

Sermon 57, Violated Bodies, Violated Boundaries: Fast-Forward to Destruction, 2 Kings 15

“Azariah’s predecessor had suffered an invasion by Joash of Israel, and the walls of the capital city were breached. Broken borders or limits and their symbolic significance emerge. The matter is brought up again with the reference in v 19 to the presence of Pul, the Assyrian, in Israel. . . . [He] here plays the same role as does Merodach Baladan in chap. 20. The anticipated threat arrives in force by v 29 with the major invasion of the Assyrian into northern Israel and with the occupation of major sections of the country. Finally, the theme is played again with the incursions of Syria and Israel (Rezin and Pekah) into Judah during Jotham’s reign (v 37). . . . The whole era — Jotham’s reign and the state of affairs in the north — is characterized as one of incursion, the breaking of limits, and invasion. Biblical leprosy provides a perfect symbol for this. The health of both Judah and Israel is in jeopardy.” — T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 206

Proposition: God’s righteous judgment on His own people is symbolized and enacted in the violation of political, social, and bodily boundaries.

Outline

- I. Uzziah: The Leprous Rot Comes to Judah, vv. 1-7
- II. Zechariah: Jehu’s Line Cut Off, vv. 8-12
- III. Shallum: Hastening on to Destruction, vv. 13-15
- IV. Menahem: Violator of Bodies and the Body Politic, vv. 16-22
- V. Pekahiah: A Dynasty Soars — and Crashes, vv. 23-26
- VI. Pekah: Invasion and Exile Comes to Israel, vv. 27-31
- VII. Jotham: Builds God’s Gate while God Violates His Borders, vv. 32-38

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the risk of invoking a technology unfamiliar to many of you, allow me to observe (with D. R. Davis) that our chapter tonight is stuck on fast-forward. In less than 40 verses, we see the dizzying rise and fall of no less than seven kings. But in this case, the number only serves to highlight the imperfection of Judah, Israel, their people, and their kings. Our text tonight deals grimly with violated boundaries and violated bodies. God’s judgment begins with His own household, the NT tells us. And certainly we see that here. God’s judgment on Israel and Judah is sickening, violent, and unstoppable. One can only say with the Apostle Peter that their damnation is not idle and their destruction does not slumber. Instead, throughout this chapter we are fast-forwarding right to the end of Israel. What I hope to show you is that God’s righteous judgment on His own people is symbolized and enacted in the violation of political, social, and bodily boundaries. Again, God’s righteous judgment on

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I. Uzziah: The Leprous Rot Comes to Judah, vv. 1-7

We see it first when we return to Judah after a chapter that largely dealt with events in Israel. The curse reaching to the fourth generation of Ahab's line has been lived down. Amaziah was the last of Ahab's cursed brood, and he was duly assassinated. Now Azariah/Uzziah his son reigns in his place. Chronicles tells us all about how Uzziah did many things to fortify and strengthen Judah. "He was marvelously helped till he was strong" (2 Chronicles 26:15). But all of that is left aside here. We were told in the previous chapter that he managed to rebuild and restore Elath to Judah. But out of everything that happened in his reign of 52 years, we are told only two things: The high places remained, and Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. Religious rot remained in Judah under his reign. The people worshipped on their own terms, rather than on God's terms. And Uzziah's illness, which was directly imposed by God, both enacts and symbolizes God's judgment on His people. Judah is starting to rot — and so how appropriate for her king to start to rot too! Brothers and sisters, the name for what's happening is "the judgment of God." He saw Judah's sin and was deeply displeased by it, and the results of that worshipping on one's own terms were all-too-clearly manifested in Uzziah's body.

Just a note here: We've talked about worshipping at high places, worshipping God on your terms rather than His. In the NT, of course, this kind of will-worship resulted in death among those who abused the Lord's Table in Corinth. And if you insist on worshipping God on your terms, it will come back to bite you — or to rot you. God judged Judah for her apostate worship. And any worship where your heart is not engaged, where you aren't listening to what God actually has to say, where you are simply going through the motions or trying to impress your fellowmen rather than your God is asking for the same kind of judgment.

II. Zechariah: Jehu's Line Cut Off, vv. 8-12

Well, the chapter switches north, and we look at the six-month wonder of Zechariah's reign. He was the fourth generation from Jehu, and he lasted six months. It's as though judgment were straining at the leash, aching to sink its teeth into Northern Israel, but it was held back by the prophetic word for four generations. As soon as the fourth generation arrives, God sends His judgment. Jehu's line survived exactly as long as God had said it would. "And that's the way it was," the narrator informs us. Are you thrilled and amazed by the way God keeps His promises? All of His promises are as certain as His promise to Jehu. All of them will come to pass in the some way. Borders can be violated, bodies can be violated, social boundaries can be violated — but the word of God cannot be violated. It is infallible. It cannot fail, cannot perish, cannot cease to do what it does so well. Like the one who speaks it, it is living and active, dynamic and powerful. Human dynasties fail. God's word never fails.

III. Shallum: Hastening on to Destruction, vv. 13-15

Well, our next king made it even less time than his predecessor. He was in and out in a month. Here in the U.S., we have also had one president (William Henry Harrison) who served in office

31 days, but he died of pneumonia, not by assassination. As some have noted, it seems almost that Israel had more assassins than kings in this era! The point, of course, is that we are fast-forwarding to judgment. The day of God's final reckoning with Israel is drawing ever closer. He will not let them violate His law with impunity forever!

Does this knowledge of God's approaching wrath comfort you? When you see all that's wrong with the world, when you see the wicked strut about in the church and proclaim themselves to be the holiest of all, do you think "God's judgment is coming quickly? Jesus will return soon and make all this right?" Because after all, Israel had only 700 years of exile to look forward to, while we have the promise of Christ's return. Their judgment was only judgment; ours will be salvation too.

IV. Menahem: Violator of Bodies and the Body Politic, vv. 16-22

We speed on to Menahem, violator of bodies and the body politic. He ripped open pregnant women, a statement that says "I hate human life and I hate the mothers who produce it." He violated the human body, and he also violated the body politic by his bribe to Assyria to be his ally. Rather than seeking God's help, he used the almighty dollar to buy foreign, pagan help. Israel was supposed to be God's nation, established in the land by Him and protected in that land by Him. But in Menahem's hands, it was an Assyrian vassal and little else. His trust was in money and brute military force, rather than in God! The result of such a mindset, of course, was his brutalizing atrocities in Tiphshah.

If you lack hope, you will also lack faith and love! I've said it before and I'll say it again. All those who refuse to trust Jesus Christ ultimately love death.

V. Pekahiah: A Dynasty Soars — and Crashes, vv. 23-26

Well, Menahem's brutality did have the advantage of working long enough that his son was able to succeed him on Israel's throne. It looks like Shallum may have been a one-off, and that stability is returning to Israel. And then we realize that Pekahiah only lasted two years. He was killed between the lion and the eagle in his palace in Samaria.

VI. Pekah: Invasion and Exile Comes to Israel, vv. 27-31

Under his successor, Pekah, Israel fared no better. Pekah reigned twenty years in Samaria, but Israel was shamefully treated during his tenure. An entire tribal territory was simply conquered and deported by Assyria. Territorial integrity was violated once more. The promised land, the land that God was going to maintain for His people, is being whittled away piece by piece. The sin of Jeroboam is the sand in the bearings that will bring this kingdom grinding to a halt. From its inception, false worship has been eating the guts out of the body politic. The invasion of Assyria only makes it more obvious. Truly, God's people are suffering the consequences of their own sinful folly!

VII. Jotham: Builds God's Gate while God Violates His Borders, vv. 32-38

We come at last back to Judah. At least there was a stable 52-year reign there during all the craziness in Israel! And Uzziah's son Jotham does what's right in the eyes of Yahweh. He even builds the upper gate of the Temple. Finally, a move toward integrity! Instead of the wall of

Jerusalem being broken down, we have someone rebuilding the wall, someone resisting violations of the body politic, someone trying to stem the hemorrhage. Except that even Jotham is powerless to stop the coming of God's judgment. The people are still worshipping on their own terms rather than on God's, and so God sent Rezin and Pekah to come invade Judah. Their incursions violate the body politic once more. Uzziah's leprosy was a warning of sorts: Keep worshipping God on your own terms, and here's what will happen to you. But the invasions under Jotham are a further step down that path. They are a warning that God is angry and that judgment is no longer avoidable.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a nation under judgment. Yes, the blessing of God still attends America in many ways. But His richly deserved judgment is falling on us too. So how do we respond?

Maybe we can think more clearly about this if we put ourselves into the shoes of a faithful Israelite in 740 B.C. Your nation is falling apart. Your leaders are losing their integrity even as your borders and bodies lose theirs. What should you do? You should trust God. We're going to see over the next several weeks how God saved Judah in this midst of this highly disturbing environment.

You should also refuse to worship according to your own fancies. What Israel needed was a reformation of worship. They needed to get back to worshipping God on His terms, rather than on their own. And that means that even when our country is falling apart, even when our territory and our bodies are being violated, there is literally nothing more important than right worship. That's the relentless focus throughout this chapter. False worship ended with the total violation of Israel's body politic. Only true worship can save us from the judgment of God!

And finally, we should rejoice, as I mentioned earlier, that the coming of Christ means salvation. The final judgment is a day of destruction, and we know that judgment begins at the household of God. But in judgment comes God's salvation, because the Judge is named Jesus and He saves. Do you believe that, brothers and sisters? If you do, it will certainly comfort you — no matter what. Amen.