

2 Kings 14

Introduction: "The days of the kings"

When I was growing up, staying home from school with a cold seemed like a fun idea – spending the day lying in bed watching TV. But there was a nasty sting in tail of staying home from school: daytime TV. Especially from midday onwards. Afternoon TV offerings in the late 80s and early 90s were like a parched desert with no relief for miles, until the distant oasis of Sesame Street at 2:30 pm.

The most arid program of all was the soap opera "Days of our lives". It opened with that painstaking line, "*Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives*". That's when my pain really started and I regretted ever thinking that staying home from school was a good idea.

As I'm sure you know, Days of Our Lives follows the lives of several families, their relationships, the scandals and betrayals. Replete with the melodramatic facial expressions and reactions we've come to expect from soap operas. One character that particularly irked me was a fellow called "Bo". This apparently handsome young man always seemed to be causing grief. On one occasion I was sick, I'd see Bo in a room with a flabbergasted and irate young lady – then the next time I was sick 6 months later, it appeared that Bo was in the same room with the same young lady, having the same conversation. Bo up to his old tricks again. I wanted to tell these characters – come on, can't you see Bo's bad news?! We've been down this road before! Why do you keep making the same mistake?!

Now I hesitate to draw this link, but as we return to our series in the OT book of 2 Kings, I was reminded of this soap opera. It feels a bit like Israel could call these times: "The days of our kings". It's:

- Mostly things going wrong
- Complicated relationships
- Complicated circumstances
- The same mistakes and scandals again and again
- And people who hang around and leave their mark for decades (I read that one actress recently left Days of our Lives after 37 years – not dissimilar to the reign of Jeroboam in 2 Ki 14).

But that's basically where the similarity ends.

Because unlike the daytime soap which is fictional drivel, the Biblical account is no fiction. It's actual history, and the marks of deliberate historical narrative are all over it. Notice v1: "*In the second year of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel, Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah began to reign. He was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 29 years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem.*" This historical detail distinguishes the Biblical account from myth or fable or allegory, and should give us confidence in the text. The writer deliberately locates the events in time and space, so they're verifiable.

But it's also not *merely* an historical account. It's *God's* historical account from His perspective. Which means it's theologically charged and has theological intent. We're meant to learn not simply what happened but what God's like and how people should relate to Him. Which also means it has timeless relevance for us – as I hope we'll see in exploring 2 Ki 14 together.

Now – just before we recap Ch14, let me remind you how 2 Kings is structured. You might recall that after King David and his son Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel split in two – the northern kingdom, which was somewhat confusingly called "Israel" (or sometimes "Samaria"), and the southern kingdom called "Judah". 1 and 2 Kings trace the successive kings in each of these kingdoms, switching back and forth between them chronologically. And in 2 Ki 14, we pick things up about 200 years after King David, from 800-750 BC. I've put a little timeline on your sheets to orient 2 Ki 14 in Israel's history.

Recap: 2 Ki 14

Ok – I thought we'd recap the events of 2 Ki 14 with a little quiz to see how much you remember.

- **True or false:** Amaziah was king of Judah and Jehoash and Jeroboam were kings in Israel?
True.
- **True or false:** Amaziah had signs of godliness?
True – One example is how Amaziah avenged his father's murder in v5-6. You'll notice that he had the assassins put to death, but he didn't kill their sons because he obeyed God's law in Deut 24:16, which commanded: *"Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."*
- **True or false:** Humility was probably not Amaziah's strong suit?
True again! Vv8-12 tell us that, emboldened by his military victory over the Edomites where his army killed 10,000 of them, he picked a fight with Jehoash the king of Israel. Jehoash warned him by telling him a fable about a thistle (that's Amaziah) getting squashed underfoot (by Jehoash) – but Amaziah refused to listen and instead learned the hard way.
- **True or false:** At the end of Amaziah's reign, Judah was better off than when he started?
False – Judah was thoroughly defeated by Israel. It was so bad in fact that Amaziah himself was captured; 180 m of the wall around Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, was broken down; all the valuable things from the temple and the palace treasury were stolen; and hostages were taken. That's all recorded in vv13-14.
- **True or false:** Amaziah died at a ripe old age and with the full respect and allegiance of his kingdom?
False – like his father Joash before him, he was assassinated by his own people, v19 – because he'd failed as a king.
- **True or false:** Jeroboam was a wicked king and he and the northern kingdom got what was coming to them?
False – it's true that he was a wicked king (v24). But during the 41-years he ruled, Israel thrived and was at its most prosperous. It's perhaps the most surprising aspect of the whole chapter. And we'll explore it a bit more shortly.

Ok, now we've recapped, there are 3 things in particular I want to draw out from 2 Ki 14. These follow the 3 headings on your handout. First of all, pursuing godliness wholeheartedly.

Pursuing godliness wholeheartedly

Amaziah was not a king who pursued godliness wholeheartedly or who led his people to do so.

Notice the summary of Amaziah's reign in v3: *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord."* It's one of the formulas in 1 and 2 Kings: each time a new king is introduced, the writer sums up the king by saying either, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord"*, or, *"He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord."* Amaziah is summed up as a king *"who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord."* It's clear, though, that this isn't an absolute statement but a relative one. Because after all, v3 says: *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord – but not as his father David had done."* In other words, relatively speaking, he was a 'good' king. He was more like David – whom the writer of 2 Kings considers the human benchmark of *godly* kingship – than he was like Jeroboam I back in 1 Ki 12 – whom the writer considers the human benchmark of *wicked* kingship. But clearly he was still not great. The very next verse, v4, tells us of his neglect: *"The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there."* The high places were hills where objects of worship had been placed. They were idolatrous. They robbed the Lord of rightful worship. And Amaziah led the way.

But there are so many bad kings – really bad kings – recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, it's tempting to read v3, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord"*, and to feel pretty satisfied with Amaziah. That his level of godliness, though lacking in some respects, was ok. But Amaziah was far from an exemplary model of devotion to God; at best he was a model of mediocrity. 2 Ch 25:2 sums him up perfectly: *"[He] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly."* He's a far cry from Jesus' words in the Sermon on the

Mount when He said to His followers, *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Jesus didn't say those words so that we'd settle for mediocrity and half-heartedness when it comes to godliness.

Taking my son Harry to Little Athletics on a Saturday morning down at Narrabeen, I could see that he was a pretty quick sprinter and was doing well against his Manly-Warringah competition. But when you see the Zone and State races, the benchmark for speed becomes clear – these kids are really quick. It was certainly a higher benchmark than what I'd grown accustomed to and comfortable with on a casual Saturday morning down at Narrabeen. When it comes to godliness as followers of Jesus, we don't want to settle for a Manly-Warringah standard. Disciples who are content with a basic level of piety but who lack wholeheartedness like Amaziah.

Well the good news is that our King Jesus is an entirely different king to Amaziah, and even far outstrips the best OT king David. Not only is Jesus the epitome of *"doing right in the eyes of the Lord"* – absolutely and unfailingly – He's a King whose wholehearted devotion to God the Father can flow, by His Spirit, to you and me His followers. So often in 1 and 2 Kings – including here in Ch14 – we see a disturbing pattern where the ungodliness of the king leads to ungodliness in the people. Not with Jesus. Instead, His power as the risen King can impart and enable godliness in a way that no OT king ever could.

So whatever else we might be pursuing right now – new hobbies, a change in job, a better job, weight loss, better sleep..., could we not prioritise the pursuit of godliness above all of them? Not godliness for the godliness sake – but for the sake of our King Jesus, who *loves* godliness and *wants* godliness for His people, and who can *make* His people more godly. The apostle Peter in the opening verses of his second letter urges Christians exactly this: he says, empowered by the Spirit, *"add to your faith godliness"* – not just as a one-off, but *"have this godliness in increasing measure"* he says. Will you pray for this for yourself? Will you earnestly pray for growing godliness, knowing that King Jesus wants it and can give it?

That's the first point: pursuing godliness *wholeheartedly* – in the mould of, and by the power of, our wholehearted King Jesus.

Promise-driven history

Secondly, 2 Ki 14 reminds us that history's not random or arbitrary, it's *promise-driven*.

On the surface it might seem that chapters like 2 Ki 14 record fairly *arbitrary and unconnected* historical events. But this isn't the case. If you look closely, you'll see here and all through the historical narratives of the Bible the unmistakable hand of God. Specifically, you'll see history working itself out according to promises that God has made.

On the one hand, there are what we could call 'short-term' promises of God playing out. For example, back in 2 Ki 10:30, the Lord said to Jehu, king of Israel: *"Because you've done well in accomplishing what's right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."* In other words, the Lord promised Jehu that his son, grandson, great grandson, and great great grandson would all become king over Israel. And what we see in 2 Ki 14 is, sure enough, Jehoash – Jehu's grandson – and Jeroboam – his great grandson – become king. Indeed, in the next chapter his great great grandson Zechariah becomes king just before the throne is taken by another family. It all happens precisely as the Lord promised.

Another example of a 'short-term' promise of God playing itself out in history is there in v25. Notice it says: *"He [Jeroboam] was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher."* That is, the reclaiming of land under Jeroboam is explained to us not in terms of the strategic prowess of the king, or the size of his army, but as the coming to pass of a promise spoken by the Lord.

But there's more – because God's also made 'long-term' – even eternal – promises that govern the course of history. Take Amaziah for example. His father Joash was assassinated by his own officials – Jozabad and Jehozabad – clearly both of them bad – back in ch12 – and how easy it would have been for his son, Amaziah, to be rejected as well. Exactly the same thing plays out with Amaziah – who's assassinated by his own people and yet they're happy enough to install his son Azariah as the next king – v21. Again, how easy it could have been for wholesale rebellion against this family line – and for another family to usurp power and take the throne. That wasn't uncommon in north. Why not here in the south?

The answer is because it couldn't have happened. It was impossible. Do you know why it was impossible? Because God had made a promise. He'd promised king David back in 2 Sam 7 that there would always be a king, descended from David, on the throne of Judah – always. And that eventually it would be a king like no other king. And we know how God fulfilled that promise in the Lord Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and descended from David. But here in 2 Ki 14, that promise is being worked out in the nitty-gritty history of Judah, with Amazaiah and his son being allowed to take the throne.

This is very important for us to grasp. Because history can appear very muddled. World events can seem scatty and random. Even our own individual histories can seem like this. But take a step back and survey, and you will see the unmistakable faithfulness of God.

When engineers want to send a signal from one place to another – say a telephone signal or a TV signal – they do it with a very well-defined waveform that carries the information. But superimposed on this waveform are always bumps and wiggles – what engineers call 'noise'. Threaded through world history and your own personal history as a Christian will be clear evidence of God working out His promise to save people and save you in Christ. But there'll also be plenty of bumps and wiggles – even painful and inexplicable ones. You may be experiencing one of those right now. These too, in God's sovereignty, are somehow a working out of His promises – maybe some of those short-term ones. At any rate, you and I can take courage and take heart from knowing that what's playing out are the good promise-driven purposes of the Lord.

That's the second point: history – even our history – is not random or arbitrary, it's *promise-driven*. So take heart.

Patience versus pleasure

And thirdly, and finally, God is very patient but we mustn't confuse His patience with His pleasure.

Perhaps the most surprising part of the chapter is the good fortune of the northern kingdom Israel under wicked King Jeroboam. Jeroboam's father and grandfather had left Israel crippled – both in area and population – for example, 2 Ki 13:7 tells us: *"Nothing had been left of the army of Jehoahaz except 50 horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of Aram had destroyed the rest and made them like the dust at threshing time."* And yet now, under the 41-year rule of Jeroboam, it all changes. He restores the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah (v25) and his reign is summed up in v28 as 'military achievement'. Israel is restored.

Does that surprise you given what Jeroboam was like? He was after all, the cut-and-dried mould of his wicked namesake from 150 years earlier – v24: *"[Jeroboam II] did evil in the eyes of the Lord and didn't turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam I son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit."* Jeroboam son of Nebat had been a horrendously ungodly king. And here Jeroboam II is matching him step for step.

So how do we explain the surge of vitality through the veins of Israel under such wicked rule? Well, the answer is that despite the immense wickedness of the king, it was outstripped by the more immense compassion of God. V26: *"The Lord had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. And since the Lord had not said He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash."*

Despite the grave wickedness of Jeroboam and those who followed his lead, the Lord responds with patient mercy rather than crushing judgement. Whatever judgement did await Israel down the track, it's not a judgement the Lord in any way delighted to bring. He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Judgement brings Him no joy because there's no skerrick of malice in Him. One might say that our Lord is pathologically compassionate. A preacher once described God as being like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He must eventually judge, but he leans towards mercy and compassion.

An important implication of this is that we mustn't confuse God's compassionate patience with His pleasure. He brought blessing to Israel under the reign of Jeroboam because of His compassionate patience. Not because He approved of Jeroboam's ungodliness. We mustn't mistake His blessing – which here flows from compassion – for His approval. We mustn't confuse His kind patience with sinners for pleasure in their ways.

Suppose you go to a restaurant and the service is so terrible you're waiting an hour to get your meal. Now you'll put up with it – not because you're happy with the service, but because you want food. The restaurant will be blessed by your patronage because you're hungry not because you're happy. In the same way, the Lord's blessing comes to many not because of His approval and pleasure of their ways but because of His compassion for them.

So when we look around and see those who disregard God and His Son Jesus receiving blessing in their lives, the right response is not to envy them; nor is to resent God (like Jonah did with the Ninevites); it's to thank Him for His wonderful attribute of compassionate patience – and to ask that those who're currently enjoying the blessing of His patience would move from being objects of His judgement to objects of His pleasure – before that patience must run out.

How much I've depended on the Lord's compassion-driven patience over the years with those I love. But I know that eventually the Lord's patience has to run out. There will be a time when that bias, that leaning towards mercy and compassion has to give way to justice. So we must ask Him to move people from wrath to pleasure.

That's the third point: God's patience is not the same as His pleasure – but we thank Him for His patience and pray that He'd move people from being under judgement to being objects of His pleasure.

Conclusion

Let me conclude. There's more to 2 Kings than meets the eye. Far from being a dull and irrelevant record of ancient events, it's a living and active word for our spiritual growth and edification. And from our reflections on it:

- Will you be encouraged to pursue wholehearted godliness, starting with prayer?
- Will you take heart from the fact that the workings in this world, and your life, are part of a promise-driven course of events?
- And will you thank God for His compassionate patience and pray for the lost more than envying their temporary blessing?

Let me pray.