

He Hasted To Go Out

2 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 26-27

Dear Brethren and Sisters, our thoughts this morning are on the 15th chapter of 2 Kings, which covers the same period that we have been considering in our reading in Chronicles. This chapter corresponds with 2 Chronicles 26 and 27.

To understand the gospel of the kingdom, we must be familiar with God's past dealings with this kingdom. Therein lies the interest and importance of this chapter. It is part of the divinely inspired record of God's past dealings with the kingdom, recorded for our instruction and admonition. This record is infinitely more important and should be more interesting to us than all the worldly rubbish we hear on the radio or read in the daily papers, for this is related to eternity.

We are told that the scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, but it is quite obvious they cannot do so, if we do not diligently apply ourselves to and take an interest in these things that God has recorded for our instruction for the development of our minds in spiritual things. Let us never feel, or act as though we feel, that we are already wise unto salvation, and therefore do not need to diligently study and give our whole interest and attention to the Word of God, and can therefore safely give our attention to the passing things of this life. Surely this is the very opposite of being wise. No one is going to just drift into eternal life with a mere shallow smattering of the Divine Word. It will only be those who give it their undivided heart.

This chapter – 2 Kings 15 – speaks of three kings of Judah—Uzziah, or Azariah, Jotham, and Ahaz—father, son, and grandson, and six kings of Israel. The kings of Israel are ignored in the Chronicles, which just deals with Judah. These six kings of Israel of this same period are Jeroboam II, Zachariah, his son, Shallum (who killed Zachariah), Menahem (who killed Shallum), Pekahiah, Menahem's son, Pekah (who killed Pekahiah), and Hoshea (who killed Pekah). Eight of the 19 kings of Israel obtained the throne by killing the previous king. The throne of Judah, on the other hand, always stayed in the House of David, except when Athaliah seized it for six years.

The time period of this chapter was in the eighth century before Christ; that is somewhere between 800 and 700 BC. These are the last days of the ten-tribed, northern Kingdom of Israel. Hoshea, mentioned in this chapter, was the last king. Samaria was destroyed, and Israel went into captivity BC 721.

Verse 1 – The first king mentioned in this chapter is Azariah of Judah, more commonly known as Uzziah. Both forms of the name occur in this chapter.

Verse 2 – He reigned 52 years, second only to the wicked Manasseh's 55.

Verse 3 – “He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all his father Amaziah had done.” This is not a commendation from an eternal point of view. It is merely a general summing up of the character of his reign. Amaziah, his father with whom he is compared, did right, we are told, but NOT like David, and NOT with a perfect heart.

Both kings, Amaziah and Uzziah, committed very serious sins. But both also suffered heavily in this life. This might indicate that God was working with them to produce true saints. However, this would seem unlikely, at least in Amaziah's case, the father, in light of what the scriptures say of his death in 2 Chronicles 25:27 – “After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD, they made a conspiracy against him...and slew him.”

Amaziah, the father, foolishly started a disastrous war with Israel, which resulted in the breaking down of the wall of Jerusalem and the loss of all the temple's treasures. He also worshipped the idols of Edom and angrily silenced a prophet who rebuked him for it. Uzziah, the son, who begins this chapter, though he had one great failure and suffered terribly for it, seems to have been a far better and more capable man.

It is not for us to form final eternal judgments of these men, unless the scripture clearly does so. In this case, we have only a brief record of a long reign of 52 years. We, therefore, could not possibly reach a balanced judgment. Only God, who knows the heart, could weigh the whole life-long picture.

This chapter says very little about him, except that he did good and that God smote him with leprosy. This would surely leave a strange impression of the ways of God, if we did not have a fuller explanation elsewhere. But, it should teach us not to make judgments on incomplete information. And we should remember that the information may be incomplete in many scriptural passages that seem strange. God is not bound to make full explanations. He records only what suits His gracious purpose of teaching us to walk in the way of life. It is all written with a view of testing and training and developing us, not merely to entertain or inform us, or that we should sit in judgment upon God or anyone else. There is a fuller record in Chronicles, but before going to it, let us consider –

Verse 4 – “The high places were not removed.” What were the high places? Obviously, they were something very common all through Israel’s history of the kingdom, but were not pleasing to God.

The high places were local places of worship and sacrifice. They were generally condemned in scripture for several reasons. God decreed that all sacrifice be at one center—the Tabernacle and Temple. This was to promote unity, to maintain the central worship, and to prevent corruption.

Human nature, being what it is, and Israel especially, the high places, the local places of sacrifice, invariably degenerated into corruption and immorality in copying the heathen practices of worship. Just like Christadelphians copying the world in Christmas and Easter activities, and even Halloween and St. Valentine’s. It is almost inevitable where there is weakness of perception.

The high places were not, in themselves, necessarily evil. They were often, at the beginning, dedicated to the pure worship of God. They were permitted, and even at times sanctioned by God, when there was no central place of worship in operation.

Samuel was sacrificing at a high place, when Saul met him (1 Samuel 9:12). And again, God appeared to Solomon, when he was sacrificing at the high place at Gibeon. Of that occasion it was recorded in 1 Kings 3:2-5 – “Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offering did Solomon offer upon that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.”

The double use of the word only here, which is a strong word of contrast, shows that the high places were tolerated as a temporary necessity, but were contrary to the basic ideal. There is a lesson in this, though we must not presume upon it, or press it too far—that is, that in this present imperfect dispensation of sin and weakness, God sometimes permits or arranges things that are not entirely ideal.

We find that throughout the later history, after the temple was built, that good kings endeavored to eliminate the high places, while evil kings rebuilt them.

Solomon built high places, right near the temple, for all the gods of his foreign wives. And this was the cause of God’s rending the kingdom (1 Kings 11:7-11). Solomon’s bad example weakened the hands of all who followed him.

We can see why the high places were, on the whole, a bad and dangerous thing, even when professedly set up to worship the true God. They looked to the mind of the flesh like a good thing. Who could find fault with facilities of worship? But God knows the weaknesses of human nature, and so we are only safe when doing things His way, not what seems to us to be good.

Verse 5 – “And the LORD smote the king (Uzziah), so he was a leper unto the day of his death,” (and it was apparently for several years).

Let us turn to 2 Chronicles 26, for the fuller account of Uzziah’s reign. Verse 5 – “He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God.” There is no other record concerning this Zechariah. Clearly, he was a prophet raised up to teach and guide the young Uzziah, as the high priest Jehoiada had done for Joash. Here is illustrated the value and power of good counsel and guidance. Uzziah was very energetic and strong minded, but he was kept in the way of right by his respect and trust of Zechariah.

Still in verse 5 of 2 Chronicles 26 – “And as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.” This is always and inescapably true, though it may not always be apparent on the surface. We may forsake

God and seek the things of the world and appear to prosper. And, we may faithfully serve God and appear to suffer for it and not to prosper. But the most important thing in the world is for us to have the sense to realize that on the one hand God cannot be mocked with impunity and on the other hand that all things eventually work together for good for them that love and serve God.

We cannot lose, IF we serve God; we cannot win, if we don't. It's that simple. If we have the sense to see this, regardless of appearances, our course is always clear. If we do not have the sense to see it, we are stupid indeed.

Verses 6-8 – Speak of the conquest of Uzziah to the west, east, and south. Verse 2 also mentions that he extended his sway as far as Eloth, the port down on the Red Sea, where Solomon maybe operated from. This port is vitally important to Israel today. It was Nasser's blocking of it that caused the 1967 war. It was similarly important to Israel in Bible days, and for the same reason—trade with the East. Clearly, Uzziah was one of the most powerful and prosperous of all the kings.

Verse 10 tells of his extensive holdings and operations in agriculture and cattle raising, “for he loved husbandry.” Or, literally, as in the margin, he loved the ground, the earth. It is strange that the scriptures give us this insight into his character. It makes him stand out as a real person so much more than many of the kings that mostly stumble through their meaningless and mostly evil courses.

He loved the earth. He dug many wells, like Elath—another parallel with present vast irrigation projects. All this makes the record very real and alive. The water is there, but it must be searched for with great effort. The whole record portrays him as a very interesting man of great energy and activity.

Verses 11-15 describe the might of his army and his military machine. The army was very thoroughly equipped, trained, and armed. Here again, he was an energetic man in whatever he did.

The military machines mentioned in verse 15 – the mechanical catapult for throwing arrows with great force and the ballista for throwing large stones appear here in recorded history for the first time. The statement “engines, invented by cunning men,” strongly implies that these were new inventions at this time by his men. This agrees with the Roman historian Pliny, who says that they originated in Syria, which in Roman times included Palestine. These machines destroyed fortifications and greatly shortened siege operations. This is a similar event to the introduction of cannons by the Turks, whereby they were able to conquer Constantinople.

Immediately following the record of the invention of these machines, it is recorded (verse 15), “his name spread far abroad.” If, as it would appear, he was the originator of these later very common weapons of war, his fame certainly would spread far.

This too could help explain the tragedy of verse 16 – “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” The sad examples of scripture show that this was a far more common and insidious danger than we realize. Prosperity or success or achievement of any kind almost invariably creates pride, and destroys the essential wisdom of humility.

At very best, man is absolutely nothing—completely dependent upon God for all that he has and for every moment's breath. Any kind of accomplishment seems to unhinge his judgment and create a false sense of importance.

Much of the world's activity is for pride and snobbery and the desire to create an impression upon others. The whole fashion industry is based upon this. The automobile and housing industry cater heavily to pride and snobbery. The pride of life is a fundamental human lust. The children of God MUST see through and rise above this juvenile folly and get their minds on sensible and eternal things.

Uzziah went into the temple to burn incense upon the golden altar in the Holy Place. It is a very interesting incident—provocative of much thought. Why did he do it? Surely he knew better. What was his frame of mind? And what is the lesson for us, translated into our own circumstances?

He had great power, great success, and great fame. God had very greatly and openly favored him, and he knew it. He was a very great man—something special in the purpose. There was only one honor and position in Israel denied to him. Hundreds of ordinary priests, common men, could go where he could not go and could do what he could not do. He, the supreme king, had to approach God humbly through them.

We do not know what led up to this event. It is not likely it was just out of the blue, on the spur of the moment. But clearly, the basic cause was pride and presumption. His heart was lifted up. Somehow—and here is the universal danger—somehow he came to feel he was something very special to God—that in some way he was an exception—that he and God had some special relationship so that he would be accepted without following the rigid rules that were for others.

This is a very easy fallacy to slip into. To some extent we all do—we all well know the many commandments: always abound in the work of the Lord; universal love and goodness to all; no discussion of the faults of others; lay not up treasure; always render good for evil; set the mind entirely on the things above; serve God continually with the whole heart, mind, soul, and strength; and many, many other very simple but very searching commands.

But somehow we subconsciously feel God doesn't really mean all that to that extent. I'm sure I can make it and still have time for many of the things of the world. I'm an exception. He will accept me, because I mean well, even if I do less than He very clearly lays out. At least, we tend very much to act as though that is how we are thinking. If we are thinking at all.

But God is no respecter of persons. He has said exactly what He requires. Attaining to eternal life is not a pleasant part-time hobby, but a serious, full-time, life-long, exclusive dedication. "Many are called, but few are chosen;" the very few who have the wisdom to believe that God means exactly what He says, and that He will stick to it.

Let us repeatedly read over the lives of the faithful in Hebrews 11, and meditate on what they were willing to do and to endure and to give up to gain salvation. How do we compare? Are we in the very select class of those few who truly live by faith exclusively, regardless of consequences? Or do we fear, like the rest of the world?

The priests rebuked Uzziah – Verse 18, 2 Chronicles 26 – "And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God." (And honor was what he was mostly concerned with.)

So far, nothing had happened to him. God was very merciful. Here was a chance to escape—to stop and think. A final warning from God through the high priest—the issue was very clear, but Uzziah plunged on. He would not take the warning.

Verse 19 – "Then Uzziah was wroth." Instead of listening, he became angry. Here, he sealed his doom. He added anger and obstinacy to pride and presumption.

"And while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests." The much worse mental leprosy of sin was inside his forehead by his own choice. God, in righteous judgment, put the physical leprosy on the outside to match, for all the world to see and loathe.

In a brief, fatal moment, everything in his life changed. The whole course of his life and power and glory and success suddenly collapsed. They thrust him out as unclean, and he himself hastened to go out. All his pride was gone. He was a shunned and untouchable leper and remained so until the day of his death.

His son took over all of the glory and power of the Kingdom. And the record very significantly adds verse 21, "He was cut off from the house of the LORD." He who had proudly presumed to officiate in the Holy Place now was barred from even approaching the outer court, but had to be confined in polluted isolation away from society, slowly consumed by a horrible and repulsive disease.

It was a terrible punishment, but still a potentially merciful one. The lawful penalty for entering the Holy Place was immediate death. Leprosy was a living death, and in many ways more dreadful than death itself. But it did give opportunity for reflection and repentance. We can only hope that he used these final years of lingering death in the way of humble wisdom. We are not told.

When he died, he was buried separately from the other kings, because he was a leper. The shame followed him even in death, and he would know that this was to be, and it would add to the humiliation of his punishment. A glorious and honorable burial was of great consequence to the Hebrews.

Natural leprosy is a matter of sympathy and pity. Judicial leprosy from God for wickedness—a matter of mocking and terrible humiliation—lifelong shame. He may have repented, but God never took away the leprosy from him, but allowed it to run its course until his death.

He was succeeded by his son Jotham, who had taken over the reins of government when Uzziah became a leper. Jotham is the only king of either kingdom of whom nothing unfavorable is recorded, but we have no personal incidents or insights into his character, except that he was a great builder—a builder of cities and fortresses. And he “became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD.”

This was a time of great prophetic activity. Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah all prophesied during Jotham’s reign and the reigns of the two kings who followed him, Ahaz and Hezekiah, his son and grandson. There is no reference to any direct contact between Jotham and any of these prophets. But they, especially Isaiah, must have been a guide and a strength to him in his righteous reign.

He reigned only sixteen years and died at the early age of 41. He appears to have been taken away from the evil to come. Going back to 2 Kings 15:37, we find that the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the king of Israel. These confederate enemies could do little against Judah, while the strong and righteous Jotham reigned. But after his death, in the reign of Ahaz, his wicked son, they jointly invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem, purposing to overthrow the house of David and set up another king over Judah in league with themselves.

Although Ahaz was a wicked idolater, Isaiah was sent to him to assure him of God’s support, because he was the king of Judah of the line of David, and to offer him any sign he might choose to confirm it, to strengthen his faith. He hypocritically refused the sign, saying that he did not want to tempt God. And he sent the treasures of the temple and the palace to the king of Assyria to come and help him.

It was at this time and on this occasion that the great sign of Emanuel was foretold, as described in Isaiah 7.

Ahaz was a very wicked king; one of the worst. He was the first to adopt the heathen custom of offering children in the fire to Molech—a practice which became common thereafter in both Judah and Israel, and which was one of the principle evils for which God destroyed both kingdoms.

Parallel to the history of Judah in this chapter are the six last kings of the northern kingdom—mean, miserable, meaningless men, most reigning briefly and dying violently. Just before this Jeroboam II, grandson of Jehu, had a prosperous and stable reign of 41 years, and Israel seemed stronger and more secure than ever before. He annexed Syria and far north to Hamath and all the territory east of the Jordan, all the way down to the Dead Sea.

Jeroboam’s Israel and Uzziah’s Judah together reconquered the whole area of Solomon’s empire at its greatest extent. It was during this brief and deceptive period of power and prosperity that Amos said to them both, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations.”

Right after Jeroboam the bubble of power collapsed in anarchy. The last 30-40 years of Israel saw these six kings—mostly usurpers, seizing the throne by violence. Against some came the Assyrian power, which repeatedly wasted and plundered the land and finally carried them all away into captivity.

Thus ended the larger northern part of God’s kingdom in the past. Judah to the south was from the same fate by the righteousness and faith of one man—Hezekiah. And was carried on another 130 years. But that too finally ended under a similar foreign wasting in captivity. This time by Babylon.

And so God’s kingdom ended in darkness and dispersion, because of wickedness, until he come whose right it is, the Lord Our Righteousness, who will reestablish God’s Kingdom, rebuild Jerusalem, its capitol, extend the Kingdom to fill the world, set up over it immortal sinless rulers, and rule all nations in equity and peace.

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