



## Second Kings - Chapter Fifteen

### **V 2 Kings 14:1-15:7 - Amaziah, Jeroboam II, and Azariah (continues/concludes)**

#### Summary of Chapter Fifteen

King Azariah or Uzziah was king for fifty two years from the age of sixteen. He was basically a good king although he too never removed the high places of worship. Not told in Kings but in Chronicles, Azariah's pride allowed him to attempt to make an offering in place of the priest and was struck with leprosy so it was his son Jotham who was in effective charge of the kingdom.

In Israel the pattern of evil kings continued. Zechariah had succeeded his father and was the fourth generation of Jehu. After just six months on the throne he was killed by Shallum, thus the dynasty of Jehu ended as the Lord had said. Shallum lasted just one month before he was assassinated by Menahem, an even more evil king. When the king of Assyria came against Israel, Menahem paid him so that he could keep his reign of the land, which he did for ten years.

Menahem's son Pekahiah succeeded his father and ruled for two years before being assassinated by Pekah, the Captain of his guard along with fifty Gileadite co-conspirators. Pekah then assumed the throne of Israel and it was during his twenty year reign that King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came against Israel and took people away to Assyria in bondage. Pekah in turn was assassinated by Hoshea to seized the throne as a result.

Meanwhile, in Judah Jotham had succeeded his father Azariah/Uzziah. Like his father he did what was good in Lord's sight but he failed to remove the high places. He reigned in Judah for sixteen years.

## V.c. 2 Kings 15:1-7 - Azariah Reigns over Judah

Azariah, also known as Uzziah, was only sixteen when he came to the throne and lived for a further fifty two years. He continued the good work of his father Amaziah but did nothing about abolishing the high places of worship. Not recorded here, his pride led him to attempt to offer sacrifices in place of the priests and the Lord struck him down with leprosy so his son Jotham became the effective king.

<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-seventh year of King Jeroboam of Israel King Azariah son of Amaziah of Judah began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

### 2 Kings 15:1-4

In the twenty-seventh year of King Jeroboam of Israel. Azariah effectively reigned in place of his father Amaziah from 791 BC because Amaziah was taken captive by King Jehoash.

King Azariah son of Amaziah of Judah began to reign. Azariah came to the throne in a difficult era. Following the tragic events that brought King Amaziah's reign to an end, Jerusalem was in disarray, a major section of its protective wall destroyed, its temple and palace emptied of their treasures, and some of its inhabitants taken away to Israel as hostages.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. Refer to 2 Kings 14:3-4 for a similar description of Azariah's father Amaziah. Azariah is also called Uzziah in various places in Second Kings, Second Chronicles and Isaiah. Uzziah's reign saw the beginning of Isaiah's prophetic ministry; refer to Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1. His reign was largely characterised by the good he did in the sight of the Lord. His godliness was rewarded with a long reign of fifty-two years although his pride and even arrogance would mean that he spent much of his life in isolation through leprosy.

Second Chronicles Chapter 26 reveals much more about the successful reign of Azariah/Uzziah:

- It confirms that he began his reign when he was only 16 years old (2 Chronicles 26:3).
- He reigned during the ministry of Zechariah the priest, who became a godly mentor: <<He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper>> (2 Chronicles 26:5).

- He defeated the Philistines and took many of their cities, and also kept the Ammonites in tribute (2 Chronicles 26:6-8).
- He was internationally famous as a strong king (2 Chronicles 26:8).
- He was an ambitious builder and skilled in agriculture (2 Chronicles 26:9-10). It is believed that he probably gave special attention to agriculture because of the prophecies of Hosea and Amos concerning the scarcity about to come. Refer to Hosea 2:9, 4:3 and 9:2; and Amos 1:2, 4:6-9 and 5:16-19.
- He built up and organised the army, introducing several new items of military technology (2 Chronicles 26:11-15).

Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. As with Jehoash in 2 Kings 12:3 and Amaziah (2 Kings 14:4), the reforms of Azariah did not reach so far as to remove these traditional places of sacrifice to the Lord. The apparent compromise is indicative of a basic spiritual shallowness that was to surface in the prophecies of the great writing prophets of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord struck the king, so that he was leprous to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son was in charge of the palace, governing the people of the land. <sup>6</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? <sup>7</sup> Azariah slept with his ancestors; they buried him with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jotham succeeded him.

### 2 Kings 15:5-7

He was leprous to the day of his death. At some point during his reign, Azariah became a leper and was unable to govern, occupying a separate house – literally in Hebrew ‘the house of freedom’ (*bet hakhopshit*), which is probably a metaphor for being relieved of responsibility in government more than a description of his living conditions. The king was seriously incapacitated and was regarded as effectively dead - the related Hebrew word *khopshi* in connection with the world of the dead in Job 3:19, where it is translated ‘free,’ and in Psalm 88:5, ‘forsaken’ or ‘set loose’. Because of his leprosy, Uzziah had to withdraw from his royal duties. His son Jotham therefore exercised effective governmental power in Judah.

King Uzziah was not buried in the normal royal tombs of Jerusalem but in a field. A stone plaque was found in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, from the Second Temple period that bears the inscription, “Here were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Judah. Do not open!” It may be that the king's bones were moved to the Mount of Olives many centuries after his death.

Second Chronicles Chapter 26 also reveals the downfall of Azariah, who was marvellously helped until he became strong. The Chronicler goes on: <<**But**

*when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of incense>> (2 Chronicles 26:16). The priests tried to stop him, but the King insisted on forcing his way into the temple to offer incense. Therefore, Azariah violated what had become a general principle in God's dealing with Israel: that no king should also be a priest, and that the offices of prophet, priest, and king should not be combined in one man until the Messiah, who fulfilled all three offices. His great power fostered such pride and haughtiness that about 750 BC he sought to add to his vast power by usurping the prerogatives of the sacred priesthood.*

The king lived in a separate house. Azariah came into the temple as an arrogant king, and he left - indeed: *<<he himself hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him>> (2 Chronicles 26:20) - he left as a humbled leper. The law states that his crime of ministering illegally in the temple was punishable by death: <<But you and your sons with you shall diligently perform your priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and the area behind the curtain. I give your priesthood as a gift; any outsider who approaches shall be put to death>> (Numbers 18:7). For Azariah the isolation of leprosy was virtually a living death sentence for the remainder of his natural life.*

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

Azariah slept with his ancestors. Azariah/Uzziah was a popular king and his death would have been a time of great sorrow for the people of Judah. However, it marked the start of a remarkable period of hope as Isaiah prophesied: *<<In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple>> (Isaiah 6:1).*

When Isaiah wrote that he was called in the year King Uzziah died, he said a lot. It is to say, "In the year a great and wise king died." But it is also to say, "In the year a great and wise king who had a tragic end died." Isaiah had great reason to be discouraged and disillusioned at the death of King Uzziah, because a great king had passed away, and because his life ended tragically. Yet despite it all, he saw the enthroned Lord God who was greater than any earthly king.

## **VI 2 Kings 15:8-31 - Israel's Last Days**

**Israel's respite from foreign oppression is as temporary as its domination of Judah. With the passing of Jeroboam II, the nation has reached the 'fourth generation' of the divine promise to Jehu and has returned to the unstable government of the northern kingdom implied by 1 Kings 14:15 and illustrated in 1 Kings Chapters 14-16 before the houses of Omri and Jehu were established.**

Reign now follows reign in quick succession, as the reader moves toward the end of Israel's story.

#### VI.a 2 Kings 15:8-12 - Zechariah Reigns over Israel

King Zechariah was assassinated after just six months on the throne of Israel. He was the fourth and last in the line of Jehu just as the Lord had prophesied.

<sup>8</sup> In the thirty-eighth year of King Azariah of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria for six months. <sup>9</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his ancestors had done. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. <sup>10</sup> Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down in public and killed him, and reigned in place of him. <sup>11</sup> Now the rest of the deeds of Zechariah are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. <sup>12</sup> This was the promise of the Lord that he gave to Jehu: 'Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.' And so it happened.

#### 2 Kings 15:8-12

In the thirty-eighth year of King Azariah of Judah was 753 BC.

Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria for six months. The reign of Zechariah was both short and wicked, and he continued in the state-sponsored idolatry begun by Jeroboam.

Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down in public and killed him. Zechariah was so despised by his own people that Shallum was able to do this. This was the end of the dynasty of Jehu, which began with such potential but ended in great darkness. After the glorious reign of Jeroboam II in earthly terms of prosperity and military success, the reign of his son Zechariah marks the end of the dynasty of Jehu, as foretold in 2 Kings 10:30.

The death of this last king of the dynasty of Jehu saw the end of the northern kingdom proper. In the last twenty years six rulers were to follow each other, but only one was to die naturally. Anarchy, rivalry and regicide led to terminal bloodshed which fulfilled Hosea's prophecies: <<And the Lord said to him, 'Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel>> (Hosea 1:4).

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

## VI.b 2 Kings 15:13-16 - Shallum Reigns over Israel

Having killed King Zechariah, Shallum became king but reigned for just one month before he too was assassinated.

<sup>13</sup> Shallum son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah; he reigned for one month in Samaria. <sup>14</sup> Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah and came to Samaria; he struck down Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; he reigned in place of him. <sup>15</sup> Now the rest of the deeds of Shallum, including the conspiracy that he made, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. <sup>16</sup> At that time Menahem sacked Tiphseh, all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on; because they did not open it to him, he sacked it. He ripped open all the pregnant women in it.

### 2 Kings 15:13-16

Shallum reigned for one month in Samaria. The dynasty of Jehu lasted four generations; the dynasty of Shallum lasted just four weeks. The great prosperity and expansion under Jeroboam II appears to have corrupted the people and caused them to give free reign to their evil desires and violence. Those in authority, instead of checking this spirit of lawlessness, found pleasure in it: **<<By their wickedness they make the king glad, and the officials by their treachery>>** (Hosea 7:3).

In the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah was 752 BC.

Now the rest of the deeds of Shallum. The writer of Second Kings has no moral comment to make on the brief reign of Shallum. Perhaps he did not reign long enough to show himself either good or bad. Certainly, the violence that marked both his rise to and fall from power shows that he did not reign with the blessing of God.

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Menahem sacked Tiphseh. This attack on an important city on the Euphrates River is the last, brutal action of an Israelite king claiming control of a Solomon-like empire; refer to 1 Kings 4:24. Such a campaign would probably have taken place early in his reign, either before the campaigns of King Pul of Assyria in 743-740 BC began, or during these years as part of the anti-Assyrian struggle in the region.

He ripped open all the pregnant women in it. This act of horrible brutality was commanded by Menham. This shows the depths of brutality and ungodliness of the

times. The action by Menahem against the inhabitants of Tiphshah is unparalleled for brutality by any Israelite. Here it may mark the increasing influence of the surrounding nations. It was a foreign practice inflicted on the Israelites themselves by Aram (2 Kings 8:12), Ammon (Amos 1:13), and Assyria (Hosea 13:8).

#### VI.c 2 Kings 15:17-22 - Menahem Reigns over Israel

Having killed the usurper Shallum after just one month on the throne, Menahem took the throne of Israel and reigned for ten years. When King Pul of Assyria came up against Israel, Shallum paid him off with a ransom, effectively making Israel a vassal state.

<sup>17</sup> In the thirty-ninth year of King Azariah of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi began to reign over Israel; he reigned for ten years in Samaria.

<sup>18</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart all his days from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. <sup>19</sup> King Pul of Assyria came against the land; Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, so that he might help him confirm his hold on the royal power. <sup>20</sup> Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy, fifty shekels of silver from each one, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land. <sup>21</sup> Now the rest of the deeds of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? <sup>22</sup> Menahem slept with his ancestors, and his son Pekahiah succeeded him.

#### 2 Kings 15:17-22

In the thirty-ninth year of King Azariah of Judah was still 752 BC.

Menahem son of Gadi began to reign over Israel. His reign was typical of the kings of Israel in that it was both evil and a continuation of the state-sponsored idolatry of Jeroboam.

King Pul of Assyria came against the land. Pul is the Hebrew version of the Akkadian Pulu, a short name for Tiglath-pileser III, known from the Babylonian king lists. Tiglath-pileser's goal was apparently to establish an Assyrian trading centre on the border with Egypt, and he required control of the intervening regions to accomplish this and to ensure safe passage for trade between Philistia and Assyria.

Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver. Menahem put the kingdom of Israel under tribute to the Assyrian Empire. He purchased the backing of the Assyrian king with a large amount of money raised from the wealthy in his kingdom, and therefore ruled with the strength of Assyria supporting him. Menahem's tributary payment of a thousand talents of silver makes him Assyria's

friend for the time being, and is mentioned in Assyrian records relating to Tiglath-pileser's successful campaign of 738 BC against Aram and Phoenicia.

The Assyrian policy was initially to leave a state on its borders independent, although requiring a substantial annual payment for this privilege. Thereafter the state might be made a vassal, which entailed having an Assyrian official at court as a watchdog on the ruler's attitudes towards Assyria and its king.

On the resurgence of Assyrian influence in the region refer to the map and the associated comments near the end of this document.

Menahem exacted the money from Israel. Sixty-three *ostraca* were found at Samaria that record tax payments dated by years of the king. These may in fact have been the additional tax payments that Menahem imposed on Israel to pay off the Assyrian king Pul in 738 BC. Most of this money was extracted from the rich and the reader will probably have little sympathy for them when they read about how they came by their wealth; for examples of this refer to Amos 4:1, 5:11-12 and 8:4-6; and Micah 2:2 and 6:10-12.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

#### VI.d 2 Kings 15:23-26 - Pekahiah Reigns over Israel

The son of an evil king rules for two years and continues the cycle of apostasy. He, like so many other kings in this period, meets a violent end.

<sup>23</sup> In the fiftieth year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned for two years. <sup>24</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. <sup>25</sup> Pekah son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty of the Gileadites, and attacked him in Samaria, in the citadel of the palace along with Argob and Arieah; he killed him, and reigned in place of him. <sup>26</sup> Now the rest of the deeds of Pekahiah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

#### 2 Kings 15:23-26

In the fiftieth year of King Azariah of Judah was 742 BC.

Pekahiah son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria. The previous two kings of Israel before Menahem did not reign successfully enough to pass the kingdom on to a son or another dynastic descendent. Menahem ruled well enough to pass the kingdom to Pekahiah.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. The familiar refrain of this indictment against the kings of Israel is repeated regarding Pekahiah.

Why should Jeroboam so frequently be called ‘the son of Nebat’? There is no historic or scriptural account to indicate that Nebat was in any way at fault for the way his son decided to turn the Israelites away from the true worship of God. Yet once again he gets a mention as the father of the man who was responsible for the continual downward slide of a once great people favoured by God, who were by now living a life far from God and would soon be plucked out of their Promised Land and scattered among the nations because of their continual sin and apostasy.

Pekah son of Remaliah, his captain, killed him, and reigned in place of him. The blessing of God was obviously not on Pekahiah, whose reign ended with assassination after only two years. This was the end of another brief dynasty, and the start of a new one. The insurrection seems to have originated with the king’s own personal bodyguard. Loyalty seems to have been only a distant memory. It is only about two hundred and fifty years since David was surrounded by men willing to fight and die for him. They even wanted him to remain behind so that he would not be killed in battle: <<*Then David’s men swore to him, ‘You shall not go out with us to battle any longer, so that you do not quench the lamp of Israel’*>> (2 Samuel 21:17b).

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#### VI.e 2 Kings 15:27-31 - Pekah Reigns over Israel

Pekah is the last of the Israelite kings to rule during the long reign of Azariah in Judah. Pekah’s twenty years in power appear to be counted from before the period when he began to reign over Israel in Samaria and governed only part of the Israelite territory mentioned in v.29; for if Menahem was king of Israel in 742 BC and Pekah was succeeded by Hoshea around 732 BC, Pekah could not have reigned for 20 years over Israel as a whole. The end of the period in which he did reign over all Israel saw Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria annex much of Israel’s northern and eastern territory during his campaigns of 733-732 BC.

<sup>27</sup> In the fifty-second year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned for twenty years. <sup>28</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

## 2 Kings 15:27-28

In the fifty-second year of King Azariah of Judah was 740 BC. However, the twenty years are counted from 752 BC as Pekah reigned in opposition to both Menahem and Pekahiah over part of the kingdom.

Pekah son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria. The kings, families, and dynasties ruling Israel changed quickly during this period. Yet there was an amazing continuity of evil through these dynasties. Each was evil, and each continued the state sponsored idolatry in Israel.

<sup>29</sup> In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria. <sup>30</sup> Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him, in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah. <sup>31</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

## 2 Kings 15:29-31

King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali. This Assyrian king, unlike in the days of Menahem, would not be paid off by the king of Israel. He came and took some of the best land of the kingdom of Israel, including much of the northern part of the kingdom. With the loss of Galilee and Gilead and with the presence of Assyrian troops all along the Israel's western frontier, it seemed evident that Pekah's anti-Assyrian policy had brought Israel to the point of extinction.

This list of conquered towns to the west of the Jordan, however, is not exhaustive but representative moving from Ijon, at the northern end of the Huleh Valley and guarding the main highway leading from Palestine to Aram, to Hazor, the largest site in Upper Galilee and occupying the most strategic position in the region.

He carried the people captive to Assyria. This became an official state policy of the Assyrian Empire. Upon conquering a land, if necessary, they relocated by force the best and the brightest of the conquered nation, bringing them to Assyria. This first reference to the practice of removing leaders and selected experts into exile shows that the next step had now been taken towards making Israel a vassal-state. Refer to the map and associated comments near the end of this document.

First Chronicles 5:26 reveals that King Pul of Assyria, carried away into captivity the two tribes of Reuben, and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh; all

that belonged to Israel on the other side of the Jordan. These were never restored to Israel. The Assyrians deported a significant percentage of Israel's population, which was a major feature of Tiglath-pileser's imperial policy, designed to increase the Assyrian labour force and reduce the possibility of further opposition among subjugated peoples.

Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him. This was another king and another dynasty to end with assassination, as a powerful demonstration of the great instability in the northern kingdom. Josephus says that Hoshea was 'a friend' of Pekah's, "But watch as he might, his very friend in whom he trusted became, in the ordering of God, his slayer; so impossible it is for the wicked to escape their merited retribution" (Jewish Antiquities 9.13).

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## **VII 2 Kings 15:32-16:20 - Jotham and Ahaz**

**The house of David has seen three of its last four kings assassinated, and the fourth set aside his power because of illness. Things are not about to improve, as Jotham and his apostate son Ahaz are introduced.**

### **VII.a 2 Kings 15:32-38 - Jotham Reigns over Judah**

The account now returns to events in Judah, providing a contrast in how the two kingdoms were fairing in terms of the relationship with God. Jotham continued to steer his people in the right direction but once again failed to address the issue of the unauthorised places of worship.

<sup>32</sup> In the second year of King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel, King Jotham son of Uzziah of Judah began to reign. <sup>33</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. <sup>34</sup> He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done. <sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord. <sup>36</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

### **2 Kings 15:32-36**

In the second year of King Pekah was 750 BC as King Pekah reigned in opposition from that time against Menahem and Pekahiah.

Jotham's reign saw the beginning of Micah's prophetic ministry: <<*The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem*>> (Micah 1:1).

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done. This stands in strong contrast to the evil done by the previously mentioned kings of Israel. Among the kings of Judah, there were good and godly kings. The pattern is seen in both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, where the son reigns as his father had before him. While this is not concretely predetermined, certainly this is a principle that shows great influence that a father has on a son.

The high places were not removed. Jotham was a relatively good, i.e. non-idolatrous king. Nevertheless, he is described as being like his father rather than like David, and he failed to centralise worship of the Lord in Jerusalem, allowing people to continue worshipping at the high places.

He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord. This was always a positive sign in Judah. When kings and leaders were concerned about the house of the Lord, it reflected some measure of spiritual revival. The upper gate is the 'gate behind the guards' mentioned in 2 Kings 11:6, presumably damaged in the course of Jehoash's incursion into Jerusalem recorded in 2 Kings 14:13-14.

Jotham also turned his attention to urban planning, constructing cities in the highlands of Judah that, together with a system of towers and fortification in the wooded areas, could serve both economic and military purposes. In particular, it seems that Jotham rebuilt the link between the temple and the palace. He wished to have free access from his own house to the temple. He would strengthen the link between the two houses - keeping his line of communication open (to use a military term) with the source of his supplies of strength and wisdom. This is one of the secrets of his prosperity and power. The building of this link between the palace and the temple was one of the chief means that he prepared his way before the Lord: <<*So Jotham became strong because he ordered his ways before the Lord his God*>> (2 Chronicles 27:6). His father Azariah/Uzziah misunderstood the link between the royal house and the house God, demanding priestly authority; refer to 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. Many kings before him wanted no link between the royal house and the house of God. Jotham understood that he was a king and not a priest, yet he wanted a good, open link between the palace and the temple.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

<sup>37</sup> In those days the Lord began to send King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. <sup>38</sup> Jotham slept with his ancestors, and

was buried with his ancestors in the city of David, his ancestor; his son Ahaz succeeded him.

### 2 Kings 15:37-38

In those days the Lord began to send King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer of Second Kings reveals that it was the hand of the Lord that sent these foreign rulers who troubled Judah. This is the beginning of the so-called Syro-Ephraimite War seen so prominently in Isaiah Chapters 7-9. In due course Judah will ask Assyria to help fight off Israel and Aram (refer to the comment on 2 Kings 16:7-9), and the Assyrian response is reflected already in the comment on vv.27-31. Refer also to the map near the end of this document.

The Lord began to send. This was the beginning. If Judah and her kings responded to these chastening events in the right way, God would take note. If they hardened their hearts and rejected the correction of God, he would take note of that as well. During Jotham's reign, the combined forces of King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel began their invasion of Judah, but the full impact of these military assaults was not felt until Jotham's son became king.



The Resurgence of Assyrian Influence circa 740 BC

Looming over most of the latter history of the divided monarchy is the growing power and influence of Assyria. The resurgence of this ancient empire dominated much of the politics of the ancient Near East from the time of Jeroboam and Azariah until the empire's demise at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Israel bore the brunt of Assyria's forays into Palestine, although Judah experienced its share of attacks as well. Assyria would eventually engulf nearly the entire Near East from Ur to Ararat to Egypt.

As the Assyrian Empire expanded westward, Aram and Israel sought to compel Judah and the other nearby states to form an anti-Assyrian alliance. Judah refused to join, therefore Aram, Israel, and perhaps Edom and Philistia attacked Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 28:1-19. Isaiah assured King Ahaz that he needed only to trust in God, who would call upon Assyria to deal with the Aramæans and Israel.

Suffering attacks on all sides due to his refusal to join an alliance against Assyria, King Ahaz of Judah called upon King Tiglath-pileser III (also called Pul) of Assyria for help. The Assyrians captured Aram and all of Galilee and Gilead from Israel (v.29). As Isaiah had foretold, however, Ahaz's petition came at a price, for he was required to pay a large tribute to Assyria and make Judah a vassal kingdom of the empire: <<*The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria*>> (Isaiah 7:17).



Aram and Israel Attack Judah circa 740-732 BC



Assyria Captures Northern Israel circa 733 BC