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WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS (Chronologies and Kings XII)

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We have now arrived at the reign of Jeroboam II. When Jeroboam II came to the throne of Northern Israel, ~~Amaziah was reigning in Judah. After the death of~~ Amaziah, there was an interregnum of eleven years, during which Judah was governed by Israel. During those years, the son of Amaziah, Uzziah or Azariah by name, grew to maturity, and in his 16th year, he was proclaimed king over Judah, and Judah threw off the yoke of Israel. This means that there is an interregnum of eleven years in the chronology of Judah, during which that nation had no king. (For a discussion of interregna, see Biblical Chronology 2:10, October 1990.)

Let us examine these events in more detail; but before we do, there is one matter to take note of. I have pointed out right along that the years of the Davidic kings of Judah are given in absolute years. Prior to the reign of Jehu, which is a definite boundary in the chronology, the years of Israel's kings were given in overlapping years, so that the first year of a new king is the same as the last year of his predecessor. After Jehu, however, the reigns of the kings of Israel are given in absolute years, like those of Judah. This is clear from the passages we shall discuss this time, but I won't bother to prove it here. Why this is so is unclear to me, but I hazard this guess: The author of Kings is making the point that before Jehu, Northern Israel was more closely tied to Judah, and was overshadowed religiously by Judah, while after Jehu, Israel took on a national life more independent of Judah's.

According to 2 Kings 14:1-22 and 2 Chronicles 25, Amaziah of Judah began his reign as a devout king. He eliminated open idolatry from the land, but did not get rid of Yahweh-worship at shrines, which he should also have done. For reasons we are not told, he got involved in a war with Edom. We can assume that this was in response to an attack from that violent people.

Amaziah made a mistake in hiring 100,000 warriors from Northern Israel to help him in this war. A prophet warned him not to take along the Israelites, and so he sent them home and fought only with his own troops. He was victorious against Edom, but the Israelite troops pillaged Judah while Amaziah was fighting Edom.

At this point, having been given victory by God, Amaziah fell into apostasy. He brought gods home from Edom and began worshipping them. A prophet rebuked him, but Amaziah refused to hear, and threatened the prophet.

Amaziah then determined to fight Israel, to avenge the sack of Judah's cities. He called out Jehoash of Israel, who warned him not to fight, because Israel was a much more

Jehoash of Israel brought Amaziah in captivity back to Jerusalem, sacked it, took all its treasures, and left Amaziah in a condition of obvious vassalage.

Amaziah reigned a long time (29 years), and reigned for fifteen years after the death of Jehoash of Israel, fifteen years into the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel. He was slain by a conspiracy. We can readily suppose that the conspirators were either Judahite nationalists who blamed Amaziah for the state of the nation, or agents of Jeroboam II who were removing a thorn from the side of the king of Israel. The latter seems to me more likely, for reasons I shall set out below.

We know that Jeroboam II was one of the most powerful kings Israel ever had, and so there is no reason to think that he relinquished Israel's hold on Judah. The book of Amos describes the prosperity of Israel at this time, and prophesies God's judgment. Clearly, Judah was vassal to Israel during this period.

2 Kings 14:21-22 says that after the death of Amaziah of Judah, "all the people of Judah took Azariah (Uzziah), who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers." On the face of it, this seems to say that right after Amaziah's death, his son Uzziah was made king. 2 Kings 15:1-2, however, indicates otherwise, clearly stating that Uzziah was made king in the 27th year of Jeroboam II, which was twelve years after the murder of Amaziah his father. The reason 2 Kings 14:21-22 is placed where it is, is to show us that whereas sinful Amaziah lost territory, his Godly son Uzziah began to reclaim it. Then the narrative goes to the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel before returning to take up the reign of Uzziah.

The eleven-year interregnum between the last year of Amaziah and the first year of Uzziah is not hard to understand. During this time, the nation of Judah was subject to Israel and to Jeroboam II. Evidently there was no great desire to put the son of Amaziah (Uzziah) on the throne of Judah. For this reason, I believe that the conspirators who slew Amaziah were agents of Jeroboam II, and that they governed Judah for eleven years, until the "people of the land" prevailed upon Jeroboam II to allow Uzziah to be made king.

The Collapse of Israel

For the first fifteen years of Uzziah's reign, Jeroboam II was on the throne of Israel, and doubtless Uzziah was subject to him. With the death of Jeroboam II, however,

described in 2 Chronicles 26.

What brought about the collapse of Israel? The book of Amos prophesies it, but we are not told anything explicitly about it in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Evidently God brought some serious enemies against Israel during Jeroboam II's reign. This is described in 2 Kings 14:26-27, "For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, very bitter; for there was neither bound nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. And Yahweh did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." The expression "neither bound nor free" indicates that the entire social order of servant and master broke down in Israel as a result of a conquest; but then God enabled Jeroboam II to rally the nation.

Amos 1:1 says that Amos delivered his oracle of doom against Israel "two years before the earthquake." Let me suggest that, as is often the case in prophetic language, a literal earthquake is not what is in mind, or at least not primarily what is in mind. Rather, Amos warned Israel that in the third year – a significant number – judgment would fall. I suggest that Amos delivered this warning toward the end of Jeroboam II's reign, because Uzziah was already on the throne of Judah (Amos 1:1). Two years later, the land quaked under an invasion that brought Israel to its knees, but Jeroboam II rallied and saved the nation. The nation, however, did not repent, and so after Jeroboam II's death, it was laid low again.

After 22 years of oppression, Israel was somehow released, as God had promised. Zechariah the son of Jeroboam II came to the throne. His reign only lasted 6 months before he was killed by Shallum, who reigned one month before being slain by Menahem. These events took place in the 38th and 39th years of Uzziah of Judah (2 Kings 15:8, 13, 17).

During the reign of Menahem, Pul king of Assyria came against him and made Israel a vassal state of Assyria (2 Kings 15:16-17). Menahem reigned 10 years, and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who reigned only two years before being overthrown by Pekah. Pekah evidently wanted to shrug off Assyrian domination, but Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria conquered him and reasserted Assyrian overlordship (2 Kings 15:29).

This is a clue as to who dominated Israel during the 22-year interregnum between Jeroboam II and Zechariah-Shallum-Menahem. According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, the same time as Amos or a few years before. Jonah also went to Assyria and converted it, as the Book of Jonah records. Assyria, now strengthened by Godly wisdom and insight, may well have taken over Israel after the death of Jeroboam II,

After this, Assyria continued to hold Israel in vassalage until finally Assyria was forced to destroy the nation because of its continuing rebellion.

Pekah was overthrown and killed by Hoshea after 20 years of Pekah's rule, but Hoshea did not become king until the 12th year of Ahaz of Judah, eight years later. Evidently Hoshea governed Israel simply as an Assyrian agent until Assyria finally allowed him to assume the throne. Anstey cites an Assyrian inscription that sheds light on these events:

The land of Beth-Omri [Samaria; Israel]. . . the goods of the people and its furniture I sent to Assyria. Pekah [Pekah] their king... and Asui [Hoshea] I appointed Over them... their tribute of them I received. (Anstey, p. 203)

Thus, it seems that Assyria put Hoshea as governor of Israel, and he slew Pekah shortly thereafter. Hoshea was not allowed to become king until later. After a few years, Hoshea rebelled against Assyria, and Assyria completely conquered Israel, bringing to an end the history of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17-18).

(We shall return to consider parallel events in Judah next month.)

The dates for these events are as follows:

YEAR	JUDAH	ISRAEL	EVIDENCE
317s	Amaziah 15	Jeroboam II 1	2 Ki. 14:16-23
31s2	Amaziah 2a	Jeroboam II 15	2 Ki. 14:17-22
31s3	Interregnum 1	Jeroboam II 16	
3204	Uzziah 1	Jeroboam II 27	2 Ki. 14:21; 15:1-2
321s	Uzziah 15	Jeroboam II 41	
3219	Uzziah 16	Interregnum 1	
3240	Uzziah 37	Interregnum 22	
3241	Uzziah 3s	Zechariah 6 months	2 Ki. 14:29; 15:8
3242	Uzziah se	Shallum 1 month; Menahem accession	2 Ki. 15:10-27
3243	Uzziah 40	Menahem 1	
3253	Uzziah 50	Pekahiah 1	2 Ki. 15:23-24
3255	Uzziah 52	Pekah 1	2 Ki. 15:25-27
3256	Jotham 1	Pekah 2	2 Ki. 15:32-33
3271	Jotham 16; Ahaz accession	Pekah 17	2 Ki. 15:33; 16:1-2
3272	Ahaz 1	Pekah 1s	
3275	Ahaz 4 ("Jotham 20")	Interregnum 1 (Hoshea Governor)	2 Ki. 15:30
32s3	Ahaz 12	Hoshea 1	2 Ki. 17:1
3291	Hezekiah 6	Hoshea 9 (end of Israel)	2 Ki. 18:10