

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 44 – Part 3

The Divided Monarchy: Judah

One of the things I like about my “day job” as a trial lawyer is the reconstruction of history. Most, if not all, of my lawsuits involve digging into the past in an effort to reconstruct accurately those events that have given rise to the legal dispute. Sometimes it is as simple as one man’s word against another’s, where you try to figure out who is remembering and recounting the occurrence properly. Other times, it is much more complicated, involving a number of people and documents.

We have seen some cases turn on *whom* the jury chooses to believe. So it is important when developing a case to pay attention not only to what witnesses say, but also to what might corroborate or authenticate their accounts.

A case we frequently reminisce over at work involved the ill effects of a certain drug, and whether the company had been forthcoming about its potential problems or had deliberately concealed them from the public and the FDA. The drug company had a key witness who had testified for the company much of the day. The company lawyers finished their examination around lunchtime, and I then began my cross-examination.

I went straight to the heart of his “reconstructed history” with a 120-page document in my hip pocket! This was an “internal eyes’ only” document that contained an executive summary of the drug’s development. The document contained statements that I believed conveyed quite a different history from that the man had just testified to under oath. Without yet showing the document, I asked the gentleman:

“Sir, there was competitive pressure to get to market with this drug before your competitor placed their similar drug on the market, true?” He denied any such pressure. I then showed him the document page where it said, “There is considerable competitive pressure to get to market before our competitor.” Once cornered, he had to admit the truth of what the document said.

I followed up asking, “Sir, your company projected that it would make an extra \$611 million if it could be first to market, true?” Again, he denied the truth until I showed him the document, which said, “The value of being first to market versus second is \$611 million.”

My next question was, “Because of this, your company compressed and accelerated their clinical program [studies], true?” He fussed over that until I

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showed him the document page where it said, “The clinical program has thus been compressed and accelerated.” This same thing happened as I walked through each aspect of the internal report, how the company convinced the FDA to accept the drug after one-year patient exposure data rather than the two-year data normally required, how the marketing department was deciding key factors for the science studies, etc.

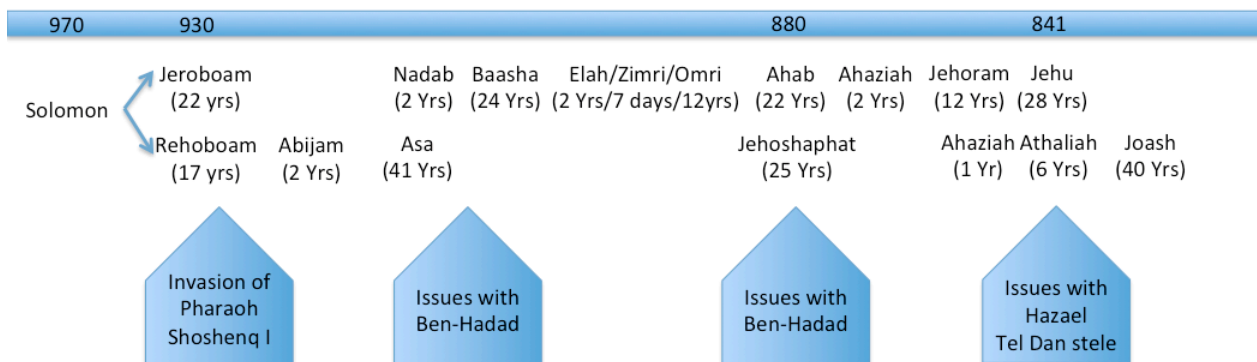
After a few more embarrassing misstatements and denials by him were shown to be false history by the document, I asked yet another question and his knowing response was, “I might as well agree with you, you’re just going to show me where it says it in my document; regardless of what I answer here!”

These stories occur day in and day out in my business. No doubt they influence me when I read books in the Bible like Kings. These are books that find their stories in the pages of history, even though they were written with purposes that far exceed simple recitation of historical facts.¹ No doubt this is one reason I enjoy mixing my reading and study of these books with the historical data that runs parallel and provides further illumination of the message of the Prophet Historian’s accounts in Kings.

We continue this study as we focus on a few final kings in Judah, before returning to the Northern Kingdom to see the fall of Samaria/Israel. We resume our study with the child king Joash.

JOASH

Time wise, we are about 841 BC in history:



¹ See the prior two lessons for the explanation about the Prophet Historian who authored these books with prophetic concerns that go beyond simple historical journaling. These and other lessons are downloadable in written or video formats at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

Where last we ended our lesson, after the death of King Ahaziah, Athaliah, daughter of King Ahab who married into the royal house of Judah, slew her grandchildren so that she could reign over Judah as Queen. One grandchild, Joash, was hidden in the temple (a place apparently never frequented by the idolatrous queen!)

For six years, Joash remained hidden away, protected from the evil queen by the priest Jehoiada. After six years, the young boy was brought out in a well-orchestrated event announcing him as king. Queen Athaliah shouted, "Treason!" to no avail and was put to death. (We note she was right on her judgment of treason, but wrong on the culprit! She was the treasonous one!)

Joash's reign got off to a great start. As a seven-year old, he received careful governance from the faithful priest Jehoiada. Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people. The people then tore down the house of Baal, tore down the altars to Baal, killed the priests of Baal, and destroyed the images of Baal. The Prophet Historian credited his good governance to Jehoiada:

And Jehoash [an alternate spelling of Joash] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him (2 Kings 12:2).

Joash collected money and oversaw the repair work to the temple. He also had difficulty with Hazael and had to buy peace with him. (This fact's inclusion in Kings, without the Chronicle's accounting given later in this lesson, runs contrary to what one would expect from a Deuteronomist Historian who allegedly alters history to account for his viewpoint. It is, however, consistent with a Prophet Historian who relates historical data with a commentary or message behind it.)

The Biblical notes that Hazael conquered both cities in Israel as well as Judah is also attested in the Tel Dan stele, which could read, "I set their towns into ruins...the cities of their land into desolation...to overturn all their cities." Joash stopped Hazael's incursion into Jerusalem by giving him the booty of the temple and king's house. Joash was killed through a conspiracy of his servants.

What happened to Joash? The Chronicler gives more insight. Joash maintained his good judgment while Jehoiada was alive. Finally, after 130 years on earth, a long and dedicated career to the LORD, Jehoiada died. He was buried in the kings' tomb because of his good service in Israel and toward God and the temple (2 Chron. 24:15-16). After Jehoiada died, Joash started listening to other leaders in Judah who were not faithful to God. These other leaders allowed the worship of various idols, in spite of prophetic words sent to warn them. Jehoiada's son Zechariah tried to warn them,

Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’ (2 Chron. 24:20).

Because of this, probably deluding himself into thinking these words were treasonous, Joash commanded the stoning of Zechariah. The conspiracy to kill Joash was brought about after these evil deeds. First, Hazael came in and destroyed much of the land. Then, Joash gave away the kingdom’s treasures to buy peace. Finally in the battling, Joash was severely wounded, and it was then that his servants finished him off, setting the stage for his son Amaziah to reign in his stead (2 Chron. 24:23-25).²

POINT FOR HOME

“...because Jehoiada the priest instructed him” (2 Kings. 12:2).

Is there any reason to read Scripture? Is there any reason to attend real teachings of Scripture? Is there any reason to have godly counselors and friends? Is there any reason to marry inside the faith? These stories and the Prophet Historian shout, “ABSOLUTELY!” If we fail to see how easy it is to stray as a result of the ungodly advice from friends or even loved ones; if we fail to see the dangers from lack of regular study in the ways of God, we are fooling ourselves. It is not that Joash was a religious slouch. There but for the grace of God go most of us!

As we consider the events of Joash’s life within the context of those kings that surrounded them, a consistent theme emerges that a number of these rulers started strong in the ways of Yahweh, and blessings followed their obedience. Yet multiple times, these kings became lax later in their reigns, with specific incidences of poor judgment, if not outright disobedience and unfaithfulness. The constant echo of falling backwards as one ages and enjoys the blessings of God heightens the contrast of Paul. Rather than falling back, Paul pressed on, always seeking a greater transformation into the likeness of Christ.

So, let’s make a commitment in this point for home. Let us commit to regular study of the Word, to fostering friends who hold us accountable to the Lord, and to daily personal prayer and time before the Lord. Then like Paul, may we seek growth each day, never finding satisfaction with the state of things while on earth.

² Someone might reasonably ask why Joash is credited in Kings with “doing right in the eyes of the LORD all his days” (2 Kings 12:2). We should note two things. First, “all” in the Hebrew sense does not always mean “every single one” (same with Greek!). It can mean “all” in a series, or “all” for a period, or “all” in a group. This is the sense in which “all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem” went out to John to be baptized (Mk 1:5). The Prophet Historian demarks his “all” with the qualifying language, “because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.” In other words, as long as Joash was listening to Jehoiada, he was doing right!

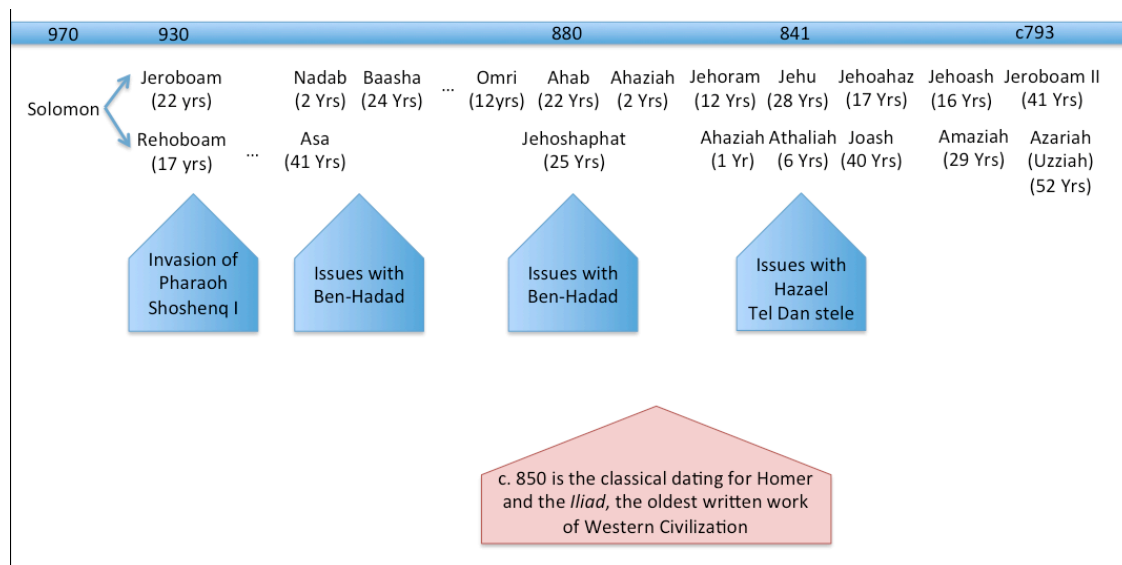
Like Paul, may we continually strive to put off our old self, which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

Then, like Paul writing at the end of his days to Timothy, may we seek the right to say,

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:6-7)!

AMAZIAH

To better understand the reign of Amaziah, we need to refresh our study with the current events in the Northern Kingdom. With ellipses placed for minor kings, a basic timeline of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (along with key events relevant to the Kingdoms and events outside of Biblical history but integral to Western Civilization) is below:



The time of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom was a golden age for Israel. As we noted in the lesson³ on his era, the northern superpower Assyria was in a time of internal struggle with little ability to exert itself beyond its borders. Egypt, the superpower to the south was similarly in a weakened state. This left the small

³ This and other lessons are available for download at www.Biblical-literacy.com.

countries existing between the two superpowers, including Israel and Judah, an opportunity to grow. Israel, as the location more suitable to trade and agriculture took great advantage of this time and was particularly thriving.

As 25-year old Amaziah assumed the throne in Judah upon the death of Joash his father, one of the first things he had to do was consolidate his power. Joash had technically been assassinated. He had been wounded in his fighting against the Syrians, when

...his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed (2 Chron. 24:25).

Joash, who owed his throne to Jehoiada, had killed the priest's son in cold blood. Joash's servants took revenge. This left the throne to Amaziah, but clearly the first priority was consolidating his hold on power. Once power was established, Amaziah set out to revenge the murder of his father.

And as soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand, he struck down his servants who had struck down the king his father (2 Chron. 25:3).

In contrast to General/King Jehu in the north, who had slaughtered anyone remotely related to his predecessors and challengers to the throne, Amaziah executed only those involved in assassinating Joash. He did not execute the children out of respect of the Torah commandment that said,

Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. But each one shall die for his own sin (Dt. 24:6).⁴

The Prophet Historian in Kings assessed the reign of Amaziah much like his father's reign. Like Joash, "he did right in the eyes of the LORD," yet, also like Joash, with the exception that he failed to stop the sacrificing on the high places (2 Kings 14:3-4). We read limited information in Kings about Amaziah defeating the Edomites, and then provoking a fight with Jehoash and the Northern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, behind a King who "did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kings 13:11) defeated Amaziah who "did right in the eyes of the LORD." The evil king then imprisoned the right king for a time. Although the text does not tell us directly when, at some point Amaziah was released. (See conjecture later under Thiele's analysis for when!) At the end of Amaziah's reign, there was a conspiracy against him, causing him to flee to Lachish. The conspiracy caught up

⁴ Interestingly, the reference given by the Prophet Historian writing Kings cites this commandment as coming from "the Book of the Law of Moses" (2 Kings 14:6). This is an early indication of Deuteronomy being considered a Book of the Law of Moses.

with Amaziah, and he was killed in Lachish, being returned to Jerusalem for burial in the king's tomb (2 Kings 14:17-20).

While Kings moves through the reign of Amaziah without much detail, the Chronicler gives us more information about what happened. After reciting the Kings passage about Amaziah doing right in the eyes of the Lord, the Chronicler does not mention anything about Amaziah's failure to remove the high places of worship. Instead, he summarizes with the added statement,

...he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart (2 Chron. 25:2).

The Chronicler then cuts back to the Kings account about consolidating power and then avenging the assassination of his fathers upon the assassins, but not their children. It is in the other matters of Amaziah's reign that Chronicles provides some interesting details. When Amaziah was setting out to battle the Edomites, he hired Northern Kingdom troops as mercenaries, paying 7,500 pounds of silver to increase his troop number by another third. Before going into battle, an unnamed prophet told Amaziah that "the LORD is not with Israel," and that God would instead help Amaziah and Judah. The Israelite army returned north, but was very angry, no doubt over the lost chance to acquire the spoils of war. Judah then marched against the Edomites and won by the hand of God. While the battle against the Edomites was ensuing, the returning Israelites raided a number of Judah's towns, taking their spoils from the defenseless villages.⁵

Meanwhile, once Amaziah successfully conquered the Edomites, he brought some Edomite idols back with him to Judah. Amaziah set these idols up and sacrificed to them (likely on a "high place" as Kings indicates that Amaziah allowed the high place idolatry in his reign). A prophet came to Amaziah to rebuke him for idolatry, earning a harsh word from the king. The prophet then proclaimed that God would destroy Amaziah for failing to listen to good counsel.

At this rebellious time, Amaziah decided to bring his revenge on the Northern Kingdom for the raiding parties of the fired mercenaries. There was trash talking between the two kings, with Amaziah challenging the Northern King Joash,

"Come, let us look one another in the face" (2 Chron. 25:17).

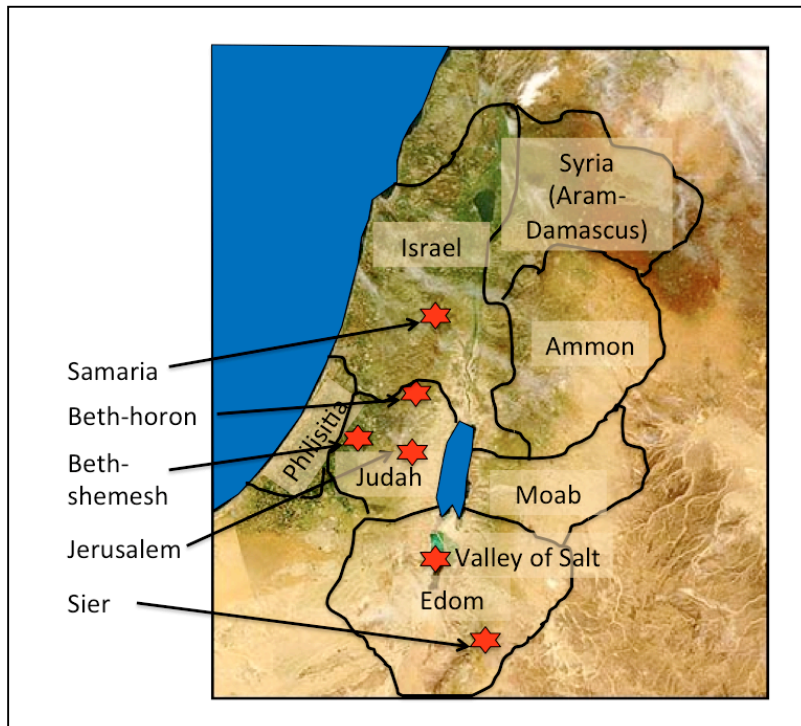
Joash had the better trash talk with his retort:

⁵ These troops were from Ephraim, the southern area of the Northern Kingdom. Just beyond the Benjamin plateau, they were raiding and ransacking towns and villages near their own homes ("from Samaria to Beth-horon"). They killed 3,000 people in the process (2 Chron. 25:13).

"A thistle on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife,' and a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle. You say, 'See, I have struck down Edom,' and your heart has lifted you up in boastfulness. But now stay at home. Why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?" (2 Chron. 25:18, 19).

Amaziah must have thought he and his troops had won their encounter with Edom, rather than realizing that God had delivered the Edomites! Amaziah must have thought it a mere religious platitude when he was told, "God has the power to help or to cast down" (2 Chron. 25:8).

The battle took place outside Beth-shemesh, a northwestern town of Judah that was the cross-roads of several highways. Not only was Judah defeated by Israel, but king Amaziah was captured. King Joash took Amaziah back to Jerusalem and wreaked havoc on the city, destroying a good bit of Jerusalem's defensive walls, and seizing treasure from the king's house. Amaziah took his booty and some hostages



and returned victorious to the North Country. As for Amaziah, once he turned away from the Lord, the people in Jerusalem turned against him and conspired against his life. Amaziah fled to Lachish, but was caught there and assassinated, meeting the same end as his father.

Amaziah marched against the Edomites in the Valley of Salt winning without the mercenaries from Israel. The mercenaries returned home plundering from Beth-horon all the way home ("to Samaria"). This led to a battle between north and south at Beth-shemesh

Judah's king after Amaziah was his son Azariah (more popularly called "Uzziah"). Azariah/Uzziah began his reign at the young age of 16, and he reigned for 52 years. Before we move on to study his life, we should note some analysis and

conclusions drawn by the late Edwin Thiele in his studies on the chronologies of the kings, which are still viewed as the fullest work on this issue. Thiele has carefully calculated the many dates given in the Old Testament for the reigns of kings, putting them into a coherent package that ties the dates into other known ancient events as well.

Taking dating that puzzled some marvelous scholars for decades, Thiele argues quite persuasively that the data, when properly put together, “reveals certain interesting details of Hebrew history that would otherwise elude us.”⁶ Walking through the convergent dates of the northern kings of Jehoash and Jeroboam II, and then considering the dates and reigning years of the Southern kings Amaziah and Azariah/Uzziah, Thiele shows that there were co-regencies where the sons sat on the thrones while their fathers were still technically kings.

Theile explains the conclusions from the timing:

Before starting out on his invasion of Judah, Jehoash had placed Jeroboam [his son] as regent. And when Amaziah was taken prisoner, the people of Judah placed the young Azariah [Uzziah] on the vacant throne. Amaziah was taken to Israel where he remained in confinement until the death of Jehoash, whereupon he was released and returned to Judah to live, [Ultimately settling in Lachish because of the conspiracy against him], but not to reign, for fifteen years after the death of Jehoash. Those years, however, together with his years of imprisonment in Israel, were added to his total years as king.⁷

POINT FOR HOME

*“...he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart”
(2 Chron. 25:2).*

How does this story hit you? Does it seem right that Amaziah could have a heart for the Lord and yet suffer such wretched defeat at the hands of a pagan Israelite king? We can see that Amaziah let his obedience waiver, beginning to trust in his own might, rather than the Lord’s, but is that a satisfactory reason for God giving him into the hands of a total reprobate who worshipped idols “full time”? For that matter, are you even a little troubled that the Prophet Historian writing Kings would say in summary that Amaziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” when we see the fuller story unfold in the Chronicler’s account?

⁶ Thiele, Edwin, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, (Zondervan 1977), at 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, at 42.

We first note that a concern over the assessment of the Prophet Historian is not fair to the reading of the text. It is apparent that the Chronicler had the Kings text before him as he wrote. The Chronicler follows the Kings' chronology, gives the same story about the start of Amaziah's reign, and even quotes the same passage in Deuteronomy. The Chronicler clearly knew what the Prophet Historian was saying in Kings, he even quotes Kings about Amaziah doing right in the eyes of the Lord! Yet whereas the Prophet Historian in Kings adds the idolatry failure of Amaziah ("the high places were not removed"), the Chronicler clearly explains the meaning of the Prophet Historian, "he did what was right...yet not with a whole heart."

This was Amaziah's downfall. He failed to follow with his whole heart to God. He retained his own selfish direction and ambition, not setting it before God at any costs. Initially, he seemed to walk in faith as he fought the Edomites, but somewhere along the way began to think he was the success, not the recipient of God's success. He got, in West Texas talk, "uppity!"

Then it does seem that God rained his justice on Amaziah, even more than he did the pagan king of Israel. Is that really a surprise? Israel's King Jehoshaphat was not without his own judgment, but simply because Jehoshaphat was evil, would never excuse the unfaithfulness of Amaziah. Each woman and man stands before God on her or his own. This is certainly one of the lessons in the parable of the talents. In Matthew 25, we read of Jesus speaking of a man entrusting money to three servants. Each was called to account for what they did with their own talents. Amaziah could never defend his own sinful rebellion simply by saying, "but he is worse, so reward me at his expense!"

In short, Amaziah let his pride and self-importance trump his humble search for God and his will. Like his father, he started strong, but failed to run the race with endurance. He substituted his own understanding for the clear reading of God's law, to which he had access, as witnessed by the passage about his vengeance limited to the ones who had killed his father.

Let us earnestly desire to follow in God's truth. Let us not rationalize away his clear directions, thinking we "know better." May we heed Proverbs 16:18,

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

AZARIAH/UZZIAH

Kings does not give us much data on Azariah, also known as Uzziah. We are told he began to reign at age 16, and sat on the throne for 52 years! Like his father and

grandfather, Kings tells us that Azariah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet there is still the caveat that it was in the same measure as his father:

And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places (2 Kings 15:3-4).

Beyond this, the 52-year reign of Azariah is wrapped up in Kings noting that the Lord “touched the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and he lived in a separate house” (2 Kings 15:5). That is it in Kings! The Prophet Historian adds nothing else (save that Azariah’s son Jotham reigned as regent while his father was a leper.)

Was Azariah just another king? Was there not much to tell? To the contrary, Azariah was one of the most successful kings in Judah! He did many amazing things, and some pretty stupid ones as well. During his reign, the prophet Isaiah rose and began his ministry. We will dissect the events of Azariah’s reign as we return next lesson to the history of the Northern Kingdom and the demise of Israel.

POINT FOR HOME

“Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written...”
(2 Kings 15:6).

The stories of Azariah are legion, yet the Prophet Historian in Kings gives us very little. Why? We can fairly surmise that the stories were readily available for readers to learn by the reference to the Annals of the Kings of Judah, so the Prophet Historian did not have a need to simply recount history. The Kings accounts are accelerating at this point to the fall of Israel. The Prophet Historian was driving this account for a reason. The fuller story of Azariah would have to lay in other writings, as the Prophet Historian moved to the monumental world-changer: the fall of Israel.

That does not mean that the stories of Azariah are not important, for they were and they are. Similarly, there are cataclysmic world events that are press worthy today, but that does not make them any more important than the day-in and day-out story of your life. Yours just may not be written and posted on the Internet!

I suggest you begin a habit of each morning and each evening doing something very specific. Each morning take a moment to think about your day. Then in prayer, dedicate that day to the Lord. Ask him to help you live that day in faithful obedience, making the most of every chance to serve him and walk in the good works that he has prepared for you. Then each night, as you prepare to sleep,

think through the day. Where were you faithful? Where do you see your mistakes? What were your missed opportunities? Take inventory while prayerfully repenting and seeking God's help for the next day. He is faithful not only in his forgiveness, but in his Spirit's powerful assistance. Then the next day, do this again. Make it a daily habit! As you and I do so, we will see not only God's transforming power, but we will live to finish the race as Paul explained to Timothy. Then even if our written history is short, the days of our lives will be full of God and his promise. It will not matter whether others read of it or not, for we are living under the care and attention of one much greater and much more important. Living before God is all that matters.

WANT MORE?

Next week we continue our historical study of Israel, we will look closely at Azariah. Read 2 Chronicles 26 for some more details! Then as we continue to work our way toward the conquering of Israel, read up on Tiglath-pileser and Sennacherib! Email us your thoughts and questions at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.