

OpenTheo

October 25th: 2 Kings 14 & Acts 4:5-31

October 24, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Amaziah and Jeroboam II. Peter and John before the Jewish authorities.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

2 Kings chapter 14. In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Jehoadim of Jerusalem, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done. But the high places were not removed.

The people still sacrificed, and made offerings on the high places. And as soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand, he struck down his servants who had struck down the king his father. But he did not put to death the children of the murderers, according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, where the Lord commanded, Father shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin.

He struck down ten thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt, and he took Sila by storm, and called it Jokhtheel, which is its name to this day. Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face. And Jehoash king of Israel sent word to Amaziah king of Judah, a thistle on Lebanon, sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, Give your daughter to my son for a wife.

And a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle. You have indeed struck down Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be content with your glory, and stay at home.

For why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you? But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel went up, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah. And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his home.

And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim gate to the corner gate. And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash that he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place.

Amaziah the son of Jehoash king of Judah lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel. Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish, and put him to death there.

And they brought him on horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. And all the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Eilath, and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers.

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Jehoash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Jehoash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

He restored the border of Israel from Lebohemath as far as the sea of the Araba, according to the word of the Lord the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah

the son of Amittai the prophet, who was from Gath-hepha. For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Jehoash.

Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, the kings of Israel, and Zechariah his son reigned in his place. Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam the second of Israel are the subject of 2 Kings chapter fourteen. At several points in these parts of 1st and 2nd Kings we might find our eyes glazing over as one king blurs into another and the two nations are increasingly difficult to tell apart, not least due to the fact that their kings so often share the same name.

One after another with intermittent exceptions, the kings in both the northern and the southern kingdoms are described as not having departed from the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. At times we might feel that we are fast forwarding through a boring movie, with the scenes becoming indistinguishable from each other, occasionally pausing to get a sense of our bearings with a small episode. Israel and Judah's history is an almost continual narrative of sin and failure.

The text can seem more plentiful in problems for the reader than in rewards. The chronological details are complex and confusing. Many elaborate theories have been put forward for how to harmonise them.

While promising explanations can be advanced, the reader might be forgiven for often feeling that they are chewing gristle rather than enjoying meat. This might indeed be part of the point that the text is communicating. There is a sterility, a monotony and a futility to sin.

The ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat are seemingly interminable, wandering in the wilderness of sin, leaving the reader longing for the relief of some divine act to interrupt the desperate tedium. Amaziah the son of Joash of Judah became king during the reign of Joash king of Israel. He does what's right in the eyes of the Lord, but in a way that follows Joash rather than David.

In particular his failure is to remove the high places. One of the key tasks of the king is to order the worship for the people and to ensure that it is centralised in the temple in Jerusalem and he fails to do this. Joash, Amaziah's father, had been killed as a result of the conspiracy and as soon as Amaziah gets the power of the kingdom firmly in his grasp, he kills the conspirators who were responsible for his father's death.

While Athaliah and Jehoram had both tried to wipe out families who were a threat to their reign, Amaziah is a righteous man and he kills the conspirators responsible for the death

of his father without avenging himself upon all of their families and the text applauds him for his adherence to the law of Moses on this point. He also has military success against the Edomites, striking down 10,000 of them in the Valley of Salt and taking Sela. This victory seems to give Amaziah confidence as he faces the Northern Kingdom, a confidence that proves misguided as we'll soon find out.

Sending messengers to Jehorash, the king of Israel, he says, come let us look one another in the face. Whether this is an invitation to battle or an invitation to deal as peers, Jehorash is having nothing of it. He sees Amaziah as an upstart, a king who has ideas well above his station and who thinks that his nation is fit to stand against Israel when it is really not.

In a parable that might remind us of the parable that Jotham gives to the leaders of Shechem back in Judges chapter 9, Jehorash compares Amaziah to a thistle on Lebanon, a small thistle that could easily be trodden underfoot that sees itself fit to stand against a great cedar of Lebanon. Jehorash thinks that Amaziah is delusional in his sense of his power but Amaziah is not to be dissuaded and when Amaziah goes and faces Israel in battle, Israel completely crushes the Southern Kingdom. Amaziah himself is captured, Jerusalem has large stretches of its wall broken down and the gold and silver of the treasuries of the king's house and of the temple are raided.

Jehorash returns to Samaria with all of this spoil and also with many hostages, presumably hostages of the royal household that will ensure that Amaziah is compliant from that point onwards. After the death of Jehorash, the king of Israel, Amaziah, the king of Judah, lives for 15 further years. It is interesting to note that we are told that he lived, we are not told that he reigned.

The knotty chronology of this passage has been discussed at length in the works of people such as Edwin Teeler and in many commentaries on the books of the kings. Co-regencies and other explanations have been given for the mismatch between the chronological details of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Tarting up the years of the kings in the South leads to a much higher number than tarting up the years of the kings in the North.

If Azariah was made king after the capture of Amaziah, this might relieve some of our chronological problems. The reign of Azariah or Uzziah is described in a great deal more detail in the book of 2nd Chronicles. In chapter 26 of 2nd Chronicles, Uzziah or Azariah's power rises to a considerable height.

He has military success against the Philistines, the Ammonites pay tribute to him, his fame spreads to the border of Egypt, he develops an army of over 300,000 men and builds towers and war machines on the walls of Jerusalem, walls which had been broken down under the reign of his father. Beyond his building of Eilath and restoring a bit of Judah though, we do not read any of this in 2nd Kings. During Amaziah's reign, Jeroboam

He becomes king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and he reigns in Samaria for 41 years.

Like his namesake Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, he continues in the sinful ways of idolatry that had defined the Northern Kingdom. However, under his reign the nation prospers and its borders are greatly extended. During this period of time, the threat of the Syrians and the Assyrians in the North is greatly relieved and so Israel was able to retake land that it had formerly lost.

All of this is said to occur according to the prophecy of Jonah the son of Amittai the prophet, who is of course the protagonist of the book of Jonah in the Minor Prophets. In that book, in the symbols of the big fish and the gourd, we can see God's dealing with the nations round about Israel, raising up and bringing down empires and kingdoms in order to deal with his people. God sees that the affliction of Israel is bitter and he saves them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

Jeroboam is of course another contender for the saviour that was anticipated by Elisha back in chapter 13. The restoration of the border of Israel from Lebo-Hemath as far as the Sea of the Araba or the Dead Sea suggests the recapture of the Transjordan and not just a diminished region of the Transjordan but well up into formerly Aramean territory. With the threat of the Aramean or Syrians quelled and Assyria focused on issues on its own borders and within itself and with Judah more quiescent under Azariah, Israel can expand considerably to its north.

Together the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Judah being victorious over the Edomites and having built Elath in territory that seems to reach down to the Gulf of Aqaba, now control an expansive territory with borders similar to those under the reign of Solomon. Discussing this passage, Peter Lighthouse observes some of the larger patterns that we can see replaying here. He writes, his son Amaziah a new Rehoboam.

The pattern holds. Like Solomon's son, Amaziah goes to fight in the north and a prophet intervenes. But unlike Rehoboam, Amaziah refuses to hear the prophet and is defeated by the northern king Jehoash.

In retaliation, Jehoash plunders the temple and breaks down the walls of the city of Jerusalem as Shishak did during the reign of Rehoboam. Idolatrous Judah ultimately returns to where it began. The parallels between beginning and end are not confined to Judah.

By the end of the chapter, another Jehoboam is in Israel and the following chapters point to a providential chronological and historical symmetry between the beginning of the northern kingdom and its closing decades. Lighthouse unpacks the pattern. Jehoboam the first, then there are seven kings, then the seventh king is Ahab and then Jehu destroys Ahab's house.

The pattern is then repeated. There's a Jehoboam the second, then there's seven kings, the seventh king is Hoshea and then he is defeated in the Assyrian invasion. Even as the northern kingdom prospers in a great many ways, it is fatefully returning to the place where it first started.

A question to consider. Within this chapter, Amaziah, a righteous king, suffers a terrible defeat and Jehoboam the second, a wicked king, experiences amazing success. How is the reader of the books of the kings to see God's hand in these events? Acts chapter 4 verses 5 to 31.

Examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed. Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

So they called them, and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge. For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God, and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. For truly in

this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. After the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple in chapter 3 of the book of Acts, in chapter 4 Peter and John, after being jailed overnight, are now placed before the Sanhedrin, who inquire of them what they are doing. They are being questioned by a who's who of Jerusalem's elite, the rulers, the elders, the scribes, Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other members of the high priestly family.

And the key question that they want to have answered is the power or name by which they perform the notable miracle. The miracle itself is clearly evident, but as those who perform the miracle were known associates and disciples of the would-be messiah Jesus of Nazareth, there is clearly a problem. Of course it's possible that the situation might be salvaged.

Perhaps these Galileans can be dissuaded from speaking in the name of Jesus, and can attribute their miracle to the power of God more generally, in a way that would allow them to fit in with the orthodoxy of the elite. Perhaps these men have a few sectarian differences, but we should focus upon the commonalities. Jesus had promised his disciples that they would be brought before councils and kings and other rulers of the Gentiles, and that in the day that that happened, the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak.

Here Peter is filled by the Holy Spirit, and he addresses the Sanhedrin. In his answer he exposes something of the surreal character of the situation. They are being examined concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, giving a lame man the power to walk again.

Of course the real issue is the power or name by which the deed was performed, and on that front Peter immediately torpedoed any hope that the Sanhedrin might have had, that the apostles would attribute the miracle to God's power, apart from any reference to Christ. No, the power of healing for this man came from the name of Jesus Christ, a man that God had raised from the dead, although they had crucified him. The Jewish leaders had a track record of persecuting and killing the prophets.

Each successive generation could rehabilitate the prophets that their fathers had killed, yet they were within the same line of those who killed the prophets, as Christ pointed out. Jesus, however, presents a problem. Jesus' disciples are still acting by his power, and

declaring the message of his unjust crucifixion in a way that seems to delegitimize the authority of the Sanhedrin.

God had decisively overruled them, in a death sentence no less. It is very easy to water down and domesticate the teaching of dead leaders and prophets. Just about everyone believes that if they lived in the days of Martin Luther King Jr., for instance, they would have supported everything that he stood for.

The message of the dead is easily defanged, rendered safe and palatable to those in authority. However, the spirit of Christ is stubbornly active and alive in his disciples, and the leaders cannot simply suppress it. This miracle then is a miracle that directly challenges and undermines their authority.

As he does in the second chapter of his first epistle, Peter references Psalm 118 verses 22-23. Christ is the stone that was rejected, and yet he has become the cornerstone. God is building a new temple, and the great builders and leaders of Israel have rejected the very stone that the entire edifice is going to be ordered around.

Jesus made a similar point in his response to the authorities in Luke 20 verses 17-18. He looked directly at them and said, What then is this that is written? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.

As James Bajon notes, in the rabbinic discussion of this text, they noted the Jews' typical rejection of the chosen leaders that were sent to them. This is similar to the message of Stephen in chapter 7 of this book. Jesus of Nazareth then is the promised Messiah, and the Jewish leaders' rejection of him made them profoundly culpable.

While the layman may have been healed or saved from his crippled condition, Peter wants to make clear that the principle extends much further. Jesus is not just one power among many others, perhaps a patron saint type figure that people can pray to in a tight spot. No, there is no salvation in anyone else.

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. This salvation is not just physical healing. It also includes deliverance from sin, reconciliation to God, forgiveness of our sins.

Christ is not just the saviour of Israel. He is appointed as the universal saviour. There is no other name under heaven given among men.

Wherever you are, whoever you are, Jesus is unique. He is the only source of salvation. The boldness of Peter and John is absolutely astonishing.

Only a couple of months ago or so, the same man that is speaking with such boldness here was denying Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest to a servant girl. Now he is

boldly proclaiming the authority of Christ to all of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. It is also clear to the authorities that Peter and John are not trained members of the scribal class.

They are not philosophers, nor do they have extensive rhetorical training. While they may know the Hebrew scriptures, perhaps even being able to read them for themselves, they are not acquainted with all the different interpretations and readings of these things. They are lay people, they don't have the formal education that the religious leaders themselves would have.

It becomes apparent to the leaders that they have been with Jesus. When he had reasoned with them from the scriptures, Jesus had completely outwitted the leaders of the people. Obviously these men had learned from their master.

When we consider that the apostles had spent three years travelling with Christ, living with him, learning from him and hearing him speak to many different crowds, we should not be surprised at the depth of knowledge and insight into the scriptures and God's truth that they exhibit. And even after the resurrection, Jesus had spent much of the forty days teaching them concerning the kingdom of God. While they may not have had a formal education, Peter and John had had extensive training, and even more intensive than the rest of the twelve.

The leaders now face a quandary, and they deliberate among themselves concerning what to do. It is very clear that a great sign has been performed, God's power has been manifested in the raising of this lay man. But yet this miracle had been performed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, a man whom they considered to be a false messiah and had put to death.

Seeking to avoid the message spreading further among the people, they instruct Peter and John not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John cannot accept the condition of silence. Craig Keener notes the parallels between this and Plato's description of Socrates' response to the leaders of Athens.

Socrates, threatened with death, yet given the possibility of release if he remained silent, responded in a respectful but firm way. It is quite likely that Luke wants us to see the parallel. If Socrates was the gadfly of Athens, then Peter and John and the rest of the apostles are the gadflies of Jerusalem.

Peter and John's response invites the leaders to consider the situation from their perspective. If God has charged them with this message, to whose word should they give priority? The leaders of the people or God himself? The New Testament puts a strong emphasis upon submission to and honouring of authorities, even authorities that are unjust. The apostles do not go out of their way to provoke confrontation.

Confrontations follow them wherever they go. But the confrontations are caused by other people's violence and injustice, not by their own behaviour. They will speak truthfully to rulers, in a prophetic way, but they do not willfully undermine or reject them.

Even here, in the case of the council that sent their master to his death, this general posture of honour, submission and respect gives their resistance on these particular points so much more force. These are not the words of rebellious men, but men who are seeking to be obedient and are respectfully speaking to the council in a way that encourages them to look at the situation differently. James Bajan notes that in Peter and John's response to the questioning, we see expressions that are typical of both Peter and John.

Doing what is right in the sight of God, or the description of Jesus as a living stone, these are Petrine statements that we find in the first epistle of Peter. On the other hand, the expression what we have seen and heard has a Johanine signature to it. All of this seems to give some weight to the authenticity of these words.

All of this leaves the council in a bit of a bind. The crowd is praising God for this incredible miracle, and they do not seem to have strong grounds on which to punish Peter and John. So, strictly warning them, they send them away.

Peter and John return to the other disciples, and they join together in prayer to God. This prayer is of great importance in this chapter. The whole mission of the apostles is driven by prayer.

They are acting in the name of Christ as those who are continually seeking God's face. The ministry of the church begins with constant prayer in the temple, awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then the response to the gift of the Holy Spirit is constant prayer in the temple again. Peter and John had been going to the temple to pray in chapter 3, and now again in chapter 4 they are returning to prayer.

Prayer is the engine of the church's mission. Verses 24-28, with which the prayer begins, is a glorious statement of God's power in creation and providence. God created all things, and he rules over all things.

He is truly the sovereign Lord. They quote Psalm 2. Indeed, this is precisely what had happened in that very city. They had gathered together against God's holy servant Jesus, the servant, the one that was promised in the prophets.

Although he was the anointed one, the leaders of the Gentiles and the leaders of God's people thought that they could withstand him, and the glorious irony of the whole situation was that they assembled together precisely in order to do what God had intended that they should do. Even as they sought to resist the Lord, they were merely performing his will and intent. The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord.

He can move it whatever way he wants. They might have meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Peter, of course, had made similar statements on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst. As you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and full knowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. The juxtaposition of human action and divine purpose has never been so stark.

The apostles call upon the Lord not for relief from opposition and persecution, but for boldness to face it. Their task is to speak with this confidence, this faith in the power of the Lord, and the Lord will act, stretching out his hand to heal and bringing about signs and wonders through the name of Jesus Christ. There is an immediate response to their prayer.

It is a sort of aftershock of Pentecost itself. The place they're gathered in is shaken and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Going forth, they continue to speak the word of God and they do so with boldness.

A question to consider, there is a very strong presentation of God's power and sovereignty in human affairs in this chapter, even over the actions of his enemies, even over those most wicked actions involved in the crucifixion of his son. How can an understanding of divine providence and sovereignty in events in history help us to act with the sort of confidence that the apostles show here?