isaiah were prophesying in Judah at that time. Listen to what Micah said about the moral and spiritual conditions in Judah. Micah 2:1-2: *“Woe to those who devise iniquity... They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.”*

And Micah 3:9-11: *“Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity: her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money.”*

King Jotham reigned over Judah in the midst of these less than ideal moral and spiritual conditions, and **he did what was right**. It is possible to do what is right in the midst of moral and spiritual decay.

We live in a time where there is moral and spiritual decay all around us. It is not easy to raise a family and live righteously during this time. But with God’s help and strength, it can be done!

Let’s be like good King Jotham. It is possible to do what is right in the midst of moral and spiritual decay.

Practical Application

How many “*however*” will be in your final record?

Jotham was a good king and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord - but look at verse 35: *“However, the high places were not removed.”* Remember, at some of the high places, the people were sacrificing and burning incense to the Lord, but according to the Law, all sacrifices to the Lord were not to be made on high places. They were to take place at the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. So there is a “however” in good king Jotham’s record.

What about us? We love the Lord and want to live a righteous life, but is there a “however” attached to our record? Some hidden sin, or a root of bitterness, or an area of jealous pride...? Are any of these sins (or other sins) holding us back from a righteous life and from full obedience to God’s Word?

How many “*however*” will be in your final record?