

Notes on 2 Kings

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Introduction

Second Kings continues the narrative begun in 1 Kings. It opens with the translation of godly Elijah to heaven and closes with the transportation of the ungodly Jews to Babylon. For discussion of title, writer, date, scope, purpose, genre, style, and theology of 2 Kings, see the introductory section in my notes on 1 Kings.

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MESSAGE

Second Kings is a sequel to 1 Kings. First Kings covers about one and a half centuries, and 2 Kings about three centuries. In both books, the two thrones are in view: the earthly and the heavenly.

First Kings emphasizes the facts of these thrones. The earthly throne consistently failed, but the heavenly throne consistently prevailed. Second Kings emphasizes the consequences that result from each of these situations. Its major value is its revelation of the failure of man and the victory of God.

The failure of man comes through the content of this book, but the victory of God comes through the pre-exilic prophets, who wrote during the three centuries covered in 2 Kings. These prophets were Hosea, Amos, and Jonah in Israel. In Judah they were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

Notice first the revelation of this book concerning human failure.

The reason the nations failed was that the people lost their vision of Yahweh. We can see this quite clearly in the attitudes and actions of the kings. Most of the kings were evil because they had no vision of the throne in heaven. They did not appreciate their position under God. A few of them were good, but even these fell short of the standard of

devotion to God that David had set. Some of them conducted reforms, but none of them removed the places of pagan worship in the land (the "high places"). Essentially they conducted state business with little concern for God. Idolatry and foreign alliances are the evidence that the people lacked a vision of God. Another evidence of this is the people's inability to perceive their national setbacks as divine discipline. The prophets were constantly trying to help the people see this.

The method by which the nations failed was that the people forgot their national vocation. They developed, on the one hand, an improper exclusiveness. They did not believe that God could have any pity or mercy on any other people but themselves. Jonah demonstrated this attitude. On the other hand, they failed to be exclusive as God meant them to be. They formed alliances with other nations contrary to God's will. God intended His people to be a blessing to all other people and to trust in Him alone. The people not only lost their vision of God, they also lost their vision of their own vocation as a unique nation in the world (Exod. 19:5).

The evidence that the nations failed was that the people lost their spiritual sensitivity. It is amazing but true that the ministry of the writing prophets, which occupies so much space in the Old Testament, was quite ineffective in their own day (e.g., Isa. 53:1; Jer. 7:13; Ezek. 3:7). The religious reformations that did take place were fairly superficial (cf. 2 Kings 22:8-20). When Hezekiah began his reform, it took 16 days simply to carry the accumulated rubbish out of the temple (2 Chron. 29:17). In Josiah's day, not even one copy of the Law was available—until someone discovered one among the debris in the temple. When the people heard it read, they were completely unfamiliar with it (2 Chron. 34:14-21). It was as though all the copies of a country's constitution had been lost.

Notice too in this book the revelation concerning the victory of God. There is much evidence of this as well.

The reason for God's victory is traceable to His promise, with an oath, to bless Abraham's descendants (Gen. 22:16-18). He will allow nothing to keep Him from fulfilling that promise. His covenant with Abraham underlies all of His dealings with the Israelites that this book documents. The Davidic Covenant grew out of the Abrahamic Covenant. God's covenants rested on His love.

The method by which God accomplished victory was by using the prophets as His messengers to communicate with His people, and by using direct intervention to control their history.

The evidence of God's victory is the continued existence of the physical seed of Abraham. The Jews still exist today. Arnold Toynbee, the historian, called the Jews a "fossil race." But God has preserved them to fulfill His purposes on the earth. So even though they failed Him, He has not failed them.

I would summarize the message of 2 Kings, therefore, as follows: Though people fail God, God will not fail people. This is foundational to the doctrine of eternal security, which the New Testament expounds more fully.

The main reason the Israelites failed God was that they lost sight of Him. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision (of God) the people cast off restraint." When people lose sight of God, their ideals deteriorate. They turn to idolatry to fill the vacuum left by God's absence. Also, their purposes suffer defeat; they do not achieve fulfillment or realize their destiny. Furthermore, their consciences become dead; they become unresponsive to the Word of God. Christians have a high calling: to point people to God.

On the other hand, God will never fail humanity (cf. Isa. 42:1, 4). The man who wrote this, Isaiah, could do so because he did not lose sight of God. His vision of God was clear and great (Isa. 1:1; 6:1). It enabled him to maintain confidence in the throne in heaven when the throne on earth was failing terribly (Isa. 40:27-31). Where is our confidence? Many evangelicals are wringing their hands in distress because the Christian cause seems to be suffering, but God is still on His throne.

If Christians are to serve this generation faithfully, they must see God. When they do, they will find inspiration in the certainty of His ultimate victory. How can we who are Christians keep God in view? Read the Word daily. Pray. Bring Him into all your decisions, your worries, and your fears. Do not lose sight of Him for one day. Do not forget your vocation in life (Matt. 28:19-20). Ask God to keep you spiritually sensitive.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:193-206.

Exposition

II. B. THE PERIOD OF ALLIANCE 1 KINGS 16:29—2 KINGS 9:29

[CONTINUED FROM 1 KGS.]

3. Ahaziah's evil reign in Israel 1 Kings 22:51—2 Kings 1:18 **(continued)**

Second Kings begins with Ahaziah's reign that fell during the 33-year period of Israel and Judah's alliance (874-841 B.C.; 1 Kings 16:29—2 Kings 9:29). This period in turn fits within the larger context of the divided kingdom (931-722 B.C.; 1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17).²

"The typical Syrian upper balcony was enclosed with a jointed wood lattice-work that, while suitable for privacy, could easily be broken."³

One of the results of Ahaziah's decision to follow his father Ahab's idolatrous example (1 Kings 22:52-53) was that during his reign Israel lost some of its control of Moab (v. 1; 3:5). It had held this since Omri's reign at least.⁴ King Mesha of Moab's rebellion was not completely effective at first, but later it proved successful.

We can detect Ahaziah's failure to acknowledge his position under Yahweh, Israel's true King, in his seeking advice from a false god (v. 2; cf. 1 Kings 22:8). Ekron was on the Philistine border southwest of Samaria. Why would Ahaziah send to Philistia to inquire of Baal since Baalism was rampant in Israel? He may have done so to keep his illness a secret from his political enemies. Furthermore, the Baal religious center at Ekron had a reputation for divination and soothsaying (cf. 1 Sam. 6:2, Isa. 2:6). In addition, Ekron was not far from Samaria.

". . . in his sickness [Ahaziah] sent to the Fly which was the god of Ekron, for that was this god's name, to inquire about his recovery . . ."⁵

The angel of the Lord here (v. 3) was perhaps the preincarnate Christ (Gen. 16:9; 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 19:35; et al.). Premature death was God's punishment for the king's insubordination (v. 4; cf. Saul). The people in the courts of Samaria knew Elijah well, of course (v. 8).

Ahaziah showed complete contempt for God's prophet and Yahweh, whom he represented, by sending soldiers to arrest Elijah. He apparently wanted to get a reversal of the prophecy against him and resorted to massive force to secure it.⁶ "Man of God"

²See the diagram of the period of alliance near my notes on 1 Kings 16:29.

³R. D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *1 Kings-Job*, vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 172.

⁴Gary Rendsburg, "A Reconstruction of Moabite-Israelite History," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 13 (1981):67.

⁵Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 9:2:1.

⁶D. J. Wiseman, *1 & 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 193.

means prophet (v. 9; et al.). Elijah replied that he was indeed a servant of God. For this reason the king should have submitted to him. Elijah's position on the top of the hill suggests his superiority over the king and his messengers.⁷ The issue in this thrice-repeated confrontation was, who is in charge and has more power, Yahweh or Ahaziah (cf. 1 Kings 18)? Fire from heaven settled the controversy (v. 10; et al.; cf. 1 Kings 18:38; Luke 9:54-56). The third captain took the proper humble approach to God's prophet (vv. 13-14).

There is wordplay in the Hebrew text that is helpful in appreciating the dialog between Elijah and the first two captains. The first two captains commanded the "man of God" to "come down" (vv. 9, 11). Elijah replied, "If I am a man [Heb. *'ish*] of God, let fire [Heb. *'sh*] come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty" (vv. 10, 12). Sure enough, fire came down on them proving that Elijah was indeed a man of God.

It is probable that Baal-zebul (v. 6) means "lord of the flies," bringing pestilence to mind.⁸ "Baal Zebub" may be a deliberate scribal corruption of the name "Baal Zebul" meaning "Baal, the Prince," a title of the idol known from Ugaritic texts.⁹ However, it may mean "exalted lord"¹⁰ or "lord of the flame."¹¹ If it means the latter, God may have been demonstrating His superiority to Baal as He had done previously on Mt. Carmel by sending fire from heaven. This time He did so to consume the soldiers (1 Kings 18:38).

"The issue is still the same as at Carmel."¹²

Ahaziah died, as Elijah had announced, as punishment for his failure to submit to Yahweh's authority over His people (v. 17). Since he had no son to succeed him—note the fertility motif—his brother Jehoram became Israel's next king (v. 18). There was also a contemporary king of Judah named Jehoram. The NIV translators have kept these two men distinct by spelling the Israelite king's name "Joram," a variant spelling, and the Judahite king's name "Jehoram."

God judged Ahaziah for his idolatry economically (1 Kings 22:47-48; cf. 2 Chron. 20:36-37), politically (v. 1), and personally (v. 2).

What were the perennial spiritual problems that dogged the steps of the kings? The high places were not removed. They made foreign alliances. Note the correspondence between these troubles and Christians' perennial spiritual problems. What are our idols today? What things are we tempted to trust in instead of God?

⁷The NET Bible note on 1:9.

⁸James R. Battenfield, "YHWH's Refutation of the Baal Myth through the Actions of Elijah and Elisha," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, p. 26.

⁹See M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 25.

¹⁰Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Kings," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 271.

¹¹F. Charles Fensham, "A Possible Explanation of the Name Baal-Zebub of Ekron," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1967):363.

¹²Wiseman, p. 192.

4. Jehoram's evil reign in Israel 2:1—8:15

"Jehoram" ("Yahweh is Exalted") reigned 12 years in Israel (852-841 B.C.). His reign overlapped with Jehoshaphat and Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram's coregency (853-848 B.C.) as well as Jehoram of Judah's sole reign (848-841 B.C.). During these 12 years Elisha, whose name means "my God is salvation," was very active in Israel. In keeping with his theological purpose, the writer of Kings again emphasized incidents of spiritual significance that took place at this time (cf. 1 Kings 17—19, the Elijah narrative).¹³

"Testimony against evil, and consequent suffering, mark the history of Elijah. Power, and grace in using it for others, mark that of Elisha. Both are seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose shadows, of course, they were. In one aspect of His history on earth, we see the suffering, driven, persecuted Witness; the world hating Him, because He testified that its works were evil; in another we see the powerful, gracious, ready friend of others, all that had sorrows or necessities getting healing and blessing from Him."¹⁴

Whereas Elijah's name appears 29 times in the New Testament, Elisha's occurs only once (Luke 4:27).¹⁵

The transfer of prophetic power 2:1-14

The Gilgal in view may have been the one between Jericho and the Jordan, or it may have been one about seven miles north of Bethel since Elijah and Elisha went down to Bethel (v. 2).¹⁶ This account presupposes previous revelation, not in Scripture, that this day was to be Elijah's last on earth (v. 3). By granting Elisha permission to remain behind (v. 2, et al.), Elijah was testing Elisha's commitment to himself and to his calling as Elijah's successor (cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 22:31-62; John 21:15-25). Elisha's refusal to speak of Elijah's departure (vv. 3, 5) probably reflects Elisha's sorrow at the prospect of losing his friend and mentor. It was not uncommon for prophets to give a valuable parting blessing (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33), and Elisha did not want to miss that. A prophet's mantle (cloak) was the symbol of Elijah's authority as God's spokesman (cf. 1 Kings 19:19). As Moses had parted the Red Sea with his rod, so Elijah parted the Jordan River with his mantle (v. 8; cf. Exod. 14:21-22). Israel's God was as able as ever to lead His people out of bondage and into promised blessing.

The double portion that Elisha requested was the privilege of God's richest blessing on his life that customarily went to the first-born son in the ancient Near East (cf. 1 Kings 3:3-9).

¹³See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 352, for the chronological sequence of events in the Elisha narrative (2:1—8:15) and their dates.

¹⁴J. G. B., *Short Meditations on Elisha*, p. 6.

¹⁵Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 521.

¹⁶Wiseman, p. 195.

"This was not a request for twice as much of the Holy Spirit, or for a ministry twice as great as that of Elijah, but for a greater degree of the inner spirit that motivated the great prophet."¹⁷

It would be a hard thing for Elijah to guarantee this double portion since blessing with His Spirit was God's prerogative (v. 10). Evidently Elijah intended to reward Elisha's continued faithful commitment to him with this blessing, but if Elisha turned back from following him he would not get it (v. 10). The eldest son, whose role Elisha filled, was responsible to carry on his father's name and work.

"The visible vehicle of his removal would be a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1) that manifest [*sic*] itself to onlookers as a fiery chariot (2:11)."¹⁸

The chariot and horses of fire symbolized God's powerful heavenly army (cf. 6:17). This display of the instruments of spiritual warfare separated the two prophets and apparently could have frightened Elisha into running away and losing his desired blessing (v. 11). The chariot and horses of fire had polemic value since the Canaanites called Baal "the rider of clouds."¹⁹ A polemic is a presentation of evidence designed to discredit someone or something. The whirlwind (shekinah?) took Elijah miraculously into heaven, not the fiery horses and chariot (v. 11). Elijah had thought he was indispensable to God at one time (1 Kings 19:10, 14), but God had told him that He would remove him and work through others (1 Kings 19:11-18). Elijah's translation to heaven was a blessing for him since he entered heaven without dying.

"The contrast between the deaths of Elijah and his enemies could hardly be any more stark. Elijah, the faithful servant of God, ascends to heaven. Ahab and Jezebel, the sworn enemies of Yahwism and the prophets, die at the hands of their foes."²⁰

Elijah had been Elisha's spiritual father and mentor (v. 12). Elisha mourned the departure of one of Israel's great spiritual warriors (v. 12). By referring to Elijah as "the chariots of Israel and its horsemen" (v. 12; cf. 13:14), Elisha probably meant that Elijah's prophetic powers and spiritual depth were the nation's true strength.²¹ He was a one-man army. The chariot was the mightiest weapon then known, and it was symbolic of God's supreme power.²² By asking, "Where is Elijah's God?" (v. 14), Elisha was calling out to Yahweh to demonstrate His power through him as He had done through Elijah.

¹⁷Wiersbe, p. 510.

¹⁸Merrill, "2 Kings," p. 272.

¹⁹Battenfield, p. 27; et al.

²⁰Paul R. House, *I, 2 Kings*, p. 210.

²¹M. A. Beek, "The Meaning of the Expression 'The Chariots and the Horsemen of Israel' (II Kings ii 12)," *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 17 (1972):1-10. See also Jack R. Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 24:1 (Spring 1973):47-48.

²²Harold Stigers, "First and Second Kings," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 342. Stigers wrote the commentary on 2 Kings in this volume.

"In their persons they symbolized two aspects of the divine power toward the people: Elijah was the divine judicial power opposing a rebellious people and containing wholesale violence; Elisha was the dispensing of divine blessing when people repented."²³

MIRACLES INVOLVING ELISHA		
Miracle	Reference	Elements
Jordan River parted	2 Kings 2:8	Water
Jericho spring water purified	2 Kings 2:21	Water
Youths cursed	2 Kings 2:24	Animals
Water provided	2 Kings 2:20	Water
Widow's oil multiplied	2 Kings 4:6	Oil
Shunammite's dead son raised to life	2 Kings 4:35	Life
Poisonous stew purified	2 Kings 4:41	Flour
Prophets' food multiplied	2 Kings 4:44	Bread and grain
Naaman healed of leprosy	2 Kings 5:14	Water
Gehazi's leprosy inflicted	2 Kings 5:27	Disease
Ax head floated	2 Kings 6:6	Water
Horses and chariots surrounded Dothan	2 Kings 6:17	Fire
Aramean soldiers blinded	2 Kings 6:18	Sight
Aramean army scattered	2 Kings 7:6-7	Sound
Hazael's future predicted	2 Kings 8:13	Future

The evidence of Elisha's succession 2:15-25

Had Elijah still been alive on the earth, Elisha could not have exercised authority as his successor. In this chapter there are parallels between the succession of the prophets and the succession of the kings that the writer recorded elsewhere in Kings. Elisha gave the skeptics opportunity to verify Elijah's departure (cf. 1 Kings 18:12). After all, Elijah had been known to disappear and reappear suddenly (cf. 1 Kings 18:12). The same Spirit that had empowered Elijah now rested on Elisha (v. 15).

The miracle that attested God's messenger and his message evidently took place at Jericho (v. 15). The physical condition in the town was symbolic of the spiritual condition of the nation (v. 19). One writer suggested that the Jericho spring had become contaminated by radioactive matter as a result of Joshua's curse (Josh. 6:26).²⁴

²³Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 185-86.

²⁴Ian M. Blake, "Jericho (Ain es-Sultan): Joshua's Curse and Elisha's Miracle—One Possible Explanation," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 99 (1967):86-97.

Refreshment and fertility had suffered as a result of apostasy. Elisha was a new vessel in God's hand similar to the new jar he requested (v. 20). Salt seemed like the worst thing to add to brackish water to make it pure, just as return to Yahweh must have appeared to be a backward step to many idolatrous Israelites. Nevertheless, since salt is what God ordered, it was effective.

The use of salt may have symbolized a break with the past, since this is what rubbing certain sacrifices with salt to sanctify them indicated (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 43:24).²⁵ Yahweh, not Baal, could restore blessing and fertility to His people. This miracle was another polemic against Baal worship (cf. 1 Kings 18; et al.). Baal's worshippers credited him with ruling over the waters on and beneath the earth, including underground springs and fountains.²⁶ God's permanent healing of the spring would have served as a continuing reminder of Yahweh's ability to bring fruitfulness and blessing out of the deadly sterility of idolatry.

"The miracle was an 'action sermon' that reminded the people that the blessings of God were for a nation that was loyal to His covenant."²⁷

Bethel was a center of idolatry in Israel; it was one of the golden calf sites (v. 23). Evidently Elisha's approach triggered a mass demonstration against him by many young men. The Hebrew word *na'ar* translated "lads" in 2:23 describes young men, not boys, in many other places in the Old Testament. Some of the individuals that this Hebrew word describes were Gehazi, Elisha's servant (4:12), an unnamed young man (4:19), and the Shunammite's servant (4:24). "Baldhead" was and is a term of disrespect. The idolaters challenged Elisha to "go up" to heaven as Elijah had done—if Elisha could!²⁸

These youths were typical of a nation that "mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at his prophets" (2 Chron. 36:16). Not motivated by personal pride but by a desire for God's glory, Elisha pronounced God's curse on them for their disrespect of His prophet and Himself (v. 24; cf. 2 Peter 3:3-7). As before, God used wild animals to judge the rebels (cf. 1 Kings 13:24).

"One of the covenant warnings was that God would send wild beasts to attack the people (Lev. 26:21-22)."²⁹

Wild bears were common in ancient Israel.³⁰ These early miracles identified Elisha as God's spokesman who possessed Yahweh's power to bless or to curse.³¹

²⁵John Gray, *I & II Kings*, p. 427.

²⁶Battenfield, p. 27.

²⁷Wiersbe, p. 512.

²⁸Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, p. 124.

²⁹Wiersbe, p.512.

³⁰James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, p. 366.

³¹For some other interpretations of this incident, see David Fass, "Elisha's Locks and the She-Bears," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 34:3 (1987):23-29.

These two miracles set the tone of Elisha's whole ministry. He would be a source of blessing to the needy, but he would be a source of judgment to those who did not respect Yahweh.

"Though having the same objectives in view as Elijah, Elisha's manner in reaching them was somewhat different. In keeping with this contrasting background [i.e., wealthy rather than poorer], he was more at home in cities and was often in the company of kings. Also whereas Elijah had been more a man of moods, either strongly courageous or despairing to the point of death, Elisha was self-controlled and even-tempered. Elisha never staged dramatic contests nor sulked in a desert. It may be, too, that Elisha was more interested in the needs of people, for many of his miracles were for the purpose of aiding and giving relief to persons in difficulty."³²

"In their persons they symbolized two aspects of the divine power toward the people: Elijah was the divine judicial power opposing a rebellious people and containing wholesale violence; Elisha was the dispensing of divine blessing when people repented."³³

God's victory over the Moabites ch. 3

Even though Jehoram was better spiritually than Ahab (v. 2), he was still so much of an idolater that Elisha had no use for him (vv. 13-14).

Mesha had rebelled against Israel earlier (v. 3), but he continued to do so. This uprising led to the alliance and battle the writer described in this chapter. Jehoram evidently sought an alliance with Jehoshaphat because he wanted to cross Judean territory to get to Moab.³⁴ The southern approach to Moab through Edom apparently did not have as strong defenses as Moab's northern border (v. 8). Edom was at this time under Judah's authority. Jehoram regarded the water shortage as a judgment from Yahweh (v. 10). Elisha used to serve Elijah by pouring water on his hands as Elijah washed them, a menial task, as well as in other ways (v. 11; 1 Kings 19:21). Music sometimes facilitated prophetic revelations (cf. 1 Sam. 16:23).

"It is more likely amid these calamitous circumstances Elisha simply wanted soothing music played so that he might be quieted before God and thus to be brought to a mood conducive for God to reveal to him his will."³⁵

Elisha conceded to help because Jehoshaphat had humbled himself by seeking Yahweh's assistance (v. 12). God provided water (refreshment) supernaturally to His people, but He brought defeat and lack of fertility and productivity on Moab for opposing Israel. He

³²Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 246.

³³Kaiser, *Toward an . . .*, pp. 185-86.

³⁴Stigers, p. 343.

³⁵Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, p. 118.

began the deliverance at the time of the Israelites' daily sacrifice when they symbolically dedicated themselves anew to God (v. 20). God's deliverance was supernatural (vv. 22-23) and showed everyone present that Israel's victory was not her own doing.

"The dried-up river bed (probably the Wadi Hesa; River Zered) was to have many trenches (Heb. 'trenches trenches') dug to retain the flash-flood (Arab. *sayl*) which would result from rain falling out of sight on the distant Moabite hills. This form of irrigation is still common in central and southern Arabia."³⁶

Kir-hereseth (modern Kerak) stood on an easily defended hill. In the ancient Near East nations generally viewed defeat in battle as a sign that they had offended their gods who were punishing them. For this reason Mesha offered the supreme sacrifice, his heir to the throne, to Chemosh, the Moabite god (v. 27). Mesha's sacrifice of his son was an integral part of an age-old Canaanite tradition of sacral warfare. It virtually guaranteed, from his point of view, that his god would save the lives of the entire population under siege.³⁷

This sacrifice expressed Mesha's great wrath against Israel. The battle meant everything to him. Nevertheless it was not that important to the members of the alliance that opposed him. All they wanted to do was keep Moab from revolting. Therefore the allies departed from Mesha and returned home having won the battle even though they could not take Mesha's stronghold.³⁸

"The object of the campaign had been attained; the power of Moab was broken, the rebellion suppressed, and the country again placed under the scepter of the king of Israel."³⁹

The Moabite Stone, a significant archaeological find, contains Mesha's own record of this battle and other battles with Israel.⁴⁰ On it he claimed to have won with Chemosh's help. Though he lost the battle he did not lose his life or his capital.

This chapter shows that God was willing to give Israel victory because she allied with Jehoshaphat who humbled himself under God (cf. 2:23-25). God in His grace sometimes allows His blessings for obedience to spill over to those who are less worthy (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14).

God's care of the faithful in need 4:1-7

It was common in the ancient Near East for creditors to enslave the children of debtors who could not pay. The Mosaic Law also permitted this practice (Exod. 21:2-4, Lev. 25:39). However, servitude in Israel was to end on the Year of Jubilee. God provided

³⁶Wiseman, p. 201.

³⁷Baruch Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:6 (November-December 1986):62-63. Cf. Montgomery, p. 363.

³⁸Cf. Josephus, 9:3:2.

³⁹F. W. Krummacher, *Elisha*, p. 45.

⁴⁰See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 188-89.

miraculously for the dire needs of this widow who had put God first, in contrast to the majority who did not do so in Israel (cf. Matt. 6:33).

"God often begins with what we already have [v. 2]."⁴¹

According to Jewish tradition, this woman was the widow of Obadiah, King Ahab's steward, who had secretly provided for Yahweh's prophets (cf. 1 Kings 18:3-4).⁴² God's miraculous multiplication of oil symbolized the adequacy of God's Spirit to provide all that the widow needed. This seems clear from the significance of oil elsewhere in Scripture. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lev. 8; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; Luke 11:13; et al.).⁴³

"The vessels were the measure of the oil. In other words, divine power waited on faith—faith measured the active resources of God on the occasion."⁴⁴

God's blessing of those who honor Him 4:8-37

In contrast to the incident above, this one shows God's blessing on a wealthy woman. She was not the marriage partner of a prophet but a simple faithful believer in Yahweh (cf. vv. 8-10, 16, 21-22, 24-25, 27, 30, 37). She was living among unbelievers in Israel (cf. Rahab, Ruth, et al.). Her husband appears to have been only a formal participant in Yahweh worship rather than thoroughly dedicated to Him (vv. 19, 23). His words may imply that he expected Elisha to be available only on holy days, but he showed genuine concern for his son's health.⁴⁵

The story illustrates the great blessing (fertility) that God will bring on those who award Him the place He deserves (cf. Hannah). He went as far as giving this infertile woman (v. 14) a son and then restoring him to life when he died. Her respect for Yahweh is clear from her respect for His prophet (vv. 9-10, 13, 30, 37).

Shunem stood in the Jezreel Valley. Gehazi (v. 12) had become Elisha's servant, as Elisha had been Elijah's. As such he was the potential successor to his ministry.

"The term for 'servant' often means a person engaged in a period of training. Rather than looking down upon this role, such a servant could consider the position an opportunity. Often these were responsible duties. The same word was also used of Elisha's own relation to Elijah (I Kin. 19:21)."⁴⁶

⁴¹Wiersbe, p. 516.

⁴²Josephus, 9:4:2. Josephus is not entirely reliable, however.

⁴³See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:47-50; and John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁴B., p. 17.

⁴⁵Patterson and Austel, p. 186.

⁴⁶*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 614.

"I live among my own people" (v. 13) translates an idiom that meant, "I am content." At first the woman found it hard to believe that God would reward her with a child (v. 16; cf. Sarah).

Evidently the woman concluded that it was better if her husband did not know about their son's death for some reason that the writer did not state (vv. 22-23). Though she had respect for Gehazi (v. 26), she had much more confidence in Elisha's ability to help her.

"Disciples can be an obstacle to the needy reaching the master (Mt. 19:13-14)."⁴⁷

Grasping his feet (v. 27) showed her desperate dependence on his power, her humility, and her veneration for Elisha (cf. Matt. 28:9). Perhaps Elisha told Gehazi to go and heal the lad to test the woman's faith (v. 29). The staff was a symbol of his power. However, she said in the strongest terms that her confidence was in Yahweh and in Elisha (v. 30). The phrase "As the Lord lives" occurs seven times in 1 Kings and seven times in 2 Kings. It is always the testimony of true faith in Yahweh.

"How many blessings husbands with nominal faith have received because of the dedication of their godly wives!"⁴⁸

Elisha probably intended that Gehazi's failure would teach him this lesson: God works in response to fervent, dependent prayer, not in response to some fetish or some formal act (v. 31; cf. Matt. 7:14-21).

Only God's power made active by petition could restore the boy's life (v. 33). Elisha's physical contact with him connected the power of God through the prophet and the miracle unmistakably (v. 34; cf. 1 Kings 17:21-23). Seven sneezes, not more or less, would have signified an act of God to ancient Near Easterners (cf. Gen. 1; 2 Kings 5:14).

"In our pericope Elisha acts as a sort of intermediary for childbirth, analogous to Baal's role in the Ugaritic tablets. YHWH, not Baal, not Elisha for that matter, grants the Shunammite a child. The child dies, bringing to mind the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 17. Prayer raises the child to life, illustrating not only that YHWH gives children, but that he can take them to himself or restore them to life."⁴⁹

If God could create new life and then revive it, as He did here, He could also give Israel life (at the Exodus) and revive it (in Elisha's day). This story, as many others in Kings, is another powerful polemic against Baal and for Yahweh.

⁴⁷Wiseman, p. 204.

⁴⁸Wiersbe, p. 518.

⁴⁹Battenfield, p. 28.

"This scene also shows that prophets not only are preachers of sin and repentance; they also are agents of God's healing mercy and kind compassion."⁵⁰

The deadly effects of apostasy 4:38-41

God again disciplined Israel by withholding fertility from the land and producing a famine (v. 38; cf. 1 Kings 17). The people were not only hungry for bread but also for what would truly satisfy their spiritual hunger, namely, the Word of God. The wild gourds were similar to Baalism. They looked attractive but proved disgusting and deadly when consumed. Scripture compares meal or bread to the Word of God because it is what satisfies people's most basic needs (cf. Deut. 8:3).

In Elisha's day, the people of Israel had turned from God and His Law. This had resulted in a spiritual famine. The people were hungry spiritually and, to satisfy their need, had swallowed Baalism. It looked harmless enough, but it proved fatal. God's prophets helped counteract the deadly effects of Baalism by making the Word of God available to the people. People need the Word of God (Matt. 4:4).

"This event shows the power to make the harmful innocuous (cf. Lk. 10:19) as well as God's care and provision for his own."⁵¹

God's ability to multiply resources 4:42-44

Archaeologists debate the site of Baal-salishah. In obedience to the Mosaic Law, the man in view brought Elisha his offering of firstfruits to honor God by giving this offering to His servants (Num. 18:13; Deut. 18:4). This simple act of obedience resulted in God miraculously multiplying these limited resources that the man committed to Him to produce enough for everyone in need (v. 43; cf. Matt. 14:16-21; 15:32-38; John 6:9). The people of Israel thus saw again God's ability to provide food in contrast to Baal's inability. The people also learned that God's blessing is much greater than what people dedicate to Him.

God's ability to heal and cleanse ch. 5

Naaman (Aram. gracious) was commander of the Aramean army under Ben-Hadad II (cf. 1 Kings 15:18, 20). Some forms of leprosy in the ancient world degenerated the bodies of its victims and eventually proved fatal. At this time no one could cure this disease. In Israel the priests normally isolated lepers from non-lepers because the disease was contagious, at least in certain stages (cf. Lev. 13—14). Naaman was able to carry on his duties as long as his illness permitted him to do so. Biblical leprosy evidently included modern leprosy, better known as Hansen's disease, but the Hebrew word translated "leprosy" and the disease it represented covered many afflictions of the skin.⁵²

⁵⁰House, p. 268.

⁵¹Wiseman, p. 205.

⁵²Rebecca and Eugene Baillie, "Biblical Leprosy as Compared to Present-Day Leprosy," *Christian Medical Society Journal* 14:3 (Fall 1983):27-29.

The faith of the slave girl (v. 3) contrasts with the general unbelief that prevailed in Israel at this time (cf. Luke 4:27). This humble girl also contrasts with the great commander whom she helped.

"She is an Israelite, he is an Aramean; she is a 'little maiden' (*na'ara qetanna*), he a 'great man' (*'is gadol*); she is a captive servant, he a commander; he has fame in the king's estimation, . . . she has none, for she simply 'waited upon' . . . Naaman's wife (cf. Deut 1:38; 1 Sam 19:7)."⁵³

"For a Syrian general to show such deference to a Jewish servant was certainly an indication that God had wrought a change in his heart."⁵⁴

Ben-Hadad's gift to King Jehoram amounted to 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 changes of royal apparel, or perhaps bolts of cloth.⁵⁵ Ancient peoples considered clothing much more valuable than most modern people normally do. Ben-Hadad probably approached Jehoram rather than Elisha because he reasoned that any prophet with such power must enjoy the personal protection of the king. How ironic it was that Jehoram had no use for Elisha. The king of Israel, who really was Yahweh's vice-regent, resented Ben-Hadad behaving as though Jehoram was just that (v. 7). He thought the Aramean king was trying to provoke another quarrel (cf. 1 Kings 20:1-3).

Even though Jehoram was not a faithful representative of Yahweh, Elisha was (v. 8). Elisha treated Naaman as a superior would treat an inferior (v. 10). Socially Naaman was superior to Elisha, but really Elisha, as God's man, was superior to the vice-regent of Ben-Hadad. Elisha's coolness may have sent a message to Naaman that Elisha was not a wonderworker who expected payment or that he wanted no political involvement with Aramea. Possibly he may have been testing Naaman's faith.⁵⁶

Naaman's cure, of course, was not due to the quality of the Jordan River water, but to his obedient trust in God's promise that His prophet delivered. Overcoming his pride, Naaman obeyed and was washed clean—body and soul (v. 14). Dipping seven times would have signified to everyone in that culture that his healing that followed was a work of God.⁵⁷ His flesh experienced healing from the leprosy and even returned to the texture of a child. Perhaps this reflected Naaman's child-like faith. Furthermore, God even cleansed the commander of the contagion of this fatal disease.

Naaman's restoration convinced him that Yahweh's power was superior. This was a lesson Jehoram had refused to learn (v. 15). Jesus later made the point that Naaman's faith condemned most Israelites of his day, since they had rejected the true God and embraced gods that could not heal (Luke. 4:23-30).

Elisha did not accept a present from Naaman, probably because to accept one would have implied that he personally had been responsible for the miracle (v. 16). False prophets

⁵³B. O. Long, *2 Kings*, p. 70. Long's analysis of this chapter's plots and subplots is very good (pp. 66-77).

⁵⁴Wiersbe, p. 525.

⁵⁵Wiseman, p. 207.

⁵⁶Gwilym Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*, 2:416.

⁵⁷C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, p. 319.

were undoubtedly lining their own pockets and thus bringing contempt on the prophetic office. Elisha wanted to avoid conduct that might appear to be self-serving.

Many polytheists believed that they had to worship their god in their own land or, if that was impossible, on an altar built on the dirt of that land (v. 17).⁵⁸ The chief god of Damascus was Hadad-Rimmon (v. 18).

"The name 'Rimmon' is an example of a deliberate corruption of a name of a foreign god by the Hebrew scribes. Instead of writing *Ramman*, meaning 'Thunderer,' a name for the storm god Hadad (see Zech. 12:11), they wrote *Rimmon*, meaning 'Pomegranate.'"⁵⁹

Gehazi's decision to take a reward from Naaman was deliberate, not compulsive, as is clear from his statement, "As the Lord lives" (v. 20). He had to tell a lie to obtain the gift (v. 21). A talent weighed 75 pounds (v. 22). The hill (v. 24) was the one on which Samaria stood (cf. v. 3). Gehazi tried to cover one lie with another (v. 25). Elisha explained that since many people did not respect Yahweh's prophets, it was inappropriate to receive gifts as Gehazi had done (v. 26; cf. v. 16). God had removed Naaman's leprosy from him for his trust in and obedience to the Lord. Now, ironically, leprosy would cling to Gehazi because he did not trust and obey God.

"The covetousness that ate away at his heart became leprosy eating away at his body."⁶⁰

His descendants would likewise suffer because of the seriousness of this failure (v. 27; cf. Josh. 7; Acts 5). Gehazi decided to join the ranks of Eli, Saul, and the kings who disregarded Yahweh, and so forfeited what he could have inherited, the privilege of serving God as Elisha's successor. Elisha had valued that privilege and had consequently succeeded Elijah (ch. 2).

"One man goes away healed because of his obedience, while the other man, indeed the one who should have known what matters most, walks away with leprosy. Yet another Israelite has made the tragic mistake of choosing a substitute for the Lord, while a Gentile convert has discovered that what his servant girl said about the Lord's prophet is true."⁶¹

"This text contains one of the great Gentile conversion accounts in the Old Testament. Like Rahab (Josh 2:9-13), Ruth (Ruth 1:16-18), and the sailors and Ninevites in Jonah (Jonah 1:16; 3:6-10), Naaman believes in the Lord. From Gen 12:2-3 onward in the Old Testament, God desires to bless all nations through Israel. This ideal becomes a reality here due to the witness of the Israelite servant girl and the work of the Israelite prophet."⁶²

⁵⁸Cf. Montgomery, p. 377.

⁵⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 616.

⁶⁰Wiersbe, pp. 525-26.

⁶¹House, p. 274.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 273.

"Naaman's experience with Elisha illustrates to us the gracious work of God in saving lost sinners."⁶³

This story contains many of the motifs we have been observing throughout 1 and 2 Kings: the fertility motif, the sovereignty motif, the faith motif, the reversal-of-fortune motif, and others. The unique contribution of this chapter is that it shows Yahweh's superiority over Baal in physical healing and ritual cleansing. The worshippers of Baal gave him credit for controlling both of these things. As in 1 Kings 17:8-24, we see that, ironically, faith in Yahweh was stronger in some individuals outside Israel than it was in Israelites in whom it should have been the strongest. God blesses those who obey His Word to some extent, regardless of who they are, or what else they may believe, or do, or be.

God's ability to revive the nation 6:1-7

"In contrast to Gehazi who had received the reward of his unfaithfulness, the account unfolded here is a demonstration of the reward of faithful labor."⁶⁴

The expensive⁶⁵ iron ax head was similar to Israel since it was an instrument used for constructive and destructive purposes (cf. Exod. 19:5-6). Like the ax, Israel had belonged to another, Egypt, but God used it for a job He had to do since the Exodus. Unfortunately Israel had gone its own way (flown off the ax handle) and appeared lost to any further usefulness. Perhaps the water symbolized the nations among whom Israel had sunk since water often represents the Gentile nations elsewhere in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, God was able to restore His people to a place of usefulness again, even as Elisha restored the ax head to its user. I suspect that around the fireside that night, after this incident took place, Elisha explained the significance of this miracle for the sons of the prophets. From then on they passed this story along until it became part of the folklore of Israel. Several interpreters have seen the symbolism that I have suggested in this story as well as in the other Elisha stories, but not all have, of course. Allegorists repudiate the factuality of these accounts.

God's ability to defend and deliver His people from her enemies 6:8-23

The king of Aram was probably Ben-Hadad II, though the writer did not mention him by name (v. 8). Perhaps since he only identified Elisha and Yahweh by name, he wished to focus attention on them as the main characters in this drama. Dothan stood about 12 miles north of Samaria (v. 13). Compare Genesis 37:17-28 where another hostile foreign foe, the Ishmaelites, surrounded another prophet, Joseph, at Dothan. Here is another vain attempt by a king to silence prophecy (cf. 1 Kings 17:1-24; 18:1-15; 19:1-18; 2 Kings 1:1-15). The Aramean king tried again to surprise the Israelites (v. 14) after having failed many times in his previous attempts to do so (vv. 8-12). This shows that he did not really believe Elisha could predict his movements. The events that followed proved him wrong.

⁶³Wiersbe, p. 521.

⁶⁴Patterson and Austel, p. 192.

⁶⁵R. L. Hubbard Jr., *First and Second Kings*, p. 157.

The Arameans surrounded Dothan (v. 15; cf. v. 13). Elisha realized that God's angelic army was in control (v. 17; cf. 2:11; Ps. 34:7). His protégé, whomever he may have been, needed to learn to see with the eyes of faith, as Elisha could (v. 17). Elisha led the temporarily blinded Aramean army into Samaria because Dothan was not the city where God wanted them (v. 19).

King Jehoram referred to Elisha as his father (v. 21) because he realized this great victory had come from Elisha, who was superior to him for accomplishing it. It was not God's purpose to kill the Arameans but to deliver the Israelites and to teach them a spiritual lesson (v. 22). In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof often constituted making a covenant of peace.⁶⁶ Social custom now bound the Arameans not to attack the friend who had spared their lives and had extended the honor of hospitality. Consequently the Arameans did not invade Israel for some time (v. 23; cf. vv. 8-10; v. 24). It is less likely, I believe, that we should understand verse 23 to mean that the Arameans never again sent small companies of troops against Israel.⁶⁷

What the Israelite army could not have accomplished without much fighting and loss of life, God did peacefully through one man. This should have been a clear lesson to everyone in Israel that Yahweh was her strong deliverer as well as her sovereign. God did not provide this victory because of the Israelites' obedience but to teach them lessons.

God's ability to preserve and provide for His people through famine 6:24—7:20

Aram's cessation of hostilities ended after some time (v. 24; cf. v. 23), perhaps between 845 and 841 B.C.⁶⁸ The famine in Samaria, and the siege that caused it, were punishments from the Lord for Israel's apostasy (cf. Lev. 26:27-29; Deut. 28:52-53, 57; Ezek. 5:10). Josephus believed that the famine was a result of Jehoram's confidence in the strength of Samaria's walls, rather than in the Lord.⁶⁹ "Dove's dung" (v. 25) is probably a better translation of the Hebrew word *hiryownim* than "seed pods" (NIV).⁷⁰ It may have been a replacement for salt.⁷¹ The two mothers who approached King Jehoram recall the two mothers who asked King Solomon for justice (1 Kings 3:16-28), but now the situation was more serious.⁷² Individuals could always appeal directly to the king.⁷³ Yahweh forced Jehoram to acknowledge His superiority over him (v. 27), but the king did not submit to God's authority. The Mosaic Law had warned of the extreme distress the Israelites were experiencing (v. 29; cf. Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53). The sackcloth Jehoram wore represented repentance, but that repentance was very superficial (v. 30; cf. vv. 31, 33). As Jezebel had threatened to kill Elijah, her son now threatened Elisha (v. 31; cf. 1 Kings 18:17; 19:2).

⁶⁶J. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 157.

⁶⁷T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 78.

⁶⁸Alberto R. W. Green, "Regnal Formulas in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Books of Kings," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 42 (1983):178.

⁶⁹Josephus, 9:4:4.

⁷⁰Jones, 2:432.

⁷¹Josephus, 9:4:4.

⁷²See idem, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:3:4, for a similar incident involving cannibalism during the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

⁷³Wiseman, p. 210.

Jehoram planned to murder Elisha as his father Ahab had murdered Naboth (v. 32; cf. 1 Kings 21:1-16). He also grew impatient with the Lord, as Saul had grown impatient with Samuel (v. 33; cf. 1 Sam. 15:11). We see the king's real wickedness in his behavior.

Jehoram's officer did not believe Yahweh could, much less would, do what Elisha predicted (7:1-2). In this he represented many others in Israel who had abandoned Yahweh for Baal. A "measure" (Heb. *seah*) of flour amounted to about seven quarts.

The four lepers likewise represented many in Israel whose hopeless destiny was death because of their uncleanness (v. 3). They were, however, the undeserving recipients of God's grace. They became the source of blessing (life) to others when they reported what God had graciously provided for all the hopeless Samaritans (vv. 9-10). Understandably many preachers have used them as examples of sinners saved by grace.

God dispersed the besieging Aramean army supernaturally (v. 6; cf. 2:11; 6:17). He accomplished this deliverance through no work of those whom He saved.

"The Lord had defeated the Moabites by a miracle of sight (3:20-23) and now He defeated the Syrians by a miracle of sound."⁷⁴

Rather than asking Elisha what was going on (v. 12; cf. 6:21) Jehoram relied on his own wisdom, but that gave him no comfort. The writer concluded this story by emphasizing the judgment the royal officer experienced for his unbelief (vv. 17-20). His fate, as God had previously announced, happened exactly as predicted (vv. 17-18). Such would be the destiny of all in Israel who refused to believe what God had said in His Law and through His prophets.

Chapter 7 is one of many sections in Scripture composed in a chiasmic literary structure that stresses a particular point in the story. We could outline this story as follows.

- A** The royal officer's unbelief vv. 1-2a
- B** Elisha's prediction of relief v. 2b
- C** The lepers' decision vv. 3-5
- D** Yahweh's salvation v. 6
- C'** The leper's deliverance vv. 7-10
- B'** The fulfillment of Elisha's prediction vv. 11-15
- A'** The royal officer's judgment vv. 16-20

This structure emphasizes the central element, Yahweh's salvation, and teaches other lessons in concentric circles of significance. These points include the role of the lepers in bringing news of deliverance to the doomed Samaritans. They were evangelists in the truest sense: heralds of good news. The value of God's revelation is another lesson, as is the folly of rejecting that revelation.

⁷⁴Wiersbe, p. 532.

God's ability to control timing to bring blessing on the faithful 8:1-6

Several details in this incident hinge on timing that God supernaturally controlled to bring blessing on the Shunamite woman, as God had promised. God directed her away from the famine before it came on Israel for the nation's apostasy (v. 1; cf. Deut. 11:16-17; 28:38-40; 1 Kings 18:2; et al.). The timing of the length of the famine showed it was an act of God (v. 1; cf. 4:38; 6:25; 7:4). Evidently the woman had sold her property before she left Israel and now wished to buy back her family inheritance. This was a right that the Mosaic Law protected (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:7; cf. 1 Kings 21:3). Another view is that the woman had left her property and "the crown" had taken it over. In such a situation the state held the land until the legal owner reclaimed it (Exod. 21:2; 23:10-11; Deut. 15:1-2).⁷⁵ Her position was similar to that of Naomi in the Book of Ruth. She had fled a famine, lost her male supporter, and was at the mercy of the political system.⁷⁶ Jehoram was responsible to enforce the Law, and he did so in this case. What God used to move him to grant the woman's request was the story that Gehazi happened (!) to tell him about this woman (v. 5). This event evidently happened before Gehazi became a leper. God blessed the woman for her obedience to God's instructions that came to her through Elisha (v. 1). He not only restored her house and land but also the produce of her land (its fertility; v. 6). Thus the Israelites saw that Yahweh is the lord of time who brings blessing on the faithful.

"Elisha wields as much political influence as any biblical prophet."⁷⁷

Elisha's preparation of God's instrument of judgment on Israel 8:7-15

Hazael was the governor of Damascus.⁷⁸ The Gentile King of Aram had more interest in inquiring of Yahweh than Jehoram's predecessor did (v. 8; cf. 1:2). It was customary in the Near East to make a great show of giving gifts. It was also common to have one camel carry only one gift to make the present appear even greater.⁷⁹

Ben-Hadad would have recovered (v. 10) if Hazael had not murdered him (v. 15). Elisha probably knew Hazael would murder him. The prophet fixed his gaze steadily on Hazael, perhaps hoping to embarrass him out of doing the deed (v. 11). Hazael evidently became ashamed because he felt Elisha could read his mind (v. 11). Hazael would be God's instrument of judgment on Israel (v. 12; cf. 1 Kings 19:15). He referred to himself humbly as a mere dog incapable of such a feat (v. 13). Hazael did come from lowly stock. On one Assyrian record Shalmaneser referred to him as "the son of a nobody."⁸⁰

Like Saul, David, and Solomon, Hazael learned that he would be king by special revelation from the Lord (v. 13). Whether this announcement accompanied Elisha's anointing by Elijah (1 Kings 19:15), or whether that took place at another time, we do not

⁷⁵Jones, 2:440.

⁷⁶A. Graeme Auld, *I and II Kings*, p. 178.

⁷⁷House, p. 281.

⁷⁸J. A. Brinkman, "Additional Texts from the Reigns of Shalmaneser III and Shamshi-Adad V," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973):43-44.

⁷⁹Keil, p. 334.

⁸⁰D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1:246.

know. Rather than waiting for God to place him on Aram's throne at the proper time, as David so admirably did, Hazael murdered Ben-Hadad. He did so in a manner that made it look as though the king had died of natural causes (v. 15).

Ben-Hadad II died in 841 B.C. and Hazael ruled from 841-801 B.C. during the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, and Jehoahaz of Israel, and Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash of Judah.

KINGS OF ARAM IN 2 KINGS⁸¹		
<u>Kings</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>References</u>
Ben-Hadad II	860-841 B.C.	1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6:24; 8:7, 9, 14
Hazael	841-801 B.C.	1 Kings 19:15, 17; 2 Kings 8; 9:14-15; 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:3, 22, 24-25
Ben-Hadad III	801-773 B.C.	2 Kings 13:3, 24-25
Rezin	773-732 B.C.	2 Kings 15:37; 16:5-6, 9 (cf. Isa. 7:1, 4, 8; 8:6; 9:11)

The episodes in this Elisha narrative (2:1—8:15) give us many insights into Jehoram and his reign over Israel. Like Ahab and Ahaziah before him, he had little regard for Yahweh. Consequently he did not enjoy much blessing from God personally, and Israel experienced severe discipline in the form of famines, invasions by foreign neighbors, and lack of influence. Nevertheless there were a few in Israel who remained faithful to the Lord, including the prophets (about 7,000 individuals in all; 1 Kings 19:18).

The meanings of the miracles Elisha performed that I have suggested rest on standard principles of historical grammatical interpretation. I have sought to understand what the original readers of Kings would have seen these miracles as signifying. The meanings of the words in the text, the relationship of the miracle to its context, and the meaning of symbols that biblical and extrabiblical references reveal are key interpretive factors. Commentators differ, of course, in their understandings of these matters as well as the interpretive problems. However, on the basis of the study I have done, the views expressed above seem to me to be what these miracles signified when they occurred. Some evangelical expositors have seen Elisha's miracles as typifying Jesus Christ and His ministry.⁸² There are many similarities.

5. Jehoram's evil reign in Judah 8:16-24

Jehoshaphat appointed his son Jehoram coregent the year Jehoshaphat went off to join forces with Ahab in battle at Ramoth-gilead (853 B.C.). For the next five years Jehoram served with his father. In 848 B.C. he began ruling alone and did so for the next eight years (until 841 B.C.). His reign overlapped the reigns of Ahaziah and Jehoram (whom the NASB called Joram from now on) in Israel. It is possible that the writing prophet

⁸¹Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 509.

⁸²E.g., Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:307-26.

Obadiah ministered and wrote the Bible book that bears his name during Jehoram's reign.⁸³

Rather than following the godly example of his father, Jehoram chose to pursue idolatry and infidelity to Yahweh like his wife Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. If it had not been for His promise to David (2 Sam. 7:12-15), God would have cut off Jehoram's line for his wickedness (v. 19). Instead, he disciplined him and Judah by allowing Edom and Libnah to revolt against Judah successfully. Edom had come under Judah's control during Jehoshaphat's administration (2 Chron. 20:1-29; cf. 1 Kings 22:47). Zair is another name for Seir or Edom. Chariots did not save Jehoram from defeat (v. 21). Libnah was a town near the border between Judah and Philistia that seems to have revolted when the Philistines invaded Judah (2 Chron. 21:16-17). Judah became weaker under Jehoram because of his wickedness. The king himself died a painful death (2 Chron. 21:18-19).

6. Ahaziah's evil reign in Judah 8:25—9:29

There were two King Ahaziahs as there were two King Jehorams, one of each in each kingdom. Both Ahaziahs reigned only one year each, but their administrations did not overlap. The administrations of the two Jehorams did overlap. Ahaziah of Israel reigned 11 years earlier than Ahaziah of Judah. In Judah, Jehoram (853-841 B.C) preceded Ahaziah (841 B.C.), but in Israel Ahaziah (853-852 B.C.) preceded Jehoram (852-841 B.C.).

YEAR	SOUTHERN (JUDEAN) KING	NORTHERN (ISRAELITE) KING
853	Jehoram	Ahaziah
852		J(eh)oram
851		
850		
849		
848		
847		
846		
845		
844		
843		
842		
841		

⁸³Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 1453-54.

Ahaziah's wickedness 8:25-29

Ahaziah of Judah continued the policies and preferences of his great-grandfather Omri that his grandfather Ahab and his uncle Joram had perpetuated (v. 27). Israel and Judah were at this time still allies. The battle of "Ramoth-gilead" ("Heights of Gilead"), in which Ahaziah fought, took place 12 years after the one in which Ahab and Jehoshaphat engaged the Arameans and Ahab died (1 Kings 22:3, 29). In the second battle of Ramoth-gilead the Israelite king Joram was wounded. He returned to his winter capital to convalesce (v. 29). Ahaziah then visited his uncle, the Israelite king, there (v. 29).

God's preparation of Jehu 9:1-13

God had told Elijah that he would anoint "Jehu" ("Yahweh is He"; 1 Kings 19:16).⁸⁴ He did this through his successor Elisha who accomplished it by using one of his protégés (v. 1). Jehu would wipe out Omri's dynasty in Israel (v. 7-10). Jehu's father was a different Jehoshaphat from Judah's king of the same name (v. 2). Elijah had prophesied the end of Ahab's line (1 Kings 21:21-22, 29) and Jezebel's death (1 Kings 21:23). God had worked through prophets previously, especially Elijah and Elisha, and would continue to do so. However, Jehu was just as much an instrument in God's hand as the prophets, though his methods were not always proper. This is the only place in Kings where the writer emphasized Yahweh as avenging (cf. Nah. 1:2-3). Jehu was His instrument.

"At times the behavior of the prophet was unusual or abnormal, but a careful consideration of each of these instances will reveal some divine purpose or spiritual significance."⁸⁵

"Jehu is the only king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) to have been anointed, perhaps to indicate that he should follow in the Davidic tradition, as Saul had been anointed by Samuel (1 Sa. 9:16; 10:1); David by Samuel, to mark the Spirit of God endowing him for the task (1 Sa. 16:12-13); and Solomon by the high priest Zadok and Nathan the prophet (1 Ki. 1:45). Such anointing was symbolic and probably confined to Hebrew practice (see also on 1 Ki. 1:34)."⁸⁶

Jehu's assassination of Joram 9:14-26

Israel had evidently retaken Ramoth-gilead after Ben-Hadad I had defeated Ahab there 12 years earlier. Israel was now defending it against the attacking Arameans (v. 14). The horsemen and Joram who asked Jehu, "Is it peace?" were asking if Israel had successfully defended Ramoth-gilead (vv. 17, 19, 22). Jehu's reply to the two horsemen, "What have you to do with peace?" (vv. 18, 19) was somewhat enigmatic and meant, "Don't worry."⁸⁷

"The question about 'peace' was a standard step in ancient negotiations. Jehu's reply indicates that he refused to negotiate."⁸⁸

⁸⁴For more information on anointing with oil (vv. 3, 6), see my note on 1 Samuel 16:13.

⁸⁵Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p. 60.

⁸⁶Wiseman, pp. 218-19.

⁸⁷Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:7:3.

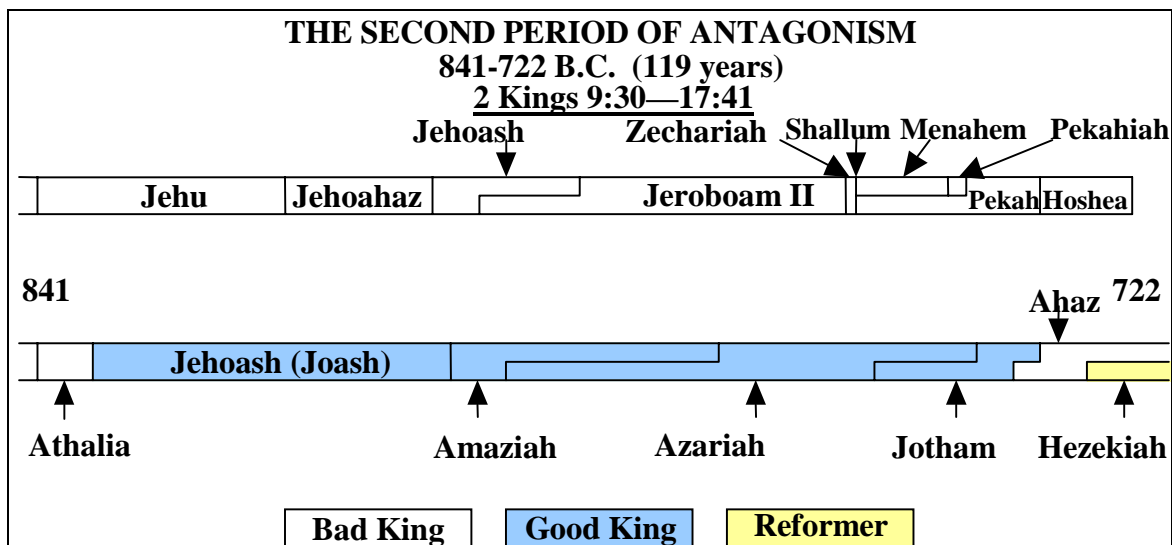
⁸⁸*The Nelson . . .*, p. 625.

He did not answer their question. They probably concluded that he did not want to say anything until he saw the king. When Joram asked him about peace, Jehu replied that there could be no peace for Israel as long as Israel's leaders allowed Jezebel's sins to continue (v. 22). Jezebel was a spiritual harlot, having pursued many idols. Her witchcraft (Heb. *kesapim*, lit. sorceries) involved seeking information from demonic forces (cf. Isa. 47:9, 12; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4). This was a capital offense under the Mosaic Law (Exod. 22:18; Deut. 18:10-12). Joram realized Jehu's words spelled treason, and he began to flee. He had evidently not worn his armor, and Jehu killed him easily with an arrow (v. 24). Jehu desired to fulfill the prophecy of Ahab's punishment (v. 26; cf. 1 Kings 21:21- 22). God had mitigated Ahab's judgment because he had repented (1 Kings 21:29), but now his descendants were reaping the consequences, as God had promised. Verse 26 adds that Jezebel had executed Naboth's sons, too. The writer did not record this earlier. Perhaps she sought to preclude any claims that Naboth's descendants could have made to his lands later. These additional murders also violated the Mosaic Law (Lev. 25:25; Num. 36:7).

Jehu's assassination of Ahaziah 9:27-29

Jehu executed Ahaziah because he was a member of Ahab's family. He died an ignominious death because of his wickedness, as did the kings of Israel in Omri's dynasty. Nevertheless Ahaziah received an honorable burial (v. 28).

The period of alliance that ran contemporaneously with Omri's dynasty, beginning with Ahab, concluded when Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah died (in 841 B.C.). Though Ahab and Jehoshaphat undoubtedly intended to bring strength to both kingdoms through this alliance, it had the opposite effect because of the wicked influence of Ahab's house. The Lord had forbidden alliances with ungodly nations, so Judah suffered His discipline for entering into this one. Relying on human allies rather than Yahweh weakened both kingdoms. Jehu's assassinations terminated not only two kings of Israel and Judah but the alliance of the two nations as well.



C. THE SECOND PERIOD OF ANTAGONISM 9:30—17:41

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah continued without an alliance between them for the rest of the time the Northern Kingdom existed. This period began with Jehu's accession to the throne of Israel in 841 B.C. and continued until the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.

1. Jehu's evil reign in Israel 9:30—10:36

Since the writer did not record Jehu's coronation, we should probably regard his reign as beginning when Joram died (9:24). Jehu began Israel's fifth and longest royal dynasty. He and his descendants reigned 88 years (841-753 B.C.). He himself reigned 28 years (841-814 B.C.). His contemporaries in Judah were Queen Athaliah and King Joash.

"The usual formula to introduce a king is lacking in the case of Jehu because of the unique and violent nature of his rise to power."⁸⁹

Jehu's execution of Jezebel 9:30-37

Jezebel evidently painted her eyes and adorned her head (v. 30) to receive Jehu. Unwittingly, or perhaps deliberately,⁹⁰ she prepared herself for her own death. At least one interpreter believed she was trying to seduce Jehu.⁹¹ Her greeting to Jehu may have been a sarcastic, derogatory threat (v. 31).⁹² She asked, "Is it peace?" as the two horsemen and Joram had (vv. 17, 19, 22). However she meant, "Have you established peace (by assassinating the king)?" She implied he had not by calling him Zimri. Zimri was the rebel who, about 44 years earlier, had assassinated his king, Elah, only to die seven days later at the hand of Jezebel's father-in-law, Omri (1 Kings 16:8-10, 17-19). Jezebel implied that Jehu would suffer a similar fate. This interpretation seems better than that Jezebel saw Jehu as a rebel but complemented him on being the one who pruned Omri's dynasty.⁹³ Wiseman believed Jezebel wanted to reach a peaceful agreement with Jehu. By calling him Zimri she was not referring to Jehu as a traitor but as a hero (Ugaritic *dmr*).⁹⁴ This seems unlikely to me. "Zimri" may have become synonymous with "traitor" by this time.⁹⁵

"On the surface Jezebel's actions seem contradictory. On the one hand, she beautifies herself as if to seduce Jehu, but on the other hand, she insults and indirectly threatens him with this comparison to Zimri. Upon further reflection, however, her actions reveal a clear underlying motive. She wants to retain her power, not to mention her life. By beautifying herself,

⁸⁹Merrill, "2 Kings," p. 278.

⁹⁰Patterson and Austel, p. 209.

⁹¹S. Parker, "Jezebel's Reception of Jehu," *Maarav* 1 (1978):67-78.

⁹²Gray, p. 551.

⁹³Saul Olyan, "2 Kings 9:31—Jehu as Zimri," *Harvard Theological Review* 78:1 (1985):203-7.

⁹⁴Wiseman, p. 223.

⁹⁵Giorgio Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria*, p. 203.

she appeals to Jehu's sexual impulses; by threatening him, she reminds him that he is in the same precarious position as Zimri. But, if he makes Jezebel his queen, he can consolidate his power. In other words through her actions and words Jezebel is saying to Jehu, 'You desire me, don't you? And you need me!'"⁹⁶

In response to Jehu's question, "Who is on my side?" a few officers (Heb. *saris*), who acted as harem attendants, threw Jezebel out of her upper-story window. The way Jehu treated Jezebel's body shows his complete lack of respect for her. Rather than mourning her death, he feasted. He fulfilled Elijah's prophecy of how God would end her life (1 Kings 21:23). She who had ordered the murders of Naboth and his sons died on the very ground she had stolen from them. This was the same plot of ground where Jehu had thrown Joram's corpse (vv. 24-26). Yahweh and the godly people of Israel shared Jehu's lack of respect for the queen. Jezebel had been responsible for much of the apostasy, wickedness, and consequent divine discipline that had plagued Israel for over 30 years. As always in Kings, the writer recorded the type of death a person died to document God's faithfulness in blessing the obedient and cursing the disobedient.⁹⁷

When Jehu occupied Jezreel, he had not yet established himself as Israel's king. Jezreel was only a secondary residence of Ahab's royal family, after Samaria.⁹⁸

Jehu's purges of the royal families 10:1-17

Jehu challenged the nobles of Samaria and Jezreel who were rearing Ahab's 70 male descendants to select an heir and to battle Jehu. This would decide whether Ahab's house or Jehu's would rule Israel. Rather than fight a battle they were sure they would lose, they submitted to Jehu and slew Ahab's sons. In the ancient Near East conquering kings sometimes piled the heads of their defeated foes at the city gate to show their power and to discourage future rebellion.⁹⁹ Jehu then proceeded to execute the nobles who had killed Ahab's sons. However, in this purge Jehu demonstrated too much zeal. God judged Jehu's own dynasty later for these unlawful assassinations (cf. Hosea 1:4). Jehu was wise and obedient to kill Ahab's sons (cf. 2 Sam. 1:14-15), but he overstepped his authority by killing the nobles.

"Jehu's killings exceed reform and become atrocities, . . . a fact Hos 1:4-5 makes clear. Eventually, Jehu becomes very much like those he replaces, which makes him more of a political opportunist than a catalyst for change."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶The NET Bible note on 9:31.

⁹⁷For interesting insights into the spirit of Jezebel and how to combat it, see Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*, pp. 97-120.

⁹⁸Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*, p. 221.

⁹⁹Luckenbill, 1:213; Gray, p. 500.

¹⁰⁰House, p. 287.

Jehu also wiped out the members of Ahab's family who were still alive in the Southern Kingdom, whom God evidently brought together to make Jehu's job easier (vv. 12-14).¹⁰¹ "Beth-eked" is a site near Mt. Gilboa, and its name means "Binding House."

"Jonadab" ("Yahweh is Noble") also rejoiced in the destruction of Ahab's line, though he may not have approved of all Jehu's killing (vv. 15-17). Other Scripture describes Jonadab as a faithful follower of Yahweh who observed the Mosaic Law strictly (cf. Jer. 35:6-7).

Jehu's purge of Baalism 10:18-28

This purge evidently took place in Samaria (1 Kings 16:32). Jehu's true religious preferences had not yet become known publicly. The various Hebrew words translated "pillar" in verses 26 and 27 indicate that Jehu desecrated two or more kinds of objects, probably flammable wooden and non-flammable stone idols. Jehu also converted the temple of Baal into a public latrine, the greatest possible insult to Baal, the god of fertility. His act made Baal's temple an unclean place as well. Jehu thus effectively eradicated the Baal worship that Ahab and Jezebel had officially established as Israel's religion.

Jehu's assessment 10:29-36

God blessed Jehu for eliminating the line of Ahab and Baalism. However, Jehu did not go far enough. He allowed the cult of Jeroboam to continue. Furthermore he was not careful to obey the Mosaic Law with all his heart (v. 31). Consequently, God cut his line off eventually, and Israel lost much Transjordanian territory to Hazael, king of Aram.

"Despite his cometlike beginning, spiritually speaking, Jehu was a falling star, so his reign is largely passed over in silence."¹⁰²

"Despite his attacks against Baalism, Jehu does not lead the nation into separatist Yahwism. He allows the worship instituted by Jeroboam to continue. In effect, then, he expels the foreign religion (Baalism) in favor of the long-standing Israelite state religion begun by Jeroboam. Apparently he believes reform beyond the elimination of Ahab's children, Ahab's wife, and Ahab's religion, that is, what secures his power, does not concern him. Indeed he acts as the instrument of punishment against the corrupt Omride dynasty, but he does not operate out of Elijah-like motives. Rather, he is, like Syria, Assyria, and Babylon, an instrument that punishes but exhibits few personal moral strengths. Israel is now back to where it was before Ahab and Jezebel assumed leadership, but it has certainly not come back to the Lord."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹See J. M. Miller, "The Fall of the House of Ahab," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967):307-24.

¹⁰²Patterson and Austel, p. 212.

¹⁰³House, p. 295.

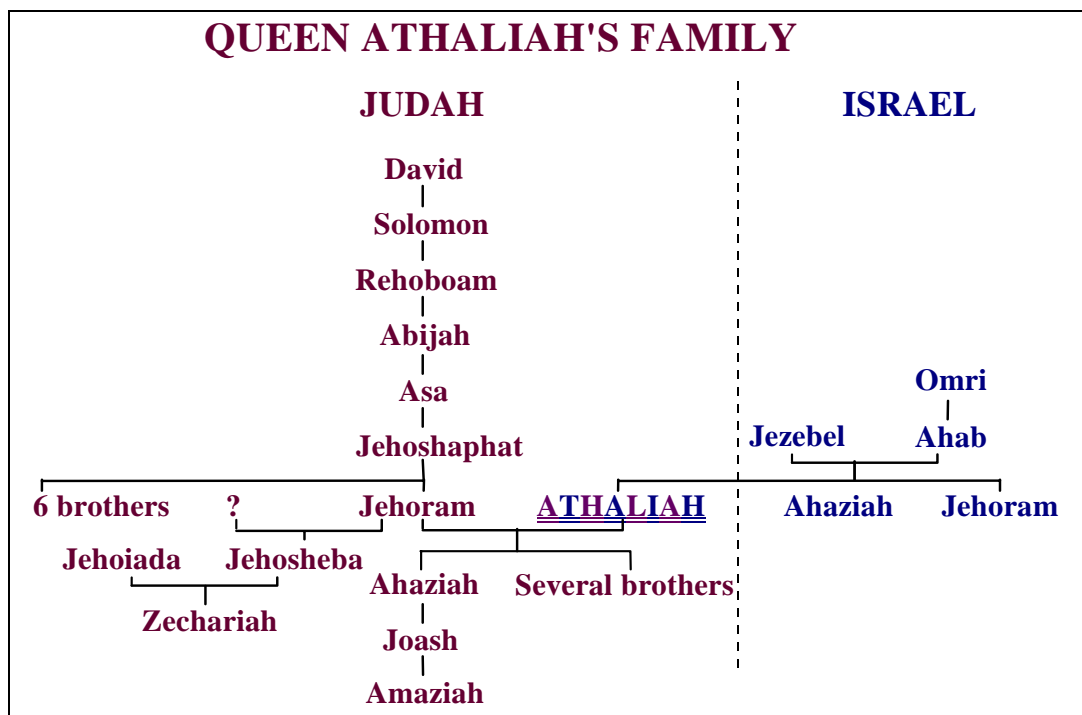
The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser shows King Jehu kneeling paying tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria.¹⁰⁴ This is the only picture of a Hebrew king discovered thus far.

2. Athaliah's evil reign in Judah 11:1-20

Queen Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah. She was not a descendant of David. She was one of the 20 rulers of Judah, however. She was Judah's only reigning queen and the strongest Baal advocate among Judah's rulers.

God's preservation of a legitimate king 11:1-12

"Athaliah" ("Yahweh is Exalted") was the mother of the Judean king Ahaziah, whom Jehu assassinated (9:27-29).¹⁰⁵ She was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel and the sister of the Israelite kings Ahaziah and Joram, who had succeeded Ahab. She was the wife of the Judean king Jehoram, who had died of intestinal disease (2 Chron. 21:18-19). Raiding Philistines and Arabians had killed her other sons besides Ahaziah (2 Chron. 21:17).



Athaliah proceeded to assassinate all potential successors to the throne, totally disregarding God's will that David's descendants were to rule Judah (2 Sam. 7:16).

¹⁰⁴See Finegan, p. 205, and fig. 73

¹⁰⁵"Jehoram" also means "Yahweh is Exalted."

"It was one of the many attempts Satan made to exterminate the male offspring to make the coming One, the promised Savior, the seed of the woman, impossible. Had he succeeded through Athaliah in the destruction of the royal seed of David, the promise made to David would have become impossible."¹⁰⁶

"Jehosheba" was a daughter of Athaliah's husband, King Jehoram. She may not have been Athaliah's own daughter, but was the half-sister of King Ahaziah of Judah, and the wife of the high priest in Judah, "Jehoiada" ("Yahweh Knows"; 2 Chron. 22:11).¹⁰⁷ She hid Jehoash (Joash), as Jochebed had hidden Moses (Exod. 2). According to Josephus, Jehosheba hid Jehoash in a secret bed-chamber.¹⁰⁸

The Carites (another spelling of Cherethites; cf. 2 Sam. 8:18; et al.) were special guards. The other guards (v. 4) were priests and Levites (2 Chron. 23:4).

When the high priest crowned Jehoash (Joash), who was then seven years old, he gave him a copy of the Mosaic Law consistent with what the Law required (Deut. 17:18-19). This is the basis for the British custom of presenting the new king or queen of England with a copy of the Bible during the coronation ceremony.¹⁰⁹

God's judgment of the usurper 11:13-20

Though Athaliah claimed that Jehoash's coronation was treasonous, she was the one guilty of treason. Jehoash was a legitimate heir to the throne of Judah, but Athaliah was not since she was not a descendant of David, but had married into Judah's royal family. She evidently wanted to bring Judah under Israel's authority. Out of disrespect, the people executed her near the gate where the horses (or king's mules¹¹⁰) entered the palace (not the city; cf. 2 Chron. 24:20-22). Like her mother she died a violent death among horses, the instruments of warfare (cf. 9:30-37).

The covenant Jehoiada led the people in adopting was a fresh commitment to the Mosaic Law (v. 17; cf. Deut. 27-30; Josh. 24; 2 Sam. 5:3; 2 Kings 23:1-3). He also destroyed the temple of Baal (v. 18) and killed the idolatrous priests in front of the Baal altars. Mattan was a common Phoenician name, but an Israelite with the same name appears in 24:17, so this priest may have been Phoenician or Israelite.¹¹¹ All of this showed contempt for the pagan worshippers' false belief that their temple area was a sacred sanctuary. The result of this return to Yahweh was joy and peace in Jerusalem (v. 20).

As Jezebel had promoted Baalism in Israel, so her daughter did in Judah. During Athaliah's six-year reign (841-835 B.C.) Baalism gained its most secure foothold in the

¹⁰⁶Gaebelein, 1:330.

¹⁰⁷Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:7:1.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Wiseman, p. 233.

¹¹⁰Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:7:3.

¹¹¹J. Skinner, *I and II Kings*, p. 341; Cogan and Tadmor, p. 130.

Southern Kingdom. It was never as influential in Judah as it was in Israel, however, because of the stronger commitment to Yahweh that existed in the Southern Kingdom.

Athaliah's history is still another proof that those who disregard God's Word and will bring God's discipline on themselves and on those they lead.

3. Jehoash's good reign in Judah 11:21—12:21

With the beginning of Jehoash's reign, Judah began to enjoy over 100 years of consecutive leadership by four men whom the writer of Kings judged good. None of these four (Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah, and Jotham) was as good for Judah as Asa and Jehoshaphat had been, or as Hezekiah or Josiah would be. Nevertheless, together they provided the longest continuous span of God-approved leadership in Judah's history.

Jehoash's contributions 11:21—12:3

Jehoash was the youngest king to mount Judah's throne. He began reigning at age seven and ruled for 40 years (835-796 B.C.). His father was Ahaziah, the most recent male ruler of Judah, and his grandmother was Athaliah.

Jehoash followed the Law of Moses and ruled well as long as his mentor Jehoiada, the high priest, lived. However when Jehoiada died, evidently shortly after Jehoash's temple repairs were complete (2 Chron. 24:15), the king began to follow the advice of certain Judean officials who led him into unfaithfulness to Yahweh. He stubbornly refused the warnings God sent him by prophets (2 Chron. 24:17-19) and by Zechariah, who had replaced his father as high priest (2 Chron. 24:20-22). He even executed Zechariah. In the earlier years of his reign he was faithful to God, except that he allowed the high places of worship to remain in Judah (cf. Deut. 12:2-7, 13-14).

"Joash [Jehoash] was an excellent follower but not a good leader."¹¹²

Jehoash's restoration of the temple 12:4-16

This was the first such project the writer recorded in Kings. Later, Hezekiah and Josiah also repaired the temple. Until now, temple expenses came out of the royal treasury, but Jehoash moved this obligation into the private sector.¹¹³ Jehoash's original plan was to use part of the money that the people contributed for the maintenance of the priesthood to pay for the restoration (cf. Exod. 30:11-16; Lev. 27; Num. 30). Apparently the priests did not cooperate with this plan, perhaps out of selfishness. Josephus wrote that it was because the high priest did not think anyone would willingly pay the money.¹¹⁴ Consequently the king adopted a completely freewill offering approach and appointed non-priests to supervise its administration. This plan proved effective. Many other

¹¹²Wiersbe, p. 548.

¹¹³Jones, 2:490.

¹¹⁴Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:8:2.

ancient Near Eastern governments used this approach to maintaining their temples at this time.¹¹⁵ The administrators of the program proved trustworthy. Integrity returned to Judah, partially, when the people rededicated themselves to Yahweh (11:17).

Jehoash's unfaithfulness and assassination 12:17-21

King Hazael of Aram had defeated Israel during the reigns of Jehu and Jehoahaz (13:3, 22). He then pressed south along the Mediterranean coast toward Judah. He captured Gath and then sent soldiers against Jerusalem who killed many Judean leaders. Rather than turning to Yahweh for deliverance, Jehoash bought Hazael off with gold from the renovated temple. Later, Hazael returned to Judah and Jerusalem with a small company of men, destroyed all the nobility of Judah, and sent their spoil to the king of Damascus (2 Chron. 24:23).

The Arameans had wounded Jehoash, who went to recuperate in a town named Beth Millo (2 Chron. 24:25). There, several of his officials assassinated him (v. 20), primarily because he had slain the high priest Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-22). The king was buried in Jerusalem but not in the royal tombs (2 Chron. 24:25) because the people did not have great respect for him.

"Once a promising, God-fearing young ruler, Joash died a disappointment. By bribing Hazael with Temple treasures, he tarnished his one great achievement, the Temple restoration."¹¹⁶

Jehoash's reign started off well but ended poorly because he turned from Yahweh. Instead of continuing to follow the high priest's counsel, he silenced him by killing him. Consequently, God's blessing on his earlier years in office turned into chastening later in his life.

"During more than fifty years of ministry, I have occasionally witnessed the 'Joash [Jehoash] tragedy.' A godly wife dies and the widower soon drops out of church and starts to live a worldly life. Sons or daughters go off to college and gradually leave the faith because father and mother aren't there to counsel and warn them. I've known some high-profile Christian leaders who 'used' their children in their ministries, but when the children were on their own, they turned their backs on their parents and the Lord. A good beginning is no guarantee of a good ending. King Josiah [*sic* Joash, Jehoash] had every encouragement to become a godly man, but he didn't take advantage of his opportunities by taking God's truth into his heart."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵A. L. Oppenheim, "A Fiscal Practice of the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (1947):116-20; Victor Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice in the Ancient Near East: 2 Kings 12:5-17 and a Letter to Esarhaddon (Las 277)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45:4 (October 1986):289-94.

¹¹⁶Hubbard, p. 185.

¹¹⁷Wiersbe, p. 551.

4. Jehoahaz's evil reign in Israel 13:1-9

"Jehoahaz" ("Yahweh Has Grasped"¹¹⁸) reigned over the Northern Kingdom from 814 to 798 B.C. Because Israel continued to disregard the Mosaic Covenant, God allowed the Arameans to dominate her. Hazael ruled Aram from 841 to 801 B.C., and his son, Ben-Hadad III, succeeded him. The date that Ben-Hadad III's reign ended seems to have been about 773 B.C.¹¹⁹

Aram's oppression moved Jehoahaz to seek Yahweh's help, which He graciously provided in spite of the king's unfaithfulness. The deliverer God raised up (v. 5) was probably King Adad-Nirari III of Assyria (810-783 B.C.) who attacked Damascus as well as Tyre, Sidon, Media, Edom, and Egypt.¹²⁰ The Arameans consequently stopped attacking Israel and turned to defending themselves against their neighbor to the east, Assyria. Another way God disciplined Israel at this time was by reducing her army through casualties (v. 7). This had begun in Jehu's reign (10:32-36) but continued during Jehoahaz's administration.

NEO-ASSYRIAN KINGS¹²¹	
Adad-nirari II	911-891
Tukulti-Ninurta II	890-884
Assur-ansirpal II	883-859
Shalmaneser III	858-824
Shamshi-Adad V	823-811
Adad-nirari III	810-783
Shalmaneser IV	782-773
Assur-dan III	772-755
Assur-nirari V	754-745
Tiglath-pileser III	745-727
Shalmaneser V	727-722
Sargon II	722-705
Sennacherib	705-681
Esarhaddon	681-669
Ashurbanipal	668-627
Ashur-etil-ilani	627-623
Sin-sum-lisir	623
Sin-sar-iskun	623-612
Assur-uballit II	612-609

¹¹⁸"Ahaziah" also means "Yahweh Has Grasped."

¹¹⁹See the chart of Aramean kings named in 2 Kings in my comments on 8:7-15 above.

¹²⁰J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 132; Merrill, "2 Kings," pp. 280-81.

¹²¹From idem, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 336.

5. Jehoash's evil reign in Israel 13:10-25

Again two kings with the same name ruled over the Northern and Southern Kingdoms at the same time, though they ruled contemporaneously for only about two years (798-796 B.C.). Jehoash of Israel's dates are 798-782 B.C., and Jehoash of Judah's are 835-796 B.C.

Jehoash of Israel's assessment 13:10-13

Jehoash of Judah (called Joash in v. 1 of the NASB) was already on the throne when Jehoash of Israel (called Joash after that in the NASB) came to power. The northern king ruled for 16 years, the first five as sole ruler and the last 11 as coregent with his son Jeroboam II. Jehoash continued the policies of his predecessors in Israel.

Elisha's prophecy and death 13:14-21

Jehoash of Israel had respect and affection for Elisha. He anticipated the loss that the death of God's spiritual warrior would be to Israel (v. 14). He recognized that Israel's real defense lay in Yahweh's angelic army and in Elisha's spiritual warfare for her (v. 14; cf. 2:12).

"The prophet is the man whose prayer is better than chariots and horsemen. Trust in the words of the prophet means that horses and chariots can be abandoned."¹²²

Elisha gave the king a prophecy of Israel's future deliverance because Jehoash had humbled himself before God (vv. 15-19).

"Elisha instructed Israel's king to pick up his bow (v. 15). When he had done so, the prophet placed his own hands on those of the king, thereby indicating that what he was about to do would be full of spiritual symbolism (v. 16)."¹²³

The bow and arrows were symbols of the strength and victory God would give Jehoash. By taking them in hand the king was symbolically becoming God's agent of power. Elisha put his own hands on the king's to illustrate that the king's power would come from Yahweh, whom Elisha represented. The east window opened toward Aram from Israel. By shooting the first arrow Jehoash was appropriating the victory symbolized by the arrow. As he shot, Elisha explained to him that the arrow represented victory over Aram at Aphek (cf. 1 Kings 20:30). The prophet then instructed Jehoash to shoot the remaining arrows at the ground. The Hebrew makes this translation preferable. He was to strike the ground by shooting the arrows at it.

¹²²Beek, p. 8. Cf. 2:12.

¹²³Patterson and Austel, p. 225.

"It is . . . a symbolic action, like that of Joshua thrusting with a spear at Ai (Jos. 8:18)."¹²⁴

Elisha was angry when Jehoash shot only three more arrows because in doing so the king was demonstrating weak faith. Jehoash knew what shooting the arrows signified (v. 17). Perhaps the king did not believe God could or would give him as much victory as Elisha had implied. He failed to trust God even though he knew what God had promised.

Elisha's ministry spanned at least 56 years.¹²⁵ When he died, friends evidently buried him in a cave or rock tomb, as was customary then. Apparently the men who placed the body of their dead friend in Elisha's tomb observed his resuscitation. Undoubtedly they told their story everywhere, and probably King Jehoash heard it. Such a sign of God's power, working even through His prophet's corpse, would have encouraged the king as he looked forward to meeting Aram in battle. It would also have rebuked him for his lack of faith. The story would have impressed on everyone who heard it the great power of Yahweh that brought blessing (life) to others through His faithful servants. Since Elisha was dead there was no question that the power was Yahweh's, not the prophet's.

"As he was a man of power in life (chaps. 2—7), moving and persuasive even in stories told about him (2 Kgs 8:1-6), so now his awesome powers continue working in death, confirming the prophet and foreshadowing the victory to come."¹²⁶

Jehoash of Israel's victories 13:22-25

The basis of God's continuing mercy to Israel was not her goodness but God's in remaining faithful to the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 23; cf. 1 Kings 8:44-50; Gen. 13:14-17). As Elisha had predicted, Jehoash defeated the Arameans three times (v. 25; cf. vv. 18-19), but he did not destroy them completely (cf. v. 19).

Why did the writer place the record of the resuscitation (vv. 20-21) within the story of the Aramean army's defeat (vv. 14-25)? Probably he intended the resuscitation incident to illustrate the fact that God would also revive Israel by defeating Aram, as he had revived the dead man. One writer argued that the man who revived was only apparently dead, which is possible since in that culture people were buried almost immediately after they died.¹²⁷

In this record of his life, Jehoash appears to have been a spiritually sensitive man whose confidence in God was weak, but he also perpetuated the Jeroboam cult.

¹²⁴Wiseman, p. 241.

¹²⁵Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 504.

¹²⁶Long, p. 166.

¹²⁷H. L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 54.

6. Amaziah's good reign in Judah 14:1-22

Amaziah of Judah reigned over Judah for 29 years (796-767 B.C.). He began reigning when Jehoash was king over Israel and died during the reign of Jehoash's son and successor Jeroboam II. The prophet Joel may have ministered in Judah during his reign.¹²⁸

Amaziah's policies 14:1-6

Amaziah's only act of goodness that the writer of Kings included was his obedience to the Mosaic Law in the matter of not executing children for their fathers' crimes (Deut. 24:16). Kings of other ancient Near Eastern countries commonly practiced such executions. Amaziah instead trusted God to control the potential rebels.

Amaziah's wars 14:7-14

God blessed Amaziah by allowing him to subdue the Edomites who had revolted from Judean control during the reign of Judah's king Jehoram (cf. 2 Chron. 25:5-16). The Valley of Salt lay south of the Salt (Dead) Sea in the Arabah. Sela was the capital of Edom at this time.

Amaziah's heart became proud because of this victory. He concluded that his superior power had gained it rather than God's might. This led him to challenge Israel in battle. King Jehoash's parable (vv. 9-10) hurt Amaziah's pride (cf. Jotham's fable, Judg. 9:8-15). Instead of backing down he insisted on a confrontation. God permitted this situation to punish Amaziah, because after subduing the Edomites, he had brought some of their idols into Jerusalem and worshipped them (2 Chron. 25:14, 20). The army of Israel took Amaziah prisoner (vv. 13-14). It was probably then that Amaziah's son "Azariah" ("Yahweh Has Helped") began to reign in Jerusalem as his father's coregent (790 B.C.). McFall believed Azariah's coregency began in 792 or 791.¹²⁹ Azariah continued as coregent until his father Amaziah died (in 767 B.C.).

Jehoash's death 14:15-16

The writer seems to have included this second mention of Jehoash of Israel's death here (cf. 13:12-13) because of the unusual situation that existed after the Israelites took Amaziah prisoner. When Jehoash died in 782 B.C., they released Amaziah who returned to Judah.

¹²⁸Proponents of this view include Freeman, p. 148; and Gleason A. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 305.

¹²⁹Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):3-45.

Amaziah's death 14:17-22

The text does not identify Amaziah's conspirators, but they were evidently Judahites who wanted to restore pure worship to their nation (2 Chron. 25:27). Lachish was a former royal city on Judah's western border. The king received an honorable burial. Elath was an Edomite port-city on the Gulf of Aqabah that Azariah restored after his father's death. Perhaps Amaziah's defeat of the Edomites made this event possible.

Amaziah's life is an example of how one who follows God's Word and consequently experiences His blessing can become proud when he or she forgets that his or her blessings come from God's grace.

7. Jeroboam II's evil reign in Israel 14:23-29

Jeroboam II's reign of 41 years was the longest in Israel's history (793-753 B.C.). For the first 12 of these years he was coregent with his father Jehoash.¹³⁰ He began ruling during the reign of Judah's Jehoash, outlived Jehoash's successor Amaziah, and died during the reign of Amaziah's son Azariah (Uzziah).

The writer, whose interests were primarily theological, passed over Jeroboam II's significant political accomplishments.

"The era of Jeroboam (northern kingdom) and Azariah (southern kingdom) would mark a significant change in the fortunes of God's people. These would be days of unparalleled prosperity for the twin kingdoms, both economically (as attested by the Samarian Ostraca) and politically."¹³¹

Jeroboam II restored Israel's borders to approximately what they had been in Solomon's day and extended Israel's influence over her neighbors to an extent unparalleled in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Hamath lay northeast of Israel, and the Sea of the Arabah was the Salt (Dead) Sea (v. 25). The prophet Jonah had predicted Israel's territorial extension. He, along with Hosea (Hosea 1:1) and Amos (Amos 1:1), ministered in Israel during Jeroboam II's reign. Wiseman believed that Jonah visited Nineveh during the reign of Assur-dan III (772-755 B.C.).¹³² Gath-hepher and Nazareth stood on the north and south sides respectively of the same Galilean hill (v. 25).

Verse 26 means no one escaped from Israel's previous national affliction in Jeroboam II's day, neither servants nor free people. This probably means that everyone in Israel was suffering before Jeroboam II began to improve conditions. Damascus and Hamath belonged to Judah under Solomon (v. 28) in the sense that he controlled them.

¹³⁰Edwin R. Thiele, "Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns Among the Hebrew Kings," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93:12 (1974):192-93.

¹³¹Patterson and Austel, p. 231.

¹³²Wiseman, p. 249.

Even though Jeroboam had a long and politically impressive career, spiritual conditions in his day were bad. The books of Hosea and Amos throw more light on this period of Israel's history. Unfaithfulness and selfishness marked the people. For these reasons Yahweh sent very bitter affliction on Israel in Jeroboam II's reign. Times of material prosperity have usually proved to be more difficult for God's people to handle successfully than times of adversity.

As Israel declined spiritually, God strengthened Assyria politically and militarily. The two periods of Israel's greatest decline correspond exactly to the two periods of Assyria's greatest growth, namely, during the Omride dynasty and shortly after Jeroboam II's reign. This reflects precisely what God had said He would do if His people forsook Him (Deut. 28:1, 25, 43, 44, 49-57). One writer correlated Assyria's rise to power with Israel's apostasy.¹³³ The cause and effect relationship is unmistakable.

"With the death of Jeroboam . . . the history of the northern state becomes a tale of unmitigated disaster. Her internal sickness erupting into the open, Israel found herself racked with anarchy at the very moment when she was called upon to face in resurgent Assyria the gravest threat of her entire history. Within twenty-five short years she had been erased from the map."¹³⁴

8. Azariah's good reign in Judah 15:1-7

Most Bible students know Azariah by his other name, Uzziah (vv. 13, 30, 32, 34; 2 Chron. 26; Isa. 1:1; Hosea 1:1, Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5; et al.). His 52-year reign (790-739 B.C.) was longer than any other king of Judah or Israel so far. King Manasseh reigned the longest in Judah (55 years), and Azariah was second. Azariah reigned while seven of the last eight kings of the Northern Kingdom ruled, all but the last Israelite king, Hoshea. The first 23 years of his reign was a coregency with his father Amaziah, and the last 11 was another coregency with his son Jotham.

Azariah was one of Judah's most popular, effective, and influential kings. He expanded Judah's territories, fortified several Judean cities, including Jerusalem, and reorganized the army (v. 22; cf. 2 Chron. 26:6-14). The combined territories over which he and Jeroboam II exercised control approximated those of David and Solomon.

Unfortunately he became proud, and in disobedience to the Mosaic Law performed functions that God had restricted to the priests (2 Chron. 26:16-21). For this sin God punished him with leprosy (v. 5). History teaches us that few people have been able to maintain spiritual vitality and faithfulness when they attain what the world calls success. As with Solomon, Azariah's early success proved to be his undoing.

¹³³Paul Gilchrist, "Israel's Apostasy: Catalyst of Assyrian World Conquest," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 99-113.

¹³⁴John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 252.

9. Zechariah's evil reign in Israel 15:8-12

"Zechariah" ("Yahweh Remembers") reigned only six months (753-752 B.C.) before his successor Shallum assassinated him. Zechariah was the fourth and last king of Jehu's dynasty (v. 12; cf. 10:30). The fact that the people made Shallum king after he killed Zechariah suggests that Zechariah was not popular.

"Zechariah's reign also is noteworthy in that it begins an era of intrigue. Shallum becomes the first person of this current era to come to power through conspiracy and assassination."¹³⁵

"The death of this last king of the dynasty of Jehu (v. 12) saw the end of the Northern Kingdom proper. In the last twenty years six rulers were to follow each other, but only one was to die naturally. Anarchy, rivalry and regicide led to terminal bloodshed which fulfilled Hosea's prophecies (1:4)."¹³⁶

10. Shallum's evil reign in Israel 15:13-16

Shallum's reign was even shorter than Zechariah's. It lasted only one month (752 B.C.).

"Menahem" ("Comforter") may have been the commander-in-chief of Jeroboam II's army.¹³⁷ He was serving in Tirzah, Israel's former capital. Menahem regarded Shallum as a usurper to the throne. He evidently believed that as commander of the army he should have succeeded Zechariah. Menahem probably attacked Tiphshah in Israel because its inhabitants refused to acknowledge his claim to the throne. He probably hoped that his violent destruction of that town (v. 16) would move other Israelite leaders to support him.

As the history of Israel unfolds, the reader cannot help noticing how the kings increasingly behaved as their Gentile neighbors, who had no special regard for God's Law.

11. Menahem's evil reign in Israel 15:17-22

Menahem began Israel's seventh royal family. His reign lasted 10 years (752-742 B.C.).

Assyrian inscriptions have identified Pul as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.; cf. v. 29; 16:7, 10; 1 Chron. 5:26). Pul was the throne name that Tiglath-Pileser III took as Babylon's sovereign after he conquered that nation about 729 B.C.¹³⁸ This is the first explicit mention of Assyria in Kings.¹³⁹ Tiglath-Pileser was a very strong Assyrian ruler. He invaded Israel in 743 B.C. and consequently Israel experienced Assyria's controlling influence.

¹³⁵House, p. 329.

¹³⁶Wiseman, p. 252.

¹³⁷Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:11:1.

¹³⁸W. W. Hallo and W. K. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, p. 137; Finegan, pp. 206-8.

¹³⁹See *ibid.*, pp. 200-6, for earlier Assyrian history.

Because of Israel's apostasy God delivered her over to the clutches of a foreign power that would one day swallow her up (cf. Deut. 28:32-33).

12. Pekahiah's evil reign in Israel 15:23-26

In 742 B.C., "Pekahiah" ("Yahweh Has Opened the Eyes") began his two-year reign (742-740 B.C.). It ended when Pekah, one of his military officers, assassinated him in Samaria, in addition to Argob and Arieah, who were probably Israelite princes (v. 25).

13. Pekah's evil reign in Israel 15:27-31

Though the writer did not clarify this point, it seems that Pekah had been ruling over Israel in Gilead since 752 B.C., the year Menahem assassinated Shallum. This must be the case in view of the writer's chronological references.¹⁴⁰ He wrote that in the fifty-second year of Azariah, Pekah became king over Israel in Samaria. Apparently Pekah never accepted Menahem's claim to Israel's throne and set up a rival government on the east side of the Jordan River in Gilead. In 740 B.C. he assassinated Pekahiah in Samaria, moved there, and reigned until 732 B.C.

Part of Pekah's reason for opposing Menahem seems to have been a difference in foreign policy. Menahem was willing to submit to Assyrian control (vv. 19-20). Pekah evidently favored a harder line of resistance since he made a treaty with Rezin, the king of Damascus, against Assyria. This resulted in Tiglath-Pileser invading Israel, along with Philistia and Aram, in 734-732 B.C. (2 Chron. 28:5-8). He captured much of Israel's territory (v. 29) and deported many Israelites to Assyria about 733 B.C.

"This was to be the beginning of the elimination of Israel as an independent state."¹⁴¹

Israel's defeat encouraged Hoshea to assassinate Pekah and succeed him in 732 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser claimed to have had a hand in setting Hoshea on Israel's throne.¹⁴² Obviously Assyria was in control of affairs in Israel at this time.

14. Jotham's good reign in Judah 15:32-38

Jotham's 16-year reign over Judah (750-735 B.C.) began while Pekah was in power in Gilead. He shared the last four of these years with his coregent son Ahaz.

"Jotham" ("Yahweh is Perfect") added the upper gate of the temple (v. 35), an opening between the outer and inner courts on the north side of the temple near the altar of burnt offerings. Other names for it were the upper Benjamin gate (Jer. 20:2), the new gate (Jer. 26:10; 36:10), the north gate (Ezek. 8:3), and the altar gate (Ezek. 8:5). This shows his concern for Yahweh's reputation in Judah (cf. 2 Chron. 27:3-6).

¹⁴⁰See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 118-40.

¹⁴¹Wiseman, p. 256.

¹⁴²James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 284.

The Syro-Ephraimitic alliance, to which the writer referred briefly in verse 37, features significantly in 16:5-8 and Isaiah 7:1-17. Judah's neighbors to the north and east were eager to secure Judah's help in combating the growing Assyrian threat. They turned against Judah because Judah did not join them (v. 37). The reasons for this will follow in the discussion of Ahaz, Judah's king (ch. 16).¹⁴³

15. Ahaz's evil reign in Judah ch. 16

"Ahaz" ("He Has Grasped") reigned for 16 years (732-715 B.C.). Before that he was his father Jotham's coregent for four years (735-732 B.C.).¹⁴⁴

Ahaz's assessment 16:1-4

Pekah's seventeenth year (v. 1) was 735 B.C. Ahaz did not follow David's example of godliness (v. 2). Rather he followed the kings of Israel and those of his pagan neighbors and went so far as offering at least one of his sons as a human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31; cf. 3:27).¹⁴⁵ These sacrificial rites took place near the confluence of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys at a place called Topheth. This place developed a reputation for wickedness, and then filth, because it became a constantly burning garbage heap. Jesus compared it to the place of eternal punishment (Gehenna; cf. Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; et al).

". . . desperate to solve his political problems, Judah's king becomes a dedicated polytheist in hopes that some god may deliver him from his trouble."¹⁴⁶

Ahaz's folly 16:5-9

Aram had captured the town of Elath from Judah (v. 6; cf. 14:22). When Aram and Israel threatened to invade Judah, Ahaz did not seek Yahweh but Tiglath-Pileser for deliverance. Rather than putting himself under Yahweh's direction, he appealed to the king of Assyria as his "servant" and his "son" (v. 7). This reflects a failure to see his role under God and God's role over Israel. Instead of making sacrifices to Yahweh, he sent them to Tiglath-Pileser (v. 8).

Ahaz's apostasy 16:10-18

As Ahab had imported Baal worship from Phoenicia, so Ahaz imported a foreign altar from Damascus (cf. Amaziah of Judah's Edomite idols, 2 Chron. 25:14, 20). As Judah's king-priest, he led the nation in worshipping at an altar different from what Yahweh had

¹⁴³See B. Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimitic War Reconsidered," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34:2 (April 1972):153-65.

¹⁴⁴For explanation of the complexities of dating Ahaz's vice-regency under Jotham (744-735 B.C.) and his coregency with Jotham (735-732 B.C.), see Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, pp. 402-5. See also Hubbard, p. 201.

¹⁴⁵See Wiseman, pp. 260-61.

¹⁴⁶House, p. 336.

specified (Exod. 27:1-8). Furthermore, he removed the altar God had established from the place God had said it should occupy in the temple courtyard (Exod. 40:6, 29).

"Readers could hardly miss the similarities between Jeroboam, the father of institutionalized idolatry in Israel, and Ahaz, the Judahite king who makes polytheism acceptable nationwide."¹⁴⁷

Ahaz did not completely discard the worship God had prescribed, but he changed it according to his liking, thus claiming God's authority (v. 15). The high priest unfortunately cooperated with the king. Ahaz likewise changed the other temple furnishings to please the Assyrian king (v. 18).¹⁴⁸

Ahaz's death 16:19-20

The godly people in Judah gave Ahaz a respectable burial (v. 20), but they did not honor him by burying him in the royal sepulchers with the good Judean kings (2 Chron. 28:27).

Ahaz reduced Judah to a new low politically and spiritually. The forces that influenced him were his culture and the people around him rather than God's Word.

"When Ahaz dies about 715 B.C., he is succeeded by Hezekiah, his son. He leaves a legacy of appeasement and syncretism unmatched to this time. Assyria can count on him for money, loyalty, and zealous acceptance of their gods. Judah's king seems genuinely pleased to serve a powerful master who can deliver him from regional foes. No doubt he feels safe, but the historian duly notes the ways in which he has exceeded Jeroboam's wickedness. If Jeroboam's practices are worth condemning, what will happen to a nation who rejects the Lord even more clearly?"¹⁴⁹

16. Hoshea's evil reign in Israel 17:1-6

"Hoshea" ("Yahweh Saves") was the Northern Kingdom's last king. He reigned in Samaria for 9 years (732-722 B.C.). He was a bad king, but he was not as bad as his predecessors. A seal of Abdi, an official of Hoshea, has been discovered that bears the name of this Israelite king, who was heretofore unmentioned outside the Bible.¹⁵⁰

Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) had succeeded his father Tiglath-Pileser III on Assyria's throne.¹⁵¹ Hoshea became the servant of Assyria rather than of Yahweh (v. 3). However, he was not a faithful servant even of Shalmaneser (v. 4). This led to the end of his

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 337.

¹⁴⁸For a more favorable evaluation of Ahaz's actions, see Richard Nelson, "The Altar of Ahaz: A Revisionist View," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):267-76.

¹⁴⁹House, p. 338.

¹⁵⁰See Andre Lemaire, "Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21:6 (November-December 1995):49-52.

¹⁵¹See Finegan, p. 208.

freedom and the siege of his capital (vv. 4-5). Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., and a second deportation of the population to various parts of the Assyrian empire followed in harmony with Assyria's policy toward conquered peoples (cf. 15:29).¹⁵²

Josephus' chronological references at this point are very specific but, I believe, inaccurate.

"So the ten tribes of the Israelites were removed out of Judea, nine hundred and forty-seven years after their forefathers were come out of the land of Egypt, and possessed themselves of this country, but eight hundred years after Joshua had been their leader, and as I have already observed, two hundred and forty years, seven months, and seven days, after they had revolted from Rehoboam, the grandson of David, and had given the kingdom to Jeroboam."¹⁵³

"So" (v. 4) may be the Hebrew pronunciation of the Egyptian capital, Sais, rather than the name of a pharaoh.¹⁵⁴ The verse so translated would read ". . . who had sent messengers to So [to the] king of Egypt," as in the NIV margin. Alternatively "So" may have been Pharaoh Tefnakht¹⁵⁵ or Pharaoh Piankhy.¹⁵⁶

As God had promised, the Israelites' apostasy had resulted in their scattering among other peoples (Deut. 28:64). According to 1 Chronicles 7, some members of the ten northern tribes returned to the Promised Land at the end of the 70-year Babylonian Captivity. Apparently most of the Northern Kingdom exiles intermarried and lost their identity among the other Semitic people among whom they went to live. There is no evidence that the "ten lost tribes" became the American Indians, the Afghans, the Armenians, the Nestorians, or the English, as various modern cults claim.¹⁵⁷

Israel had suffered for 209 years under 20 different kings from 9 different families, sometimes called dynasties. The heads of these ruling families were Jeroboam I (two kings), Baasha (two kings), Zimri (two kings), Omri (four kings), Jehu (five kings), Shallum (one king), Menahem (two kings), Pekah (one king), and Hoshea (one king). Seven of these kings died at the hands of assassins: Nadab, Elah, Jehoram, Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah. All of them were evil. They did not comply with the will of Yahweh as contained in the Mosaic Law and the revelations of His prophets.

¹⁵²See Luckenbill, 2:2, 26-27. See Rodger C. Young, "When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for Precision in Biblical Chronologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:4 (December 2004):577-95, for a reexamination of Thiele's dates; and idem, "Tables of Reign Lengths from the Hebrew Court Recorders," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (June 2005):225-48.

¹⁵³Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:14:1.

¹⁵⁴H. Goedicke, "The End of So, King of Egypt," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 171 (1963):64-66.

¹⁵⁵John Day, "The Problem of 'So, King of Egypt' in 2 Kings 17:4," *Vetus Testamentum* 42:3 (July 1992):289-301.

¹⁵⁶Alberto R. W. Green, "The Identity of King So of Egypt—An Alternative Interpretation," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52:2 (April 1993):99-108. On the subject of Egyptian history during this period, see Hallo and Simpson, pp. 287-92.

¹⁵⁷See *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 446.

17. The captivity of the Northern Kingdom 17:7-41

The writer of Kings took special pains to explain the reasons for and the results of Israel's captivity.

The reasons for the captivity 17:7-23

In this section the writer catalogued Israel's transgressions of God's Word that resulted in her going into captivity. Ironically, Israel's last king had sought help from Egypt, from which Israel had fled 724 years earlier.

- (1) They feared other gods (v. 7; cf. Exod. 20:3; Judg. 6:10).
- (2) They adopted Canaanite customs (v. 8; cf. Lev. 18:3; Deut. 18:9).
- (3) They adopted customs condemned by the Mosaic Law (v. 8; cf. 16:3; 17:19).
- (4) They practiced secret sins (v. 9).
- (5) They built pagan high places (v. 9; cf. Deut. 12:2-7, 13-14).
- (6) They made many sacred pillars and Asherim (v. 10; cf. Exod. 34:12-14).
- (7) They burned incense to other gods (v. 11).
- (8) They did evil things that provoked Yahweh (v. 11).
- (9) They served idols (v. 12; cf. Exod. 20:4).
- (10) They refused to heed God's warnings (vv. 13-14).
- (11) They became obstinate (v. 14; cf. Exod. 32:9; 33:3).
- (12) They rejected God's statutes (v. 15).
- (13) They rejected God's covenant (v. 15; cf. Exod. 24:6-8; Deut. 29:25).
- (14) They pursued vanity (v. 15; cf. Deut. 32:21).
- (15) They became vain (v. 15).
- (16) They followed foreign nations (v. 15; cf. Deut. 12:30-31).
- (17) They forsook Yahweh's commandments (v. 16).
- (18) They made molten calves (v. 16; cf. Exod. 20:4).
- (19) They made an Asherah (v. 16; cf. Exod. 20:4).
- (20) They worshipped the stars (v. 16; cf. Deut. 4:15, 19; Amos 5:26).
- (21) They served Baal (v. 16).
- (22) They practiced child sacrifice (v. 17; cf. Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31).
- (23) They practiced witchcraft (v. 17; cf. Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10-12).
- (24) They sold themselves to do evil (v. 17; cf. 21:20).

Though God allowed Judah to remain, she was not innocent (v. 19).

The cult of Jeroboam was a major source of Israel's apostasy (vv. 21-22).

"The unbelieving world might tell Christians not to worry about the reason for suffering. 'What will be will be.' But the Scriptures indicate that at least sometimes there are knowable reasons why a person or nation does or does not suffer. Discerning those reasons may not be simple, but what is

clear from most of Israel's history is that defiant, consistent rejection of God's standards leads to judgment by suffering."¹⁵⁸

The results of the captivity 17:24-41

The immediate result of the captivity (vv. 24-33) was twofold. The Assyrians deported many Israelites to other places in the Assyrian Empire, and they imported other people from the empire into the newly formed Assyrian province that they called Samaria (v. 24). The king who did this was probably Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). Shalmaneser died either during or shortly after the siege of Samaria. These imported foreigners—whom Josephus called "Cutheans, who had formerly belonged to the inner parts of Persia and Media"¹⁵⁹—eventually intermarried with the Jews who remained in the land and probably were the ancestors of the Samaritans of Jesus' day (cf. John 4:9). As polytheists the Assyrians did not hesitate to worship Yahweh as well as their other gods (cf. Exod. 20:3). They had no priestly caste but appointed anyone as a priest (v. 32). The syncretistic worship of Yahweh and false gods prevailed (vv. 32-33). The writer again emphasized the judgment of God that came on the Israelites who remained in the land for their apostasy.

The continuing result of the captivity (vv. 34-41) was the same. In this section of verses the theme of Israel's disobedience reaches a climax. In verses 35-39 there are several loose quotations of passages from the Mosaic Law: Exodus 6:6; 9:15; 14:15-30; 20:4-5, 23; Leviticus 19:32; Deuteronomy 4:23, 34; 5:6, 15, 32; 6:12-13; and 7:11, 25.

This chapter concludes the second major section of Kings: the history of the Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17). The lessons of the history of this period that the writer emphasized could not be clearer.

"God's people had become disloyal to their Suzerain who had brought them redemptively out of Egyptian servitude. They had expressed disloyalty by worshipping other gods (17:15-17). And they did all this despite his persistent reminders to them through his spokesmen, the prophets, that what they were doing constituted high treason. The inevitable result was the judgment of God, a judgment which took the form of exile from the land of promise."¹⁶⁰

III. THE SURVIVING KINGDOM CHS. 18—25

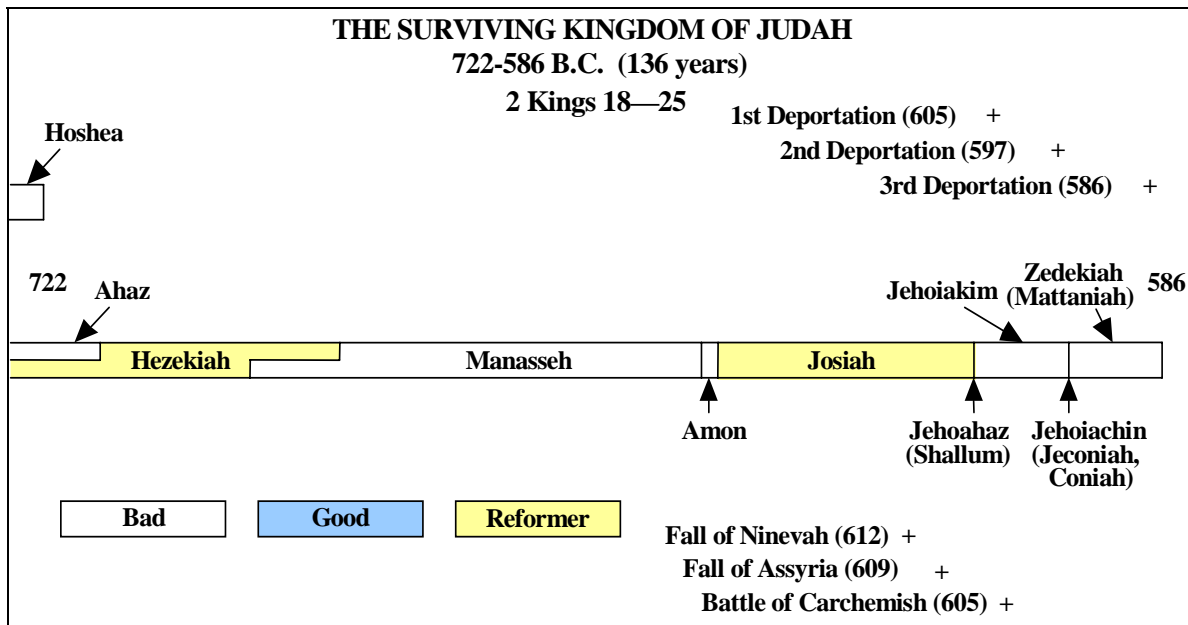
In this third major section of 1 and 2 Kings, the writer showed that the captivity of Judah was also a natural consequence of not following the covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The remaining kings in 2 Kings all ruled over the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

¹⁵⁸Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Historical Books," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁹Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:9:7. Cf. *ibid.*, 9:14:3; 11:2:1.

¹⁶⁰Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 399. See also Pauline Viviano, "2 Kings 17: A Rhetorical and Form Critical Analysis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (October 1987):548-49.

This part of the book concludes with events that happened in Judah immediately following the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C.



A. HEZEKIAH'S GOOD REIGN CHS. 18—20

The writer of Kings devoted more attention to Hezekiah than to any Hebrew king except Solomon.

1. Hezekiah's goodness 18:1-12

"Hezekiah" ("Yahweh Has Strengthened") began reigning as his father Ahaz's vice-regent in 729 B.C. and ruled as such for 14 years. In 715 B.C. he began his sole rule over Judah that lasted until 697 B.C. (18 years). He then reigned with his son Manasseh who served as his vice-regent for 11 more years (697-686 B.C.). His 29-year reign (v. 2) was from 715-686 B.C.¹⁶¹

The writer recorded that only three other kings did right as David had done: Asa (1 Kings 15:11), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:3), and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-2). These were the other three of Judah's four reforming kings. The only other king, beside Hezekiah, that the writer said removed the high places (v. 4), was Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:6). Someone must have rebuilt them after Hezekiah removed them. Nehushtan (v. 4) was the name that someone had given to Moses' bronze serpent. This word in Hebrew sounds similar to the Hebrew words for bronze, snake, and unclean thing. The Israelites had come to worship the object that had been a symbol of Yahweh's healing grace.

¹⁶¹See J. Barton Payne, "The Relationship of the Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:501 (1969):40-52; and Andrew Steinmann, "The Chronology of 2 Kings 15—18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:4 (December 1987):391-97.

"How easy it is for human nature to want to honor religious relics that have no power!"¹⁶²

Regarding his faith, Hezekiah was the greatest Judahite king (v. 5). He did not depart from Yahweh later in life (v. 6). Consequently God's blessing rested on him (v. 7; cf. 2 Chron. 29—31). His rebellion against Sennacherib (v. 7) precipitated Assyria's invasion of Judah (18:3—19:36). This was a reversal of his father Ahaz's policy of allying with Assyria (16:7-9). God gave him consistent victory over the Philistines (v. 8).

Verses 9-12 serve a double purpose. They relate the Assyrian defeat of Samaria to Hezekiah's reign, and they explain again the spiritual reason for that defeat (v. 12). Verses 11 and 12 are a concise statement of the purpose of the books of Kings. Hezekiah's fourth year (v. 9) was 725 B.C., the fourth year of his coregency with Ahaz.

2. Sennacherib's challenge to Hezekiah 18:13-37

Samaria's conqueror, Shalmaneser V, died in 722 B.C. shortly after his conquest. His successor, Sargon II (722-705 B.C.), carried out the deportation of the Israelites. The king who followed him was Sennacherib (705-681 B.C., v. 13).¹⁶³ Hezekiah's fourteenth year (v. 13) as sole ruler over Judah was 701 B.C.

Sennacherib's inscriptions claim that he conquered 46 strong cities of Hezekiah, plus many villages.¹⁶⁴ In preparation for his siege of Jerusalem, the Assyrian king set up his headquarters at Lachish, 28 miles to the southwest of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had joined an alliance with Phoenicia, Philistia, and Egypt to resist Assyria. He admitted to Sennacherib that this was a mistake (v. 14). Hezekiah offered to pay whatever Sennacherib would take to avoid a siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib demanded about 11 tons of silver and one ton of gold, which Hezekiah paid. He did so by stripping the palace and temple that the king had previously re-overlaid to glorify Yahweh (v. 16).

"In Judah silver appears to have been more valuable than gold."¹⁶⁵

Sennacherib accepted the ransom but would not abandon his goal of taking Judah's capital. The upper pool (v. 17) was the pool at the Gihon spring on Jerusalem's east side. From this pool water ran down into the Kidron Valley to a field where the people did their laundry. This was close to the wall of Jerusalem and was a busy area. Rabshakeh stood at the very spot where Isaiah had stood when he warned King Ahaz against making an alliance with Assyria (cf. Isa. 7:3-9). Hezekiah sent three of his officials to negotiate with the three representatives that Sennacherib had sent.

"Rabshakeh" was an Assyrian title equivalent to commander-in-chief of the army. The commander assumed Hezekiah was trusting in his Egyptian alliance and that Judah's gods were no better than those of the other nations. He said that even if the Assyrians provided

¹⁶²Wiersbe, p. 570.

¹⁶³See Finegan, pp. 210-14.

¹⁶⁴See *ibid.*, pp. 192-95, for information about the Lachish Letters.

¹⁶⁵Wiseman, p. 274.

2,000 horses for Hezekiah, perhaps what Egypt might have contributed, Judah could not win. The commander's claim that Yahweh had sent Sennacherib against Judah (v. 25) may or may not have been true (cf. Isa. 45:1-6).

Because many Judahites were hearing the negotiations taking place and would have become fearful as a result, Hezekiah's officials asked that they proceed in the Aramaic language. Only the educated leaders of Israel understood Aramaic (v. 26).

"Aramaic was the language of international diplomacy and . . . the normal medium of communication in such a situation."¹⁶⁶

However, the Assyrians wanted all the people to know that surrender would be better than resistance. The commander's references to the inability of the gods of Samaria would have been especially intimidating since many in Israel had worshipped Yahweh (v. 35).

The writer recorded this lengthy incident in Kings because it shows the central issues Judah faced. Would she trust in Yahweh or herself? God's enemies challenged Him again (cf. Exod. 7—11; 1 Sam. 17). Isaiah also recorded these events (18:13, 17—20:17) in Isaiah 36:1—38:8 and 39:1-8, as did the writer of Chronicles in 2 Chronicles 32:1-23.

3. Yahweh's immediate encouragement 19:1-13

Hezekiah's response to this crisis was to turn to Yahweh in prayer and to His prophet for an answer. He sensed his position under Yahweh's authority, humbled himself, and sought God's help (cf. 2 Sam. 7; 1 Kings 8). God rewarded Hezekiah's attitude and assured him of success because the Assyrians had challenged the reputation of Yahweh.

God's method of deliverance involved harassing the Assyrian army. First Libnah, a town a few miles northeast of Lachish, needed Sennacherib's attention. Then he received word that the king of Cush (southern Egypt) was coming to attack from the southwest, the direction opposite from Libnah and Jerusalem. These divinely sent diversions caused Sennacherib to suspend his siege of Jerusalem.

Finegan suggested that Sennacherib made a second invasion of Palestine after Tirhakah was actually ruling as king, that is after 689 or 684, and before his own (Sennacherib's) death in 681 B.C.

"In this case we might consider II Kings 18:13—19:8 as describing Sennacherib's first invasion when Hezekiah paid heavy tribute, and II Kings 19:9-37 with its mention of Tirhakah as king as referring to Sennacherib's second campaign."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶Auld, p. 240.

¹⁶⁷Finegan, p. 213.

4. Hezekiah's prayer 19:14-19

Sennacherib sent another warning to Hezekiah (vv. 10-13) that led him to pray again. Some scholars believe that Sennacherib conducted two campaigns against Jerusalem.¹⁶⁸ Hezekiah's model prayer shows the king's proper view of Yahweh, himself, and their relationship, all of which were in harmony with God's revelation. Hezekiah's concern was more for God's glory than for Judah's safety. Furthermore, he viewed deliverance as an occasion for Israel to fulfill the purpose for which God had raised her up (v. 19; cf. Exod. 19:5-6).

"God is the one Being in all the universe for whom seeking his own praise is the ultimately loving act. For him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When he does all things 'for the praise of his glory,' he preserves for us and offers to us the only thing in all the world which can satisfy our longings. God is for us! And the foundation of this love is that God has been, is now, and always will be, for himself."¹⁶⁹

5. Yahweh's answer 19:20-37

God sent Hezekiah the news of what He would do, and why, through Isaiah. The "virgin" daughter of Zion (v. 21) refers to Jerusalem as a city that a foreign foe had never violated. The "Holy One of Israel" (v. 22), a favorite name of God with Isaiah (cf. Isa. 5:24; 30:11-15; et al.), stresses His uniqueness and superiority. On some monuments Assyrian conquerors pictured themselves as leading their captives with a line that passed through rings that they had placed in the victims' noses.¹⁷⁰ God promised to do to them as they had done to others (v. 28; cf. Gal. 6:7).

An immediate sign helped Hezekiah believe in the long-range deliverance God promised (v. 29). Signs were either predictions of natural events, which came to pass and thus confirmed the prediction (cf. Exod. 3:12; 1 Sam. 2:34; Jer. 44:29), or outright miracles that proved God's work in history (cf. Isa. 7:14; 38:7).¹⁷¹ The Israelites had not been able to plant crops around Jerusalem because of the besieging Assyrians. God promised to feed His people for two years with what came up naturally, namely, as a result of previous cultivation. This was a blessing of fertility for trust and obedience (cf. Deut. 28:33). In the third year they would again return to their regular cycle of sowing and reaping. Like the crops, the remnant of the people remaining after the invasions of Israel and Judah would also multiply under God's blessing. As for Sennacherib, God would keep him away from Jerusalem (vv. 32-33).

"The mention of mice [in Herodotus' history] may well indicate that it was plague which struck Sennacherib's army, since mice are a Greek symbol of pestilence and since rats are carriers of the plague. Perhaps this is the

¹⁶⁸Bright, pp. 282-87.

¹⁶⁹John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁰Cf. Luckenbill, 2:314-15, 319.

¹⁷¹Keil, p. 454.

real explanation of the disaster referred to in II Kings 19:35 as a smiting of the army by an angel of the Lord, for plague and disease elsewhere in the Bible are regarded as a smiting by an angel of God (II Samuel 24:15-17; Acts 12:23)."¹⁷²

Ironically, the Assyrian king suffered assassination in the temple of his god, who was not able to deliver him. This was the very thing he had charged Yahweh with being unable to do for Judah. Extra-biblical sources corroborate Sennacherib's assassination, though they mention only one assassin.¹⁷³

Sennacherib's own account of his siege of Jerusalem is inscribed on clay cylinders, or prisms, now kept in the British Museum in London and in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.¹⁷⁴

6. Hezekiah's illness and recovery 20:1-11

"In those days" (v. 1) refers to the year Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem (701 B.C.) since Hezekiah died 15 years later in 686 B.C. His response to his illness was proper. He sought help from Yahweh primarily (v. 2). In contrast, King Ahaziah sought help from Baal-zebub when he was ill (1:1-2). God had promised long life to the godly under the Mosaic Covenant, and that promise was the basis of Hezekiah's appeal and God's answer. Fig poultices were a common treatment in the ancient world as a remedy for boils.¹⁷⁵ Hezekiah's physicians apparently did not prescribe this treatment.

"Despite his recovery, Hezekiah asks for a sign that he will in fact go back to the temple in three days. Rather than an indication of unbelief, his request should be viewed against the background of Ahaz's refusal of a sign in Isa 7:12. Isaiah gladly offers Hezekiah a choice of signs . . ."¹⁷⁶

God's sign guaranteed what He had promised. This was evidently a local miracle as were some others involving sunlight (cf. Exod. 10:21-23; Josh. 10:12-13).¹⁷⁷

7. The prophecy of Babylonian captivity 20:12-19

Merodach-baladan ruled as king of Babylon for two terms, 721-710 and 703-702 B.C. The event recorded in these verses evidently took place in 702 B.C.¹⁷⁸ Hezekiah appears to have let his visitors know the extent of Judah's financial strength because he favored Merodach-baladan and the Chaldeans against the then more powerful Assyrians.

¹⁷²Finegan, p. 214.

¹⁷³See Cogan and Tadmor, pp. 239-40.

¹⁷⁴Finegan, pp. 211-12, and fig. 77.

¹⁷⁵Cf. Keil, pp. 462-63; Wiseman, p. 287; Finegan, p. 172.

¹⁷⁶House, p. 373.

¹⁷⁷See John Davis and John Whitcomb, *A History of Israel*, p. 464.

¹⁷⁸John Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1090.

"His [Merodach-baladan's] search for allies in his resistance to Assyria may have occasioned the embassy to Hezekiah, especially because he had heard of Hezekiah's miraculous deliverance from the Assyrian army (2 Chr. 32:31)."¹⁷⁹

In pride, as a result of his healing, Hezekiah evidently wished to impress his Babylonian visitors with his wealth and power (cf. 2 Chron. 32:25, 31). Isaiah prophesied that Babylon would take Judah into captivity one day (vv. 17-18). While Hezekiah would have been sorry to hear this prophecy, he evidently accepted it as the Lord's will for Judah and was glad it would not happen in his lifetime (v. 19). Other interpretations are that he made a smug, self-serving comment, or that he took the message as a prayer that the disaster would be delayed as long as possible.¹⁸⁰ The first interpretation seems most consistent with Hezekiah's character. Babylon's future invasion came primarily as a result of Judah's sins. Hezekiah's unwise exposure of Judah's wealth on this occasion was not the major cause.

8. Hezekiah's death 20:20-21

Hezekiah's 1,777-foot long tunnel was a noteworthy accomplishment. It brought water from the Gihon spring outside the city wall, under the wall of Jerusalem, and into the city, specifically to the pool of Siloam. This made Jerusalem much more self-sufficient in times of invasion than it would have been otherwise.¹⁸¹

Hezekiah's reign was one of the best in Judah's history because of the king's humility and dependence on God, evidences of which the writer of Kings provided in abundance. Judah declined from then on, however, because most of the subsequent kings were wicked. Judah fell to the Babylonians exactly 100 years after Hezekiah died. The prophet Isaiah ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa. 1:1). Micah ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Mic. 1:1). Both eighth-century prophets ministered in the Southern Kingdom.

"Perhaps Hezekiah's only serious flaw is his inability to prepare Manasseh, his successor, to be like himself. On the other hand, how can anyone guarantee the quality of their children's life choices?"¹⁸²

"Between the death of Hezekiah and the final fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians there lay precisely a century (687-587). Seldom has a nation experienced so many dramatically sudden reversals of fortune in so relatively short a time. Through the first half of the period a vassal of Assyria, Judah then knew in rapid succession periods of independence and of subjection, first to Egypt then to Babylon, before finally destroying

¹⁷⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 648.

¹⁸⁰Peter R. Ackroyd, "An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38—39," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27:3 (August 1974):338-39.

¹⁸¹See Kathleen Kenyon, *Jerusalem*, pp. 69-71; and Finegan, pp. 190-91.

¹⁸²House, p. 376.

herself in futile rebellion against the latter. So quickly did these phases follow one another that it was possible for one man, as Jeremiah did, to have witnessed them all."¹⁸³

B. MANASSEH'S EVIL REIGN 21:1-18

"Manasseh" (lit. "Making Forgetful") began reigning as vice-regent with his father Hezekiah when he was 12 years old in 697 B.C. This arrangement continued for 11 years until Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. For a total of 55 years Manasseh was king of Judah (697-642 B.C.). He reigned longer than any Hebrew king, and he was Judah's worst king spiritually.

"Externally, the period was one of political stability. It is known as the Assyrian Peace, an era in which the kings Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.) reigned and brought the Assyrian Empire to its zenith."¹⁸⁴

"Manasseh was 'the Ahab of Judah' and the antithesis of the great David."¹⁸⁵

Among his serious sins, Manasseh built idol altars in Yahweh's temple (v. 4). This diminished the reputation of Yahweh considerably, as well as diverting worship from Him. Canaanite idolatry, Ahab's Baalism, Canaanite astral worship, Ahaz's human sacrifice, and Saul's spiritism were all heresies he revived even though the Law of Moses condemned them (Exod. 20:3-5). He did not follow David's example, he defiled the temple with idolatry, and he rejected the Mosaic Covenant. Thus he not only acted opposite to Hezekiah, but he also scorned the examples of Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. In his day the people were more wicked in their religious practices than even the Canaanites had been (v. 9).

Isaiah and Micah were two of the prophets that God had used to warn the nation before Manasseh's reign, and their influence undoubtedly continued after their deaths. According to Jewish tradition, Manasseh sawed Isaiah in two (cf. Heb. 11:37). The early church father Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) wrote that the Jews sawed him to death with a wooden saw.¹⁸⁶ However, this tradition is quite late and may be inaccurate. We have no record of who "the prophets" who ministered during Manasseh's reign were (v. 10; cf. 2 Chron. 33:10).

One of them might have been Nahum, whose recorded ministry was against Assyria. Some scholars believe Nahum ministered at about the same time as Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk, namely, after Manasseh's reign. I think Nahum probably ministered during Manasseh's reign (ca. 660-650 B.C.). Keil believed that Habakkuk was one of

¹⁸³Bright, p. 288.

¹⁸⁴*The Nelson . . .*, p. 649. Cf. Finegan, pp. 214-17, for more information about these two kings.

¹⁸⁵Wiseman, p. 291.

¹⁸⁶See also *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*, 5:1ff.

these prophets.¹⁸⁷ But it seems more likely that Habakkuk ministered later, during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.).

Not only did Manasseh apostatize himself, he also led the nation in departing from God (v. 11). The "line of Samaria" (v. 13) refers to the righteous standard that God had used to measure Samaria's fidelity to His will. The "plumb line of Ahab's house" (v. 13) was the same plumb line of righteousness by which God had judged Ahab's family. God would abandon His people temporarily but not permanently (v. 14; cf. Deut. 28:63-64). The "remnant" that God said He would "abandon" probably refers to the Southern Kingdom of Judah (cf. 17:18). It, too, in addition to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, would go into captivity.

Manasseh's murders included those of his own children (v. 6) as well as Isaiah, evidently. Manasseh's many sins stained Judah deeply. Even Josiah's later reforms could not avert God's judgment (23:36). His "garden variety" burial reflects the fact that his behavior resulted in his people esteeming him lightly. God had disciplined him personally (cf. 2 Chron. 33:11-13), and he had become a channel of God's discipline for Judah.

Perhaps we should view the fact that God allowed such a wicked king to rule his people so long, as an evidence of His longsuffering desire that Manasseh and Judah would repent. The king did repent later in life (2 Chron. 33:12-19).¹⁸⁸ His long life was not a blessing for faithfulness, as Hezekiah's had been, but an instrument of chastening for Judah.

C. AMON'S EVIL REIGN 21:19-26

Amon reigned two years (642-640 B.C.). Rather than continuing to follow the Lord, which his father's repentance encouraged, Amon reverted to the policies of Manasseh's earlier reign and rebelled against Yahweh completely. This provoked some of his officials to assassinate him (v. 23). Again we see that rebellion against God often leads to one's premature personal destruction (cf. 1 John 5:16). To their credit, the leaders of Judah executed the king's assassins and so prevented anarchy.

Amon may have been the only king of either Israel or Judah who bore the name of a foreign god. Amon-Re was the sun god of Egypt. His father may have named him in honor of this god. However, the Hebrew word *amon* means "faithful," so his name may not connect with Amon-Re.

D. JOSIAH'S GOOD REIGN 22:1—23:30

Since Josiah was eight years old when his father died at age 22, he must have been born when Amon was only 14. It was very common, both in the ancient Near East generally and in Israel, for kings to marry very young and to father children when they were early teenagers.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷C. F. Keil, "Habakkuk," in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, p. 52.

¹⁸⁸Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:3:2.

¹⁸⁹Nadav Na'aman, "Historical and Chronological Notes on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth Century B.C.," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986):83-91.

The years Josiah ruled were 640-609 B.C., 31 years. During his reign Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 B.C., as did the Assyrian Empire in 609 B.C., to Babylon. Thus world leadership passed from Assyria to Babylon during Josiah's reign.¹⁹⁰

1. Josiah's goodness 22:1-2

"Josiah" ("The Lord Supports") was one of Judah's best kings. He was one of the reformers who followed David's good example (v. 2) all his life. A young unnamed prophet from Judah had predicted his birth, by name, long before he was born (1 Kings 13:1-2; cf. Isa. 44:28; 45:1; Mic. 5:2).

2. Josiah's reforms 22:3—23:27

Josiah began to seek Yahweh when he was 16 years old and began initiating religious reforms when he was 20 (2 Chron. 34:3-7). His reforms were more extensive than those of any of his predecessors. One of them involved the repair of Solomon's temple (v. 5; cf. 12:4-16). He began this project when he was 26.

". . . Josiah rules during years in which Assyria fades but also those in which Babylon is not yet ready to rule as far west as Judah and in a time when Egypt does not yet attempt to rule the smaller nations north of the border. Judah thereby gets a rest from its constant role as political football."¹⁹¹

It seems probable that Manasseh or Amon had destroyed existing copies of Israel's covenant constitution since there is every reason to believe that Hezekiah knew the Mosaic Law (cf. chs. 18—20). This would not have been difficult because in ancient times there were few copies of even official documents.

Some scholars have interpreted 22:8-10 as meaning that Hilkiah found the Book of Deuteronomy, but it was not the writing of Moses. They have hypothesized that someone in Josiah's day composed this Deuteronomy about 621 B.C. to encourage centralization of worship in Jerusalem. Conservative scholars have rejected this late date theory of Deuteronomy for several reasons. The laws peculiar to it, and the nature of the commands that presuppose a wilderness wanderings context and anticipation of entrance into the Promised Land, argue against a late date of composition. Furthermore, the names of deity used in it, the detailed geographical data, and the anachronism of stressing centralization of worship in Jerusalem after the fall of the Northern Kingdom make this theory unlikely. "The book of the law" here seems to refer to the entire Torah (Pentateuch), not just the Book of Deuteronomy.

Josiah's shock at hearing the Law read points to the fact that people had been unfamiliar with it for a long time. Verse 13 is especially helpful in understanding Josiah's perception of and response to God's will. He was a genuinely humble man who trembled at the Word

¹⁹⁰For a detailed study of the chronology of this period, see A. Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 18:3 (1968):137-56.

¹⁹¹House, p. 382.

of the Lord. Josiah made monotheism the official theology again, but it is hard to say how many of the people abandoned other gods. The prophets who wrote in that time bewailed the lack of true godliness in the nation.

Other prophets beside Huldah lived in and around Jerusalem at this time: Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1), Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1), and perhaps Nahum and Habakkuk. Nevertheless, for reasons unexplained in the text, the king sought the prophetess Huldah in her residence in Jerusalem's Second Quarter (v. 14; i.e., the southern, lower part of the city topographically). His willingness to seek guidance from a woman demonstrates Josiah's humility. God would judge Judah, but He would spare Josiah because he humbled himself under Yahweh's authority (v. 19). The king would die in peace (v. 20). His death in 609 B.C. was four years before King Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem in 605 B.C.

Josiah died in battle (vv. 29-30). The promise of his dying in peace therefore probably means that he would die before God ended the peace of Jerusalem by bringing Nebuchadnezzar against it. Some commentators have taken the promise as referring to the fact that Josiah evidently died at peace with God.¹⁹²

Josiah did not wait for the completion of the temple renovation before he assembled the people and personally read some parts of the Mosaic Law to them (23:2). Perhaps he read the portions that dealt with God's covenant with Israel (i.e., Lev. 26; Deut. 28—30) or perhaps Deuteronomy 12—26 or 5—30.¹⁹³ He then rededicated himself to Yahweh, and the people renewed their commitment to the covenant as a nation (v. 3; cf. 2:3; Exod. 19:8; Josh. 24:21-24).

Putting the ashes, which burning the relics connected with Baal worship created, on the Bethel altar would have made it unclean (v. 4). Evidently Josiah scattered more ashes on the graves of the common people because they had been idolaters (v. 6). Male prostitutes had apparently been living in the side rooms of the temple (v. 7). The king excluded the Levitical priests who had offered sacrifices on the high places from serving at the rededicated altar. Nevertheless he permitted them to eat the unleavened bread the worshippers brought to the temple (v. 9; cf. Lev. 6:9 10, 16). Topheth was the place where child sacrifice had taken place (v. 10; cf. 16:3; Josh. 15:8).

"Some scholars equate Molech with a pagan deity such as the Ammonite god Milcom (I Kin. 11:5) or an individual Canaanite god (Lev. 20:1-5), whose worship was carried on in Jerusalem. Other scholars think that Molech was the name of a type of child sacrifice associated with Baal (see Jer. 7:31, 32; 19:5, 6; 32:35. Evidence of child sacrifice has been found in the excavations at the Phoenician city of Carthage."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²E.g., Patterson and Austel, p. 284.

¹⁹³Auld, p. 222.

¹⁹⁴*The Nelson . . .*, p. 653.

The people had also used horses and chariots to honor the sun (v. 11). This was a common practice in the ancient Near East.¹⁹⁵ The Mount of Destruction was the hill on the southern portion of the Mount of Olives, later known as the Hill of Corruption (cf. 1 Kings 11:5, 7).

Josiah finally destroyed Jeroboam's altar at Bethel (v. 15) and desecrated the site. A young prophet from Judah had predicted Josiah's actions back in Jeroboam's day (v. 16; cf. 1 Kings 13:2-3). "The prophet who came from Samaria" (v. 18) was the "old prophet living in Bethel," mentioned in 1 Kings 13:11. King Josiah even extended his purges into formerly Israelite territory (vv. 19-20).

Josiah also replaced pagan worship with revived Yahweh worship. He conducted his Passover celebration with more attention to the Law than anyone had done since the days of the judges. King Hezekiah had held a Passover (2 Chron. 30), but he had done so with some modification of the Mosaic Law (cf. 2 Chron. 30:13-20). Josiah was careful to conduct the Passover just as the Law required (cf. 2 Chron. 35:1-19). Teraphim (v. 24) were household gods that some people connected with oracles and sources of prosperity. Josiah was Judah's most careful king regarding the Mosaic Covenant (v. 25). He is the only king described with the exact wording of Deuteronomy 6:5: he turned to the Lord "with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might." Hezekiah was praiseworthy for his great trust in Yahweh (18:5), and Josiah excelled in his obedience to Yahweh.

Notice that in the sequence of reforms that the writer narrated, the discovery of the Law (22:8-13) that took place during the repairing of the temple (22:3-7) led to the other reforms. This order is another indication of the writer's purpose. He emphasized the centrality of the Law in Israel's life.¹⁹⁶ When leaders recommit themselves to following God's Word wholeheartedly, good things result for their followers.

3. Josiah's death 23:28-30

The king seems to have preferred Babylon to Assyria in his foreign policy. When Egyptian armies moved up the Mediterranean coast to join Assyria in resisting Babylonian advance westward, Josiah intercepted Pharaoh Neco II (609-595 B.C.) at Megiddo and tried to stop him.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately for Judah, the Egyptians killed Josiah there in 609 B.C. Egypt continued north, united with Assyria, and battled Babylon at Carchemish on the upper Euphrates River. There Babylon defeated the allies and broke the domination of the Assyrian Empire over the ancient Near Eastern world. The Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. was one of the most important in ancient Near Eastern history for this reason.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵Patterson and Austel, p. 287.

¹⁹⁶See Lyle Eslinger, "Josiah and the Torah Book: Comparison of 2 Kgs 22:1—23:28 and 2 Chr. 34:1—35:19," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):37-62.

¹⁹⁷See Finegan, pp. 129-30.

¹⁹⁸See the map "The Babylonian Empire" in Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 434.

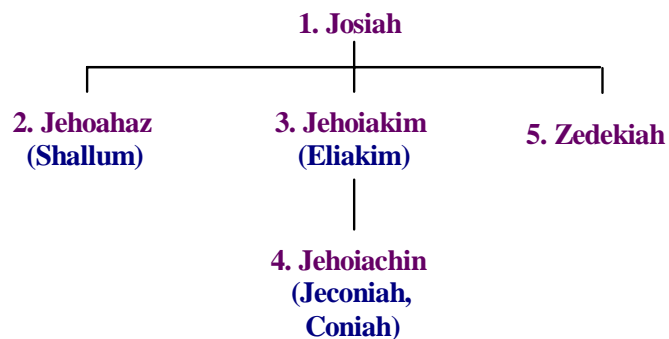
Josiah was a strong influence for righteousness in his day and a very capable ruler. The success of his far-reaching reforms indicates his ability to overcome much popular opinion that must have opposed his convictions. His influence for good extended even into the fallen territory of Israel.¹⁹⁹ Unfortunately, he died prematurely as a result of his unwise decision to challenge Pharaoh Neco (cf. 2 Chron. 35:20-27). Josephus wrote that the prophet Jeremiah composed an elegy to lament Josiah, which was still extant when Josephus wrote.²⁰⁰ Unfortunately, it no longer exists.

E. JEHOAHAZ'S EVIL REIGN 23:31-35

"Jehoahaz" ("The Lord Has Grasped"), whose other name was Shallum, was the middle of Josiah's three sons, all of whom ruled Judah after Josiah. Jehoahaz was the people's choice (v. 31), but he reigned for only three months in 609 B.C.

When Pharaoh Neco defeated Josiah at Megiddo (v. 29), Judah fell under Egyptian control. Neco summoned Josiah's successor Jehoahaz to meet him at Riblah. This town stood about 65 miles north of Damascus in central Aramea. The meeting took place before the battle of Carchemish. Neco found Jehoahaz obstinate, as his father had been, so he imprisoned him and sent him back to Egypt (v. 34) where he died later (Jer. 22:10-12). Neco also imposed a heavy tax on Judah (v. 33) and installed Jehoahaz's older brother Eliakim on Judah's throne as his puppet. The naming of a person shows superiority over that person. Neco was declaring his sovereignty over Judah's king by renaming him Jehoiakim.

The Last Five Kings of Judah



F. JEHOIAKIM'S EVIL REIGN 23:36—24:7

"Jehoiakim" (lit. "Yahweh Has Established"), formerly named "Eliakim" (lit. "God Establishes"), reigned as a puppet king for 11 years (609-598 B.C.). He was a weak ruler who did not stand up for Judah's interests against her hostile enemies.

In 605 B.C. Prince Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army of his father Nabopolassar against the allied forces of Assyria and Egypt and defeated them at Carchemish in Syria.²⁰¹ This victory, as previously explained, gave Babylon supremacy in the ancient Near East. With Babylon's victory Egypt's vassals, including Judah, came under

¹⁹⁹See the map of his kingdom in Wiseman, p. 295.

²⁰⁰Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:5:1.

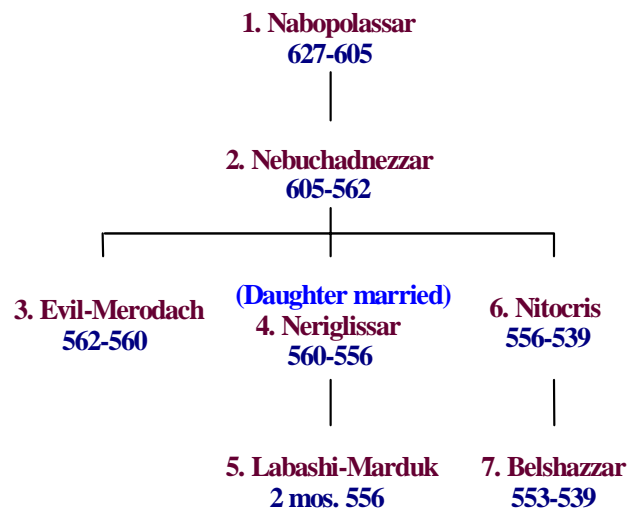
²⁰¹See Finegan, pp. 220-25.

Babylon's control. Shortly after that event, in the same year that Nabopolassar died, Nebuchadnezzar succeeded him. Nebuchadnezzar then moved south and invaded Judah (605 B.C.). He took some captives to Babylon including Daniel (Dan. 1:1-3). This was the first of Judah's three deportations in which the Babylonians took groups of Judahites to Babylon.

Jehoiakim submitted to Nebuchadnezzar for three years and, according to Josephus, paid him tribute of 100 talents of silver and a talent of gold.²⁰² But then Jehoiakim rebelled. He appealed to Egypt for help unsuccessfully (24:1, 7). Foreign raiders who sought to take advantage of her weakened condition besieged Judah (24:2). The Babylonians then took Jehoiakim to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6). Later they allowed him to return to Jerusalem where he died (Jer. 22:19).

"The name 'Chaldeans' [v. 2] originally applied to certain inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia. But by the neo-Babylonian period, the term Chaldean had become identified with Babylonians, and Babylonia was called Chaldea. After the fall of the Chaldean or Neo-Babylonian Empire, the term Chaldean was used to mean 'soothsayer' (see. Dan. 2:2). In this verse the ethnic sense of the term is meant."²⁰³

Kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire



Jehoiakim did little to postpone God's judgment on Judah for her previous sins. The prophet Jeremiah despised him for his wickedness (Jer. 22:18-19; 26:20-23; 36).

"He was of a wicked disposition, and ready to do mischief; nor was he either religious towards God, or good-natured towards men."²⁰⁴

G. JEHOIACHIN'S EVIL REIGN 24:8-17

Jehoiakim's son "Jehoiachin" ("The Lord Has Appointed"), whose other names were Jeconiah and Coniah, succeeded him on the throne but only reigned for three months (598-597 B.C.). When Nebuchadnezzar's troops were besieging Jerusalem, the Babylonian king personally visited Judah's capital, and Jehoiachin surrendered to him (v. 12).²⁰⁵ The invasion fulfilled the Lord's warning to Solomon about apostasy in

²⁰²Ibid., 10:5:2.

²⁰³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 655.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵See Finegan, pp. 225-27.

1 Kings 9:6-9. A large deportation of Judah's population followed in 597 B.C. Josephus numbered the deportees at 10,832.²⁰⁶ None of Jehoiachin's sons ruled Judah, as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 22:30). Rather, Nebuchadnezzar set up Jehoiakim's younger brother, "Mattaniah" ("The Gift of Yahweh") on the throne—as his puppet-king—and exercised his sovereign prerogative by changing his name to "Zedekiah" (v. 17). The Jewish people, however, seem to have continued to regard Jehoiachin as the rightful heir to David's throne until his death.²⁰⁷

H. ZEDEKIAH'S EVIL REIGN 24:18—25:7

Zedekiah (Mattaniah) was Josiah's third son to rule over Judah. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (v. 20) by making a treaty with Pharaoh Hophra (589-570 B.C.), being pressured by nationalists in Judah (cf. Jer. 37—38).

"Clearly, he lacks the moral fiber to be more than what he is, a man who gauges each situation by how long its results can keep him in power."²⁰⁸

Jerusalem was under siege for about eighteen months (588-586 B.C.; 25:1-2).²⁰⁹ Josephus described it this way.

"Now the king of Babylon was very intent and earnest upon the siege of Jerusalem; and he erected towers upon great banks of earth and from them repelled those that stood upon the walls: he also made a great number of such banks round about the whole city, the height of which was equal to those walls."²¹⁰

The resulting famine that the residents experienced (v. 3) was only one of many that the Israelites underwent for their rebellion against God. Yahweh again withheld fertility as a punishment for apostasy. Jerusalem finally fell in 586 B.C. Some scholars believe it fell in 587 B.C.²¹¹ The Babylonians captured King Zedekiah while he was trying to escape and took him to Riblah (cf. 23:33) where Nebuchadnezzar passed judgment on him. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's heirs to the throne thus ending his fertility, blinded him (cf. Rev. 3:17), and bound him with bronze shackles (v. 7). All of these measures also represented the fate of the nation the king led. The Israelites were now without royal leadership, spiritually blind, and physically bound. The blinding of prisoners was a common practice in the ancient East (cf. Judg. 16:21).²¹² Josephus recorded that Nebuchadnezzar also took the high priest "Josedek" captive to Babylon.²¹³

²⁰⁶Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:7:1.

²⁰⁷William Albright, "Seal of Eliakim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932):91-92. Cf. 25:27-30.

²⁰⁸House, p. 395.

²⁰⁹Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:7:4.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 10:8:1.

²¹¹E.g., Rodger C. Young, "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:1 (March 2004):21-38.

²¹²Andre Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, p. 97.

²¹³Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:8:5.

"The lesson of Samaria's fall and exile should have been learned."²¹⁴

". . . the deuteronomistic history, which extends from Joshua through 2 Kings 25, begins victoriously on the plains of Jericho (Josh. 1—7) and ends in tragic defeat on the plains of Jericho (2 Kings 25:5)."²¹⁵

These bracketing references to the plains of Jericho are an indication of the narrative unity of this section of Scripture.

Josephus, who reflects some traditional Jewish interpretations of Scripture, wrote the following about Zedekiah.

"It happened that the two prophets [Jeremiah and Ezekiel] agreed with one another in what they said as to all other things, that the city should be taken, and Zedekiah himself should be taken captive; but Ezekiel disagreed with him [Jeremiah], and said, that Zedekiah should not see Babylon [Ezek. 12:12-13]; while Jeremiah said to him, that the king of Babylon should carry him away thither in bonds [Jer. 32:4-5]; and because they did not both say the same thing as to this circumstance, he [Zedekiah] disbelieved what they both appeared to agree in, and condemned them as not speaking truth therein, although all the things foretold him did come to pass according to their prophecies . . ."²¹⁶

"And after this manner have the kings of David's race ended their lives, being in number twenty-one, until the last king, who all together reigned five hundred and fourteen years, and six months, and ten days: of whom Saul, who was their first king, retained the government twenty years, though he was not of the same tribe with the rest."²¹⁷

I. THE CAPTIVITY OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM 25:8-30

Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's commander-in-chief, returned to destroy Jerusalem more thoroughly and to preclude any successful national uprising in Judah. Berosus, an ancient Chaldean historian, confirmed the destruction of the city, the temple, and the captivity of the people.²¹⁸

His burning of Yahweh's house (v. 9) was a statement that the Babylonians had overcome Yahweh as much as it was an effort to keep the remaining Judahites from worshipping Him. This act would have thoroughly demoralized even the godly in Judah, since in the ancient Near East the condition of the house (temple) of a god reflected on that god's

²¹⁴Wiseman, p. 312.

²¹⁵J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):8.

²¹⁶Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:7:2. Cf. *ibid.*, 10:8:2.

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 10:8:4.

²¹⁸Cited in *idem, Against Apion*, 1:19.

reputation. (Josephus claimed that the temple had stood 470 years, six months, and 10 days after it was built, 1,957 years, six months, and 10 days after the Flood; and 3,513 years, six months, and 10 days after the creation of Adam.²¹⁹ He also counted the time from the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the fall of the Southern Kingdom as 130 years, six months, and 10 days.²²⁰)

The breaking down of Jerusalem's walls (v. 10) prevented the inhabitants from defending themselves but also visualized the fact that Judah no longer had any defense. Yahweh had been her defense. The third deportation removed all but the poorest of the people from the land (vv. 11-12).

The writer's emphasis on the desecration of Yahweh's temple (vv. 13-17) illustrates God's abandonment of His people (cf. 1 Kings 9:7-9). His special interest in the pillars (v. 17) draws attention to the fact that Israel, which God had established (Jachin), had suffered destruction. Israel's strength (Boaz) had also departed from her because of her apostasy (cf. Samson). Most scholars believe the Babylonians either destroyed the ark of the covenant or took it to Babylon from which it never returned to Jerusalem (but cf. 2 Chron. 5:9). A few believe the Jews hid it under the temple esplanade.

The Babylonians also cut the priesthood back (vv. 18-21) so the people could not unite around it and rebel. (Josephus provided a list of the 18 high priests who served from Solomon's time to Zedekiah's.²²¹) Its temporary termination also meant that Israel was no longer able to worship God as He had prescribed because she had been unfaithful to Him. Access to God as the Mosaic Law specified was no longer possible. Both the temple furnishings and the priesthood that God had ordained for access to Himself were no longer available to the people. Israel could no longer function as a kingdom of priests as God had intended her to live (Exod. 19:5-6).

There were three Babylonian invasions of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. The first occurred in 605 B.C., during Jehoiakim's reign, when Nebuchadnezzar took many of the nobles captive, including Daniel and his three friends. The second invasion and deportation occurred in 597, during the reign of Jehoiachin, when Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin, Ezekiel, and about 10,000 other Jews into exile. The third invasion and deportation took place in 586, during the reign of Zedekiah, when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took Zedekiah and all but the poorest of the remaining Jews captive. The Jews returned to the land from Babylon in three waves: in 536, 458, and 444 B.C.

Ezekiel and Daniel both ministered in Babylon during the Captivity: Ezekiel to the exiles in their settlement, and Daniel to the Babylonians and Medo-Persians in their capitals. The context of the Book of Esther is also the Babylonian captivity and the Persian capital.

²¹⁹Idem, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:8:5.

²²⁰Ibid., 10:9:7.

²²¹Ibid., 10:8:6.

"In the exile and beyond it, Judaism was born."²²²

By this, Bright meant the present form of Israelite worship that operates around the world today without a temple and Levitical priesthood.

Gedaliah (v. 22) was a descendant of Josiah's secretary (of state? 22:3). He was a friend of Jeremiah (Jer. 39:14) who followed that prophet's advice to cooperate with the Babylonians. Ishmael (v. 25) possessed royal blood and evidently wanted to rule over Judah (cf. Jer. 41:2). Mizpah, the Babylonian provincial capital, was just seven miles north of Jerusalem (cf. 1 Sam. 7:5-12).

"It is not altogether clear whether this [Gedaliah's assassination] is in the same year that Jerusalem fell or not. The wall was breached in the fourth month (=early July; Jer 39:2) and Nebuzaradan came and burned the palace, the temple, and many of the houses and tore down the wall in the fifth month (=early August; Jer 52:12). That would have left time between the fifth month and the seventh month (October) to gather in the harvest of grapes, dates and figs, and olives (Jer 40:12). However, many commentators feel that too much activity takes place in too short a time for this to have been in the same year and posit that it happened the following year or even five years later when a further deportation took place, possibly in retaliation for the murder of Gedaliah and the Babylonian garrison at Mizpah (Jer 52:30). The assassination of Gedaliah had momentous consequences and was commemorated in one of the post exilic fast days lamenting the fall of Jerusalem (Zech 8:19)."²²³

It is ironic that the Judahites who rebelled against the Babylonians and God's will in an attempt to secure their independence ended up fleeing back to Egypt. Their forefathers had been slaves there, and God had liberated them from Egypt 850 years earlier (v. 26; cf. Deut. 28:68).

In 560 B.C., the Babylonian king Evilmerodach (562-560 B.C.) permitted Jehoiachin to enjoy a measure of freedom. Perhaps the writer of Kings chose to end his book on this positive note because in the Abrahamic Covenant, God had promised that He would never abandon His chosen people completely (Gen. 12:1-3, 7). In the Mosaic Covenant, He also assured them that if they repented, He would bring them back into their land (Deut. 30:1-5; cf. 1 Kings 8:46-53). God's mercy to Jehoiachin also points to the continuation of the Davidic dynasty that God had promised would never end (2 Sam. 7:16). God's mercy to His people is one of the persistently recurring motifs in Kings.

2 Kings closes on a positive note (25:27-30). The writer takes us back to the covenant promises of God in the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants. He did not cut off the line of David. God is faithful to His promises. The way was now open for return and restoration, which we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah.

²²²Bright, p. 323.

²²³The NET Bible note on 25:25.

Conclusion

The Books of Kings teach that failure to honor the revealed will of God always brings ruin and destruction. The writer traced this theme through the 411-year monarchy, from Solomon to the Babylonian Captivity. He did so both in the national affairs of Israel and Judah and in the lives of representative individuals, notably the kings.

"The entire history of the monarchy in Israel hinges on the word of the Lord. Having established the basis of his covenant relationship with David, God faithfully demonstrates the veracity of his word. From the first chastisement against Solomon to the ultimate deportation of the nation, God's word of the covenant controls history."²²⁴

The United Kingdom of Israel attained its largest extent geographically, as well as its greatest influence, under Solomon. However, it ended in discord and ruin because of Solomon's failure to honor the Mosaic Covenant faithfully.

In the period of the Divided Kingdom, the writer evaluated each king by his allegiance to that covenant. He showed that Yahweh either blessed him for his fidelity, or cursed him for his infidelity to it. Also the writer opened windows into the lives of the ordinary citizens. God dealt with them as He did the kings. He consistently applied these principles to the common people's lives as well as the kings' reigns. As the people departed from God, He raised up His servants the prophets to call them back to trust and obedience.

To review, during the divided monarchy there were in Israel nine dynasties and 20 kings, of whom seven were assassinated. The writer evaluated all of them as bad, but Ahab was probably the worst and Jehu the best. In Judah there was only one dynasty, with 19 kings, plus one queen who usurped the throne. Five of these rulers suffered assassination. Twelve were bad, eight were good, and four of the good kings were reformers (very good). Manasseh was the worst king, and Josiah was probably the best.

In the history of the Surviving Kingdom, the writer emphasized that ultimately, deportation (unrest) and captivity (enslavement) are the inevitable consequences of persistent departure from God and His will.

The church operates under a different covenant than Israel did, and what God requires of us is different in many respects from what He required of the Israelites. Nevertheless, He still deals with us in the same way He dealt with Israel. He blesses those who trust and obey Him, and He disciplines those who do not (cf. Rom. 11:21-22). God has preserved the Books of Kings to teach us how consistently He deals with people on this basis.

"What does the writer tell the reader? Trust the Lord and find hope in him. If God can give the land once, God can give it again. If the Lord can raise up one David, another can come to take his ancestor's place. If people could be faithful in Hezekiah's and Josiah's reigns, then they can be obedient again."²²⁵

²²⁴O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 266.

²²⁵House, p. 402.

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