

2ND KINGS

Week 19, chapter 14

We had just opened the divine door of Holy Scripture into 2nd Kings 14 last week when we ran out of time, so we'll continue with that this week, and we'll even have to take some time next week to finish this action-packed and information laden chapter. We were introduced to the latest king of Judah, **Amatzyah**, whose father was the murdered King Joash. Thus when we turned the page from chapter 13 to chapter 14, we moved from Israel back to Judah.

We found out that **Amatzyah** was just like his father in that in many ways he ruled righteously, but yet among other indiscretions he allowed the **bamot**, the high places, to remain in operation in Judah. While on the surface this looks largely like a political policy designed to maintain support of the citizens, in reality it reflects something more insidious. Recall that these high places were essentially private family altars that many of the Hebrews preferred to sacrifice upon rather than following God's Torah and going to the Temple. They were used to sacrifice to Yehoveh but even so to allow them to continue to operate was wrong. But what this demonstrates to us couples nicely with the opening subject of last week's lesson that used the frog in the kettle fable as an analogy. That is, the use of private high places was so normal and customary in Israelite society and had been in use for so long, that it was simply an accepted and unquestioned part of Hebrew religious custom in both the northern and southern kingdoms. The people of Israel and Judah had become blind to the historical fact that the use of high places was purely pagan in its origin and character. No amount of trying to convert their use from worshipping false gods to worshipping the God of Israel made it acceptable in God's eyes, since God never gave anyone authority to declare holy what He has declared as evil. Its legitimacy wasn't called into question except by an occasional prophet or a brave Levitical priest, whose unwelcome rant against the use of **bamot** was considered that of a fanatic and someone who was completely out of step with the contemporary Hebrew religious practices.

The bottom line being that the Hebrews didn't just jump overnight from being totally dedicated to a Torah observant lifestyle to something that was nearly unrecognizable as being Biblically sound. Baby step by baby step, over decades and even centuries, the Torah was pushed to the background while manmade observances, rituals, and doctrines rose up to modify or replace God's commands. Thus as both Israel and Judah were racing towards a day of reckoning in which God would say to them that as a result of their rebellion in placing their trust in these invented traditions and doctrines and practices they have lost their privilege to live in His Kingdom and would be vomited out from it, they were generally oblivious to their condition. In fact, over and over we read how the people and their leaders were in total denial, and when someone would dare to point out their wrongness and wickedness that person was either run out of town or stoned to death.

Remember: by now it had been over 200 years since David was king, and over 500 years since God gave Moses the Torah. The Torah had been given to a wandering group of desert dwellers who lived in tents. So for these more modern Hebrews who lived a settled life in their own country, in towns and cities with stone houses, and who grew crops on terraced fields, established trade routes to distant lands, formed political alliances with their gentile neighbors, and were ruled by a Hebrew monarchy, Moses and the Torah was old news. It seemed to them that things had changed sufficiently that the new ways they practiced their religion must be better than the old ways God had originally laid down.

As I did last week I want to caution us all who call ourselves followers of Christ, to look into the mirror and ask ourselves some tough questions. But the mirror I'm speaking about is not made of reflective glass; it is the mirror of God's Word. Because as James, brother of Jesus said in the New Testament Book of James, chapter 1:

CJB James 1:22-25

22 Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it!

23 For whoever hears the Word but doesn't do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror,

24 who looks at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

25 But if a person looks closely into the perfect Torah, which gives freedom, and continues, becoming not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work it requires, then he will be blessed in what he does.

What "Word" was James speaking of when he was speaking to followers of Christ, and urging them to do what it says? Well, it certainly wasn't the New Testament because it didn't yet exist. Of course; it was the Torah and the Old Testament, the so-called Hebrew Bible. Now in our day the New Testament is of course part of that Word. But are we to think that the Word that James, the unquestioned leader of The Way, was speaking so highly of is now a dead and gone Word, and only the Word that came no sooner than 150 years after him is what he was referring to? That's rather preposterous on its face, isn't it?

The Torah is not here to save us, but rather to lead us to Salvation. At the same time, the New Testament wasn't created to give us God's laws and commandments, or God's authorized observances and rituals and worship practices, or to define sin and its consequences, because the Old Testament (the Word James was speaking of) had already done that. But within

Roman Christianity (which whether you like to hear it or not is what all modern Western Christian denominations practice in one form or another) the Torah and the Old Testament portion of the Bible has been declared irrelevant, abolished, or perhaps even a danger to our Christian faith. Just as James said, because Christianity has walked away from the mirror of the Torah, we have forgotten what we are to look like. And when James was speaking of what we look like, which identifies who we are, he wasn't meaning physical or ethnic Jewishness. He was meaning what we look like as followers of the God of Israel and His Son Yeshua.

Since Moses' death, Israel slowly but surely looked less and less into the mirror until they stopped altogether; and the result is what we're reading about now in 2nd Kings.

In 2nd Kings 14 verses 3 and 4, because **Amatzyah** was indeed a descendant of the Davidic Dynasty and thus fully authorized to sit on Judah's throne, he is compared to his forefather David and is judged as not being like David. The primary complaint that the writer of 2nd Kings seems to have had against Joash and his son **Amatzyah** was a lack of zeal towards the Torah and insincerity in following God's laws. David on the other hand is always characterized as having limitless zeal and fierce loyalty to Yehoveh and His ways, and despite his many failures and sins he had no tolerance for idolatry or graven images. Therefore it seems that this is what sets David apart, and makes him an earthly standard for Israel's kings, from the Lord's perspective.

We're going to do quite a lot of reading now. First we're going to re-read some of 2nd Kings 14, and then we're going to immediately move to 2nd Chronicles 25, because it is a parallel account of these events and provides us with important additional information.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 14: 7 – end

Now let's read 2nd Chronicles 25.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 25 all

There's a couple of important pieces of historical background information in 2nd Chronicles 25 that we can race right by. First, in verse 5, we see that Benjamin was no longer part of the northern kingdom coalition of tribes. Rather they have become an ally and partner with Judah. And thus some of the troops that **Amatzyah** formed for an upcoming military expedition came from Benjamin. Benjamin would, generally speaking, stay within Judah's sphere of influence until first Israel was exiled to Assyria and then later on Judah to Babylon. When it comes to the

2 exiles it is hard to place Benjamin because due to their geographical location as a kind of buffer territory between the northern and southern kingdoms, some of the clans of Benjamin were taken with the 10 tribes into Assyria, and other clans more or less melted into Judah and so eventually went to Babylon. It doesn't mean that Benjamin completely lost its identity (as St. Paul identifies himself as a Benjamite), but they did lose their tribal cohesion.

Another piece of information is one that I have explained numerous times in prior lessons because it is important for us modern day Believers due to its effect upon End-Times prophecy. In verse 7, Ephraim is equated with Israel. That is, the tribe of Ephraim is made synonymous with the nation of Israel (the northern kingdom). This is because Ephraim was by far the most dominant tribe among the northern tribes, and so as customary in that era, Ephraim lent its name to the nation itself. More and more as we move along in time in these remaining books of the Old Testament, Ephraim's name will be used to identify one large segment of Hebrews; and that segment is what we today might call the 10 lost tribes. Again: on the one hand Ephraim is technically a separate and individual tribe (just 1 of the 12), but on the other hand from here forward they are representative of the entire northern tribal alliance of 10 tribes because of their dominant role. Please grasp that what I'm saying in this regard is not allegory or doctrine or speculation; it is simply well documented historical fact that is completely validated in the Bible, despite the reality that you may never have heard it in another church or synagogue.

Let's take only a moment to refer to but one, but perhaps the most exciting and pertinent, End-Times prophecy where this understanding of Ephraim as representative of the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom is present.

Turn your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 37.

READ EZEKIEL 37:15-22

Ezekiel was among the first wave of exiles to Babylon that were taken from Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. So even though the exile of the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel was around 130 years earlier, it was fresh enough in peoples' minds that it was common knowledge that in this kind of context Ephraim and Israel were synonymous terms. Thus this passage is speaking of the return of the 10 lost tribes of the northern kingdom from their Assyrian exile, back to the Promised Land at a time when Judah has already returned and re-established a Hebrew nation called Israel. Understand that until 1948, following WWII, this had never happened. Judah of course did return to the land from Babylon, but they returned to the land of the former southern kingdom (from whence they came) and naturally retained the national name of Judah (they didn't call their nation Israel because to them Israel was the name of the former nation of the 10 northern tribes).

Understanding Biblical history and Hebrew culture is everything in understanding End-Times prophecy and in understanding the New Testament isn't it? And that's why we spend so much time with it in Torah Class.

Let's go back now to 2nd Kings 14, and I'll incorporate additional info from 2nd Chronicles as we go along.

Verse 7 begins a section whereby King **Amatzyah** attacks Edom, gains a stunning victory, becomes overconfident, forgets who gives the blessing of such victories to the Hebrew people and thinks himself invulnerable now.

Historically, David was the first among the Israelites to conquer Edom. So from David's time until the time of **Amatzyah's** great grandfather King **Y'horam**, Edom was a vassal state beholden to Judah. But **Y'horam** allowed Edom to rebel and escape from Judah's sphere of influence and it had remained that way for about the past 50 to 60 years. Determined to make a name for himself and to return Edom to vassal status under Judah, **Amatzyah** attacked Edom and killed 10,000 enemy soldiers at a place called the Valley of Salt. In time the place was renamed **Yokte'el**. Although the Scripture passage says that he changed the name to Jokteel, that's really not quite what the verse says. It more alludes to the fact that after the victory the place name was changed and this was because of the king (**Amatzyah**). I'm quite certain of this because there is no way that **Amatzyah** would have used such a name. The name **Yokte'el** is kind of a play on words that comes from a Hebrew idiom that literally means to "set the teeth on edge". In modern English that loosely means to either give or receive severe criticism. And so the name comes from what happened later after, as a result of this victory, **Amatzyah** stubbornly refused to heed the harsh and critical warning of a prophet about the king returning home with some of Edom's idols as his war booty.

2nd Kings gives almost no information about this war with Edom, but 2nd Chronicles does. The place that **Amatzyah** captured is in English, Rock. In Hebrew **Sela**. In Greek the same word is a familiar one to us: Petra. Yes, that Petra; the city made famous first by the Bible and next by the Indiana Jones movie. If one has ever been to Petra, what you learn is that it is far more extensive than meets the eye. The tourist part is big enough of itself; but it extends for a couple more miles to the south and west. More than likely that is the part where the battle took place.

And what 2nd Chronicles 25 explains is that it was a gigantic force with which **Amatzyah** attacked Edom, so they had no chance whatsoever. First the king mustered a force of 300,000 troops consisting of men from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But that wasn't enough of a comfort level for him, so next he hired 100,000 mercenaries from Israel. He paid close to 7000 pounds of silver to hire them. Who did he pay it to? Joash, the current King of Israel, great grandson of Jehu. Joash essentially rented part of his army to **Amatzyah** for the tidy sum of 7000 pounds of silver for his treasury. This kind of transaction was not at all

uncommon in those days.

But something partially derailed **Amatzyah's** plans; an *ish elohim* (a man of God, a prophet) came to the king and told him that he should not use these northern Israelite troops because they are men who do not worship the God of Israel. God would not grant victory for Judah if they allied with wicked and idolatrous Israel. **Amatzyah** was reasonably prepared to go ahead and send the 100,000 troops back to Israel, but he had a problem; he had already paid the 7000 pounds of silver to the King of Israel and there was no way he was going to get it back. This was an enormous sum of money and he didn't want to lose it. The Prophet responded not to be concerned, because he would get more than that back in return for his obedience. How would **Amatzyah** get more back, and where would it come from?

The nature of war in ancient times was that most of the time the incentive to go to war was the spoils of war that might be captured. While the victorious king would get the largest portion of the spoils, his troops would also share in it. In fact, the troops' pay was largely based on whatever spoils of war they could take from the enemy (it's not like they received a monthly paycheck for their military service). So the idea was that **Amatzyah** would capture more than enough of Edom's treasury to repay him plus some for the 7000 pounds of silver that he had shipped off to Joash, King of Israel. **Amatzyah** responded by releasing the 100,000 troops to go home, thinking all was well.

But then we find out that this decision caused a violent and furious reaction from these troops. They had come only for the hope of war booty, and now they were going to be cut out of the deal. The 100,000 troops took out their outrage by looting towns in Judah, and killing 3,000 of their residents on their way home. By golly, they weren't going to go home empty handed; so they simply raided some fellow Hebrews. This demonstrates just how distant and separated Israel and Judah had become. No one would question that they shared the same patriarch, Jacob, but they now belonged to different nations, had developed different cultures with different moral values, and were hostile and always on the verge of war with one another. Blood may be thicker than water, but money trumps it all.

So, with only his 300,000 troops from Judah and Benjamin **Amatzyah** marched to Edom, and overwhelmed the enemy. Then we see a horribly cruel side to the king that is rather shocking; after killing 10,000 Edomites he takes another 10,000 of the helpless captured Edomite troops to the top of the sandstone cliffs that form the steep walls of the canyon that is Petra (the Rock) and the enemy troops are, one by one, pushed off the cliff to their death. This gratuitous and unnecessary barbarity reveals the corrupt and dark state of mind that the Kings of Judah had arrived at; and the Sages say that this only sped up the downward spiral that would lead Judah into exile.

But in an outcome that is all the more shocking, **Amatzyah** not only captures some of the

Edomite god idols (that are no doubt made out of gold and silver), but he takes them home with him and begins to worship them by bowing down and burning incense before them! How could a Hebrew king who has just won a great military victory, as prophesied by a Hebrew prophet, and whose patron God is Yehoveh, turn right around and embrace the gods of the nation that he just defeated? The notion boggles our minds, but not nearly as much as it angered The Lord God.

So the Lord sends another prophet to severely criticize **Amatzyah** for not just an unfaithful, but an absolutely idiotic, act of rebellion that could only serve to bring down God's wrath upon Judah. But as the prophet was in the middle of his dressing down of the king, the king interrupted and asked just who he thought he was speaking to. Besides, the king didn't appoint him as an advisor. So the king completely rejected God's oracle to him. The prophet started to leave and looking back told the king that God was planning on destroying him for this abominable behavior. But the king's arrogance knew no bounds, now, and he called for a meeting of his royal court.

After consulting with them, King **Amatzyah** sent a message to King Joash of Israel telling him that he wanted to meet him in the field of battle. This didn't mean a one on one confrontation of kings, of course; this meant one army against another army. Why would he do this? The reason, although obscured in 2nd Kings 14, is answered in 2nd Chronicles 25. It is that a) the King of Israel had kept **Amatzyah's** 7000 pounds of silver, and b) his men had been given permission by King Joash to raid several towns and cities in Judah to collect the booty that they didn't get by being left out of the war with Edom. c) 3,000 of his subjects had been killed, and in an honor and shame society, this demanded retribution.

But no doubt there is more to it. **Amatzyah** had become so emboldened by his smashing victory over Edom, and after telling God's prophet that he wasn't interested in God's Word, to him it seemed to feel as though there was no consequence that had come of it, and so felt that he had to some degree faced down Yehoveh and won. But as powerful as **Amatzyah** felt, the King of Israel knew that he had the superior forces at his disposal and so taunted **Amatzyah** with a sarcastic and insulting reply that was in the form of parable. The parable compared **Amatzyah** to a lowly thistle and himself to a mighty cedar of Lebanon. The "give your daughter to my son for a wife" is referring to a kind of social relationship that is common among kings, which the King of Israel says he would never entertain by entwining his family with such an inferior "thistle" as family of the King of Judah. The trampling of the thorn bush by a wild animal refers to Israel easily defeating Judah without half trying.

Then the King of Israel offers some advice: don't let your arrogance at defeating Edom get the best of you. Stay home and stay alive; don't be a fool to challenge me.

Verse 11 in 2nd Kings 14 explains that **Amatzyah** wouldn't be swayed so Judah and Israel

went to battle in **Beit-Shemesh**, which was Judahite territory. That means **Amatzyah's** army should have had an advantage. The battle was over quickly as the Judahite army ran for their lives. **Amatzyah** was captured by Joash (kings usually didn't kill other kings), and taken to Jerusalem so that he could witness a large part of his capital city's critical defensive walls demolished. The breach was made from the Ephraim Gate to where the wall turns towards the south. The Ephraim Gate is today known as Jaffa Gate (I have taken hundreds of tour members through those gates). The huge 600 foot long wall section that was dismantled was the northern flank of Jerusalem; it would have taken years to build this wall and it would take years to repair it; thus Jerusalem would lay vulnerable for a long time. Why this particular section of defensive wall? This was partly symbolic because Israel was north of Jerusalem and so this represented that Israel could enter Jerusalem at will. And by the way, notice that in the End-Times, Jerusalem's enemies will come from the north, and the battle of Armageddon will be fought in Jezreel, which is also north of Jerusalem.

But in addition, Joash looted Judah's precious Temple of much gold and silver. This would be taken back to Samaria to adorn the Golden Calf shrines and whatever other images and idols that might suit King Joash. This shows us the complete lack of respect that the King of Israel had for God's Holy Temple. The goal here was to make it clear that the God of Judah was inferior to the god of Israel. All battles between kings and kingdoms were also seen as a battle of the gods; and just as there were winning and losing kings, there were corresponding winning and losing gods. Naturally King **Amatzyah's** personal palace was also looted; but in addition some of his wives and children were taken hostage. This completed the humiliation of the King of Judah. Part of the reason for taking these family members was to ensure **Amatzyah's** cooperation. No doubt the children of members of the royal court were also taken so as to douse any thought of a future rebellion by these aristocrats.

Amatzyah, most of his family, several of his court and their families, were all hauled off to Samaria.

In verses 15 and 16 we find out that in time Joash died and his son Jeroboam II took his place. Joash of course was buried in Samaria, the capital of Israel. But **Amatzyah** would remain under house arrest for many years in Samaria, his humiliation mounting day by day.

We'll finish up chapter 14 and get well into chapter 15 next week.