

The Decline of the Kingdoms of Israel & Judah

2 Kings 15 & 16

Key Bible Texts

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Key Bible Verse(s)

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places.” (2 Kings 15:3-4)

Background to the Study

Chapter 15 summarises the reign of King Azariah of Judah and five kings of Israel: Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah. Azariah, also called Uzziah, began ruling at sixteen and reigned for fifty-two years. God helped him prosper, but when he overstepped into priestly duties, he was struck with leprosy. Because lepers could not live among the people or enter the Temple, his son Jotham served as co-regent for about ten years and became king after Azariah's death.

The narrative then shifts to Israel. Zachariah reigned for six months, fulfilling God's earlier promise to Jehu that four generations of his descendants would sit on Israel's throne. He was assassinated by Shallum, who ruled for one month before being killed by Menahem. Menahem, likely a military commander, ruled for ten years and was known for cruelty. During his reign, Assyria invaded Israel for the first time. To avoid destruction, Menahem paid a large tribute to King Pul (Tiglath-pileser III), funded by taxing the wealthy.

After Menahem's death, his son Pekahiah became king but was assassinated two years later by Pekah. Pekah opposed Assyrian control and allied with Syria, but Tiglath-pileser invaded again and deported many Israelites. Eight years later, Pekah was killed by Hoshea, who was loyal to Assyria and became Israel's final king. The chapter then returns to Judah, where Jotham ruled faithfully, though he did not remove the high places.

Chapter 16 covers the reign of King Ahaz of Judah. Ahaz rejected the godly example of his father Jotham and ancestor David, and instead followed the idolatrous practices of the northern kingdom. He even participated in child sacrifice. When Syria and Israel attacked Judah, God sent Isaiah to reassure Ahaz, but Ahaz refused to trust God and instead sought help from Assyria. He paid Tiglath-pileser with treasures from the palace and the Temple, effectively making Judah a subject nation.

During a visit to Damascus, Ahaz saw a pagan altar and ordered a copy to be built in Jerusalem, replacing the altar God had commanded. He also altered the Temple layout to accommodate his new form of worship. His choices brought spiritual ruin to Judah. The chapter ends with his death and the rise of his son Hezekiah.

TESTIMONIES FROM OUR DAY

Our son works as a designer for a precision moulding company, and one day he held a small plastic helicopter part in his hand and commented on how exact the mould must have been. In his field, even a variation of a few thousandths of a millimetre can make a part unusable. If the mould is faulty, every piece that comes from it will be faulty. The template determines the outcome.

The same principle applies spiritually. In today's passage, King Ahaz had a new altar built in Jerusalem, copying a pagan altar he had seen in Damascus. Because he used the wrong pattern, the sacrifices offered on it were not acceptable to God. Ahaz ignored God's instructions and followed a template that could only lead the nation away from Him.

We face the same choice. The world around us offers its own moulds, shaped by its values and priorities. If we follow those patterns, our lives will not reflect holiness or obedience. But God has given us a perfect template in His Word. When we follow His instructions, He shapes our hearts, forms our character, and produces a life that honours Him and leads to eternal hope.

A Closer Look

Question 1

After his first invasion of Israel, what action did the king of Assyria take, and how did it affect the nation? What does paying tribute to Assyria reveal about Israel's condition? II Kings 15:19-20

Question 2

Why do you think the high places continued to be used for worship, even when kings claimed to follow God? (II Kings 15:5, 14, 35) Why do you think the author connects idolatry with political instability? (2 Kings 15:14-16, 25, 30)

Question 3

What does chapter 15 reveal about the dangers of partial obedience to God's Word? What parallels exist today between spiritual compromise and leadership failure? (II Kings 15: 3-4, 18, 24, 34-35)

Question 4

According to the first four verses of chapter 16, what specific actions did Ahaz take that were wrong in God's sight? (2 Kings 16:3-4) What lessons about worship purity and influence can believers draw from Ahaz?

Question 5

Do you think Tiglath-pileser would have helped Ahaz without receiving the tribute? What reasons support your view? II Kings 16:8-9

Question 6

In what ways might people rely on “Assyria-like” solutions instead of God? What practical steps can help us ensure that, in moments of crisis, we place our trust in God rather than in human solutions?

Take Home

God wants full-time obedience from His people. Are we listening to His instructions today? We should beware that it is unprofitable to divert from God’s instructions.