

Old Testament History

The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 10

Background:

Introduction:

With the exception of only two kings, the lives of the next group of rulers in the northern kingdom of Israel were cut short by assassinations. Zachariah (753-752 BC), the son of Jeroboam II, succeeded his father to the throne, but ruled only six months before he was assassinated by Shallum. Shallum (752 BC) reigned only one month before he was deposed by Menahem (752-742 BC). After ten years as king, Menahem left the throne to his son Pekahiah (742-740 BC). But after ruling only two years Pekahiah was also assassinated by the captain of his guard, a man by the name of Pekah (752-732 BC). Although Pekah reigned for the next twenty years, he was exactly like so many of his predecessors and "did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin" (2 Kings 15:28). In the end Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea (732-722 BC), the nineteenth and last king of Israel.

As conditions worsened in the north, Jotham and Ahaz occupied the throne of David in Judah, (perhaps as co-regents for a while). Jotham (742-735 BC), the son of Uzziah, followed closely in his father's footsteps – both good and bad. He neglected to remove the high places and even failed to observe the temple ceremonies, but made a name for himself in domestic and foreign affairs. He built new fortifications in Judah and brought the Ammonites under tribute. However, he was troubled by Rezin, king of Damascus (c. 740-732 BC), though both he and Rezin faced a greater threat – Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul)¹ of Assyria (c. 744-727 BC).

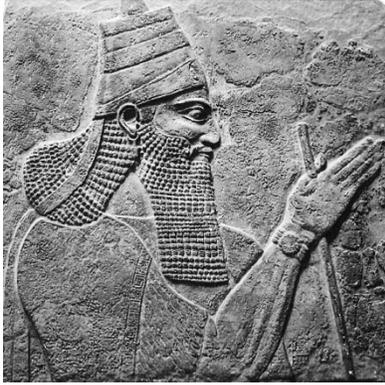
In the southern kingdom of Judah, Ahaz (735-715 BC) came to the throne and soon faced a greater threat from the north than his predecessor. Pekah, king of Israel, combined with Rezin to invade Judah (2 Kings 16:5), a move that turned out to be foolish in light of the need for these kingdoms to ally themselves together against the far greater Assyrian threat. In desperation, Ahaz requested aid from Tiglath-Pileser, a move that had been discouraged by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7). The Assyrian king gave his assistance, even going so far as to slay Rezin and carry off the inhabitants of Galilee. But Ahaz paid a heavy price for his alliance with Assyria. He was ultimately forced to rob the temple treasury to pay for Tiglath-Pileser's help.

Ahaz came to be known as the most evil king in the history of Judah. He not only followed the example of his fathers in idol worship in the high places and groves, Ahaz went to an unprecedented degree of offering his own children as burnt offerings (2 Kings 16:3-4; 2 Chronicles 28:2-4). As if this weren't enough, he went to Damascus,

¹ Pul is the Babylonian name for Tiglath-Pileser III (cf. 1 Chronicles 5:26)

where the Assyrian king was staying at the time, and saw a great altar to the Assyrian gods. Ahaz immediately returned to Judah and ordered one like it to be placed in the temple at Jerusalem. Of course, these gods were powerless to save him, and Ahaz died, having been saved from Assyrian captivity, but at the cost of selling his own soul.

Historical Notes:



Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul)
c. 744-727 BC

The ascent of Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) to the throne (c. 744-727 BC) ended a period of political and military weakness in Assyrian history. He moved first to reestablish Assyrian dominance in Babylon and also attacked his powerful opponent to the north, Urartu. In 740 BC he conquered Arpad in northern Syria. The effect of this victory was far-reaching (2 Kings 19:13; Isa 37:13). Tribute came in from Tyre, Damascus, Cilicia, and Carchemish. During this period, the armies of Tiglath-Pileser III reached all the way to Israel, where he received tribute from Menahem.

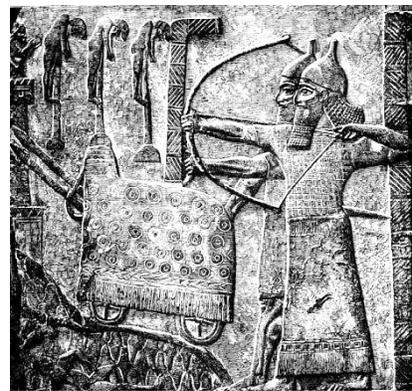
The extravagant sum of 1,000 talents of silver "from all the very wealthy" probably resulted in the unpopularity of Menahem (2 Kings 15:17-22). This transaction is known

from both the biblical record as well as the extensive annals that Tiglath-Pileser III had left for posterity – annals that also mention several kings of Israel and Judah by name.

From these inscriptions we learn that his reign lasted at least seventeen years, and in addition to wars against Syria and Samaria, he attacked Babylonia, Media, Armenia, and the independent tribes in the upper regions of Mesopotamia. Like the other great Assyrian monarchs, Tiglath-Pileser III was fighting battles along the whole frontier of the empire.

According to history, he did not have a legitimate claim to the throne, but seized the throne from his predecessor to found his own dynasty. This is believed true based on historical records, and from the fact that Assyrian kings generally gloried in their ancestry, whereas Tiglath-Pileser III omits all mention of his, not even recording his father's name upon his monuments.

His well-trained professional standing army, the first in recorded history, was powerful and his tactics were known for unparalleled brutality. His army was equipped with thousands of chariots and war horses, thousands of skilled archers, and the latest instruments of war – including sophisticated siege instruments. He would often impale captives on stakes before cities to which he laid siege to completely demoralize and strike fear in the hearts of the inhabitants. Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III and his exploits are in the British Museum.



Assyrian archers and impaled prisoners

B. Shallum (2 Kings 15:13-16)

1. How long did Shallum reign? (2 Kings 15:13-15)

2. Who killed Shallum? (2 Kings 15:13)

C. Menahem (2 Kings 15:16-22)

1. What horrible brutality did Menahem commit? (2 Kings 15:16) ².

2. To whom is Menahem compared? (2 Kings 15:16-18)

3. Who invaded Israel during the reign of Menahem, and how were the invaders turned back? (2 Kings 15:19-20) ³

D. Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:23-26)

1. Who was the father of Pekahiah? To what king of Israel is he compared? (2 Kings 15:23-24)

2. Who conspired against Pekahiah? (2 Kings 15:25)

² Tiphshah was located on the Euphrates River and was the northern extremity of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kings 4:24). However, in this instance Tiphshah may be a place in Samaria where the inhabitants refused to recognize Menahem as king.

³ Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III) (cf. 1 Chronicles 5:26)

E. Pekah (2 Kings 15:27-31)

1. To whom is Pekah compared? (2 Kings 15:27-28)
2. Who invaded Israel during the reign of Pekah, and what happened to part of the people of Israel? (2 Kings 15:29)
3. Who conspired against Pekah? (2 Kings 15:30)

II. Jotham reigns in Judah (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27:1-9)

1. To whom is Jotham compared? (2 Kings 15:32-34; 2 Chronicles 27:1-2)
2. What did Jotham fail to remove? What defenses did he build? (2 Kings 15:35; 2 Chronicles 27:3-4)
3. Why was Jotham able to prevail against the Ammonites? (2 Chronicles 27:5-6)
4. Whom did the Lord send against Judah? (2 Kings 15:37)

III. Ahaz reigns in Judah (2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28:1-21)

A. Ahaz comes to the throne (2 Kings 16:1-4; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4)

1. In whose way did Ahaz walk? What abominations did he commit? (2 Kings 16:1-4; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4)

B. Syria and Israel defeat Judah (2 Kings 16:5-6; 2 Chronicles 28:5-15; cf. Isaiah 7:1)

1. In whose hand were Ahaz and Judah delivered? (2 Kings 16:5; 2 Chronicles 28:5-8)
3. Who recovered Elath and drove away the Jews? Who had conquered the city earlier? (2 Kings 16:6; cf. 2 Kings 14:21-22, 2 Chronicles 26:2)
4. Who spoke against the host of Israel, and why? (2 Chronicles 28:8-11)
5. What did the princes of Israel do with these captives? (2 Chronicles 28:12-15)

C. Ahaz seeks an alliance with Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9; 2 Chronicles 28:16-21)

1. What other nations invaded Judah? (2 Chronicles 28:16-19)

2. To whom did Ahaz send tribute to obtain assistance? (2 Kings 16:7-8; 2 Chronicles 28:16, 20-21)

3. What nation did the king of Assyria conquer during the reign of Ahaz? (2 Kings 16:9)

D. Apostasy and death of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:10-20; 2 Chronicles 28:22-27)

1. What did Ahaz do during his time of distress? (2 Chronicles 28:22-23)

2. Describe the idolatry of Ahaz and his desecration of the temple. Who assisted him? (2 Kings 16:10-20; 2 Chronicles 28:24-26)

Application:

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?