

Homiletics Analysis: 2 Kings 15

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Second Kings 15 moves at a deliberately rapid pace through a succession of kings across both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The chapter opens with Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah, whose fifty-two year reign is summarized in just a few verses — he did right in the LORD's eyes, but the high places were not removed, and the LORD struck him with leprosy. The pace then shifts dramatically to the north, where five kings of Israel appear in rapid succession: Zechariah (six months), Shallum (one month), Menahem (ten years, marked by brutal violence and tribute paid to Assyria), Pekahiah (two years), and Pekah (twenty years, during which Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria begins to devour Israel's territory). The chapter closes with Jotham of Judah, who did right but again left the high places standing. The structural effect is jarring — Judah's kings are measured; Israel's are chaotic, violent, and brief. The word of the LORD to Jehu in 2 Kings 10:30 — that his dynasty would extend to the fourth generation — is explicitly fulfilled and then suddenly terminated. Prophetic word governs even the chaos.

This Text — Intent

God is using this passage to press a claim that history does not drift — it unravels precisely as He declared, and the unraveling itself is the judgment. The relentless compression of Israel's final decades, the bloodshed, the Assyrian encroachment, the failure to repent — all of it functions as a sustained demonstration that covenant unfaithfulness does not merely produce consequences, it produces a kind of national death by a thousand self-inflicted wounds. God intends the reader to feel the weight of what it looks like when a people have exhausted their covenanted patience — and to recognize that the same LORD who warned is the same LORD who delivers, both for judgment and for grace.

Subject Sentence: Israel's accelerating collapse fulfills God's word exactly as promised — judgment arrives on schedule.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through the chaotic, violent, and abbreviated reigns of Israel's final kings that covenant unfaithfulness does not produce a stable alternative — it produces disintegration — and that He governs even the chaos, fulfilling His word to the letter while Assyria closes in.

Interpretive Evaluation

The function of the regnal formulae

A recurring interpretive question in the Kings narratives concerns whether the standardized evaluative formulae (“he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD”; “he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat”) are genuinely theological verdicts or merely scribal convention. Some historical-critical readings treat them as late Deuteronomistic editorial overlay, essentially ideological rather than historical — the product of a southern, Josiah-era editorial agenda designed to delegitimize the northern monarchy. This reading should be *refuted* on two grounds. First, the formulae are not uniformly negative even in the north — they retain precision (Zechariah “did evil,” but the evaluation of Jeroboam II earlier in chapter 14 is complex, noting God’s compassion even through a sinful king). Second, the theological framework is internal to the narrative, not imposed from outside — the passage itself connects the word given to Jehu with Zechariah’s assassination, demonstrating that the formulaic evaluations are not mere convention but load-bearing theological claims about why events unfold as they do.

The relationship between political history and prophetic fulfillment

A Dispensational reading might treat this passage primarily as political and military history illustrating the progressive judgment on Israel that leads toward the Assyrian captivity — a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28 in its most literal, national-Israel form. This reading *acknowledges* genuine insight: the passage is explicitly tied to Mosaic covenant consequences, and Assyria functions as a covenant enforcement mechanism. However, Dispensationalism risks underweighting the passage’s internal theological commentary — the text is not merely documenting the historical slide toward captivity but pressing a claim about the nature of covenant unfaithfulness and the character of God who both warns and fulfills. The Reformed reading retains the covenantal-historical framework and adds the redemptive-historical telos: Israel’s failure does not terminate God’s purposes but rather drives the narrative toward the faithfulness of the greater Son of David who will not fail where Israel did.

The meaning of Azariah’s leprosy

Some interpreters (following the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 26) treat Azariah/Uzziah’s leprosy as primarily a lesson about priestly-royal boundary violations — Uzziah’s specific sin was entering the temple to burn incense. Second Kings 15 mentions the leprosy without specifying its cause, simply noting the LORD “touched” him. The Reformed reading does not collapse these accounts but notes that Kings’ silence on the cause is itself interpretively significant: Kings is not interested in the specific mechanism of Uzziah’s judgment but in the pattern — a king who does “right” incompletely (high places remain) and is nevertheless judged by God. The partial obedience of Judah’s kings is a recurring theme that prepares the reader for the Josiah crisis and ultimately for the coming of a king whose obedience is not partial.

Key Canonical Support

- **2 Kings 10:30** — The LORD’s promise that Jehu’s dynasty would extend to the fourth generation is explicitly recalled and fulfilled in Zechariah’s assassination; this grounds the chapter’s entire argument that prophetic word governs what appears to be chaos.
- **Deuteronomy 28:25, 36-37** — Moses warned that covenant unfaithfulness would result in military defeat, foreign domination, and exile; Tiglath-Pileser’s incursions in this chapter are the beginning of that Mosaic covenant curse arriving in its most concrete form.
- **Hosea 1:4; 8:4** — Hosea, prophesying in this same period, explicitly names the dynasty of Jehu under judgment and indicts Israel for making kings without God’s sanction — the rapid succession of assassinations in 2 Kings 15 is the precise fulfillment Hosea announces.
- **Isaiah 7:1-9** — Isaiah’s encounter with Ahaz (immediately following this period) refers directly to the Rezin-Pekah coalition forming in the latter half of 2 Kings 15; the canonical reader sees that the political chaos of this chapter is the precise backdrop to Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy, connecting Israel’s disintegration directly to the coming of the faithful King.
- **Luke 1:32-33** — The angel’s promise to Mary that the Son of the Most High will receive “the throne of his father David” and that “of his kingdom there will be no end” stands in direct canonical contrast to the six-month reign of Zechariah and the one-month reign of Shallum; the brevity and bloodshed of Israel’s kings make the permanence of Christ’s reign the more magnificent.

Aim: To expose the reader to the anatomy of covenant disintegration — what it looks like, what drives it, and how God governs it — so that they are gripped both by the seriousness of incremental unfaithfulness and by the confidence that God’s word, not human power, governs history.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–4	Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah — 52-year reign; did right in the LORD’s eyes; high places not removed; leprosy from	Longest reign in the chapter; incompleteness is the verdict (“right, but...”)

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	the LORD	
5	Azariah isolated as a leper; Jotham governs the palace and judges the people	Leprosy as covenant consequence; Jotham introduced as a regent figure
6–7	Death and burial of Azariah; Jotham succeeds	Standard regnal close for Judah
8–12	Zechariah of Israel — 6 months; did evil; assassinated by Shallum; word of the LORD to Jehu fulfilled	First of four rapid northern transitions; fulfillment of 10:30 explicitly noted
13–16	Shallum of Israel — 1 month; assassinated by Menahem; Menahem's brutal violence at Tiphseh	Shortest reign in Kings; brutality of Menahem established immediately
17–22	Menahem of Israel — 10 years; did evil; paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria; taxed Israel's wealthy	First explicit Assyrian appearance; tribute as sign of subjugation; longest northern reign in this chapter
23–26	Pekahiah of Israel — 2 years; did evil; assassinated by Pekah in a palace coup with Gileadite support	Pattern of assassination continues; Pekah's Gileadite backers hint at factional instability
27–31	Pekah of Israel — 20 years; did evil; Tiglath-Pileser takes territory and deports populations; Pekah assassinated by Hoshea	Assyrian encroachment intensifies; territorial losses name specific regions; Hoshea's coup sets up final northern king
32–38	Jotham of Judah — 16 years; did right; high places not removed; construction of upper gate; Rezin and Pekah begin pressuring Judah	Structural parallel to Azariah: right, but incomplete; threat from north begins
39	Death and burial of Jotham; Ahaz succeeds	Sets up 2 Kings 16 and the Syro-Ephraimite crisis

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
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Division	Verses	Label
1	1–7	Azariah of Judah — Long Reign, Partial Obedience, Divine Judgment
2	8–31	Israel’s Five Kings — Rapid Succession, Assassination, and Assyrian Encroachment
3	32–38	Jotham of Judah — Right but Incomplete; the Northern Threat Arrives

Note: Division 2 may be further subdivided by individual reigns (Zechariah 8–12; Shallum 13–16; Menahem 17–22; Pekahiah 23–26; Pekah 27–31), but the structural and theological unity of the five northern reigns argues for treating them as one movement: the progressive and accelerating disintegration of the northern kingdom.

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Israel’s accelerating collapse fulfills God’s word exactly as promised — judgment arrives on schedule.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through the chaotic, violent, and abbreviated reigns of Israel’s final kings that covenant unfaithfulness does not produce a stable alternative — it produces disintegration — and that He governs even the chaos, fulfilling His word to the letter while Assyria closes in.

Applications (Five)

1. Incremental unfaithfulness is not stability — it is slow collapse. (*Mind/Belief*) Azariah and Jotham both “did right in the LORD’s eyes” — yet both left the high places standing. This is not presented as a minor footnote; it is the verdict. A faith that is mostly obedient but preserves one region of compromise does not produce a lesser version of blessing — it produces a king struck with leprosy and a kingdom increasingly exposed to enemy pressure. The reader needs to stop categorizing areas of persistent disobedience as “small” and recognize them for what they are in covenant terms: the same structural dynamic that left Judah’s kings always “right, but.” Ask: where in your life is the theological verdict “right, but”?

2. God’s word governs what looks like random chaos. (*Mind/Belief*) The assassination of Zechariah by Shallum is not a political accident — the narrator pauses to say explicitly: “This was the word of the LORD that he spoke to Jehu” (v. 12). The most violent and chaotic

events in this chapter are events over which God retains sovereign commentary. The reader who lives in a cultural moment that feels like accelerating chaos — institutions destabilizing, leaders falling, powers shifting — is invited by this text to adopt the narrator's vantage point: history is not spinning out of control; God's word is being fulfilled, on His schedule, according to His prior announcements.

3. Let the brevity of Shallum's reign grieve you for what is lost when a people abandon God. (*Affections/Worship*) One month. Shallum reigned one month in Samaria. Six months for Zechariah. These compressed numbers are not merely political trivia — they are the sound of a people in free fall, of a covenant people who have rejected the God who gave them kings and are now consuming themselves. The reader should feel something when reading this chapter — not detached historical interest, but grief at what covenant unfaithfulness costs, what it destroys, what it cannot sustain. The nations around us live out versions of this story constantly. Grieve it. Do not become numb to institutional disintegration as though it is simply the way things go.

4. Stop paying tribute to Assyria — name the functional lords you are actually serving. (*Affections/Worship*) Menahem's solution to the Assyrian threat was tribute — paid with Israel's own wealth, extracted from Israel's own people, to secure a foreign power's protection. This is the logic of idolatry rendered politically: when God's protection is forfeited through unfaithfulness, substitutes are sought — and they always cost more than they promise. The reader should ask not merely about ancient political history but about the functional Assyrias they are paying tribute to: the approval structures, financial securities, relational dependencies, and institutional loyalties that substitute for trust in the LORD's covenant faithfulness. Identify them. Paying tribute to Assyria is expensive, and Assyria always comes back for more.

5. Hold fast to the word God has spoken — it is the only fixed point in the chapter. (*Will/Behavior*) The one stable element in 2 Kings 15's chaos is the word of God. Everything else shifts: kings rise and fall in months, territories are annexed, populations are deported. But what God said to Jehu came to pass, exactly. The behavioral implication is concrete: saturate yourself in the prophetic and apostolic word, because it is the only thing in your world that will not shift. When the interpretive framework for your life comes primarily from news cycles, cultural narratives, or institutional authorities, you are building on the same instability that characterized Israel's final decades. Return to the word. It is the only thing in the text — or in your life — that keeps its promises.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Second Kings 15 makes a sustained theological claim about the relationship between covenant faithfulness, historical stability, and divine sovereignty. The chapter teaches that God is not absent from political history — He is its active commentator and ultimate governor, and the narrator's repeated prophetic fulfillment notices make this explicit. The passage also teaches that covenant unfaithfulness is not

self-stabilizing — the north's rapid succession of kings, each more violent and short-lived than the last, is not a political accident but a covenant consequence. Equally important, the passage teaches about the nature of partial obedience: Judah's kings are evaluated not merely on the basis of spectacular wickedness but on the basis of what they failed to remove — the high places remain, and this structural incompleteness accumulates toward judgment. God's character here is that of a covenant-keeping God who means what He says in both directions: the promise to Jehu holds, and the warnings of Deuteronomy hold.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This passage is a sustained illustration of the covenant structure that runs from Deuteronomy through the Former Prophets — blessing for faithfulness, curse for unfaithfulness, exile as the ultimate covenant sanction (Deuteronomy 28-30; Leviticus 26). From a Reformed perspective, the chapter is not merely political history but covenant theology in motion: God's absolute sovereignty over the nations (Assyria as His instrument, as Isaiah 10 will make explicit) is coordinated with genuine human moral responsibility (each king's sin is their own). The chapter also illuminates the doctrine of common grace and its limits — Menahem's brutal reign and Pekah's twenty-year consolidation show that God may sustain a wicked regime temporarily without endorsing it, but the trajectory of judgment is not arrested. Most significantly, the disintegration of Israel's monarchy — the failure of every successor to David in the north — drives the canonical reader toward the one King whose dynasty does not terminate in assassination, whose reign does not end after six months, and whose obedience is not "right, but." The whole of this chapter is eschatological background to the permanent reign of the Son of David, whose faithfulness accomplishes what Israel's kings — and Judah's — never could.

Main Takeaway

God is not surprised by the chaos of 2 Kings 15, and He is not surprised by yours. He governed Shallum's one-month reign and Pekah's assassination and Tiglath-Pileser's advancing armies — fulfilling His word exactly, on His schedule. The lesson is not that history is bleak but that partial obedience destroys what it was supposed to build, and that the only fixed point in a chapter full of collapsing thrones is the word the LORD already spoke. Stop leaving the high places standing. Stop paying tribute to Assyria. The King whose reign does not end in bloodshed has come — hold to Him.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the passage as merely historical background.** The most common failure with a chapter like this is to treat it as a “bridge passage” — useful for understanding the chronological sequence leading to the Assyrian captivity but not itself preachable. This evacuates the passage of its theological force. The narrator is not giving us a timeline — he is giving us a theological autopsy of covenant disintegration. The passage has a Primary Claim, and that claim is worth preaching in full.
- **Losing the congregation in the succession of names.** Five northern kings in twenty-three verses, none of them familiar, with near-identical evaluative formulae — the preacher who simply moves through the list will lose the room. The solution is not to skip the names but to let the cumulative effect of the list do its work rhetorically: the speed of succession, the violence of the transitions, and the Assyrian shadow growing larger — these are the point. Let the congregation feel the acceleration.
- **Moralizing individual kings without attending to the structural claim.** It is easy to preach Menahem’s brutality as a character lesson (“don’t be ruthless”) or Shallum’s brevity as an irony illustration (“the plans of men come to nothing”). Both miss the passage’s structural argument, which is not about individual character but about the systemic, accelerating consequences of covenantal unfaithfulness at a national level.
- **Underweighting the “right, but” pattern in Judah.** The symmetrical framing of Azariah and Jotham — both evaluated positively, both leaving the high places standing, both experiencing the beginning of judgment — is the chapter’s subtlest and most penetrating claim. Congregations who think of themselves as basically obedient Christians need to hear that the high places left standing by otherwise faithful people are not a footnote in God’s evaluation. Do not rush past Azariah’s leprosy.
- **Failing to connect the disintegration of Israel’s monarchy to the coming of Christ.** The passage sits within a canonical movement that ends at the empty tomb. A congregation that finishes 2 Kings 15 merely feeling sobered about unfaithfulness has received only half the message. The point is not merely that Israel’s kings failed — it is that their failure establishes the need for, and magnifies the glory of, the King who does not fail. The Isaiah 7 connection (Immanuel prophesied in the immediate aftermath of the Rezin-Pekah coalition mentioned in verse 37) is a canonical gift to the preacher and should not be left on the table.
- **Treating Assyria as merely political rather than as a theological actor.** Tiglath-Pileser appears in this chapter without theological commentary — but the preacher working in the canonical context of Isaiah 10 and Deuteronomy 28 knows that

Assyria is not merely a geopolitical development. Assyria is covenant enforcement. Preaching that ignores this connection reduces the passage to ancient political history and fails to arm the congregation with the interpretive framework they need for their own moments of national and institutional pressure.