

Notes on 2 Kings

2023 Edition
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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 the 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 people and the victory of God.

The failure of people 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

reforms 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 are unrestrained."¹ 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

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

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 their 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 of God 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

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

Second Kings begins with Ahaziah's reign, which 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).¹

"The typical Syrian upper balcony was enclosed with a jointed wood lattice-work that, while suitable for privacy, could easily be broken."²

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.³ 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 ..."⁴

"The angel of the LORD" here (v. 3) was perhaps the pre-incarnate Christ (Gen. 16:9; 2 Kings 19:35; et al.). Premature death was God's punishment

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

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

³Gary Rendsburg, "A Reconstruction of Moabite-Israelite History," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 13 (1981):67.

⁴Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 9:2:1.

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.¹ "Man of God" 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 (cf. David submitting to Nathan). Elijah's position on the top of the hill suggests his superiority over the king and his messengers.² 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, may 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-zebub (v. 6) means "lord of the flies," bringing pestilence to mind.³ "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.⁴ However, it may mean "exalted lord"⁵ or "lord of the flame."⁶ 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).

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

²The NET2 Bible note on 1:9. The NET2 Bible refers to *The NET (New English Translation) Bible* version of 2019

³James 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.

⁴See M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 25.

⁵Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Kings," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 271.

⁶F. Charles Fensham, "A Possible Explanation of the Name Baal-Zebub of Ekron," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1967):363.

"The issue is still the same as at Carmel."¹

Ahaziah died, as Elijah had predicted, 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."²

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).

"God is displeased with any occult involvement. God is dishonored by any specific pursuit of the future that does not find its source in His Word. But let me reassure you, *God is delighted when we trust Him only*. The Lord strengthens those who put their trust in Him."³

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?

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).⁴

¹Wiseman, p. 192.

²NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

³Charles R. Swindoll, *Elijah: A Man of Heroism and Humility*, p. 155.

⁴See 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.

"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."¹

Whereas Elijah's name appears 29 times in the New Testament, Elisha's occurs only once (Luke 4:27).²

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 a few miles north of Bethel, since Elijah and Elisha went down to Bethel (v. 2).³ 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. Elijah's "coat" (v. 8) 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 coat (v. 8; cf. Exod. 14:21-22). Elijah's act showed that 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).

¹J. G. B., *Short Meditations on Elisha*, p. 6.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 521.

³Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 270; Wiseman, p. 195; John Gray, *I & II Kings*, p. 474.

"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."¹

"... Elisha's request was, simply, to be heir to the prophetic office and gifts of his master."²

"Elisha wanted to be the heir of the disposition or attitude that enabled Elijah to touch lives so deeply."³

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)."⁴

The chariot and horses of fire (v. 11) 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."⁵ 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.

¹Wiersbe, p. 510.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 270. See also Gray, p. 475.

³David Roper, *Seeing Through*, p. 203.

⁴Merrill, "2 Kings," p. 272.

⁵Battenfield, p. 27; et al.

"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."¹

Elijah had been Elisha's spiritual father and mentor (v. 12). Elisha referred to Elijah as his "father" figure. Similarly, the pupils of the prophets were called their "sons" (vv. 3, 5, 7, et al.). These titles expressed respect and dependence.²

"Remember, mentoring is not so much a matter of transferring [*sic*] information as it is coming alongside another person to serve them in their development."³

"Whenever you see someone eager to grow spiritually and personally, ask yourself, what can I do to help? It may be that this individual is someone the Lord wants you to mentor."⁴

Elisha mourned the departure of one of Israel's great spiritual warriors (v. 12). When Jesus said to His disciples: "Do not call anyone on earth your father, for only One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9), He was probably forbidding them from attributing their spiritual life to anyone but their heavenly Father.

By referring to Elijah as "the chariot 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.⁵ He was a one-man army. The chariot was the mightiest weapon then known, and it was symbolic of God's supreme power.⁶ By asking, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" (v. 14), Elisha was calling out to Yahweh to demonstrate His power through him as He had done through Elijah.

¹Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, p. 210.

²Gray, p. 476.

³Howard G. Hendricks, *Standing Together*, p. 99.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵M. 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.

⁶Harold 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."¹

Parallels with the story of Israel's entrance into the Promised Land suggest that the writer wanted his readers to connect Elijah with Moses and Elisha with Joshua. Even the meanings of their names is similar: "Elisha" meaning "God saves" and "Joshua" meaning "Yahweh saves."

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

¹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 185-86.

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, which 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).¹ That theory, of course, is pure speculation. Refreshment and fertility had suffered as a result of apostasy (departure from God and His will), as the Mosaic Law had promised.

Elisha was a new vessel in God's hand similar to the new jar that 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 in order to sanctify them indicated (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 43:24).² 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

¹Ian M. Blake, "Jericho (Ain es-Sultan): Joshua's Curse and Elisha's Miracle—One Possible Explanation," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 99 (1967):86-97. See also Gray, pp. 477-78.

²Ibid., p. 478.

underground springs and fountains.¹ 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."²

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 (cf. 2 Chron. 36:16). The Hebrew word *na'ar* translated "young boys" 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!³

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, therefore, the LORD Himself (v. 24; cf. 2 Peter 3:3-7). As before, God used wild animals to judge the rebels (cf. 1 Kings 13:24). Wild bears were common in ancient Israel.⁴

"One of the covenant warnings was that God would send wild beasts to attack the people (Lev. 26:21-22)."⁵

These early miracles identified Elisha as God's spokesman who possessed Yahweh's power to bless or to curse. They 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 fear Yahweh.

¹Battenfield, p. 27.

²Wiersbe, p. 512.

³Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, p. 124.

⁴James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, p. 356. For 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.

⁵Wiersbe, p.512.

"Though having the same objectives in view as Elijah, Elisha's manner in reaching them was somewhat different. ... {Elisha} 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."¹

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).

King Mesha of Moab had rebelled against Israel earlier (v. 3), but he continued to do so. This uprising led to the alliance and battle that the writer described in this chapter. Jehoram of Israel evidently sought an alliance with Jehoshaphat because he wanted to cross Judean territory to get to Moab.² 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 while Elijah washed them, which was a menial task, as well as in other ways (v. 11; 1 Kings 19:21). Music (v. 15) 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."³

Elisha conceded to help the two kings because Jehoshaphat had humbled himself by seeking Yahweh's assistance (v. 12). God provided water (refreshment) supernaturally to His people (v. 20), but He brought defeat and lack of fertility and productivity on Moab for opposing Israel. He began

¹Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 246.

²Stigers, p. 343.

³Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, p. 118. Cf. John C. Whitcomb, in *A History of Israel*, p. 407.

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. *sayf*) 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."¹

Kir-hereseth (v. 25, 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 performing sacred rites in warfare. It virtually guaranteed, from his point of view, that his god would save the lives of the entire population under siege.²

This sacrifice expressed Mesha's great anger against Israel (v. 27). 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.³

"The Israelites lost all heart in sight of the gruesome act."⁴

Several explanations for the Israelite soldiers' departure follow:

"His [Mesha's] troops respond to this desperate act with a superhuman fury that carries them to victory."⁵

¹Wiseman, p. 201.

²Baruch Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:6 (November-December 1986):62-63.

³Cf. Josephus, 9:3:2.

⁴Montgomery, p. 364.

⁵Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 186. Bold type omitted.

"The superstitious (and increasingly polytheistic) Israelites were so terrified at the prospect of what Chemosh, the god of Moab, would do in response to this supreme sacrifice, that they gave up the siege and returned to their own land!"¹

"The efficacy of the Moabite king's solemn oath (whatever it may have been) was so enhanced by the act of human sacrifice that the besiegers were appalled by the possible consequences to themselves and superstitiously raised the siege."²

"By this deed of horror, to which the allied army drove the king of Moab, a divine judgment came upon Israel; that is, the besiegers feared the anger of God, which they had incurred by giving occasion to the human sacrifice forbidden in the law (Lev. 18:21; 20:3), and hastily raised the siege."³

The Moabite Stone, a significant archaeological find, contains Mesha's own record of this battle and other battles with Israel.⁴ 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 city.

"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."⁵

Verse 25 states that the Israelites "stopped up every spring of water" in the area of the battle, among other acts of punishment.

"... in the Moabite Stone ... King Mesha refers to every man having to make his own cistern when the water supply of the city was sabotaged. The existence of many cisterns at the site of ancient Dibon [east of the Dead Sea] was bought out when one of the staff, John Thompson of Australia, counted sixty-seven cisterns still evident on the mount ..."⁶

¹Whitcomb, p. 407.

²W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 164.

³Jamieson, et al., pp. 271-72.

⁴See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 188-89; Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 186-87.

⁵F. W. Krummacher, *Elisha*, p. 45.

⁶Free, p. 191.

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 permitted Israelites to buy Hebrew slaves, though these slaves were not to be subject to a slave's service, as non-Hebrew slaves were (Exod. 21:2-4, Lev. 25:39). However, Israelites were to allow their Hebrew slaves to go free after six years (Exod.21:2).

God provided 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]."¹

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).² 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.).³

"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."⁴

"They had a regular oil well going in that house!"⁵

¹Wiersbe, p. 516.

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

³See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:47-50; John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.

⁴B., p. 17. Cf. 13:18-19.

⁵J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 2:309.

"The way to increase what we have is to use it; to him that hath shall be given [Matt. 13:12]."¹

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.²

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 (v. 8) stood in the Jezreel Valley. Gehazi (v. 12) had become Elisha's servant, as Elisha had been Elijah's servant. As such he was the potential successor to his ministry.

"Let me give you a definition of ministry: ministry means moving people toward Jesus Christ."³

"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)."⁴

"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).

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 403.

²Patterson and Austel, p. 186.

³Hendricks, p. 108.

⁴*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 614.

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). Israelites customarily did no work on the "new moon" and "Sabbath" days (cf. Exod. 20⁹⁻¹²; Amos 8:5), so apparently her husband was suggesting that they wait to visit the prophet. The woman, however, did not want to wait. 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)."¹

Grasping Elisha's feet (v. 27) showed this woman's desperate dependence on his power, her humility, and her veneration for Elisha (cf. Matt. 28:9; John 11:32).

"Oftentimes when people are hurting, they need us to close our mouths and open our arms."²

Perhaps Elisha told Gehazi to go and heal the lad in order 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 surely 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!"³

Elisha probably intended that Gehazi's failure would teach him that 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, activated by petition, could restore the boy's life (v. 33). Elisha's physical contact with the boy 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).

¹Wiseman, p. 204.

²Hendricks, p. 150.

³Wiersbe, p. 518.

"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."¹

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.

"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."²

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, in order 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."³

¹Battenfield, p. 28.

²House, p. 268.

³Wiseman, p. 205.

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

Archaeologists debate the site of Baal-salishah (v. 42). In obedience to the Mosaic Law, the man in view brought Elisha his offering of first-fruits 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 King Ben-Hadad II (cf. 1 Kings 15:18, 20), but he was a leper.

"Every man has some *but* or other in his character, something that blemishes and diminishes him."¹

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 skin abnormalities.²

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,

¹Henry, p. 405.

²Rebecca and Eugene Baillie, "Biblical Leprosy as Compared to Present-Day Leprosy," *Christian Medical Society Journal* 14:3 (Fall 1983):27-29.

... she has none, for she simply 'waited upon' ... Naaman's wife (cf. Deut 1:38; 1 Sam 19:7)."¹

"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."²

Ben-Hadad's gift to King Jehoram (v. 5) amounted to 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 changes of royal apparel, or perhaps 10 bolts of cloth.³ 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 viceregent, 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 like 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 viceregent 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.⁴

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.⁵ His flesh experienced healing from the leprosy, and it even returned to the texture of a child's flesh. Perhaps this reflected Naaman's child-like faith.

¹B. O. Long, *2 Kings*, p. 70. Long's analysis of this chapter's plots and subplots, in pp. 66-77, is very good.

²Wiersbe, p. 525.

³Wiseman, p. 207.

⁴Gwilym Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*, 2:416.

⁵C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, p. 319.

Naaman's restoration convinced him that Yahweh's power was superior to that of any other god (cf. Luke 17:15). This was a lesson that 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 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 (cf. 1 Thess. 5:22).

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 soil of that land (v. 17).¹ 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.'"²

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."³

Gehazi's 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

¹Cf. Montgomery, p. 377.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 616.

³Wiersbe, pp. 525-26.

could have inherited, namely, 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."¹

"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."²

"Naaman's experience with Elisha illustrates to us the gracious work of God in saving lost sinners."³

This story contains many of the motifs that 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.

¹House, p. 274.

²Ibid., p. 273.

³Wiersbe, p. 521.

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."¹

The expensive² iron ax-head was similar to Israel in that 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 that He purposed 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 grace can thus raise the stony iron heart which has sunk into the mud of this world, and raise up affections naturally earthly, to things above."³

Some commentators have tried to explain the miracles that Elijah and Elisha performed as purely natural phenomena (nothing really unusual).⁴ The biblical writers often attributed miraculous events directly to God, not explaining in detail how they took place. In some cases, God used instruments not always mentioned in the text to accomplish the miraculous. But true miracles always involve a supernatural element.

¹Patterson and Austel, p. 192.

²R. L. Hubbard Jr., *First and Second Kings*, p. 157.

³Henry, p. 407.

⁴See, e.g., Gray, pp. 511-12.

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

The king of Aram (v. 8) was probably Ben-Hadad II, though the writer did not mention him by name. 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.

"Certain liberal Bible students have been skeptical of the Scriptural record of Elisha and some have even doubted his existence. In view of these doubts, it is significant that the writer's excavations at Dothan (1953-1956 ...) have uncovered areas of the city of Elisha's day in the upper stratification of the ancient mound. Dothan was a thriving city in the days of that prophet, as implied in the Biblical record and confirmed by our excavations ..."¹

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 that Elisha could predict his movements. The events that followed proved him wrong.

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).

"When we are magnifying the causes of our fear we ought to possess ourselves with clear, and great, and high thoughts of God and the invisible world. *If God be for us*, we know what follows, Rom. viii. 31. ... The opening of our eyes will be the silencing of our fears. In the dark we are most apt to be frightened. The clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven the less we shall fear the calamities of this earth."²

¹Free, p. 191.

²Henry, p. 408.

Elisha led the temporarily blinded Aramean army into Samaria because Dothan was not the city where God wanted them (v. 19). Since Elisha commanded the Aramean soldiers to follow him, and they did, perhaps they were not totally blind, but blind to where they were.

King Jehoram referred to Elisha respectfully as his father (v. 21) because he realized that 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). It was customary to kill captives taken in battle, but these soldiers had virtually surrendered and were therefore not to be executed.¹ In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof often constituted making a covenant of peace (cf. Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27; Rom. 12:20).² Social custom now bound the Arameans not to attack the friends who had spared their lives and had extended the honor of hospitality to them. Consequently the Arameans did not invade Israel for some time (v. 23; cf. vv. 8-10; v. 24). Evidently we should understand verse 23 to mean that the Arameans never again sent "marauding bands" against Israel.³ As we read on, we discover that the Arameans did invade Israel again with armies (v. 24).

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.

"The most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend."⁴

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.⁵ The famine in Samaria, and the siege

¹See Jones, 2:428.

²J. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 157.

³T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 78.

⁴Henry, p. 408.

⁵Alberto R. W. Green, "Regnal Formulas in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Books of Kings," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 42 (1983):178.

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.¹

"Dove's dung" (v. 25) is probably the colloquial name for a wild plant. Some think that the Hebrew word used (*hiryownim*) refers to "seed pods" (NIV) or "course corn"² or the bulb of the Star of Bethlehem plant.³ But it may refer to a vegetable, such as chickpeas.⁴ Or it may have been a replacement for salt.⁵

"... if the Biblical figures [in verse 25] seem absurd, they have parallels in other ancient story!"⁶

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.⁷

"Individuals could always appeal directly to the king."⁸

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).

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.

¹Josephus, 9:4:4.

²Henry, p. 408.

³E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 225.

⁴Jones, 2:432; Gray, p. 522.

⁵Josephus, 9:4:4.

⁶Montgomery, pp. 384-85.

⁷See Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:3:4, for a similar incident involving cannibalism during the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

⁸Wiseman, p. 210.

Jehoram's officer did not believe that 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 (v. 1) amounted to about seven quarts.

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity of magnifying his own power; his time to appear for his people is when *their strength is gone*, Deut. xxxii. 36."¹

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.

"There is a great spiritual lesson for us here. At this moment you and I are enjoying the Word of God. Today is a day of good tidings, and we sit here and enjoy it. What about getting the Word out to others? What are you doing to share the Word of God with those who are starving spiritually? You ought to be busy getting the Word of God out to needy hearts."²

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."³

"Those that will not fear God he can make to fear at the shaking of a leaf."⁴

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. It may seem strange that the king's servants took "two chariots with horses" to check

¹Henry, p. 409.

²McGee, 2:320.

³Wiersbe, p. 532.

⁴Henry, p. 409.

out the lepers' report (v. 14), rather than simply riding the horses. But riding horses was not a common art in those days.¹ The writer concluded this story by emphasizing the judgment that 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 (crossing) 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.

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 because of the nation's apostasy (v. 1; cf. Deut. 11:16-17; 28:38-40; 1 Kings 18:2;

¹Montgomery, p. 388.

et al.). The timing of the length of the famine, seven years, showed that it was an act of God (v. 1; cf. 4:38; 6:25; 7:4).

"Frankly I believe that the different tragedies that have struck our land in recent years have been a warning to our nation. The earthquakes, hurricanes, storms, and other tragedies that have swept across our land have, I think, been warnings from God to stop and think and change our ways."¹

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 government 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).² This woman's 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 government.³

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 may have taken place before Gehazi became a leper, or after, since it was permissible to converse with lepers.⁴ God blessed the woman for her obedience to God's instructions that came to her through Elisha (v. 1). The king 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.

"God looks after those who look after his prophets (Matt. 10:40-42)."⁵

"Elisha wields as much political influence as any biblical prophet."⁶

¹McGee, 2:320.

²Jones, 2:440.

³A. Graeme Auld, *I and II Kings*, p. 178.

⁴Henry, p. 410.

⁵Provan, p. 205.

⁶House, p. 281.

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

Hazael was the governor of Damascus.¹ The Gentile King of Aram had more interest in inquiring of Yahweh than the King of Israel's predecessor, Ahaziah, 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.²

KINGS OF ARAM (SYRIA) IN 2 KINGS ³		
Kings	Dates	References
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)

Ben-Hadad II would have recovered (v. 10) if Hazael had not murdered him (v. 15). Elisha probably knew that Hazael would murder him. The prophet fixed his gaze steadily on Hazael, perhaps hoping to embarrass him out of committing murder (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).

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

¹J. A. Brinkman, "Additional Texts from the Reigns of Shalmaneser III and Shamshi-Adad V," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973):43-44.

²Keil, p. 334.

³Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 509.

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.

"The word Ben-hadad, meaning 'son of Hadad,' is intelligible when we know that Hadad was one of the most prominent of Near Eastern deities, being the Aramean stormgod [*sic*]. An archaeological reference to this god was found on a stone statue of about 800 B.C. from Zandjirli in northern Syria which bears an Aramaic inscription stating that King Panammu had dedicated the statue to Hadad. The Amarna Tablets also show that Hadad was already a prominent figure in the religion of Palestine in the Bronze age, i.e., before 1200 B.C. ..."1

"Archaeological confirmation of the fact that Hazael succeeded Ben-hadad and gained the throne but was not of royal blood or in the royal line of succession is found in an inscription of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (860-825 B.C), which reads, 'Hazael, son of nobody, seized the throne.' Further confirmation of Hazael was found on some ivory decorations discovered at Khadatu in northwestern Mesopotamia. One of these ivory objects bears the name of Hazael, king of Damascus ..."2

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 loyal 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

¹Free, p. 187.

²Ibid., p. 188. Paragraph division omitted. See also D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1:246.

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 that 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.¹ There are indeed many similarities between Elisha and Jesus.²

5. Jehoram's evil reign in Judah 8:16-24 (cf. 2 Chron. 21)

Jehoshaphat appointed his son Jehoram coregent the year that 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 Obadiah ministered and wrote the Bible book that bears his name during Jehoram's reign.³

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.

"When you marry a child of the devil, your father-in-law sees to it that you have trouble."⁴

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" (v. 21) is another name for Seir or Edom. Libnah (v. 22) was a town near

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

²See Provan, pp. 233-34, for discussion of these.

³Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 1453-54.

⁴McGee, 2:297.

the border between Judah and Philistia that seems to have revolted when the Philistines invaded Judah (2 Chron. 21:16-17). Chariots did not save Jehoram from defeat (v. 21). Judah became weaker under Jehoram because of his wickedness, and the king himself died a painful death (2 Chron. 21:18-19).

6. Ahaziah's evil reign in Judah 8:25—9:29 (cf. 2 Chron. 22)

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.). Ahab had two sons, Ahaziah and J(eh)oram, who reigned successively in Israel; Jehoshaphat had a son, Jehoram, and a grandson, Ahaziah, who reigned successively in Judah.

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).¹ 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

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

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 extreme. This is the only place in Kings where the writer described Yahweh as avenging (v. 7; 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."¹

"Those that have no religion commonly speak with disdain of those that are religious, and look upon them as mad [v. 11]. They said of our Saviour, *He is beside himself*, of John Baptist, *He has a devil*, of St. Paul, *Much learning has made him mad*. The highest wisdom is thus represented as folly, and those that best understand themselves are looked upon as beside themselves."²

"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)."³

Placing clothing under Jehu (v. 13) symbolically expressed the captains' recognition of his authority and their submission to him (cf. Matt. 21:8).

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

¹Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p. 60.

²Henry, p. 412.

³Wiseman, pp. 218-19.

with peace?" (vv. 18, 19) was somewhat enigmatic and meant, "Don't worry."¹

"The question about 'peace' was a standard step in ancient negotiations. Jehu's reply indicates that he refused to negotiate."²

Jehu 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 a humiliating death because of his wickedness, as did the kings of Israel in Omri's dynasty. Nevertheless Ahaziah received an honorable burial (v. 28). Another reason for his execution may have been to eliminate him as a possible future threat to Jehu.³

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

¹Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:7:3.

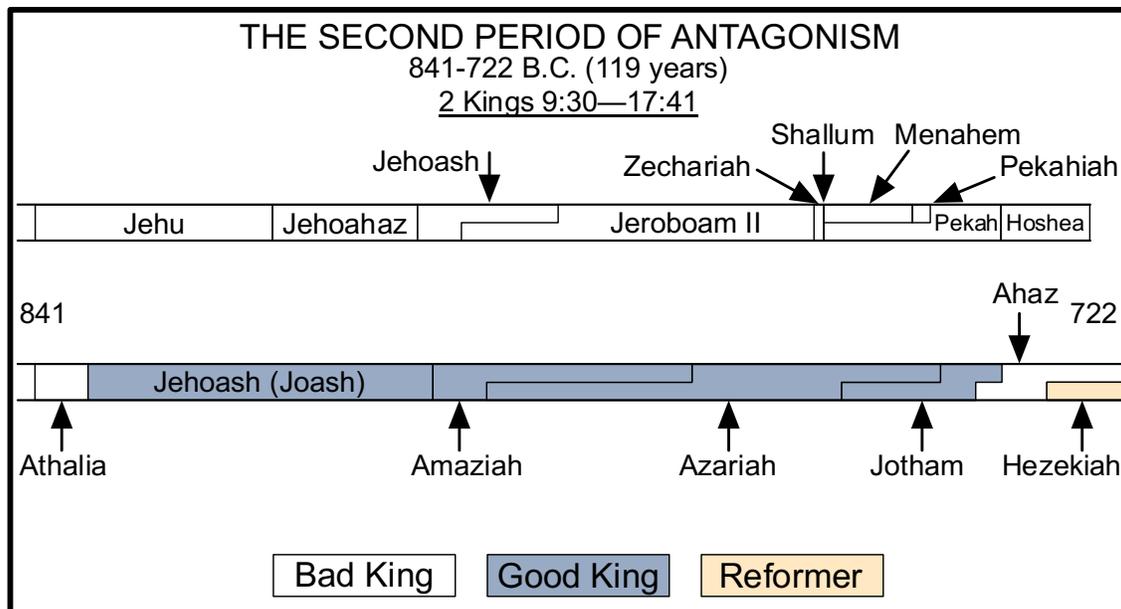
²*The Nelson ...*, p. 625.

³Jones, 2:461.

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.



"The two strongest ruling families of Israel reigned consecutively: first, the family of Omri, just considered; and second, that of Jehu. Jehu's dynasty ruled longer than Omri's—eighty-nine years as against forty-four—and it included five generations (Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah), in comparison with Omri's three. Jehu's dynasty, however, was not as strong in rule as Omri's, for during its time Israel experienced heavy loss to both the Aramaeans and the Assyrians. Religiously, each dynasty was

seriously deficient, but at least that of Jehu did not foster Baal worship as had that of Omri."¹

"The date 841 B.C. is one of the most significant in Old Testament history for it marks the end of the reigns of Joram of Israel and both Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah as well as the commencement of the reign of Jehu, the founder of the longest-lasting dynasty that the northern kingdom was to know (841-753 B.C.). Moreover, 841 was the year when, from a human viewpoint, the Davidic messianic line was suspended by its slenderest thread, for in the aftermath of Jehu's slaughter of Ahaziah, Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother and Ahab's daughter, undertook a systematic purge of all the Judean royal family. ... Finally, 841 was a date of international significance for in that year Shalmaneser III made one of his most successful and far-reaching campaigns into the west. He besieged Hazael of Damascus and would no doubt have conquered Israel had not Jehu, in his very first year, paid an enormous tribute to the Assyrians."²

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."³

Jehu's execution of Jezebel 9:30-37

Jezebel evidently put on makeup and arranged her hair (v. 30) in preparation to meet Jehu. Unwittingly, or perhaps deliberately,⁴ she

¹Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 320.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 357-58.

³Idem, "2 Kings," p. 278.

⁴Patterson and Austel, p. 209; Whitcomb, p. 421.

prepared herself for her own death. More than one interpreter believed that she was trying to seduce Jehu.¹

Jezebel asked Jehu, "Is your intention peace?"—like the two horsemen and Joram had previously asked (vv. 17, 19, 22). That is, "Have you come to make peace?" According to this interpretation, 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*).² However she may have meant, "Have you established peace (by assassinating the king)?" If so, she implied that 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 may have been implying that Jehu would suffer a similar fate. Her greeting to Jehu may have been a sarcastic, derogatory threat (v. 31).³ "Zimri" may have become synonymous with "traitor" by this time.⁴ Another interpretation is that Jezebel saw Jehu as a rebel but complimented him on being the one who pruned Omri's dynasty.⁵ I prefer the explanation that follows:

"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, 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!'"⁶

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-

¹McGee, 2:324; S. Parker, "Jezebel's Reception of Jehu," *Maarav* 1 (1978):67-78.

²Wiseman, p. 223.

³Jones, 2:462.

⁴Giorgio Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria*, p. 203.

⁵Saul Olyan, "2 Kings 9:31—Jehu as Zimri," *Harvard Theological Review* 78:1 (1985):203-7.

⁶*The NET2 Bible* note on 9:31.

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 that 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 in order to document God's faithfulness in blessing the obedient and cursing the disobedient (cf. Rev. 19:2).¹

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.²

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 house would rule Israel. Rather than fight a battle that they were sure they would lose, they submitted to Jehu and killed Ahab's sons. Though some scholars take the number 70 as a round number,³ there is no reason in the text why it could not be literal.

"These elders of Jezreel had been wickedly obsequious [obedient to an excessive or servile degree] to Jezebel's order for the murder of Naboth, 1 Kings xxi. 11. She gloried, it is likely, in the power she had over them; and now the same base spirit makes them as pliable to Jehu and as ready to obey his orders for the murder of Ahab's sons."⁴

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

¹For interesting insights into the spirit of Jezebel and how to combat it, see Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*, pp. 97-120.

²Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*, p. 221.

³E.g., Gray, p. 553.

⁴Henry, p. 413.

future rebellion.¹ 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."²

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; cf. 2 Chron. 22:8).³ Beth-eked (v. 14) 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).

"This ["see my zeal for the LORD," v. 16] is commonly taken as giving cause to suspect that the zeal he [Jehu] pretended for the Lord was really zeal for himself and his own advancement. For, (1) He boasted of it, and spoke as if God and man were mightily indebted to him for it. (2) He desired it might be seen and taken notice of, like the Pharisees, who did all to be seen of men."⁴

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 "memorial stones" in verses 26 and 27 indicate that Jehu desecrated two or more kinds of objects, probably flammable wooden and non-flammable stone idols. The most effective way of

¹Luckenbill, 1:213.

²House, p. 287.

³See J. M. Miller, "The Fall of the House of Ahab," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967):307-24.

⁴Henry, p. 414.

destroying a standing stone was to heat it and then throw cold water on it, causing it to crack. Jehu also converted the temple of Baal into a public latrine, the greatest possible insult to Baal, the god of fertility. His act made the site of Baal's temple an unclean place. Jehu thus effectively eradicated the Baal worship that Ahab and Jezebel had officially established as Israel's religion.

"Seldom has history witnessed a more thorough blood purging of a previous royal family and favored religious order than this."¹

Jehu's assessment 10:29-36

God blessed Jehu for eliminating the line of Ahab and Baalism. However, Jehu went too far by killing the nobles, and he did not go far enough in that 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 (vv. 32-33).

"Despite his cometlike beginning, spiritually speaking, Jehu was a falling star, so his reign is largely passed over in silence."²

"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."³

¹Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 321.

²Patterson and Austel, p. 212.

³House, p. 295.

"The reign of Jehu heralded a period of eclipse for Israel in Near Eastern politics. It began with his submission to Shalmaneser III in 841, when Hazael successfully held Damascus against Assyria."¹

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, discovered in 1846 at Nimrud in Assyria, shows King Jehu kneeling and paying tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria.² This is the only picture of a Hebrew king discovered thus far.

"Jehu's zeal to rid the land of Omri's house was not matched by his capacity to rule. His twenty-eight years as king were marked by unrest and turmoil, with serious social and economic abuses rife among the people. This fact is evidenced especially by the writings of Amos and Hosea, both prophets to Israel who wrote about one-half century after Jehu's rule. The abuses of which they speak had existed during his time."³

2. Athaliah's evil reign in Judah 11:1-20 (cf. 2 Chron. 22:10—23:21)

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

¹Gray, p. 563.

²See Finegan, p. 205, and fig. 73; Free, pp. 189-90.

³Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 321, including footnote 59.

"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."¹

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).² She hid Joash, as Jochebed had hidden Moses (Exod. 2). According to Josephus, Jehosheba hid Joash in a secret bed-chamber.³

"What is called, however, the bed-chamber in the East is not the kind of apartment that we understand by the name, but a small closet, into which are flung during the day the mattresses and other bedding materials spread on the floors or divans of the sitting-rooms by day."⁴

At this point I need to comment on the names Joash and Jehoash, because both names were used by the English translators to identify both the king of Judah and the king of Israel. For example, in the NASB, 2020 edition, the king of Judah is called Joash in 11:2; 12:19, 20; 13:1, 10; 14:1, 3, 17, 23, and he is called Jehoash in 11:21; 12:1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 18; 14:13, 15, 16. The king of Israel is called Joash in 13:1, 12, 13, 14, 25; 14:1, 27 and he is called Jehoash in 13:10, 25; 14:8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17. In order to make identification simpler, I have tried to consistently refer to the King of Judah as Joash, and the king of Israel as Jehoash, in these notes.

As the child Joash grew he undoubtedly played with the other priests' children publicly but remained undetected by Athaliah, since she would not have known who his parents were and who he really was.

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).

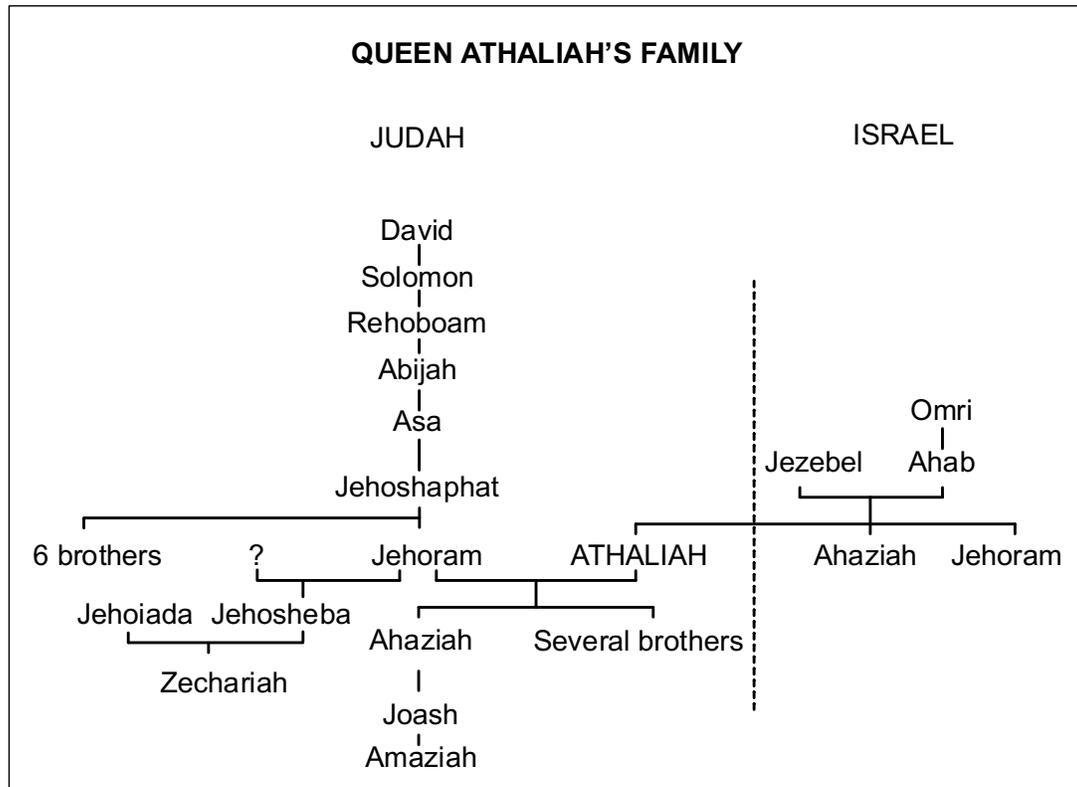
¹Gaebelein, 1:330.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:7:1.

³Ibid.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 278.

When the high priest crowned 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, by the way, is the basis for the British custom of presenting each new king or queen of England with a copy of the Bible during the coronation ceremony.¹



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

Though Athaliah claimed that Joash's coronation was treasonous, she was the one guilty of treason. Joash 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 mules²) entered the royal palace (cf. 2 Chron. 24:20-22). Like her mother she died a violent death among horses, the instruments of warfare (cf. 9:30-37).

¹Wiseman, p. 233.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:7:3.

The covenant ceremony that Jehoiada led the people in celebrating 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. All of these actions 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). Mattan (v. 18) was a common Phoenician name, but an Israelite with the same name appears in 24:17, so this priest may have been either Phoenician or Israelite.¹

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 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. Joash's good reign in Judah 11:21—12:21 (cf. 2 Chron. 24)

With the beginning of Joash'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 (Joash, 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.

Joash's contributions 11:21—12:3

Joash 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.

"The forty-year reign of Joash may be divided into two parts—before and after the death of his spiritual guardian, Jehoiada. ... Without the moral and spiritual courage of this high priest [Jehoiada], Joash was as unstable as Lot without Abram.

¹J. Skinner, *I and II Kings*, p. 341; Cogan and Tadmor, p. 130.

Therefore, God showed His mercy to the people of Judah by extending Jehoiada's life to an amazing 130 years [longer than anyone on record during the previous 600 years (cf. Exod. 6:20)]!"¹

Joash 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 Joash'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 that 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).

"... it is evident from the sequel of his history that the rectitude of his administration was owing more to the salutary influence of his preserver and tutor, Jehoiada, than to the honest and sincere dictates of his own mind."²

"Joash was an excellent follower but not a good leader."³

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

The renovation of Solomon's temple was the first such project that the writer recorded in Kings. Later, Hezekiah and Josiah also repaired the temple. Until now, temple expenses came out of the royal treasury, but Joash moved this obligation into the private sector.⁴ Joash'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.⁵ Consequently the king adopted a completely freewill offering approach and appointed non-priests to supervise its administration. This plan proved

¹Whitcomb, p. 439, and footnote 5.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 278.

³Wiersbe, p. 548.

⁴Jones, 2:490.

⁵Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:8:2.

effective. Many other ancient Near Eastern governments used this approach to maintaining their temples at this time.¹

"There was no coinage; silver was cast into ingots of round bars or rings ..."²

The administrators of the program proved trustworthy. Integrity returned to Judah, partially, when the people rededicated themselves to Yahweh (11:17).

Joash's unfaithfulness and assassination 12:17-21 (cf. 2 Chron. 24:23-27)

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 east against Jerusalem, and they killed many Judean leaders. Rather than turning to Yahweh for deliverance, Joash bought Hazael off with gold from the renovated temple. Later, Hazael returned to Judah and Jerusalem with a small company of men, destroyed the nobles of Judah, and sent their spoil to the king of Damascus (2 Chron. 24:23).

The Arameans had wounded Joash, who went to recuperate in a town named Beth Millo (v. 20; lit "the house of Millo"). 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."³

Joash's reign started off well but ended poorly because he turned from Yahweh. Instead of continuing to follow the high priest's counsel, he

¹A. 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.

²Montgomery, p. 430.

³Hubbard, p. 185.

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 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] 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."¹

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

Jehoahaz ("Yahweh Has Grasped") 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.²

Aram's oppression moved Jehoahaz to seek Yahweh's help, which the LORD graciously provided in spite of the king's unfaithfulness. The deliverer whom 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.³ The Arameans consequently stopped attacking Israel and turned to defending themselves against their neighbor to the east, Assyria. Another way that God disciplined Israel at this time was by reducing her army through casualties (v. 7). This reduction had begun in Jehu's reign (10:32-36) but continued during Jehoahaz's administration.



¹Wiersbe, p. 551.

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

³J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 132; Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 324; Merrill, "2 Kings," pp. 280-81.

NEO-ASSYRIAN KINGS ¹		
Kings	Dates	References
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	2 Kings 15:19, 29; 16:7, 10; 2 Chron. 5:26
Shalmaneser V	727-722	2 Kings 17:3; 18:9
Sargon II	722-705	2 Kings 18:11; Isa. 20
Sennacherib	705-681	2 Kings 18—19; 2 Chron. 32; Isa. 36—37
Esarhaddon	681-669	2 Kings 19:37; 2 Chron. 33; Ezra 4:2
Ashurbanipal	668-627	Ezra 4:10
Ashur-etil-ilani	627-623	
Sin-sum-lisir	623	

¹Idem, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 336; J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 2:204.

Sin-sar-iskun	623-612
Assur-uballit II	612-609

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 Joash of Judah's are 835-796 B.C.

Jehoash of Israel's assessment 13:10-13

Joash of Judah was already on the throne when Jehoash of Israel 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. This king 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). He may have wept because he thought he was going to suffer defeat.¹

"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."²

Elisha gave the king a prophecy of Israel's future deliverance because the king 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

¹Provan, p. 232.

²Beek, p. 8. Cf. 2:12.

the king, thereby indicating that what he was about to do would be full of spiritual symbolism (v. 16)."¹

The bow and arrows were symbols of the strength and victory that God would give the king. 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.

"It is ... a symbolic action, like that of Joshua thrusting with a spear at Ai (Jos. 8:18)."²

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.³ 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.

¹Patterson and Austel, p. 225.

²Wiseman, p. 241.

³Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 504.

"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."¹

"The ministry of Elisha stands in many respects in vivid contrast with that of Elijah. There is a gentleness about it which inevitably reminds us of that of the Messiah Himself in His day. Instead of suddenly appearing at critical moments, with thunder and flame, he seems to have moved about among the people, doing good wherever he came. Indeed, the ministries of Elijah and Elisha seem in many ways to suggest the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus."²

Jehoash of Israel's victories 13:22-25

The basis of God's continuing mercy to Israel was not her goodness but God's goodness 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.³

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.

¹Long, p. 166. See also Provan, p. 230.

²G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 148.

³H. L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 54.

6. Amaziah's good reign in Judah 14:1-22 (cf. 2 Chron. 25)

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.¹

Amaziah's policies 14:1-6

One of Amaziah's acts of goodness that the writer of Kings included was his obedience to the Mosaic Law in the matter of not executing children for their parents' 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 (v. 7) lay south of the Salt (Dead) Sea in the Arabah. Sela was the capital of Edom at this time.

"Edom ... continued to be attractive to Judah because of the southern trade routes to which it gave access."²

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 at this time that Amaziah's son Azariah ("Yahweh Has Helped") began to reign in Jerusalem as his father's coregent (790 B.C.). McFall believed that Azariah's

¹Proponents of this view include Freeman, p. 148; and Gleason A. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 305.

²Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 350.

coregency began in 792 or 791.¹ 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.

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 (v. 19) was a former royal city on Judah's western border. The king received an honorable burial. Elath (v. 22) 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 restoration 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.² He began ruling during the reign of Judah's King Joash, outlived Joash'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

¹Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):3-45.

²Edwin R. Thiele, "Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns Among the Hebrew Kings," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93:12 (1974):192-93.

prosperity for the twin kingdoms, both economically (as attested by the Samarian Ostraca) and politically."¹

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 entrance of Hamath" probably refers to the northern frontier of Israel.²

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. Donald Wiseman believed that Jonah visited Nineveh during the reign of Assur-dan III (772-755 B.C.).³ 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.

Jeroboam II's success was due to the capable leadership that both Jeroboam II and Joash of Judah provided, and the weaknesses of both Damascus and Assyria at this time.⁴

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.⁵ The cause and effect relationship is unmistakable.

¹Patterson and Austel, p. 231.

²Jones, 2:515.

³Wiseman, p. 249.

⁴Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 326.

⁵Paul 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.

"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."¹

8. Azariah's good reign in Judah 15:1-7 (cf. 2 Chron. 26)

Most Bible students know Azariah ("Yahweh Helps" or "Yahweh Has Helped") by his other name: Uzziah ("Yahweh Is Strong" or "Yahweh Is My Strength," vv. 13, 30, 32, 34; 2 Chron. 26; Isa. 1:1; Hosea 1:1, Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5; et al.).

"Azariah is evidently the throne-name, Uzziah an adopted name, or possibly a popular *alias* with play on the roots, 'help' in the first case, 'might' in the second, the latter as a result of the king's triumphs."²

Azariah's 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 Azariah's 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.

"Uzziah assumed sole rule of Judah some fifteen years after Jeroboam II became supreme head of Israel. Equally talented, he was able to follow the example set by Jeroboam in land

¹John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 252.

²Montgomery, p. 446.

acquisition and even, after the demise of Jeroboam, to attain a role yet more influential in the world."¹

Unfortunately Azariah (Uzziah) became proud, and in disobedience to the Mosaic Law performed functions that God had limited to the priests (2 Chron. 26:16-21). For this sin God punished him with leprosy (v. 5).

"It is important to point out here that Uzziah's sin was not in his offering incense per se but in his doing so in the very temple itself and on the altar of incense. This was a privilege reserved to the priests of the Aaronic line. As the Davidic heir—the priest after the order of Melchizedek—he did, indeed, enjoy priestly prerogatives as had David and Solomon before him. But his role as messianic priest was not to be confused with the specific function of the Aaronic priest."²

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.

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 fifth 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."³

"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

¹Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 352.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 377.

³House, p. 329.

die naturally. Anarchy, rivalry and regicide led to terminal bloodshed which fulfilled Hosea's prophecies (1:4)."¹

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.² 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 Tiphseh 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.

"What was involved was more than an ordinary grab for power; indeed, it was an attempt to reassert the domination of the old political base located at Tirzah."³

"The savage cruelty against pregnant women [v. 16] was typical of those days of the Assyrian terror; it was expected from Hazael (8¹²), practiced on Israel by Ammon (Am. 1¹³), and was to be part of Israel's final tragedy (Hos. 14¹[sic 13¹⁶])."⁴

As the history of Israel unfolds, the reader cannot help noticing how the kings increasingly behaved like 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.).

¹Wiseman, p. 252.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:11:1.

³Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 393.

⁴Montgomery, p. 450.

Assyrian inscriptions have identified Pul as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.; cf. v. 29; 16:7, 10; 1 Chron. 5:26), as well as confirming his contacts with several of the Israelite kings.¹ Pul was the throne name that Tiglath-Pileser III took as Babylon's sovereign after he conquered that nation in or about 729 B.C.² This is the first explicit mention of Assyria in Kings.³ Tiglath-Pileser was a very strong Assyrian ruler. He invaded Israel in 743 B.C. and consequently Israel experienced Assyria's controlling influence.

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 collaboration with Argob and Arieah, who were probably Israelite princes and influential friends of the king (v. 25).⁴

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.⁵ 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.

¹See Free, pp 196-99.

²W. W. Hallo and W. K. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, p. 137; Finegan, pp. 206-8.

³See *ibid.*, pp. 200-6, for earlier Assyrian history.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 281.

⁵See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 118-40; Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 209-10..

This resulted in Tiglath-Pileser invading Israel—and 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."¹

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.² Obviously Assyria was in control of affairs in Israel at this time.

14. Jotham's good reign in Judah 15:32-38 (cf. 2 Chron. 27)

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. Other names for this gate 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 opening of another entrance into the temple precincts suggests his concern for Yahweh's worship in Judah (cf. 2 Chron. 27:3-6).

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).³

¹Wiseman, p. 256.

²James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 284.

³See B. Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimitic War Reconsidered," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34:2 (April 1972):153-65.

15. Ahaz's evil reign in Judah ch. 16 (cf. 2 Chron. 28)

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.).¹

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 that of 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).² 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."³

"We usually expect that godly parents are going to bring up godly children. But that isn't always the case. Jotham, for the most part, followed the Lord. But when his son Ahaz came into power, he did the exact opposite. There is no formula for parenting. We can't explain why godly parents sometimes have prodigals and ungodly parents sometimes have mature Christian children. Each of us is dependent on God for His grace. Where we think we are strong, we may actually be weak. Where we know we are weak, we may be laying the groundwork for our children's excellence. The one constant is that God is in control. He is the One we must turn to for wisdom, guidance, and strength."⁴

¹For 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; and Hubbard, p. 201.

²See Wiseman, pp. 260-61.

³House, p. 336.

⁴Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 472. Paragraph division omitted.

Ahaz's folly 16:5-9

Aram had captured the southern 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 specified (Exod. 27:1-8). Furthermore, he removed the altar that 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."¹

Ahaz did not completely discard the worship that 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).²

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 tombs 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.

¹House, p. 337.

²For 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.

"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?"¹

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 some of his predecessors. A seal of Abdi, an official of Hoshea, has been discovered that bears the name of this Israelite king, who was heretofore unknown outside the Bible.²

Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) had succeeded his father Tiglath-Pileser III on Assyria's throne.³ 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 freedom and the three-year 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).⁴

"Assyriology has determined how the prolonged siege was terminated. The city was taken by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II, who is generally regarded as an usurper. Sargon records in the Annals of his first year (722/721) as follows:

¹House, p. 338.

²See Andre Lemaire, "Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21:6 (November-December 1995):49-52.

³See Finegan, p. 208.

⁴See 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 Records," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (June 2005):225-48.

'Samaria (Samerinai) I besieged and took ... (three lines lost). 27,290 inhabitants I carried away, 50 chariots I collected there as a royal force ... (The city) I set up again and made more populous than before. People from lands which I had taken I settled there. My men I set over them as governors. Tribute and taxes as upon the Assyrians I set upon them.'¹

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."²

So (v. 4) may be the Hebrew pronunciation of the Egyptian capital, Sais, rather than the name of a pharaoh.³ The verse so translated would read "... who had sent messengers to So [to the] king of Egypt." Alternatively So may have been Pharaoh Tefnakht⁴ or Pharaoh Piankhy.⁵

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 specifically Israelite identity among the other Semitic people among whom they went to live. There is no evidence that the "ten lost tribes" became the American

¹Montgomery, p. 466.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 9:14:1.

³H. Goedicke, "The End of So, King of Egypt," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 171 (1963):64-66.

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

⁵Alberto 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.

Indians, the Afghans, the Armenians, the Nestorians, or the English, as various modern cults claim.¹

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 in the LORD's sight. They did not comply with the will of Yahweh as contained in the Mosaic Law and the revelations of His prophets.

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).

¹See *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 446.

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).

"The picturesque notion of the noun and its derivative verb is lost in these trr. [translations]; it is a puff of air that they followed, and so they became light as air."¹

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 the major source of Israel's apostasy (vv. 21-22).

¹Montgomery, p. 469.

"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."¹

"It is a wonder that either nation [Israel or Judah] lasted as long as it did. One must conclude with the prophets that it was possible only because of the patient mercy of a loving God who remembered his covenant promises, though his people had forgotten theirs."²

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"³—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 the people left the land, the LORD caused "lions" to multiply and kill many of the remaining Israelites (v. 25; cf. Lev. 26:22; Exod. 23:29). The Assyrians imposed foreign cults on newly acquired provinces such as Israel.⁴ Because Judah was a vassal state, the Assyrians did not impose these cults there, though Judah had to pay tribute to Assyria.⁵ 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

¹Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Historical Books," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 107.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 392.

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

⁴Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C. E.*, pp. 105-10.

⁵Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 401, footnote 34.

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.

"Archaeology has provided ample evidence to support the Biblical account."¹

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. These passages warned the Israelites what they could expect if they broke the Mosaic Covenant.

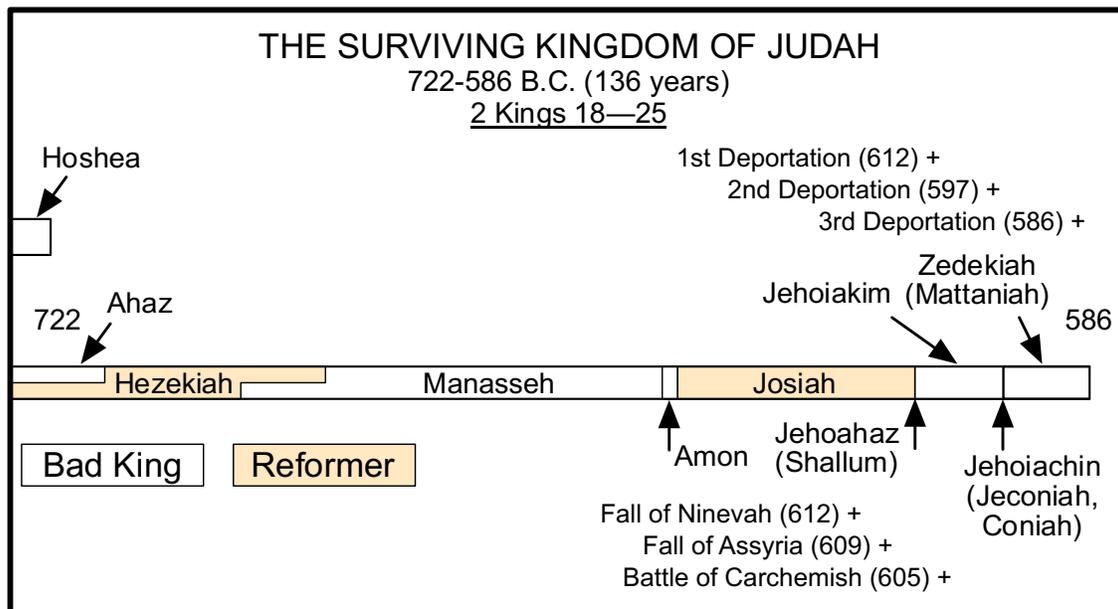
This chapter concludes the second major section of Kings: the history of the Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17). The lessons of the history of this period that the writer emphasized could not be clearer.

"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."²

¹Kathleen Kenyon, *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, p. 78.

²*Ibid.*, p. 399. See also Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 334; and Pauline Viviano, "2 Kings 17: A Rhetorical and Form Critical Analysis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (October 1987):548-49.

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 being faithful to the covenantal relationship that the Israelites had with Yahweh. The remaining kings in 2 Kings all ruled over the Southern Kingdom of Judah. 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 (CF. 2 CHRON. 29—32)

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

1. Hezekiah's goodness 18:1-12 (cf. 2 Chron. 29—31)

Hezekiah ("Yahweh Has Strengthened") began reigning as his father Ahaz's viceregent in 729 B.C. and ruled as such for 14 years. In 715 B.C. he began his sole rule over Judah, which lasted until 697 B.C. (18 years). He then

reigned with his son Manasseh who served as his viceregent for 11 more years (697-686 B.C.). His 29-year reign (v. 2) was from 715-686 B.C.¹

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 (Num. 21:8-9). 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.

"How easy it is for human nature to want to honor religious relics that have no power!"²

"There are certain organizations, certain movements, and certain methods that God has used in the past. Unfortunately, folk did not know when God was through with them. ... They became Nehushtan. They became brazen serpents that at one time had served a purpose and were mightily used by God. Then the day came when God was through with them."³

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 Hezekiah 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 (cf. 17:7-18) the spiritual reason for that defeat (v. 12). Verses 11 and 12 are a concise

¹See 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.

²Wiersbe, p. 570.

³McGee, 2:340.

statement of the purpose of the books of Kings. Hezekiah's fourth year (v. 9) was 725 B.C., namely, the fourth year of his coregency with Ahaz.

2. Sennacherib's challenge to Hezekiah 18:13-37 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:1-19; Isa. 36)

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 Sargon II was Sennacherib (705-681 B.C., v. 13).¹ Hezekiah's fourteenth year (v. 13), as sole ruler over Judah, was 701 B.C.

Sennacherib's Assyrian inscriptions claim that he conquered 46 strong cities of Hezekiah, plus many villages.² 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 with gold in order to glorify Yahweh (v. 16).

"In Judah silver appears to have been more valuable than gold."³

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, Hezekiah's father, 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.

¹See Finegan, pp. 210-14.

²See *ibid.*, pp. 192-95, for information about the Lachish Letters, which contain this information.

³Wiseman, p. 274.

"Rabshakeh" was an Assyrian title equivalent to commander-in-chief of the army. Scholars have defined the titles of the various Assyrian officers mentioned in verse 17 as follows: "Tartan" ("Field Marshal" or "Second In Rank"¹; cf. Isa. 20:1), "Rab-saris" ("Chief Eunuch"; cf. Jer. 39:3), and "Rabshakeh" ("Chief Officer").² The Rabshakeh assumed that Hezekiah was trusting in his Egyptian alliance and that Judah's gods were no better than those of the other nations. He boasted that even if the Assyrians provided 2,000 horses for Hezekiah—perhaps what Egypt might have contributed—Judah could not win.

"... cavalry was never an important arm of the Israelite military ..."³

The Rabshakeh used six arguments to persuade Hezekiah to surrender:

1. Egypt was an undependable ally (vv. 19-21), therefore Hezekiah should not count on Egypt for help.
2. The altars to Yahweh throughout the land had been removed (v. 22), therefore Hezekiah should not count on the LORD's assistance.
3. The Assyrian army was overwhelmingly large and powerful (vv. 23-24), therefore resistance would cost the Judahites many lives.
4. Yahweh had told Sennacherib to attack Jerusalem (v. 25), therefore God was on the side of the Assyrians.
5. Conditions for the Israelites would be paradisiacal if they surrendered (vv. 31-32), therefore the Judahites should not fear defeat.
6. No other god was able to save the nations that the Assyrians had attacked (vv. 33-35), therefore Hezekiah should not think that Yahweh could save Judah.

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 the

¹Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 360, n. 72.

²Whitcomb, p. 450. See also Gray, p. 678; Free, p. 210.

³Montgomery, p. 488.

Assyrian representatives speak in the Aramaic language rather than in Hebrew. 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."¹

However, the Assyrians wanted all the people to know that surrender would be better than resistance. The commander may have spoken in the language of the Israelites through an interpreter. His references to the inability of the gods of Samaria would have been especially intimidating, since many in the Northern Kingdom of Israel had worshipped Yahweh (v. 35).

The writer recorded this lengthy incident in Kings because it shows the central issues that Judah faced. Would she trust in Yahweh or herself or her allies? This is another instance in which 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. The threefold repetition of this revelation underlines the importance of its lessons for every reader of Scripture.

3. Yahweh's immediate encouragement 19:1-13 (cf. Isa. 37:1-13)

Hezekiah's admirable 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 primarily because the Assyrians had challenged the reputation of Yahweh.

God's method of deliverance involved harassing and distracting 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 (to the south of 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.

¹Auld, p. 240.

Finegan suggested that Sennacherib made a second invasion of Palestine after Tirhakah was actually ruling as king of Egypt, 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."¹

4. Hezekiah's prayer 19:14-19 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:20; Isa. 37:14-20)

Sennacherib sent another warning to Hezekiah (vv. 10-13) that led him to pray again.

"My friend, we need to spread our disturbing letters before the Lord just as Hezekiah did."²

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 to the Israelites. 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."³

5. Yahweh's answer 19:20-37 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:21-23; Isa. 37:21-38)

God sent Hezekiah the news of what He would do, and why, through the prophet Isaiah. The "virgin" daughter of Zion (v. 21) refers to Jerusalem as

¹Finegan, p. 213. See also Bright, pp. 282-87.

²McGee, 2:344.

³John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, p. 37.

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. Assyrian conquerors pictured themselves, on some monuments, as leading their captives with a line that passed through rings that they had placed in their victims' noses.¹ God promised to do to them as they had done to others (v. 28; cf. Gal. 6:7). Sennacherib's claims (vv. 23-24) were probably exaggerated. Verses 21-28 are perhaps the only poetry in 2 Kings.²

"The passage is not *meant* to be taken literally. It is the very point that Sennacherib has an exaggerated view of his own accomplishments, as Assyrian kings often did. He thinks of himself as a god."³

An immediate sign helped Hezekiah believe in the long-range deliverance that God promised (v. 29). God-given 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 that God was at work in history (cf. Isa. 7:14; 38:7).⁴ 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, as a result of previous cultivation. This was a blessing of fertility for trust and obedience (cf. Deut. 28:33). In the third year, the people would again resume 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' *Histories*, 2:141] 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 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

¹Cf. Luckenbill, 2:314-15, 319.

²Sanford C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, pp. 62, 76-77.

³Provan, p. 262.

⁴Keil. p. 454.

disease elsewhere in the Bible are regarded as a smiting by an angel of God (II Samuel 24:15-17; Acts 12:23)."¹

Ironically, the Assyrian king suffered assassination in the temple of his god, who was not able to deliver him. This was the very thing that he had charged Yahweh with being unable to do for Judah. Extra-biblical sources corroborate Sennacherib's assassination, though they mention only one assassin.² 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.³

6. Hezekiah's illness and recovery 20:1-11 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:24-27; Isa. 38:1-8, 21-22)

"In those days" (v. 1) refers to the year that 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). "He turned his face to the wall" (v. 2) perhaps "for private communion with his God"⁴ (cf. 1 Kings 21:4). In contrast, King Ahaziah had sought help from Baal-zebul 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 (cf. James 5:16). "The middle courtyard" (v. 4) was probably the area between the temple and the palace.⁵ Fig poultices (v. 7) were a common treatment in the ancient world as a remedy for boils.⁶ Hezekiah's physicians apparently did not prescribe this treatment, but Isaiah did.

"It is our duty, when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man."⁷

¹Finegan, p. 214.

²See Cogan and Tadmor, pp. 239-40.

³Finegan, pp. 211-12, and fig. 77. See also Free, p. 209.

⁴Montgomery, p. 506.

⁵Jones, 2:586.

⁶Cf. Keil, pp. 462-63; Wiseman, p. 287; Finegan, p. 172; Gray, p. 693.

⁷Henry, p. 427.

"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 ..."¹

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).² Gwilym Jones did not take the view of some that what happened was a solar eclipse (on January 11, 689 B.C.) seriously.³ The same Hebrew word, *ma'alim*, can be translated either "stairway," "steps," or "degrees."⁴ Evidently a staircase served as a sundial. As God caused the shadow to go back, so He would cause Hezekiah's health to go back to what it had been, so that he could live longer.

7. The prophecy of Babylonian captivity 20:12-19 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:31; Isa. 39:1-8)

Berodach-baladan (also spelled 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.⁵ Hezekiah appears to have let his visitors know the extent of Judah's financial strength because he favored Berodach-baladan and the Chaldeans rather than the then more powerful Assyrians.⁶

"His [Berodach-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)."⁷

Evidently Hezekiah became proud as a result of his healing and wished to impress his Babylonian visitors with his wealth and power (cf. 2 Chron. 32:25, 31). He may also have been naive. Isaiah prophesied that Babylon

¹House, p. 373.

²See Whitcomb, pp. 464-65.

³Jones, 2:589.

⁴Montgomery, p. 508.

⁵John Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1090.

⁶Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 432.

⁷*The Nelson ...*, p. 648.

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 that 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.¹ 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.

Some students of this passage have concluded that Hezekiah was wrong in asking the LORD to lengthen his life, since his wicked son Manasseh was evidently born during that period. The writer did not address that issue, because it was not important to him. It is impossible to say if Hezekiah was responsible for his son's wickedness, or if he was not.

8. Hezekiah's death 20:20-21 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:32-33)

Hezekiah's 1,777-foot long tunnel (v. 20) 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.²

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 after his death, 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,

¹Peter 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.

²See Kathleen Kenyon, *Jerusalem*, pp. 69-71; Finegan, pp. 190-91; and W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 135.

how can anyone guarantee the quality of their children's life choices?"¹

"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 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."²

B. MANASSEH'S EVIL REIGN 21:1-18 (CF. 2 CHRON. 33:1-20)

Manasseh (lit. "Making Forgetful") began reigning as viceregent 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."³

"Manasseh was 'the Ahab of Judah' and the antithesis of the great David."⁴

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 sacrifices, and Saul's spiritism were all abominations that he revived, even though the Law of Moses condemned

¹House, p. 376.

²Bright, p. 288.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 649. Cf. Finegan, pp. 214-17, for more information about these two kings.

⁴Wiseman, p. 291.

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 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).¹ The early church father Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) wrote that the Jews sawed him to death with a wooden saw. 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 these prophets.² But it seems more likely that Habakkuk ministered later, during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.).

Not only did Manasseh apostatize (renounce previously held beliefs) personally, 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 "plummet of the house of Ahab" (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" (v. 14) 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 his own son (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" burial (v. 18) reflects the fact that his behavior resulted in his people esteeming him

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

²C. F. Keil, "Habakkuk," in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, p. 52.

lightly. God had disciplined him personally (cf. 2 Chron. 33:11-13), and he had become an instrument of God's discipline for Judah.

"It is fitting that the name of the burial place of Manasseh, and of the son who walked in his ways [i.e., "the garden of Uzza," v. 18], should carry connotations of spectacular judgment upon impiety [cf. 2 Sam. 6:1-8]."¹

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).² His long life was not a blessing for faithfulness, as Hezekiah's had been, but an instrument of chastening for Judah for Judah's unfaithfulness.

C. AMON'S EVIL REIGN 21:19-26 (CF. 2 CHRON. 33:21-25)

Manasseh's son Amon reigned for 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. Amon's 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 at all.

D. JOSIAH'S GOOD REIGN 22:1—23:30 (CF. 2 CHRON. 34—35)

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

¹Provan, p. 269.

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

ancient Near East generally and in Israel, for kings to marry very young and to father children when they were early teenagers.¹

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.²

1. Josiah's goodness 22:1-2

Josiah ("Yahweh Supports") was one of the surviving kingdom of Judah's best kings, if not the very best. He is the only king of whom the writer wrote that he "did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (v. 2), a condition that God specified for His kings in relation to His law (Deut. 17:20). Josiah 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). Unfortunately, he came to the throne of Judah too late to prevent the demise of his nation.

2. Josiah's reforms 22:3—23:27 (cf. 2 Chron. 34)

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."³

¹Nadav 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.

²For 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.

³House, p. 382.

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 to do, because in ancient times there were few copies of even official documents.

Many critical 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. in order to encourage centralization of worship in Jerusalem.¹

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 Book of Deuteronomy, since the phrase "the Book of the law" is used in the Pentateuch only of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26; cf. also Josh. 1:8; 8:30-35; 23:6; 24:26).

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 of chapter 22 is especially helpful in understanding Josiah's perception of and response to God's will: He was a genuinely humble man who submitted to the Word of the LORD.

"Those put the truest honour upon their Bibles that study them and converse with them daily, feed on that bread and walk by that light."²

Josiah made monotheism the official belief again, but it is hard to say how many of the people abandoned other gods. The prophets who wrote in that time (Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah) bewailed the lack of true godliness in the nation.

¹E.g., Jones, 2:606.

²Henry, p. 429.

"We don't need so-and-so's book; we need the Bible. We don't need the book of the month; we need the Book of the ages."¹

Other prophets beside Huldah (22:14) 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 topographically²). 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 (22:19). The king would die in peace (22:20). This prophecy may have expressed God's desire and intent for Josiah. The fact that he died in battle, not in peace (23:29), may have been the result of his departing from God's will by confronting Pharaoh Neco in battle. A better explanation is that the prophecy was fulfilled in that Josiah died before the violent destruction of Jerusalem.³ His death in 609 B.C. was four years before King Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem in 605 B.C. He died in peacetime.

"Those that most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it."⁴

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—30.⁵ He then rededicated himself to Yahweh, and the people renewed their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant as a nation (23:3; cf. 2:3; Exod. 19:8; Josh. 24:21-24).

"The story of finding the book is the most detailed narrative in Ki., apart from the stories of the prophets, since the history of Solomon."⁶

Putting the ashes, which burning the relics connected with Baal worship created, on the Bethel altar would have made it unclean (v. 4). Evidently

¹McGee, 2:353.

²Jones, 2:612.

³Provan, p. 275.

⁴Henry, p. 429.

⁵Auld, p. 222. See Montgomery, pp. 543-44, for other scholarly speculations.

⁶Ibid., p. 545.

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.¹ Nevertheless, he permitted them to eat the unleavened bread that 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 (1 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."²

The people had also used horses and chariots to honor the sun (v. 11). This was a common practice in the ancient Near East.³ The mount of destruction (v. 13) was the hill on the southern portion of the Mount of Olives, and was 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 its 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 who lived in Bethel, mentioned in 1 Kings 13:11. King Josiah even extended his purges into formerly Northern Kingdom 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 Judges Period of Israel's history—including David and Solomon. 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

¹See Brian Taylor, "Bamot in Josianic Reforms: A Heuristic Approach for the Signification of the Term *Bama*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:3 (September 2017):457-78.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 653.

³Patterson and Austel, p. 287.

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.

"As Hezekiah was a nonsuch [*sic* nonesuch, an excellent person] for faith and dependence upon God in straits (*ch.* xviii. 5), so Josiah was a nonsuch for sincerity and zeal in carrying on a work of reformation."¹

Notice that in the sequence of reforms that the writer narrated, the discovery of the Law (22:8-13), which 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.² When leaders recommit themselves to following God's Word wholeheartedly, good things result for their followers.

3. Josiah's death 23:28-30 (cf. 2 Chron. 35:20-27)

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 advances westward, Josiah intercepted Pharaoh Neco II (609-595 B.C.) at Megiddo and tried to stop him from proceeding.³ Unfortunately for Judah, the Egyptians killed Josiah there in 609 B.C. Egypt's forces then continued marching north, united with the Assyrian army, 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.⁴

"The discovery of a clay tablet published by Gadd of the British Museum explains the reason [why Josiah engaged Neco in

¹Henry, p. 431.

²See 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.

³See Finegan, pp. 129-30.

⁴See the map "The Babylonian Empire" in Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 434.

battle]. It shows that Nineveh had already fallen, and that Nechoh [Pharaoh Neco] was not going against the remnant of the Assyrian army, but was actually going to its aid ..."¹

Josiah died in battle (23:29-30). The promise of his dying in peace (22:20) 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.² Perhaps the prophecy that he would die in peace presumed that Josiah would continue to follow the will of Yahweh. But by going into battle against Pharaoh Neco, Josiah departed from God's will and so nullified the prophecy (cf. the prophesied death of King Ahab; 1 Kings 21:19; 22:38).

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 the Northern Kingdom of Israel.³ The fact that his nation quickly abandoned the LORD after his death seems to indicate that Josiah's reforms, while official, did not result in a spiritual revival among his people. Unfortunately, this great king 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 in existence when Josephus wrote.⁴ Unfortunately, it no longer exists.

"That the best king of Judah should end his days in the same way as one of the worst [i.e., Ahaziah, cf. 9:27-28] indicates the way things are now going. The delay of judgment for Jerusalem and its kings is utterly at an end."⁵

¹Free, p. 218.

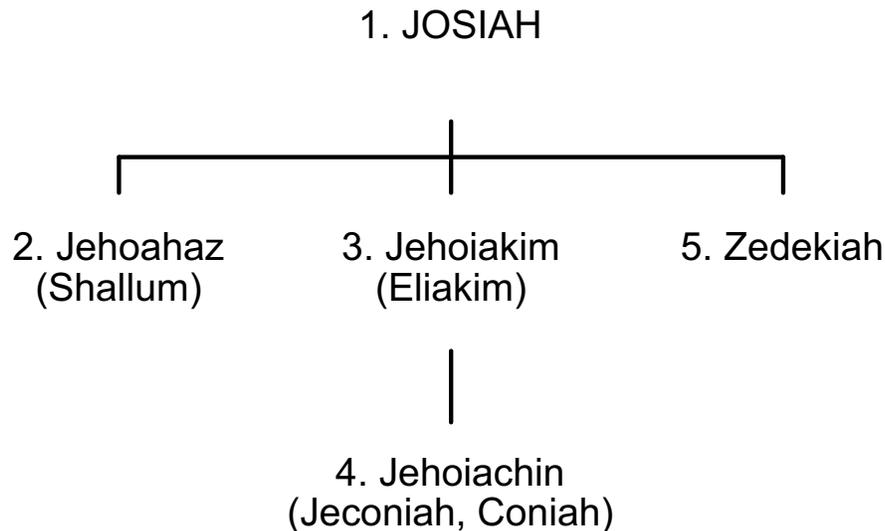
²E.g., Patterson and Austel, p. 284; Whitcomb, p. 474.

³See the map of his kingdom in Wiseman, p. 295.

⁴Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:5:1.

⁵Provan, p. 275.

The Last Five Kings of Judah

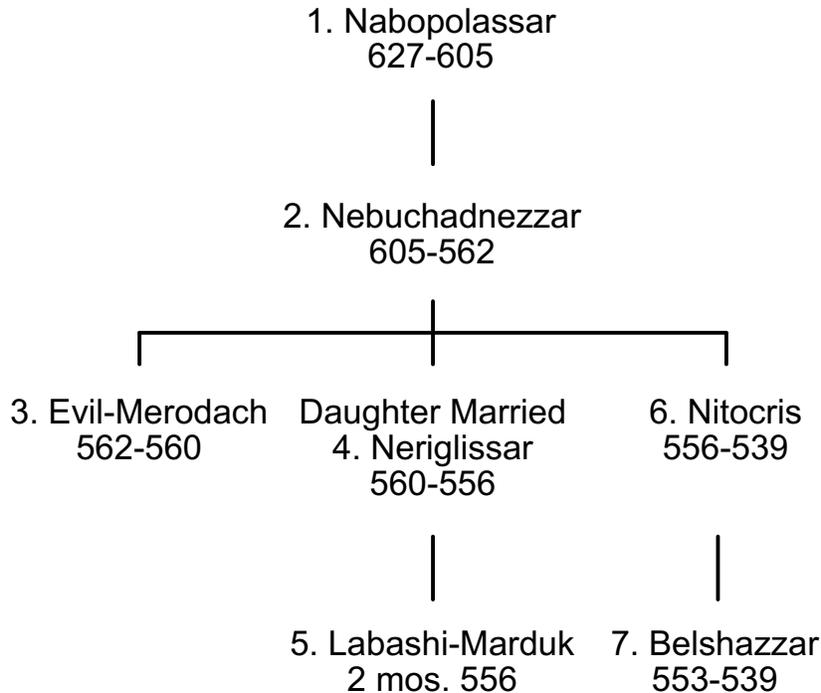


E. JEHOAHAZ'S EVIL REIGN 23:31-35 (CF. 2 CHRON. 36:1-4)

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's death. 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). Jehoahaz was the first Judean king to die in prison. 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.

Kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire



F. JEHOIAKIM'S EVIL REIGN 23:36—24:7 (CF. 2 CHRON. 36:5-8)

Jehoiakim (lit. "Yahweh Has Established"), formerly named Eliakim (lit. "God Establishes"), reigned as a puppet king under Pharaoh Neco 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—he was not yet king—led the Babylonian army of his father Nabopolassar against the allied forces of Assyria and Egypt and defeated them at Carchemish in Syria (Aramea).¹ This victory, as previously explained, gave Babylon supremacy in the ancient Near East.

"The three major Chaldean tribes—Bit-Yakin, Bit-Dakkuri, and Bit-Amukani—first appear in texts from the era of Shalmaneser

¹See Finegan, pp. 220-25.

III (ca. 850). Eventually becoming the dominant political element in the south, they were the forerunners of the Neo-Babylonian Empire founded by Nabopolassar in 626. It is accurate to say, then, that 'Chaldean' and 'Neo-Babylonian' are interchangeable terms to describe a people or peoples who occupied central and lower Mesopotamia in post-Kassite times."¹

With Babylon's victory at Carchemish, Egypt's vassals, including Judah, came under Babylon's control. Shortly after that event, in the same year that Nabopolassar died, Nebuchadnezzar succeeded him as king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar has been called "the greatest Eastern king since Hammurabi."²

"Babylon was rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar and became the world's metropolis."³

"... Nebuchadnezzar's engineers formed that city and its surroundings into the world's mightiest fortress."⁴

Shortly after he became king, Nebuchadnezzar 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.⁵ 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

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 448.

²Abram Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 59.

³A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p. 15.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:5:2.

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."¹

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."²

G. JEHOIACHIN'S EVIL REIGN 24:8-17 (CF. 2 CHRON. 36:9-10)

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).³ The invasion fulfilled the LORD's warning to Solomon about apostasy in 1 Kings 9:6-9. A large deportation of Judah's population followed in 597 B.C. Josephus numbered the deportees at 10,832.⁴ Jehoiakim was not able to establish a dynasty of kings to follow him, as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 22:30). Instead, 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.⁵

H. ZEDEKIAH'S EVIL REIGN 24:18—25:7 (CF. 2 CHRON. 36:11-21)

Zedekiah (Mattaniah) was Josiah's third son to rule over Judah. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (v. 20) by making a treaty with Pharaoh Hophra

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 655.

² Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:5:2.

³ See Finegan, pp. 225-27.

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:7:1.

⁵ W. F. Albright, "Seal of Eliakim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932):91-92. Cf. 25:27-30.

(589-570 B.C.), being pressured by nationalists in Judah to do so (cf. Jer. 37:1—39:18; 52:1-3, 17-34).

"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."¹

Jerusalem was under siege for about eighteen months (588-586 B.C.; 25:1-2).² 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."³

The resulting famine that the residents experienced (v. 3) was only one of many that the Israelites underwent in their history 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.⁴ The Babylonians captured King Zedekiah while he was trying to escape, evidently at the south end of the city near the Pool of Siloam (cf. Neh. 3:15). They 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 that 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).⁵

"The act of blinding captives appears in Assyrian reliefs; such mutilation destroyed the royal potency."⁶

¹House, p. 395.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:7:4.

³*Ibid.*, 10:8:1.

⁴E.g., Rodger C. Young, "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:1 (March 2004):21-38.

⁵Andre Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, p. 97.

⁶Montgomery, p. 562.

Josephus recorded that Nebuchadnezzar also took the high priest, Josedek, captive to Babylon.¹

"The lesson of Samaria's fall and exile should have been learned."²

"... 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)."³

These bracketing references to the plains of Jericho are an indication of the narrative unity of this large 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 ..."⁴

"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,

¹Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:8:5.

²Wiseman, p. 312.

³J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):8.

⁴Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:7:2. Cf. *ibid.*, 10:8:2.

retained the government twenty years, though he was not of the same tribe with the rest."¹

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

This concluding section of 2 Kings relates what happened after the fall of Jerusalem.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem 25:8-21

After Jerusalem fell, Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's commander-in-chief, returned to destroy Jerusalem more thoroughly and so 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.²

Nebuzaradan's burning of Yahweh's house (v. 9) made 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 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.³ 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.⁴)

The breaking down of Jerusalem's walls (v. 10) prevented the inhabitants from defending themselves, but it also visualized the fact that Judah no longer had any defense. Yahweh had been her defense. The third deportation (in 586 B.C.) 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

¹Ibid., 10:8:4.

²Cited in idem, *Against Apion*, 1:19.

³Idem, *Antiquities of ...*, 10:8:5.

⁴Ibid., 10:9:7.

interest in the pillars in front of the temple (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, perhaps when they burned the temple, or took it to Babylon, from which it never returned to Jerusalem (but cf. 2 Chron. 5:9). A few believe that the Jews hid it under the temple esplanade (or courtyard). Another tradition is that Jeremiah took the Tent of Meeting, the ark, and the altar of incense to Mount Nebo, where he hid them in a cave, believing that when the LORD restored the Israelites, He would reveal the hiding place to His people (2 Macc. 2:4-8).

The Babylonians also cut the priesthood back, by killing many priests (vv. 18-21), so the people could not unite around the priests and rebel. (Josephus provided a list of the 18 high priests who served from Solomon's time to Zedekiah's time.¹) The priesthood's 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. The temple, its 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. Some of the Jews later 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.

¹Ibid., 10:8:6.

"In the exile and beyond it, Judaism was born."¹

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

2. Gedaliah's governorship 25:22-26

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)."²

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).

¹Bright, p. 323.

²The NET2 Bible note on 25:25.

3. Jehoiachin's good treatment in Babylon 25:27-30

In 562 B.C., the Babylonian king Evilmerodach (562-560 B.C.) permitted Jehoiachin to enjoy a measure of freedom.

"The reason for the new king's favour to Jehoiachin is obscure; political motives in his short and troubled reign [of only two years] may have been the cause."¹

"Cuneiform tablets found by [E. F.] Weidner in Babylon agree with these biblical notations. They identify Jehoiachin as 'King of the land of Judah,' and indicate that he and his five sons received liberal allowances of oil and food. They state further that the sons were in the care of an attendant, suggesting that servants were actually provided for the family."²

"Daniel may ... have exerted influence to bring about the elevation of Jehoiachin to a place of honor by King Amelmarduk (II Kings 25:27-30). This type of act toward a captive king suggests the interests of a special friend working in his behalf. Further, Daniel may have had much to do with the decree which permitted Jews to return to Palestine. The decree was issued in Cyrus' first year (II Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1) when Daniel was yet active. He [Daniel] held his highest position at the time of this return and could have exerted his greatest influence."³

Perhaps the writer of Kings chose to end his book on this positive note (25:27-30; cf. Jer. 52:31-34) 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).

"The people of Judah seem never to have accepted Zedekiah as their true king, ... probably because he had been appointed

¹Montgomery, p. 567.

²Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 386. See also Jones, 2:649; Gray, p. 774.

³Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 384, including part of footnote 30.

by the foreign Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, they ascribed this honor still to Jehoiachin, though in captivity."¹

God is faithful to His promises. God's mercy to His people is one of the persistently recurring motifs in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. The way was now open for return and restoration, which we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

¹Ibid., p. 374.

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."¹

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 to 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.

¹O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 266.

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 Christians is different in many respects from what He required of the Israelites. Nevertheless, He still deals with Christians in the same way He dealt with the Israelites: 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."¹

¹House, p. 402.

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