

I and II Kings

The Death of David: Crisis Reveals Character

Historical Context

The record of First Kings covers about one hundred and twenty years in Israel's history. It begins with the death of David (971 B.C.) and continues through the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahaziah of Israel (about 853 B.C.). The united nation of Israel under David and Solomon did, during this period, split into two kingdoms, north and south. The northern kingdom was called Israel and had its capital at Samaria. The southern kingdom was called Judah and retained Jerusalem as its capital. This record made clear that the continued disobedience of the kings and their people directly caused Israel to split into two kingdoms and subsequently fall to foreign powers.

The End of David (1 Kings 1:1–4)

As First Kings opens, David was in his last years, maybe even last days, and his servants convinced him to accept a carefully selected young virgin to lie with him to keep him warm. Abishag was her name, and while the Bible recorded that David did not “know” her sexually, he did accept her help. She unwittingly played a part in a later power struggle between two of David's sons.

Adonijah's Power Play (1 Kings 1:5–52)

As David neared death, his successor had not been publicly presented. David had nineteen sons and one daughter by seven wives (Michal, his first wife, had had no children), plus other children by concubines, whose names were not recorded. His first-born son Amnon and third-born son Absalom were already dead. Although David had privately promised his wife Bathsheba that her second son Solomon would succeed him, David's fourth-born of all his sons, Adonijah, began to take deliberate steps to take over David's throne.

David had never stopped Adonijah before from doing exactly as he pleased. Adonijah's self-centered activities were soon to be halted abruptly by a power greater than his own. However, to strengthen his position, Adonijah recruited key supporters like Joab, David's chief military officer, and Abiathar, a descendant of Eli and the current high priest (Mark 2:26). Adonijah invited all the king's sons (with the exception of Solomon), Joab, Abiathar, and the men of Judah to his “inaugural” feast. While gathered there, the group celebrated and shouted, “Long live King Adonijah!” (verse 25).

News of this came to David's faithful spiritual adviser Nathan. He immediately enlisted the help of Bathsheba to confront David with the problem. Nathan and Bathsheba knew of David's promise to make Solomon the next king. David listened to both Nathan and Bathsheba and then found the strength to take action. David called for Benaiah, who was in charge of David's personal body guard, the Cherethites and the Pelethites. He sent them all forth, with Solomon riding royally on David's own mule, to anoint publicly Solomon and watch him take his seat on David's throne. The trumpet was blown, and the celebrating began in the city as Solomon was recognized as the new king of Israel.

The noise disturbed Adonijah's gathering, and the guests left quickly when they realized what had just occurred with Solomon. Adonijah feared for his life and ran to the altar of the tabernacle for safety. When Solomon heard of his brother's plea to be spared from the certain death that normally followed

such treachery, Solomon granted him mercy so long as he was not a threat to the new order. Adonijah went back to his own house as ordered.

Advising Solomon (1 Kings 2:1–9)

From his death bed, David gave Solomon superb spiritual advice: “Be strong...And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies...that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.”; Such behavior, David counseled, would certainly assure the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to continue Solomon’s line.

David next turned his attention from spiritual matters to some pressing matters of state. Remembering how Joab, his violent army commander, had murdered Abner and Amasa without warning in revenge for personal wrongs, David asked Solomon to use his wisdom to deal with Joab after David’s death.

Solomon was urged to continue to show kindness to the family of Barzillai. This man had generously provided for David while David was in exile from Absalom (2 Samuel 19:31–39). David urged Solomon to use his wisdom to punish Shimei, the man who dared to curse David as he left Jerusalem to flee from Absalom. Knowing the challenges Solomon would face as a young man taking over the affairs of state, David wanted him to be aware of those who had caused grief or brought blessing, so that Solomon would not be caught off guard by any action they might take in the future.

Solomon’s Early Reign

Adonijah’s Request (1 Kings 2:10–46)

David “rested with his fathers” after having reigned forty years. Solomon now sat on the throne, secure as God’s anointed king. However, Adonijah, Solomon’s older half-brother who had failed in his first attempt for the throne, apparently still desired to be king. As elder brother, Adonijah must have felt he had more right to succeed David than Solomon had.

Adonijah asked Bathsheba to request that he be given Abishag, David’s concubine, for his wife. Normally, only the successor of a king had access to the royal harem. Naively, Bathsheba approached Solomon to make this request. Solomon rose to meet her, a biblical sign of respect for one’s elders (Leviticus 19:32), and sat her on his right hand. On hearing her request that Abishag be given to Adonijah in marriage, Solomon became furious. He recognized this as a power-play on the part of Adonijah and saw in it another plot to take over the throne. Earlier, Solomon had mercifully spared the lives of Adonijah, Joab, and Abiathar when they were exposed in their attempt to make Adonijah king instead of him. In return for this mercy, it was assumed that Adonijah would cause no more trouble. With his bold request for Abishag, Adonijah had broken the fragile peace.

Solomon quickly dispatched Benaiah, his chief “mighty man,” to execute Adonijah. Then, Solomon banished Abiathar, the high priest, from Jerusalem and sent him to Anathoth. His life was spared because Solomon recognized his long-term faithfulness to David, yet this banishment actually fulfilled an earlier prophecy about the family of Eli (1 Samuel 2:31–35). However, Joab was not as fortunate. Joab, the old warrior, fled to the altar of the tabernacle for asylum. As the murderer of Amasa and Abner, Joab was not allowed that protection by law, and Solomon had him executed right there (Exodus 21:13, 14).

The final enemy of David, about whom Solomon had been warned (1 Kings 2:8, 9), was Shimei. Solomon had told him to remain in Jerusalem, a sort of “house arrest,” to limit any possible treachery against the throne. However, when two of his slaves ran away, Shimei ignored Solomon’s restrictions and pursued them. Solomon considered that an act of rebellion, for which he withdrew his mercy and had Shimei executed by Benaiah. Thus, Solomon dealt with all the enemies to his throne about whom David had warned him.

The Beginning of Trouble (1 Kings 3:1–3)

Solomon made a political treaty with the king of Egypt and confirmed it by marrying Pharaoh’s daughter. God had specifically warned against making marriage covenants with the heathen of the land. (Exodus 34:12–16; Deuteronomy 7:1–6.) Although she was not from the tribes of Canaan, she was a pagan, and Solomon allowed her to continue her false worship, against the expressed will of God (Deuteronomy 21:10; Exodus 20:1–5). This and numerous other marriages led Solomon into serious sin against God (1 Kings 11:3). In these verses, at the beginning of his reign, Solomon loved the Lord and generally obeyed His laws, but his sin of amassing many wives and his allowing worship to continue in the “high places,” first set up by the heathen, would bear sour fruit in his personal life and for the nation as a whole. Solomon accomplished so much in his life, but his overall record was tainted and tarnished because of his disobedience in a few critical areas.

Solomon’s Request to God (1 Kings 3:4–15)

Solomon worshiped the Lord. At the high place in Gibeon, the current location of the tabernacle (2 Chronicles 1:3), Solomon offered one thousand burnt offerings! In a dream afterward, God asked him what he desired. Solomon did not choose what many would have chosen, namely, power, wealth, or long life. He asked God to give him the wisdom to govern God’s people. The Lord was so pleased with his choice that He gave him not only “a wise and understanding heart” but also wealth and power. Long life was promised, too, if Solomon would continue to obey God’s commandments. When Solomon awoke from the dream, he went to Jerusalem and stood before the ark and worshiped the Lord with offerings and a feast for his servants.

Solomon’s Wisdom (1 Kings 3:16–28)

The Scripture writers recorded an interesting problem brought to Solomon for his judgment. Two harlots lived together with brand new infants. One rolled over on hers in the night and killed him; then she switched her dead son for the other’s live one while that mother slept. That mother realized the next morning that the dead child was not hers and confronted her “roommate.” Unable to settle the matter, they brought it to Solomon. He asked for a sword that he might divide the child between the two harlots. Of course, the child’s real mother pleaded for the king to keep the child alive and give him to the other woman. By her immediate outrage and compassion, Solomon knew her to be the real mother and gave her back her son. So the matter was solved, and Solomon’s wisdom was recorded.

Prosperity under Solomon (1 Kings 4)

As David had done, Solomon organized his administration. Life for the nation under his administration could only be described as prosperous: “Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing” (1 Kings 4:20).

The daily allotment for food for his family and staff was huge (1 Kings 4:22, 23), and his land holdings were the largest Israel had before or since. After the years of warfare that Saul and David endured, Israel under Solomon experienced “peace on every side.”

Some of Solomon’s collected possessions were against God’s direct commands for kings given in Deuteronomy 17. He “multiplied” horses and chariots (1 Kings 4:26) as well as wives (1 Kings 11:1–3), yet God did not take back from him the wisdom and wealth that He had given him. Solomon was credited with writing three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs.

Help from Hiram (1 Kings 5)

Hiram, an old friend of David’s, sent messengers to greet Solomon as the new king of Israel. Solomon responded with a request to Hiram to provide the cedars needed for the building of the new temple. Hiram happily agreed and was well paid for the lumber. Solomon raised up a workforce of thirty thousand to help with the construction, and Hiram sent builders, too. Hiram sent a particularly gifted craftsman who was “skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson, and to make any engraving and to accomplish any plan which may be given to him...” (2 Chronicles 2:14). At last the project for which David had prayed and provided was about to be started.

The Temple (1 Kings 6)

Four hundred and eighty years after the exodus, the work on a permanent temple was begun. It would take seven years to complete this beautiful worship center. The dimensions of the holy place and holy of holies of the original tabernacle were at least doubled for this temple. Multiple storage chambers were added, which had not been part of the portable tabernacle’s layout. The temple itself and surrounding structures were made of stone, quarried elsewhere and brought to the temple mount ready for placement. The floor was made of cypress planking. All exposed stone was covered with cedar paneling and then overlaid with gold!

Solomon’s House (1 Kings 7:1–12)

Solomon also constructed a spectacular residence for himself which included a hall of judgment. He spent thirteen years on this structure. It was made of costly stones, cedar wood, and many windows. More about the Temple (1 Kings 7).

The site chosen for the building of the temple was Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. It had been the threshing floor originally purchased by David from Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite as a place where David could offer sacrifices to God after his ill-fated census (2 Samuel 24:24). Numerous architectural details about its construction were given in these chapters as well as descriptions of the fabric and colors used in the veils.

Solomon greatly increased the dimensions of the “Sea” or laver from those of the one used in the tabernacle. His could hold up to at least twelve thousand gallons of water for the ceremonial washings of the priests. Solomon also commissioned the building of special carts to be used for the work of preparing and transporting the sacrificial offerings as well as ten smaller lavers to be placed in the altar area.

The Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8)

Seven years after construction had begun, the temple was finished. In a national assembly, the priests and Levites brought up the ark of the covenant and the rest of the sacred furnishings to be installed in their proper places in the new temple. In the holy of holies, Solomon had placed hand-crafted golden cherubim fifteen feet tall, with wingspreads so wide that they touched either wall (1 Kings 6:23–28). Under them, the ark was placed.

In a display of divine approval as the priests came out of the holy place, the Lord filled the temple with His glory in the form of a cloud. Solomon recognized the cloud of glory as a fulfillment of the Lord's word to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:9: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.' So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD."

Solomon blessed the whole assembly and then began a prayer of dedication to God. He reviewed the history of the temple's construction, beginning with David's desire to build it, and explaining how God had denied him that privilege but had allowed his son to do so. Solomon praised God as the unique God of heaven and earth, who faithfully kept covenant with his people. Then he proceeded to ask God to hear the prayers of Israel when they called to Him for help for a variety of problems.

According to the reference in 2 Chronicles 7, following Solomon's prayer of dedication, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple...they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever.'" What a wonderfully dramatic proof of His approval of the new temple! From then on, the sacrifices would be burnt on an altar which had had its fire started by God Himself.

Solomon continued the national worship service with the sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep! These had to be sacrificed in the middle of the temple courtyard because there was not room on the bronze altar to handle that many offerings. For fourteen days Israel sacrificed to the Lord. On the eighth day after the second week, when the celebration concluded, the people went away "joyful and glad of heart for all the good that the LORD had done for His servant David, and for Israel His people" (1 Kings 8:66).

Solomon's Later Reign

God Appears to Solomon Again (1 Kings 9:1–9)

When Solomon had finished both the temple and his own house, God appeared to him for the second time with a promise and a warning: "I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually...But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me...then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight." No matter how impressive the temple was or how pleased God was with it, it still would not last nor its people remain secure in their land if their king and his sons failed to obey God fully.

Money (1 Kings 9:10–23)

Evidently, to raise more money for his other extensive building plans, Solomon gave twenty border cities in Galilee to his ally Hiram of Tyre, who had helped him so generously in his first projects.

Although Hiram claimed the cities were of no real value, he still sent one hundred and twenty talents of gold (about four tons) to Solomon for them. According to the Jewish law, Solomon should not have given Israel's land to a foreign power (Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 36:7). The land allotments were to be owned perpetually by members of the tribes to which they had been assigned.

In addition to the temple and his own residence, Solomon raised the finances and gathered the workforce necessary to build "the Millo," a large land-fill which made the city level, as well as the wall around Jerusalem, and the storage cities, strategically placed around the country north to south as headquarters for his horses, chariots, food stores, and cavalry. Solomon forced the descendants of the pagan population to work for him but gave the workers of Israel positions of authority.

House for a Princess (1 Kings 9:24)

Solomon built a separate residence for his wife, the princess of Egypt. He did not put her in the house of David because he recognized that the presence of the ark there had made it sacred, and as a pagan, her presence would defile it. God had warned Israel in Exodus 34:16 and in Deuteronomy 7:3 and 4 about the idolatry that would result from intermarriage with pagans, but Solomon had defied God's clear command and tried to make it right by putting his Egyptian wife in separate housing. However, Solomon would not escape being negatively influenced by his multiple marriages to pagan women (1 Kings 11:4, 5).

Spiritual and Military Activity (1 Kings 9:25–28)

Solomon provided the daily, monthly, and yearly offerings required by the Mosaic law for the new temple. He followed the organizational procedures established by his father David for the rotation of duties for the Levites who served in the temple. With the temple running smoothly, Solomon turned his attention to the formation of a navy, using the expertise of Hiram of Tyre in the training and management of personnel and ships.

Visit from the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13)

Curious to verify the words about Solomon's great wisdom and wealth, the queen of Sheba made the 1200-mile trip north from what is now Yemen, bordered by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, to visit Jerusalem. With "a very great retinue" bearing expensive gifts of spices, gold, algum wood, and precious stones, the queen was given the full attention of Solomon for "all that was in her heart." Anything she asked, he answered, and she was awed by his lavish life-style. She noted the food and the richly dressed servants and pronounced the people blessed indeed who were fortunate enough to serve him and the Lord, who made it all possible. Solomon was generous to her in return, with gifts. She eventually departed with her servants to her own country.

Solomon's Material Prosperity (1 Kings 10:14–29)

Solomon annually received twenty-five tons of gold in income! He had so much gold that he could afford to decorate his royal hall with three hundred shields of hammered gold, to build a magnificent throne, and use golden cups for drinking. Silver was "as common in Jerusalem as stones" while Solomon was king. His merchant ships kept him supplied with necessary as well as exotic provisions like "gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys."

Pagan Women Lead Solomon Away from God (1 Kings 11:1–40)

In direct disregard of God's law (Exodus 34:16), Solomon married many pagan women. How many? Seven hundred wives plus three hundred concubines! Not surprisingly, they turned his attention away from his duties to God. In seeking to please them, he angered the Lord. He not only provided for but also participated in their continual idolatrous worship. The man who had supervised the building of the glorious temple for God turned his back on the Creator of all, who had appeared to him twice! In punishment, God swore to tear the kingdom away from Solomon's successor, leaving only one tribe to be ruled by him for David's sake.

As further proof of God's anger, enemies were allowed to grow in strength against Solomon. Hadad of Edom, supported by Pharaoh of Egypt, returned to Israel to oppose Solomon as did a man named Rezon, who reigned over Syria. In addition, a gifted and able officer of Solomon's named Jeroboam was informed by the prophet Ahijah that God had chosen him to be king over ten tribes of Israel, which He would remove from Solomon. Jeroboam was warned to walk in God's ways and heed His commands if he wanted to stay in power. Solomon evidently heard about this and tried to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam managed to escape to Egypt until Solomon's death.

Solomon's Death (1 Kings 11:41–43)

Solomon was certainly a man who had everything in a material sense, but he consequently lost the things that had eternal value:

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11).

Kingdom Divided

Solomon's Harsh Rule Remembered (1 Kings 12:1–3)

After the death of Solomon, the people of Israel gathered at Shechem to inaugurate his son Rehoboam as their new king. Jeroboam, who had been told by the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh that God was going to give him a throne over ten tribes, came back from his exile in Egypt to be spokesman for those tribes. Evidently, Solomon's rule had been very hard on the citizens of his kingdom. Whereas Saul and David were military leaders, who unified the tribes by leading them in wars against their mutual enemies and sharing the spoils of war with the people, Solomon had used the peace he inherited from their efforts to focus on building an internationally influential trading organization and making himself rich. His interests were mainly material, and he evidently became a tyrannical ruler over Israel, demanding high taxes from his own people as well as requiring them to work at hard labor. His actions were the fulfillment of what Samuel had told the people a king would cost them, and now they were responding just as Samuel had warned they would: “And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day” (1 Samuel 8:18).

Rehoboam Refuses (1 Kings 12:4–16)

Jeroboam asked Rehoboam to lighten the heavy yoke that Solomon had placed on the people and assured him, in return, that the nation would stay united behind him. Rehoboam asked for three days to confer with his advisers. The elders wisely told him to agree, to “be a servant to these people

today” so that the people would be willing to serve him in the future. His younger advisers foolishly ignored the pain of the people and urged him to get even tougher in his rule over them. When Rehoboam took the advice of the younger men and announced that things would get even harder under his rule, the northern tribes repeated the cry of Sheba when he launched his rebellion against David, “We have no share in David...every man to his tents, O Israel!” (2 Samuel 20:1).

Divided Nation (1 Kings 12:17–24)

Rehoboam took his throne and ruled over those people in Israel nearest the cities of Judah. He sent out one of his officers to stop the rebellion of those farther out, but the rebels stoned him. 1 Kings 12:18 called him Adoram and described him as being in charge of the revenue, which perhaps included tax collecting. However, 1 Kings 4:6 and 5:14 are thought to refer to the same man—there called Adoniram—who was in charge of the labor force.

The ten tribes made Jeroboam king over them, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord to him in 1 Kings 11:29–32. Rehoboam, in response, gathered all the men of Judah and 180,000 warriors from Benjamin to prepare to fight the ten tribes to restore the kingdom to his own control.

Before Rehoboam could launch an offensive, a prophet of the Lord named Shemaiah told him not to go fight his brothers because the Lord had said, “This thing is from Me.” In fulfillment of His word, promising punishment for Solomon’s idolatry, God had allowed the situation to develop so that the ten tribes would withdraw from Rehoboam’s kingdom. Wisely, Rehoboam accepted the word of the Lord and stopped his plans for civil war.

Jeroboam’s Idolatry (1 Kings 12:25–33)

Even though he had been warned by God to stay away from the idolatry that had brought judgment on Solomon’s family, Jeroboam gave into his fear that the ten tribes would miss the temple worship and leave him or even kill him in order to return to worship properly in Jerusalem. So, on the advice of others, he made two golden calves and presented them to his people saying, “Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” Shockingly, these people, who had witnessed the glory of God filling the new temple just twenty or thirty years before, accepted these man-made idols, which were available for their worship at two convenient locations, Bethel and Dan. Not surprisingly, “this thing became a sin” for the people who made the trips to worship there.

Jeroboam did not stop with the golden calves. He also built shrines on the high places and selected his own priests, in direct contradiction to the law. He also made up his own feast for the eighth month to replace one that was required by law in Judah during the seventh month.

Jeroboam Confronted (1 Kings 13:1–6)

Jeroboam’s idolatry was so hateful to God that his actions would be referred to time and again in Scripture to describe leadership at its worst. With the prophetic ministry beginning to be more and more active, a man of God was sent to Jeroboam to speak a judgment or curse over the pagan altar he was using. The judgment stated that one future day, a man not yet born named Josiah, from the line of David, would rise up and execute on this same altar the false priests Jeroboam had brought to power. As a sign that this would happen, the prophet announced that the altar would split apart and spill the ashes from the sacrifices. As Jeroboam called for the man of God’s arrest, God withered Jeroboam’s hand in judgment. The altar then split and poured out its ashes. Jeroboam begged the

man of God to ask God for mercy to restore his hand. The man of God did so, and Jeroboam's hand was restored.

Death of the Man of God (1 Kings 13:7–34)

Jeroboam asked the prophet to go home with him, but the man of God quickly refused since God had prohibited him from eating or drinking in that idolatrous place or even traveling the same way he had come when he finished his mission. Oddly, an old prophet, who had been told by his sons what the man of God had said to Jeroboam, rode on his donkey to find the man. He invited the younger prophet home for a meal, but, again, the man refused because of what he had been told by God. The old prophet claimed to have a fresh word from an angel, who said the man of God should go home and dine with the old prophet. The man of God believed the old prophet, went and ate bread and drank water, only to be told by the old prophet that he would die for disobeying the first word of the Lord! When the man of God mounted his donkey and left, a lion came up and killed him. The old man recovered the corpse and buried him in his own tomb, mourning for him like a brother and repeating the prophecy given about the future destruction of all the idolatrous places Jeroboam had set up.

Far-Reaching Judgment on Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:1–18)

Though Jeroboam had set up idolatrous worship centers for his people, when his own son Abijah became ill, he wanted help from a true prophet of God. He sent his wife in disguise to ask the blind prophet Ahijah if the boy would live. God told the prophet to expect her, and when she arrived, the prophet announced God's three-fold judgment on the house of Jeroboam and his kingdom. First, because Jeroboam had done more evil than anyone before him, God was going to bring disaster on every male heir of his line. His descendants would be removed like garbage, with dogs and birds eating their unburied bodies. Secondly, only the sick son Abijah, who would die when his mother returned to the city, would be mourned by the nation and properly buried, because in him had been "found something good toward the LORD God of Israel." Lastly, the ten tribes of Israel would be uprooted from their land and scattered beyond the River Euphrates in judgment for their widespread idolatry.

Jeroboam's Death (1 Kings 14:19, 20)

Since from this point on the parallel histories of Israel and Judah were traced simultaneously, the record sometimes closed on one king's life so that the life of the king of the sister nation could be logically detailed. Jeroboam's death was recorded here, but he actually outlived Rehoboam, the first king of Judah after the division of the kingdom. So, more details of Jeroboam's reign will follow in the next lesson as they intertwine with the last years of Rehoboam's reign and the first years of his successor.

Judah and Israel

The Chastening of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:21–31)

During the first three years in which Rehoboam, son of Solomon, served as king over Judah, he generally obeyed the Lord and experienced God's blessings. First, he obeyed God's word not to go forward with plans for war against Israel (2 Chronicles 11:4). Next, he offered refuge for the outraged priests and Levites who wanted to escape the idolatry promoted by Jeroboam and continue the true worship of the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem. Scripture noted that Rehoboam and his people

“walked in the way of David and Solomon” in those first years and grew strong and stable as a nation (2 Chronicles 11:17).

However, Rehoboam was not completely whole-hearted in his following of the Lord even at the beginning of his reign. By the fifth year he had actually forsaken the law of God and led his people in this same disobedience. In response, God allowed Shishak, the king of Egypt, to come up with huge forces to overtake the fortified cities of Judah and actually prepare to take over Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah was sent to confront Rehoboam, and Rehoboam, much like his grandfather David when confronted with sin, immediately humbled himself before the Lord. His people joined him. As a result, God granted “some deliverance” and did not allow the wrath of Shishak to fall on Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 12:7). However, Shishak did take the beautiful furnishings of Solomon’s temple and palace, taking not only the treasures of the Lord but also the five hundred golden shields (1 Kings 10:16, 17).

Perhaps to keep up appearances, Rehoboam had the stolen shields replaced with bronze ones, but these were kept safely out of sight except for state occasions. Rehoboam still carried on as king. However, his failure to “prepare his heart to seek the LORD” kept him from becoming a man God could really use. Rehoboam died after serving only seventeen years as king and was succeeded by his son Abijah (Abijam).

Abijam’s Reign (1 Kings 15:1–8)

Abijam was no better in following the Lord’s commands than his father Rehoboam had been; yet God kept His covenant with David and allowed his descendants to continue on the throne of Judah. “Except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite,” David had been whole-hearted in his obedience to the Lord, unlike any of the kings who had followed him so far in either nation. Abijam lived only three years to reign as king of Judah and endured civil war between Israel and Judah during that period. Second Chronicles recorded one high moment, however, in Abijam’s short reign. It was when he was facing the larger forces of Jeroboam and speaking to the assembled enemies about Judah’s allegiance to the Lord. He pointed out that Jeroboam’s people were living in rebellion to the law of God with their idol worship and illegitimate priesthood, while Judah still worshiped according to God’s laws at the temple. He warned that their blatant spiritual disobedience would keep them from succeeding, but his words were ignored. Jeroboam proceeded with his attack. The troops of Judah were surprised to see the ambush Jeroboam had set up, but they cried out to the Lord while the priests sounded the trumpets. The Lord heard and intervened on behalf of Judah, causing Israel to flee before them and allowing the slaughter of “five hundred thousand choice men of Israel.” As Abijam had predicted, Jeroboam did not prosper and never recovered his strength after that battle against Judah. In fact, “the Lord struck him, and he died” in judgment on his extended wickedness and idolatry.

Asa’s Righteous Rule (1 Kings 15:9–24)

Finally, Judah was to have a descendant of David on her throne who actually had a heart for the Lord like David’s. Asa’s overall righteousness was rewarded with a long reign as Judah’s king—forty-one years in all. Israel, in the same span of time, would change kings seven times! Asa’s longevity was due to the fact that he set his heart early on to obey God: “And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.” He even removed his own grandmother from the position of “queen mother” because of her public involvement in idolatry. Also,

Asa replaced some of the treasures of the temple stolen by the king of Egypt with donations of silver, gold, and utensils from himself and his father Abijam.

In the first part of his reign, Asa enjoyed peace and used the opportunity it afforded to build fortified cities in Judah. He still maintained an army for defense against possible attacks, three hundred thousand armed men from Judah and two hundred and eighty thousand “men of valor” from Benjamin. These were tested when Zerah the Ethiopian came to attack Judah with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots. Asa set his troops in proper order and then wisely prayed to God for help, reminding himself and the Lord that being greatly outnumbered had never been a problem for God: “Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You...” The Lord made the Ethiopians flee before Asa’s troops, and Asa’s army pursued them to Gerar, overcoming all the cities in that area. The result was not only victory and the recovery of cities but also “exceedingly much spoil” and abundant numbers of animals.

Baasha Kills Nadab(1 Kings 15:25–34)

Back up north in Israel, Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, reigned after his father’s death. He continued in Jeroboam’s evil ways but was soon challenged for the throne by a man from the tribe of Issachar named Baasha. Baasha killed him after he had reigned only two years and then claimed the throne as his own. After Baasha was established as king, he proceeded to execute all the heirs of Jeroboam, not leaving “anyone that breathed” until the prophecy spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 14 was fulfilled. Having finished that effort, Baasha turned his attention to fighting with Asa and the armies of Judah.

Asa Fails to Seek God’s Help (1 Kings 15:16–24)

Baasha, king of Israel, provoked Asa, king of Judah, by beginning construction on a fortified city from which he could control those going in and out of Judah. Even after thirty-six years of faithful dependence on God, Asa seemed to give in to desperate fear and sought outside military help from Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. Asa removed the same treasures he had restored to the Lord’s house and his own house and used them to pay Ben–Hadad to break his covenant with Israel and make a new one with Judah. Ben-Hadad accepted the offer and sent troops to attack Israel’s storage cities in Naphtali. When Baasha heard about it, he called off the building project which would have put Judah under siege and so made it possible for Asa to confiscate all the building supplies that had been left behind.

Even though safety was returned to Judah, God was not pleased that Asa had made covenant with an earthly power instead of calling on Him to help. The prophet Hanani was dispatched to confront Asa about this, reminding him of how God had been sufficient to help him get victory over the million-man army of the Ethiopians years earlier. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” God would punish Asa’s foolish disloyalty with more years of war.

Asa did not humble himself at this inspired reprimand but, instead, became very angry, putting the prophet in prison and taking his wrath out on some of the people. Sadly, the last three or four years of his reign were not lived at his former high level of obedience to God. He even contracted some disease in his feet but stubbornly refused to seek God’s help, suffering severely despite the efforts of his physicians. His stubborn pride expressed in these final years marred an otherwise godly life. The

people mourned his death properly with a “very great burning” (probably of spices, since cremation was not normally practiced in Israel), but his overall record was tarnished by this last failure to admit his sins.

Decline of Israel, Debut of Elijah

Baasha Warned (1 Kings 16:1–7)

The prophetic ministry really took on a prominent role during the time of the divided kingdom. God's mercy and patient love were evidenced again and again as He sent His prophets to call the kings and their people away from false gods and back to Himself. In this chapter the prophet used was Jehu, the son of Hanani. He spoke directly to Baasha to remind him that his very right to rule had been allowed by God Himself who had lifted him “out of the dust” and made him king over God's people Israel.

Although Baasha had fulfilled God's prophetic judgment on the wicked family of Jeroboam (1 Kings 15:29), it had evidently been out of his own lust for power and not out of any sense of righteousness, because God later held him accountable for those deaths (1 Kings 16:7). Yet, having witnessed the evil of Jeroboam's influence, Baasha somehow failed to see that he would not be exempt from the same judgment if he abandoned the true God and followed in the evil ways of Jeroboam as he ruled Israel. The prophet Jehu announced that God would allow the same thing to be done to Baasha's family that Baasha had done to Jeroboam's.

However, there was no record that Baasha believed it or repented of any of his bad actions. Yet, he evidently had some worldly accomplishments to his credit, since the compiler of 1 Kings noted in verse five, “Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?”

Baasha Dies, Elah Reigns (1 Kings 16:8–14)

Baasha's death was recorded along with the record of his son Elah's succession to the throne. After only two years into that reign, the prophecy of Jehu to Baasha began to be fulfilled. Elah, while drunk in the home of his steward, was assassinated by his own chariot commander Zimri. In keeping with the prophecy, as soon as Zimri became king, he killed everyone in Baasha's family-line too, not leaving “one male, neither of his relatives nor of his friends” (1 Kings 16:11).

King Zimri (1 Kings 16:15–20)

Zimri was king of Israel for only seven days before the people decided they did not want an assassin to rule over them. They called on Omri, the commander of Israel's army, to be their new king. When Zimri saw that Omri and the army had surrounded him at the royal residence in Tirzah, he killed himself by burning down the king's quarters where he had been hiding.

Omri (1 Kings 16:21–28)

Confusion and controversy still troubled the land. Half the people accepted Omri as king while the others followed a man named Tibni. Omri's coalition prevailed, and he kept the throne. During his twelve-year reign, he moved Israel's capital from Tirzah to Samaria. Historical sources record that Omri was a successful military leader and builder during his reign. He was so successful that for one

hundred and fifty years afterward, the nation of Assyria, starting its own expansion westward in those days, referred to the northern kingdom of Israel as the “land of Omri.”

The biblical record stated bluntly that “Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all who were before him.” Yet, just when you might think things could not possibly have gotten worse in the northern kingdom, they did.

Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29–34)

While King Asa of Judah was in the thirty-eighth year of his righteous reign in the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom of Israel embraced her new king, Ahab, the son of Omri. Scripture records introduced Ahab with this statement: “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). In light of the wickedness already displayed by his six predecessors, he must have been quite a wicked ruler!

Ahab had broken God’s law and married a heathen princess from Sidon named Jezebel. With her and perhaps for her, Ahab introduced and promoted the worship of the Canaanite god Baal, believed to be the god of fertility and rainstorms. Perhaps in rival to the true temple in Jerusalem, Ahab also constructed a temple to Baal in Samaria. Wooden images to the Canaanite goddess Asherah were also erected throughout the nation, and the true prophets of the Lord were massacred at the order of Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4).

The Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1)

In this chapter one of the greatest prophets of all Scripture, Elijah the Tishbite, was introduced. He was from Gilead, east of the Jordan River, but traveled northwest with God’s first message to Ahab. Later in 2 Kings 1:8 there was a physical description of him given that said he was a “man wearing a leather belt around his waist.” The boldness of his spirit was certainly evident no matter what he wore as he appeared before Ahab that day. He announced that God was withholding both rain and dew in Israel for “these years,” until Elijah gave the word that moisture would return.

God had warned Israel long before in Deuteronomy 11:13–17 that her receiving of adequate rain or being punished with damaging drought would be determined by her faithfulness to Him and to His commands:

And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.” [Moses then added his own warning about the danger of disobedience.] “Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.”

Rejection of Elijah (1 Kings 17:2–16)

Of course such a prophesy of disaster in a country that had embraced Baal, who supposedly controlled all rainfall, made Elijah a hated man. God gave orders for him to flee the area and go to the

Brook Cherith, a tributary of the Jordan River. There, God had ravens deliver meat and bread to Elijah twice a day! His water came from the brook. However, since the rains stopped as Elijah had said they would, the brook, too, eventually dried up. God, of course, did not forget His prophet and immediately directed him to go east to a city in Phoenicia, Jezebel's homeland, where a widow in Sidon had been commanded to provide for him.

The woman Elijah saw at the gate of the city, whom he asked for water, seemed a very unlikely choice to host him since the drought-caused famine had affected her food supply, too. She agreed to bring him water but explained when he asked for food that she had only a tiny amount left and had planned to make a final small meal for her son and herself and then die. Elijah urged her not to be afraid and to do what she had planned, except that she should bring him the first small cake and then bake another for her son and herself. He assured her that the Lord God of Israel had promised that her bin of flour and jar of oil would last until "the LORD sends rain on the earth." To her credit, she believed and obeyed him and subsequently received the blessing of continual provision from the Lord for her needs.

Tragedy Strikes (1 Kings 17:17–24)

The widow of Zarephath was shocked that after giving her last food to Elijah, receiving the supernatural provision of flour and oil, and housing the man of God under her own roof, that her son would become ill and die. Certainly just as shocked, Elijah took the dead boy to his room upstairs and cried out to the Lord, who He knew held the power of life and death. Elijah agonized in prayer about why God had allowed this to happen to the woman who was showing him hospitality. He earnestly pleaded with the Lord three times to let the child come back to life.

The Lord heard Elijah and revived the child. This was the first recorded resurrection in Scripture. She exclaimed to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth." Out of this tragedy, she had received the gift of faith.

Go to Ahab (1 Kings 18:1–19)

After three years of drought and famine, God told Elijah to return to Israel and tell Ahab that the rain would return. Ahab and Obadiah, the man in charge of Ahab's household, were out looking for any grass that might be left to feed the royal livestock. Obadiah worked for Ahab publicly, but privately he served the Lord by caring for one hundred of the Lord's prophets, who had escaped Jezebel's executioners.

Elijah appeared to Obadiah and told him to announce his arrival to Ahab. Obadiah was afraid. He knew that the Spirit of the Lord had protected Elijah from Ahab's many efforts to find him during the long drought, and he doubted whether the Lord would let Elijah remain in one place long enough for Ahab to meet with him. Elijah assured Obadiah that he would stay, and so Obadiah went to tell Ahab. When Ahab came to meet Elijah, he said, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" Elijah responded quickly that Ahab was the true troubler of Israel because of his disobedience to the commandments of the Lord and his following after the Baals. Elijah invited him to a contest, a showdown of sorts, to demonstrate publicly, once and for all, that the Lord was the true God and Baal was nothing.

Contest at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–40)

Ahab was to call for the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah to meet at the top of Mount Carmel and to bring two bulls for sacrifice. Elijah, being the only known public prophet of the Lord, would represent the other side. The Baal side would go first. They were to kill their bull, lay the sacrifice on the wood, but not set fire to it. They were to pray to Baal to light it. Then, Elijah would do the same, and the one answering by fire would be recognized as the true God.

The Baal prophets pleaded with Baal from morning till night; they leapt and cried and cut themselves, but Baal was silent. Elijah mocked them by asking if Baal was busy, or gone on a trip, or sleeping. Then, at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prepared his offering and placed it on the wood of the rebuilt altar of the Lord. He dug a trench all around the altar and gave orders to fill four waterpots with water. He ordered the four pots to be poured on the sacrifice and wood, refilled and poured again, three times. The water ran over it all and then down to fill the trench.

When Elijah prayed, interestingly, he did not ask for fire. He asked God to show the people that He was the true God and that Elijah was His true prophet. He asked the Lord to turn the hearts of the people back to Himself. In response, God immediately sent fire that not only consumed the sacrifice but also consumed the wood, stones, and dust, and even all the water that was in the trench. The people watching were amazed; they fell down on their faces and cried, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" They had seen and believed. Elijah seized the moment and called for the execution of all the prophets of Baal. They took them down the mountain to the Brook of Kishon and "executed them there."

Praying for Rain (1 Kings 18:41–46)

God did not suddenly send the rain. If he had, the people might have thought it was coincidence, so He waited for Elijah to ask for it. Before he prayed, Elijah told Ahab to go ahead and eat and drink because the rain God promised was coming. Then, Elijah went back up the mountain. On the ground, with his head between his knees, seven times he prayed for rain. Each time he sent his servant to look for a rain cloud. After the seventh time, the servant finally reported seeing the tiniest of clouds—the size of a man's hand. That was enough of a signal for Elijah. He sent word to Ahab to get in his chariot and go quickly before the rain stopped him. Ahab obeyed, and the rain came suddenly. The "hand of the LORD came upon Elijah," empowering him to run ahead of Ahab's chariot for the twenty-five-mile trip to Jezreel!

Trouble at the Top

Elijah Flees Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1–4)

Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife, had not been present on Mount Carmel to witness the display of power by the mighty God of Israel. She had not seen the utter failure of the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to incite any response from Baal at all. However, at hearing of the execution of all the Baal prophets, she became furious and sent a message to Elijah telling him he would die by her orders within twenty-four hours.

Elijah was in no physical or spiritual shape to have to defend his own life that day. Overwhelmed and feeling abandoned, Elijah fled the area, heading south over the next several days to the city of Beersheba in the southernmost part of Judah. Even though he had traveled about one hundred miles, he left his servant at Beersheba, seeking even deeper isolation in a remote area another day's journey beyond there.

God finds Elijah (1 Kings 19:5–10)

Deep depression had enveloped Elijah. Wanting to be alone, craving sleep, having to be reminded to eat, feeling helpless, hopeless, and a failure, he just wanted to die. God sent the angel of the Lord to minister to him. Elijah slept and ate two times, with the angel of the Lord ministering to his needs. The prophet was then sent away for forty days and nights to Mt. Horeb or Sinai, which was about two hundred miles southwest, deeper in the desert wilderness. Elijah slept in a cave. He was awakened by a question from the Lord, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah responded in self-defense, from the depth of his pain, explaining that although he had been faithful to God, the entire nation had turned to wickedness. On top of that, they all wanted to kill him, and he felt utterly alone. God did not correct or reprimand him for his response.

Revelation (1 Kings 19:11–14)

God instituted a six-week recovery plan for His servant Elijah. Then, at the right time, God addressed the spiritual dimension. Elijah was feeling alone, inadequate, and afraid. God responded by reminding him of His power which could never be depleted or defeated. With rock-cracking wind, an earth-splitting quake, and a supernatural show of fire, the immeasurable greatness of the God who loved Him was displayed. Yet, in these, God did not speak to Elijah personally. He chose the tenderest communication for His pitiful prophet, namely, God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.

Recovery through Reassignment (1 Kings 19:15–17)

Humbled yet encouraged by the personal appearance of the Lord of Glory to him in his deep darkness, Elijah covered his face and went to the front of the cave. God repeated His earlier question: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah, still not well, responded with the same answer as earlier, and God let it go unchallenged again. But God had not given up on Elijah. Elijah was not a failure in God’s eyes. God showed His continued approval and trust by giving Elijah three new tasks which would require him to travel many miles: the anointing of the new king of Syria, the anointing of the new king of Israel, and the anointing of the prophet who would take over Elijah’s ministry.

Recovery through Reality (1 Kings 19:18)

Elijah was not the only faithful person serving the Lord in Israel. God announced that there were seven thousand people who had never participated in the Baal worship which Jezebel and Ahab had promoted. This truth would help Elijah get back into the Lord’s work again. The power of God evident in the display of earthquake, wind, and fire would protect his life. The seven-thousand like-minded believers would relieve him of his loneliness.

Elisha Chosen for Service (1 Kings 19:19–21)

In obedience to his new orders, Elijah threw his prophet’s mantle on Elisha, the son of Shaphat, while Elisha was at his regular work as a farmer for his father’s large operation. Elijah had come out of isolation to serve the Lord obediently again. The healing he found is still available for any who find themselves in the very real pit of depression.

Syria Attacks Ahab (1 Kings 20:1–30a)

Ben-Hadad of Syria (probably the son of the Ben-Hadad of 1 Kings 15:18) formed a coalition with thirty-two other kings to go and besiege Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The lack of moral integrity in Ahab was made obvious in his spineless and faithless response to Ben-Hadad's orders to send him all the gold and silver in the capital as well as all of Ahab's "loveliest wives and children." Ahab agreed! Without any moral truth to guide his life, he did not believe that anything was really worth fighting for. When the order was amended to include unchallenged looting of the whole city, Ahab's elders and people told him not to consent. Ben-Hadad responded with the threat to turn the whole city to dust.

In a surprise turn of events, a prophet of the Lord came to announce to Ahab that the God of Israel was going to bring him victory against the large forces of Ben-Hadad's coalition in order to show Ahab that God was the Lord. Ahab was instructed about how he was to organize his forces, and when he launched his attack, the opposing kings were all drunk! Israel won. However, after the victory, the prophet warned Ahab that the Syrians would return to fight him again in the spring.

Thinking the "gods" of Israel were territorial, the Syrians thought they could win the next battle if they moved it from the hills to the plains near Aphek. They had 127,000 against 7,232 of Israel; yet the Lord let Israel win again gloriously.

Wrong Move (1 Kings 20:30b–43)

Ben-hadad escaped the massacre and fled to an inside chamber in Aphek. His servants, knowing of the characteristic mercy of the kings of Israel, made a plan to appeal to Ahab. As a result, Ben-hadad was not executed but instead offered a peace-treaty that included a commercial trade arrangement! God was not pleased. He dispatched a prophet to dramatize the sin of Ahab and cause Ahab to pronounce his own judgment—his life for Ben-Hadad's. "Sullen and displeased," his victory soured, Ahab returned to Samaria.

Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–16)

An account of the stealing of the vineyard of Naboth is included here. Ahab wanted a garden plot adjoining his holdings and asked the owner of a nearby vineyard, a man named Naboth, to sell him his land. In Israel, by law, land was not to be sold outside the family, and, sensitive to this, Naboth refused. Ahab pouted and Jezebel proceeded to show what her heathen background had taught her about making difficult things happen. Using Ahab's seal of authority, she wrote letters and organized an illegal proceeding against Naboth, complete with false charges of blasphemy against God and the king, supposedly witnessed by two scoundrels. Naboth was quickly found guilty and taken outside the city and stoned. His land was then confiscated by Ahab for his vegetable garden.

"Have You Found Me, O My Enemy?" (1 Kings 21:17–29)

God responded quickly to this evil. Sending no less a prophet than Elijah himself, God promised that in the place where Naboth's blood had been licked up by dogs, so Ahab's would be. Not only that, but every male of Ahab's line would die, just as had those of the wicked kings Jeroboam and Baasha. Jezebel would not escape either: "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." Surprisingly, Ahab showed signs of real repentance after this pronouncement, and God, always surprising us with His mercy, put off the judgment until after Ahab's death.

Jehoshaphat, the Good King of Judah (2 Chronicles 17)

While Ahab and Jezebel were promoting evil in the north, the new king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, was continuing in the godliness that had characterized his father's reign. Jehoshaphat obeyed God's commandments himself and even organized the sending out of the Levites to teach the law of God all over the nation. God blessed his efforts with military successes and the inflow of international tributes of gold, silver, and much livestock.

Foolish Alliance (1 Kings 22:1–28)

Jehoshaphat was introduced in 1 Kings 22 because of his alliance with Ahab through the marriage of his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (2 Kings 8:16–18, 25–27). Jehoshaphat had traveled to Samaria for a visit three years after Ahab's war with Syria. While there Ahab asked him to join him in a battle to release Ramoth Gilead from Syrian control. Evidently Ben-Hadad had not kept his word given earlier to return all the cities taken (1 Kings 20:34). In characteristically covenant language Jehoshaphat said, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." However, Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of God before they proceeded.

Ahab gathered four hundred prophets together, who all urged him to go up to the battle because victory was assured. One of them named Zedekiah even made some iron horns to illustrate how Israel would "gore" Syria to death. Jehoshaphat, a true follower of the Lord, discerned that these were not true prophets and asked if a real one could be found. Ahab immediately thought of Micaiah, a prophet whom he hated because he never seemed to prophesy anything good for him. Called to the threshing floor where Ahab and Jehoshaphat were arrayed in their royal robes, Micaiah, at first, just sarcastically echoed the message of the other prophets. Ahab saw through him and pressed for the truth. Then Micaiah revealed his vision of disaster: all the sheep of Israel scattered without a shepherd. Challenged by the disgusted Ahab, Micaiah continued with the vision of God's throne room, where he had heard that a lying spirit would go out into the mouths of all of Ahab's prophets to cause him to go to Ramoth Gilead and meet his death.

As usual, when Ahab did not like the message, he attacked the messenger. He sent Micaiah to prison to be fed on bread and water until Ahab returned in peace. Micaiah boldly responded, "If you ever return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." He finished by saying, "Take heed, all you people!"

God's True Word (1 Kings 22:29–40)

Despite Micaiah's warnings, Jehoshaphat and Ahab proceeded to battle. The cowardly Ahab insisted that Jehoshaphat dress like a king while he went in disguise. According to 2 Chronicles 18:31, God protected Jehoshaphat and diverted the attack from him. A "random" shot found its mark in Ahab, mortally wounding him. Ahab managed to prop himself up in his chariot as the battle continued but died at sunset. When his chariot was washed out, dogs came up to lick his blood, just as the Lord had promised in 1 Kings 21:19.

Jehoshaphat Reprimanded (1 Kings 22:41–46)

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat was reprimanded by the prophet Jehu for joining with Ahab in that battle (2 Chronicles 19:1–3). Jehu asked, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?" The wrath of the Lord was pronounced on Jehoshaphat but then tempered with a word of God's approval for his good heart and righteous removal of idolatry from the land.

New King in Israel (1 Kings 22:47–53)

Ahaziah succeeded his father Ahab in Israel while Jehoshaphat continued his righteous reign in Judah. The two kingdoms were at peace with each other even though the ungodliness in the north continued. Sadly, Ahaziah had learned nothing from his father's evil mistakes and continued the Baal worship, provoking the Lord to anger just as his father had always done.

Godliness Blessed; Sin Punished

Good Works of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 19:4–11)

To his eternal credit, Jehoshaphat did instigate spiritual reform in Judah. He himself traveled south to north to bring people back to the Lord. In addition, he placed godly judges and Levites throughout the nation as righteous leaders. Jehoshaphat charged these men to teach and follow the law of God, to rule with impartiality, and to act at all times “in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart.”

The Power of Praise (2 Chronicles 20:1–30)

This chapter revealed Jehoshaphat at his best. When Judah was threatened by a confederation of the forces of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, Jehoshaphat immediately used his weapons of spiritual warfare. He called a national fast and solemn assembly and led the gathering himself in an appeal to God for help.

God answered by sending the prophet Jahaziel to prophesy to the assembly: “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's” (2 Chronicles 20:15). The prophet continued by telling them that the next day they should assemble against the enemy, but that they would not need to fight at all. They were to “stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.” Jehoshaphat bowed in worship at this word of the Lord, as did all the people, and then the Levites began a praise service to God.

Early the next morning Jehoshaphat led them to the battle site, urging the people to trust the Lord and His prophets. He then organized a praise and song service, and when the music and praising began, the Lord caused the enemy armies to fight each other. When the men of Judah looked from a high place down on the battlefield, they saw that none of their enemies had escaped. God had certainly fought for them. The spoil from the dead bodies took three days to collect, and so the people of Judah returned to Jerusalem playing instruments and singing with joy. Even the surrounding enemy kingdoms were overcome with the fear of God when they heard of His exploits on behalf of Judah.

Jehoshaphat's Bad Alliance (2 Chronicles 20:31–37)

For the second time in his twenty-five year reign, Jehoshaphat made an alliance with the king of Israel. This time Ahab's son Ahaziah was his partner. Together they built ships and launched them, only to have them all wreck. The prophet Eliezer was sent to tell Jehoshaphat that the destruction of the ships was a direct judgment of God on his partnership with Ahaziah. God does not change His rules even for His own followers. He requires consistent obedience to His law.

Ahaziah Continues His Father's Idolatry (2 Kings 1)

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who continued the idolatry his parents had promoted. After suffering from a fall through the lattice of his upper chamber, he sent to inquire of Baal at the shrine in Ekron in Philistia to see if he would recover. The Lord dispatched Elijah to confront Ahaziah's messengers about Ahaziah's seeking advice from a god outside of Israel. Elijah told them to tell their master he would certainly not recover from his injuries.

When Ahaziah was told the message and the description of the messenger—"a man wearing a leather belt around his waist"—he knew it was Elijah, the old nemesis of his parents. Ahaziah must have forgotten the stories of Elijah's powers, because he sent three groups of fifty soldiers to apprehend him, only to have the first two groups killed by the fire Elijah called down on them. The third group was only spared because of the humility of its captain, after whose plea Elijah agreed to come down to face Ahaziah and reiterate the message of the king's certain death.

Elijah had evidently fully recovered from his earlier depression. When he knew that Ahaziah was after him for harm, Elijah did not flee as he had from Jezebel but faced each group of soldiers fearlessly. Elijah knew from experience that Baal had no real power, and no king aligned with Baal could overcome God's anointed one.

Elijah Ascends to Heaven (2 Kings 2)

Elijah had about ten more years of service to the Lord following his time of depression. In those years he had served God with obedient boldness while also training the one who was to take his place. On the day God had picked to bring Elijah to Himself, something that had been recorded only once before in Genesis 5:24 about Enoch, God had told not only Elijah but also at least three schools of prophets located in Bethel, Jericho, and near the Jordan River. Despite Elijah's requests that he stay behind, Elisha loyally refused to leave Elijah on that final day's extensive tour of some of Israel's most famous places. Beginning at Gilgal, the two retraced the steps of Joshua as he led the children of Israel out from the miraculously opened waters of the flooded Jordan River into the promised land centuries before. There Joshua had erected memorial stones to commemorate the occasion and had led the celebration of the first Passover in their own land.

Next, they traveled fifteen miles west to Bethel where Abraham and Jacob had worshiped the living God, but where now the idolatry started by Jeroboam was flourishing. From there they went about fifteen miles east to Jericho, the site of Israel's first supernatural victory in Canaan as well as the place of Achan's sin. Finally, the two traveled further east to the Jordan River, the place where nine and a half tribes had obediently crossed over to claim their inheritance while two and a half were content to stay on the other side. It was at the Jordan River where the third school of prophets warned Elisha that his master was leaving him and then watched the two from a distance. Elijah struck the Jordan with his prophet's mantle, and the river opened for the two to cross over.

Knowing Elisha's heart was troubled at his impending departure, Elijah asked him what he wanted. Elisha had already been called by God to succeed Elijah, but he knew that without the Holy Spirit, he could not really carry on in Elijah's place. The double-portion he requested was the lawful share to be expected by the firstborn in a family, who needed more than his siblings if he were to take care of all who needed him as head of the family. Elijah said that if Elisha were allowed to see him depart he would know that his request was granted. Elisha did see Elijah's departure: "Suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

The horsemen and chariots of Israel that Elisha saw were probably shown to reveal that Elijah had been God's true spiritual warrior. On earth, kings and armies lined up for battle, but the real power lay in the hands of those like Elijah, who were filled with the spiritual power of God. Elisha would one day pray that his own servant could see such spiritual horsemen and chariots and trust in the Lord without fear (2 Kings 6:17). Many had not recognized Elijah's powerful position, but God let Elisha see His true appreciation of one who had served Him so faithfully.

Elisha did receive the "double portion" of power. The Holy Spirit showed Himself strong on Elisha's behalf as Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah and parted the waters of the Jordan. The school of the prophets watching begged to go find the body of Elijah, as if God would have "dropped" it somewhere along the way! Elisha permitted it because of their annoying persistence but, of course, the body was not found because God had taken Elijah to heaven alive. He joined Enoch as only the second one to enjoy such an honor.

Back to Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3)

For the third time Jehoshaphat made a foolish alliance with the king of Israel that once more put his life in danger. Jehoram, another son of Ahab's, succeeded his brother Ahaziah, who had died from a fall through the lattice work at his home. The kingdom of Moab, which had formerly paid tribute to Israel while Ahab was king, had withdrawn allegiance and rebelled against Israel. Jehoram wanted to put them back under Israel's authority and so asked Jehoshaphat, his sister Athaliah's father-in-law, to join him. Without any recorded prayer, Jehoshaphat agreed and joined forces with Israel and Edom against Moab. God's favor was not on the union from the start, as they found themselves without water for seven days and in fear for their lives from Moab. Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of the Lord and was told about Elisha. When they came to him, Elisha was indignant at being approached by Jehoram, the wicked king of Israel. He asked him why he wasn't consulting the false prophets of his father and mother. Only out of respect for the presence of the righteous Jehoshaphat did Elisha help them.

Elisha gave them God's directions for victory over the Moabites. They were to go and dig ditches in the valley where they were. God promised to fill them with water without a sound of wind or rain. They obeyed, and God produced the water. When the Moabites assembled for battle, the reflection off the ditches of water appeared to be blood to them. They presumed that the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom had killed each other and so hurried down to the spoil. They were met by the forces of the three confederate armies and were destroyed. In some horrible act of superstition, the king of Moab sacrificed his own son in hopes of turning the battle in his favor. This act so sickened the men of Israel that they all withdrew.

God had again intervened to save Jehoshaphat despite his foolish alliance with the northern kingdom. This was to be Jehoshaphat's last recorded battle. He later died, supposedly of natural causes, "and was buried with his fathers in the City of David" (2 Chronicles 21:1). He was succeeded by his son Jehoram, who coincidentally had the same name as the current king of Israel.

The Ministry of Elisha

Elisha Helps a Widow (2 Kings 4:1–7)

Elisha was God's prophet, and he seemed as comfortable using the Lord's power to help suffering individuals as he was in boldly reprimanding sinful kings. His influence was apparently positive on the

schools of the prophets, as well, since they continued to be active and even to grow during his ministry. Often his efforts were devoted to meeting their practical needs. The first miracle in this week's lesson had to do with just such a case. A widow of one of the "sons of the prophets" was about to have her sons taken as slaves because of some debts owed to a creditor. Since God promised then as now to meet the needs of those who serve Him, she asked Elisha to help her. Elisha began by asking what she had that could be put toward paying the debts—a productive first step in financial counseling even today. She responded by telling him about her only thing of value, a jar of oil. He told her that one jar of oil would be her provision if she would borrow vessels from everywhere and then fill them from its contents. She evidently believed him because she had her sons gather many vessels. Behind closed doors, she witnessed God at work. The oil in her jar lasted until the final borrowed vessel was filled. After she sold the oil in them, she was to have enough money not only to pay her debts but also to fund her needs in the future. It should be noted that it was in direct proportion to her faith and obedience that she received the provision for her needs.

A Woman Helps Elisha (2 Kings 4:8–37 and 2 Kings 8:1–6)

In the time of Elisha there were also generous people, who recognized the needs and worth of those serving full-time in God's ministries. A "notable woman" from Shunem enjoyed feeding Elisha in her home when he passed through. Recognizing his on-going need for a room because he traveled through her area regularly, she asked her husband to allow a room to be added on the second story of their home for Elisha's exclusive use. Her husband evidently agreed, and Elisha and his servant Gehazi became their regular guests. In gratitude, Elisha wanted her to be blessed. After Gehazi told him that the woman was childless and that her husband was old, Elisha prophesied that she would have a son within the year.

A son was born and everything was fine until he developed a terrible headache and died in his mother's lap. Grief-stricken but still very aware of the powerful force of God, she put the body out of sight in Elisha's room, not telling anyone of his death, and asked her husband for permission to travel to see Elisha at Mount Carmel. When she saw him, she threw herself at his feet. In deep anguish, she swore not to leave him till he came home with her to see the dead boy. Elisha went with her, although he had sent Gehazi on ahead to lay his staff on the boy. Gehazi could not raise him, but Elisha did.

Romans 8:28 promises that all things that happen to God's people can be used to bring forth some good for them. The "good" that came out of this trouble was to be evident some time later. In 2 Kings 8, after this same widow was warned by Elisha to leave the country to escape an extended famine, she returned just in time to be a witness to answer the inquiries of the king of Israel about the miracles of Elisha. Had she not been through the death and resurrection of her son, she would not have had such a powerful testimony to give to the king.

Poison in the Pot (2 Kings 4:38–41)

Because of a famine on the land, even the sons of the prophets were having to scrounge their surroundings for contributions to their communal stew. Elisha ordered a pot to be put on for them, and someone ignorantly added some poisonous gourds. Shortly after they began eating, they realized the danger and cried to Elisha for help saying, "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" Elisha called for flour, added it, and pronounced it safe to eat.

More than Enough (2 Kings 4:42–44)

Even in the time of famine, there was a righteous man who obeyed the law and presented his firstfruits to Elisha. With one hundred hungry people to feed, Elisha immediately ordered that all the offering be given to them. His servant voiced the concern that such an offering would not be enough for so many. However, Elisha simply repeated his instructions, assuring his doubting servant that not only would there be enough but also there would be “some left over.”

Naaman Finds Healing (2 Kings 5:1–19)

An unnamed captive girl from Israel, who worked in the home of the commander of the Syrian army, compassionately wished aloud that her master could meet the prophet from her country and receive healing from his leprosy. The girl’s mistress took her words to heart and told her husband Naaman, who then appealed to his own king to send him to Israel. Naaman was dispatched with a personal letter from his king to the king of Israel in which the king of Israel was asked to heal Naaman. Naaman also took with him much gold and silver and ten changes of clothing, supposing that the God of Israel would require rich payment for such a miracle.

The king of Israel was horrified that the king of Syria expected him to heal a man of leprosy. He tore his clothes in grief, thinking the king of Syria was trying to start a war. Everyone knew that such a miracle could be done only by God Himself! When Elisha heard of the king’s reaction, he quickly sent word for him to calm down and send the inquirer from Syria to him.

When Naaman arrived, however, Elisha did not come out to meet him personally. Perhaps to expose Naaman’s pride, Elisha had his servant give the Syrian commander the simple directions for healing. Outraged at what he considered to be Elisha’s lack of respect for him, Naaman refused to travel to the Jordan River to wash himself seven times. Surely the prophet could have come out and just touched him to heal him! Didn’t he have many more beautiful rivers in which to bathe back in Syria? Providentially, Naaman did have wise servants brave enough to be voices of reason at that moment: “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” Naaman gave in, obeyed the instruction of Elisha, received his healing, and “his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.”

Naaman went back to Elisha, full of gratitude for the healing and praise for the God of Israel. Naaman urged Elisha to take the gifts he had brought, but Elisha was strong in his refusal. The blessings of the God of Israel could not be purchased.

Naaman then asked something for himself: he wanted two mule-loads of earth for preparation of a place of worship back in Syria. He vowed from then on to worship only the Lord God of Israel, but he also asked Elisha to pardon him for the times ahead in which he still would have to escort his king to the temple of Rimmon. Naaman had come as a leprous but proud commander of Syria; he left as a humble, grateful, and healthy follower of the true God.

The Greed of Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20–27)

Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, was disturbed that his master would not accept anything from all that Naaman had offered. Unaware or unconcerned with the danger of letting a man just coming out of a pagan mindset think that the God of Israel could be paid for His services, Gehazi thought only of the riches he had missed. On his own, he decided to go after Naaman and ask for some of those gifts. Naaman, still overjoyed at his healing and his new knowledge of the Lord, was delighted to see

Gehazi and give him whatever his master had sent him to bring back. Gehazi lied about the sudden change of mind in his master and the visit of two needy prophets, but Naaman did not know that and generously responded with two talents of silver and two new garments. As proof that he knew his actions were wrong, Gehazi hid the treasure from Elisha when he returned.

Of course, Elisha, with his hot-line to heaven, was not fooled. He confronted Gehazi with a question about where he had been. Gehazi lied again, but Elisha filled him in with the facts. Gehazi would receive in his own body the leprosy from which Naaman had been healed. All his treasure would never make up for that terrible disease or the awful knowledge that his sin would bring the judgment of leprosy to his descendants after him.

Lost and Found (2 Kings 6:1–7)

One group of prophets had outgrown their quarters and asked Elisha, evidently their recognized leader, for permission to build larger ones. He gave permission and also agreed to go with them to the work. In the process of chopping down a tree, someone, using a borrowed ax head, lost it in the water. Certainly it was not an uncommon happening. There was even a law covering damage in such a case (Deuteronomy 19:5). Yet Elisha answered the call for help to locate the ax head, showing compassion for the poor student's panic over losing something "borrowed" and perhaps beyond his ability to replace. Elisha threw in a stick at the place the ax head was last seen, and the ax head floated!

Elisha Surrounded (2 Kings 6:8–17)

To the great consternation of the king of Syria, Elisha was aware through the Holy Spirit of everything the king was planning against Israel. Elisha, "not just once or twice," warned the king of Israel where his forces should not be, so as to avoid attack by Syria. The king of Syria thought he must have a spy among his counselors but was informed that the culprit was Elisha.

The king of Syria sent troops to surround the city of Dothan where Elisha was headquartered. Elisha's servant was terribly frightened when he rose early the next morning to see the great army surrounding the city. Elisha told him not to be afraid because their allies were greater than their enemies. Then Elisha prayed for God to open his servant's eyes to see the spiritual reinforcements. God answered that prayer. As Elisha had seen the chariots and horsemen of Israel at Elijah's departure to heaven, so the servant saw those same strong forces on the mountain all around Elisha.

Blind Eyes (2 Kings 6:18–23)

When the enemy troops closed in, Elisha asked God to make them blind. When God did so, Elisha led them away from Dothan. Traveling south for about fifteen miles, they found themselves right inside of Samaria, the capital city of Israel, surrounded by their enemies. The king of Israel was instructed to treat them as captives and not to execute them. After a great feast, they were sent back to their Syrian master and stopped their raids on Israel.

Syrians Set a Siege at Samaria (2 Kings 6:24–33)

Sometime later, with Israel having persisted in her idolatry, the Syrian forces under Ben-Hadad successfully besieged the city. The famine caused by the siege was extreme. Normally inedible things, like donkey heads and dung of doves, were selling for exorbitant prices as food. When the

king overheard two women arguing over eating a child, he tore his clothes in grief and exposed the sackcloth beneath, revealing that he had already been in mourning over the situation.

Unable to find any solution, the king lashed out in a verbal attack on Elisha, promising to behead him for bringing this about. Forgetting that Elisha was the messenger of the Lord and not the cause of anything in and of himself, the king sent his own messenger to go ahead of him to find Elisha. The Lord had told Elisha what was happening and so Elisha informed the elders with him. Without panic, he waited first for the messenger to arrive and then for the arrival of the angry king.

Siege Lifted by the Hand of the Lord (2 Kings 7:1–20)

Elisha spoke a good word to the troubled king and his people. He announced that by the next day good food would be plentiful and cheap. One of the king's officers verbalized his doubts about God's ability to provide that much food, and Elisha rebuked him by telling him that he would see it but would not be allowed to partake of it.

Four men with leprosy, outcasts from the city, were starving from the famine and desperate for some relief. They sat at the city gates trying to decide whether to risk going in and dying with everyone else from the famine or surrendering to the Syrians, where they would at least have a chance of being taken captive and fed or at worst being killed quickly. They chose the Syrians and went out at twilight. To their surprise, the camp had been abandoned by all the soldiers. God had scared them with the noise of chariots and horses, and they had retreated so suddenly that they had left behind all their possessions and livestock.

The happy lepers feasted and hid away treasure, but their consciences began to bother them. They remembered those starving in the city and decided that they had better stop immediately and go tell them. The gatekeepers relayed the news to the king, who thought it was a trick to get them outside the city gates. He agreed to send two chariots and horses to investigate. When it was all found to be true, the messengers returned to tell the king, and the people poured out of the city. The officer who doubted Elisha earlier was guarding the gate, and in the stampede of eager people, he was trampled to death. Elisha's prophetic word given earlier about God's sure provision and the doubter's failure to enjoy it was fulfilled.

Continuing Kingdoms

Kings of Syria (2 Kings 8:7–15)

The kings of Syria were mentioned many times in the Biblical record because of the geographical nearness of Syria to Israel and the regular confrontations that occurred between the two countries. The Syrian kings and their armies had many opportunities to see the God of Israel at work on behalf of His people. Perhaps that is why the ailing Ben-Hadad sent extravagant gifts to Elisha the prophet, who he had heard was in Damascus. Hazael, the king's servant or trusted counselor, was sent with the gifts to ask Elisha if the king would recover. Back in 1 Kings 19:15, Elijah had been instructed by God to anoint Hazael as the next king of Syria, but the Scriptures are silent about when or if that had occurred. However, Elisha was aware, through the Holy Spirit, about the future of Hazael—what kind of man he was and what he would do when he came to power. In answer to the question about Ben-Hadad's recovery, Elisha told Hazael to tell him that he would not die, even though Elisha knew that he would die at the hands of his own servant Hazael.

The gruesome deeds Elisha saw as he looked at Hazael and then described as being Hazael's future actions made the prophet weep. Hazael became defensive, as is still common when the true conditions of our hearts are exposed by the searching eyes of God's Holy Spirit. The fulfillment of all that Elisha saw about Hazael came to pass later.

Three different Ben-Hadads are mentioned in the Bible as ruling in Syria. The first one ruled at the same time as King Asa of Judah, causing him much grief (1 Kings 15:18). The second one was in this week's lesson, and the third will be introduced later as the son of Hazael, who succeeded his father as king (2 Kings 13:3, 24).

Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 8:16–24)

While Jehoram (or Joram), son of Ahab, was in his fifth year as king of Israel, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, became king in Judah. Married to Ahab's daughter Athaliah, Jehoram of Judah was the brother-in-law of Jehoram (Joram) of Israel. The influence of the wicked family of Ahab affected Jehoram of Judah and, had it not been for God's promise to continue David's line, Jehoram would have been cut off for his evil actions. However, God did afflict him for his sins. One of the consequences for disobeying God and worshiping idols was that God allowed his kingdom of Judah to become vulnerable to the people she had formerly controlled. Edom and Libnah rebelled against Judah.

A worse result of the influence of Ahab's line on Jehoram of Judah was seen in his brutal actions toward his own brothers. Jehoram was king because he had been Jehoshaphat's oldest son, but he had six other brothers whom his father had honored with gifts and positions of authority. Without provocation, Jehoram killed them all along with other "princes of Israel" (2 Chronicles 21:4).

The prophet Elijah was still on earth at this time and wrote Jehoram a letter of judgment. Because Jehoram had walked in the pagan ways of Israel and had led the people of Judah in doing the same, the Lord was going to afflict him with a terrible disease of the intestines, from which he would slowly and painfully die. Besides that personal problem, God also stirred up the Philistines, the Arabs, and the Ethiopians to come against him to loot his house, take away his wives, and kill all his sons except for one, the youngest named Jehoahaz (also known as Ahaziah in 2 Kings 8:25 or Azariah in 2 Chronicles 22:6). The Scriptural writer succinctly summed up Jehoram's wicked life: "He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed" (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Ahaziah of Judah (2 Kings 8:25–29)

Ahaziah, the youngest son of Jehoram, became king because all his older brothers had been killed by Arabian raiders. Under the evil influence of his mother Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and granddaughter of Omri, Ahaziah continued to lead Judah away from the true God of Israel. He joined his uncle Joram (Jehoram), king of Israel, in war against King Hazael of Syria. Joram was wounded in the fighting, and Ahaziah went to visit him while he recuperated at Jezreel (2 Kings 8:29).

Jehu the Avenger (2 Kings 9:1–10)

When Elisha sent another prophet to find and anoint Jehu, a military commander in Israel, to be the next king there, he was finishing a task that had earlier been assigned to his mentor Elijah (1 Kings 19:16). The prophet found Jehu and anointed him, and then he gave him God's orders. He was to execute all the descendants of Ahab to avenge the blood of the many prophets of God whom Ahab

and Jezebel had killed. As God had ended the lineages of Jeroboam and Baasha earlier for their wickedness, so He would end Ahab's as well. The prophet announced that Jezebel was not to be spared either; she was to experience a very shameful death in which dogs would eat her, leaving nothing to be buried.

Joram and Ahaziah Killed by Jehu (2 Kings 9:11–29)

Jehu's companions convinced him to tell them what the prophet had said. They embraced him as their new king, quickly making the news public. Jehu immediately went to Jezreel to find the wounded King Joram, who was recovering there, and King Ahaziah, who was visiting him. Alarmed by Jehu's unexpected and rapid approach, both kings tried to send greetings of peace, but Jehu answered, "What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?" Jehu shot Joram with an arrow as he tried to escape. He then had his dead body dumped in the field of Naboth to fulfill the earlier prophecy of judgment on Ahab's family for stealing Naboth's land and killing Naboth and his sons (1 Kings 21:19).

The record of 2 Chronicles 22:7 stated that Ahaziah's going down to visit Joram "was God's occasion for Ahaziah's downfall." Although Ahaziah tried to flee, Jehu pursued and killed him also.

Jezebel's Death (2 Kings 9:30–37)

Ever vigilant, Jezebel knew that Jehu had come to Jezreel to kill her son Joram. In an interesting detail from the record it was noted that she applied her make-up before calling to him, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" In calling Jehu "Zimri," she was alluding to a very similar situation in Israel years before in which King Elah was assassinated by one of his own military leaders named Zimri (1 Kings 16:10). Jehu had only to call up to her window for some assistance, and some of her own eunuchs obeyed him and threw her down. Her fatal fall left wall and horses spattered with her blood, and Jehu contributed to her humiliation by trampling her body with the feet of his horses. He left her corpse there while he went in for a meal. When he finished, he gave orders to bury her, since she was a king's daughter. However, it was too late. Just as earlier prophesied by Elijah, the dogs had licked up her blood and eaten her flesh, leaving too little to bury (1 Kings 21:23).

Ahab's Seventy Sons Executed (2 Kings 10:1–11)

Jehu continued his mission to exterminate Ahab's family line. However, in the matter of the seventy sons of Ahab, who were being raised by prominent families in Israel, Jehu had some help. He initially wrote letters to the elders of Israel and the custodial families. Jehu asked them to pick the son of Ahab who would best replace Joram as the new king of Israel and then support that son in battle against Jehu. The leaders receiving the letter knew that there was little hope of stopping Jehu, and so they offered instead, to grant any request Jehu made that would bring peace to the situation. Jehu asked for the heads of all seventy sons of Ahab, and the elders and custodial families agreed. They had them delivered to Jehu in baskets! Jehu commented that such a response only gave strength to his belief that everything the Lord had prophesied through Elijah about Ahab would not fail to happen.

Ahaziah's Brothers Killed (2 Kings 10:12–17)

Definitely at the wrong place at the wrong time, the brothers of the recently killed king of Judah, Ahaziah, were on their way to Samaria to commiserate with their cousins, who were of the royal house of Ahab. Jehu was committed to finishing his bloody mission, which he evidently thought

included the line of Ahab that had spread to Judah through Athaliah's marriage to Jehoshaphat's son. So, Jehu gave orders, and all forty-two men were killed. With just one more daring effort (2 Kings 10:15–17), Jehu's mission to execute Ahab's line was completed.

Jehu Stops Baal Worship (2 Kings 10:18–36)

Jehu continued in his work for the Lord. He devised an effective plan to stop the widespread Baal worship in Israel. Pretending to endorse the idolatry, he issued a call for all the prophets and worshippers of Baal to assemble at the temple of Baal for a great event. He had all participants given distinctive vestments and issued orders for any followers of the Lord to be expelled. As he went in to oversee the sacrifices, Jehu had arranged for eighty of his men to enter at his command and execute everyone inside. After killing all those involved in the idolatrous worship, they destroyed the worship center, making it into a garbage dump. The biblical record stated, "Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel" (2 Kings 10:28).

God approved Jehu's obedience in that action and in the judgment on Ahab's house and promised to let Jehu's line continue to rule Israel for four generations. Later though, the prophet Hosea pronounced a future judgment for the violence of Jehu's actions (Hosea 1:4).

After this, Jehu did not follow God's commands in his personal life. He continued to worship the gods Jeroboam had introduced, and so God began to punish him. Israel began to be harassed again by Syria and lost her large land holdings east of the Jordan River where Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had settled. The eroding of the former influence and power of Israel had begun. Jehu died and his son Jehoahaz succeeded him.

Queen Athaliah of Judah (2 Kings 11:1–3)

When Jehu killed Ahaziah, Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, ordered all the other royal heirs killed. Fortunately, Ahaziah's sister Jehoshabea (also known as Jehoshabeath), the wife of the priest Jehoiada, managed to save Ahaziah's infant son Joash from Athaliah's wicked executions. For six years the child was hidden by his aunt and uncle in the Lord's house, while Athaliah ruled Judah as queen.

Joash the Child-King (2 Kings 11:4–21)

Jehoiada, who according to 2 Chronicles 24:6 was the chief priest, bravely made a covenant with the ranking military officers to help make Joash king. With this action, the line of David could continue. The officers traveled through Judah calling all the Levites to assemble at the temple. They joined in the covenant and obeyed Jehoiada's orders to follow rotating schedules to provide protection for the young child. Armed and ready for any opposition from Athaliah, they crowned Joash, gave him the law, and made him their king.

Athaliah soon came to the temple to investigate the noises of celebration she had heard. She tore her royal robes and cried, "Treason!" Jehoiada ordered her removal from the temple and immediate execution. He then quickly made a covenant with the people gathered there to return to the Lord. The results were as follows: "And all the people went to the temple of Baal, and tore it down. They broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars" (2 Chronicles 23:17). Jehoiada also organized and reinstated the proper worship procedures for the Lord's temple, according to the law of Moses. Then, the young king Joash, at just age seven, was seated on the

throne. The record concluded that “the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword” (2 Chronicles 23:21).

The Child-King Joash (Jehoash) of Judah (2 Kings 11)

On his mission to exterminate the family of Ahab, Jehu killed King Ahaziah of Judah because he was Ahab’s grandson. Ahaziah’s mother, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of the northern kingdom, evidently shared the evil ways of her parents. When her son Ahaziah was killed, Athaliah quickly killed all the other royal heirs so that she could take the throne of Judah for herself. By the grace of God and in fulfillment of His promise to keep the Davidic line alive forever, God allowed Ahaziah’s sister to rescue Ahaziah’s infant son Joash before Athaliah could find him. For six years the child was hidden by his aunt Jehosheba and her husband Jehoiada, the chief priest, in the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 22:11; 24:6).

Joash’s First Project (2 Kings 12:1–16)

When Joash was seven, Jehoiada the chief priest who was already in his nineties, arranged for the boy’s coronation as king of Judah. Queen Athaliah, who had usurped the throne after her son’s death, was executed. Joash, the child-king, was mentored by Jehoiada in the affairs of the southern kingdom, and he pleased God so long as Jehoiada was alive to advise him.

An important project endorsed by Joash when he grew older was the repair of the approximately 150-year-old temple, which had been damaged when Queen Athaliah had it looted to fund the temple of Baal. At first Joash called on the priests and Levites to go to the cities of Judah and raise the needed funds, according to the law of Moses, by assessing each man a half-shekel for upkeep of the temple (Exodus 30:13–16). For reasons not given, the priests, Levites, and even his adviser Jehoiada, failed to obey him. So, Joash handled the project more directly. He had an offering chest made and placed near the altar to receive the contributions of the people when they came to worship. King Joash and Jehoiada hired workmen to do the various repairs and paid them directly from the temple fund. The extra serving pieces needed were not made until the main renovation project was completed and they had “restored the house of God to its original condition and reinforced it” (2 Chronicles 24:13).

Joash Turns to Idols (2 Kings 12:17, 18)

Unfortunately, Joash’s reign did not end on that high note. Although Jehoiada lived to one hundred and thirty and gave godly guidance to Joash for most of his forty-year reign, Joash did not continue in the godly path after the old priest’s death. Tragically, Joash began to listen to ungodly advisers and actually left the worship of the true God of Israel and led his people in the worship of idols!

God judged Joash and the nation by allowing Hazael of Syria to plan an attack on Jerusalem. Joash, who had earlier directed the refurbishing of the temple, stripped it of its treasures to pay Hazael to go away. How far he had fallen from the leader he had once been! Even worse, Joash’s payment did not keep them away permanently. The Syrians returned later to renew their attack successfully.

Joash Warned (2 Kings 12:19–21)

God sent prophets to correct Joash and his nation and to call them to repentance, “but they would not listen.” Even Jehoiada’s son Zechariah, a prophet, confronted Joash. What was Joash’s response to the son of the man who saved and guided his life? He had him executed!

In judgment on the wicked change in Joash and the nation of Judah, God allowed a small company of soldiers from Syria to return and get a large and profitable victory over Judah. In the fighting, Joash was critically wounded, but instead of helping him, his own men decided to kill him in revenge for what he had done to Zechariah. They did not even give him the honor of being buried with the other kings of Judah. Jehoiada the priest had been buried with kings; Joash the king was not.

Jehoahaz Rules in Israel (2 Kings 13:1–9)

Before the death of Joash of Judah, Jehoahaz succeeded his father Jehu as Israel’s king. Jehoahaz did not return to the Lord but continued to lead Israel in the idolatry started by Jeroboam. So God continued to allow Hazael of Syria to be His instrument of judgment on Israel. One instance was recorded in which Jehoahaz cried out to God for help against Syria, and God mercifully responded by giving Israel an unnamed deliverer to lead her to freedom. However, the conflict with Syria left the army of Israel greatly reduced, but Israel and her king still did not repent of their idolatries.

Jehoash (Joash) and Elisha (2 Kings 13:10–14)

After the death of Jehoahaz, Jehoash (Joash) his son became king. He continued, as was now the established pattern in Israel, in the sins of idolatrous worship. During his reign, Joash fought against Judah and won, looted the treasuries of the temple, and died an unremarkable death. One of the only memorable things recorded about him was his affection for and attention to the dying Elisha.

Visual Aid (2 Kings 13:15–21)

Elisha’s word to Joash was accompanied by signs. Elisha placed his hand on the king’s hand as they touched a bow, probably to illustrate that the king would not be acting alone in a military showdown that was coming. At Elisha’s command, Joash obediently shot an arrow eastward out an open window. Elisha said it meant deliverance in a coming war with Syria through the power of God. Next, the king was told to strike the ground with the arrows, but he did it only three times. Disgusted, Elisha told him that his lack of enthusiasm would cause him to push Syria back only three times instead of completely defeating them.

With that last prophecy, Elisha died. But one last miracle was recorded in his honor. A dead body, being placed quickly into Elisha’s tomb because of approaching raiders, came in contact with Elisha’s bones and was immediately revived! Spiritual to the bone, that was Elisha, and that same reviving power of God in him had been available to the people of Israel. Sadly, very few had yielded to the Lord God, who was so willing to empower them, too.

Syrians Come Again (2 Kings 13:22–25)

As disobedient as Israel had been, God still remembered the northern kingdom as part of His covenant people and kept them from being completely destroyed by the attacks from Hazael of Syria. When Hazael died and was succeeded by his son Ben Hadad III, God fulfilled Elisha’s prophecy and gave Jehoash (Joash) victory over him and his Syrian forces three different times.

Amaziah Rules Judah (2 Kings 14:1–7)

When the good-king-turned-idolater Joash of Judah died at the hands of his own servants, his son Amaziah was made king. Amaziah was twenty-five when he took the throne and ruled twenty-nine years, “but not with a loyal heart.” His first official act was to execute the murderers of his father, which he did without also killing their families. In this he kept the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 24:16), which kings before him had often violated. Some time in his reign, Amaziah organized his military forces and then supplemented them with soldiers from Israel, whom he paid a hundred talents of silver. A prophet was sent to warn him not to go to battle with the hired troops of Israel, or God would make him lose. In what we would consider a normal reaction, Amaziah asked the prophet what he was to do about the hundred talents of silver he had already paid those troops. The prophet responded with a word that should still guide us whenever we hesitate to obey God because of money: “The LORD is able to give you much more than this” (2 Chronicles 25:9).

Amaziah obeyed, but the Israelite army was angry at being sent home. However, the army of Judah had a great and financially beneficial victory over Edom without them. Following the battle, Amaziah stupidly gathered up the idols of Edom, took them home, set them up, and worshipped them! God, of course, was angry and sent a prophet to ask, “Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?” (2 Chronicles 25:15). Amaziah would not accept the correction and told the prophet to be quiet, but the prophet pronounced Amaziah’s coming doom.

Amaziah of Judah vs. Joash of Israel (2 Kings 14:8–22)

Bolstered with a false sense of power because of his victory over Edom, Amaziah arrogantly challenged Joash (Jehoash) king of Israel to face him in battle. Joash tried to put him off with a witty response, but Amaziah persisted. They fought, Israel won, and Amaziah was captured. Joash went to Jerusalem, broke down four hundred cubits of wall, and looted the temple. Joash later died and was succeeded by his son Jeroboam II.

Interestingly, Amaziah was released and lived to rule Judah for fifteen years after the death of Joash, but he was not a popular king. A conspiracy was formed against him, causing him to flee to Lachish, but he was found there and killed. His son Azariah (Uzziah) was made king in his place.

Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–29)

After King Joash (Jehoash) of Israel died, and before Amaziah of Judah died, Jeroboam II became king of Israel. The second Jeroboam was as evil as the first, but because of the mercy of God, he was allowed to fulfill the prophecy of Jonah and restore some of Israel’s land that had been taken away by Syria. After all her wicked leadership, Israel’s security was still in the heart and mind of God.

Azariah (Uzziah) Rules in Judah (2 Kings 15:1–7 and 2 Chronicles 26)

After Amaziah’s assassination, his sixteen-year-old son Azariah (Uzziah) was crowned king of Judah. He ruled fifty-two years and was a good king, following the Lord except for not completely removing all the high places where idolatry was practiced. However, God struck him with leprosy. The Second Chronicles record must be consulted for more detail.

In Uzziah’s fifty-two years, he accomplished many positive things and, most importantly, was a spiritual man in the best sense. The prophets Zechariah and Isaiah were active during his reign (2

Chronicles 26:5, 22), and “as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.” Uzziah was also a builder. Some of his projects included towers in the desert, wells, and farming enterprises, “for he loved the soil” (2 Chronicles 26:10). Next, he was an excellent military leader. God gave him victory over the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Meunites. The Ammonites were also brought under his authority. He armed his large forces with the best equipment and even invented defense devices that could shoot arrows and big stones from towers and high corners (2 Chronicles 26:6–8 and 11–15). Perhaps this success was the cause of his undoing because it made him famous, and “he was marvelously helped till he became strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction.”

It was at the peak of his fame that Uzziah decided to offer incense to Him, which was completely against the laws for proper worship. No one but Levites of the direct line of Aaron could serve as priests and enter the holy place where the altar of incense stood. To their credit, eighty priests united to challenge Uzziah and warned him to leave the area. Instead of repenting, Uzziah became angry, and God struck him with leprosy for the rest of his life. His problem with pride was solved in an instant. He had to leave his place of authority and live in isolation. His son Jotham ruled in his place. How tragic again to see a moment of pride end a lifetime of faithful service. No repentance was recorded; therefore, no healing was given to Uzziah. Uzziah died a leper and was buried in a field near, but not with, the kings of Judah.

Wicked Kings of Israel in Fast Succession (2 Kings 15:8–38)

In contrast to the long and positive reign of Uzziah in Judah, the reigns of the kings of Israel in that same time-span were short and wicked. Here is a quick summary:

1. **Zechariah the son of Jeroboam II**, and the fourth and final generation of Jehu to become king (as God had promised in 2 Kings 10:30), reigned only six months before being publicly assassinated by Shallum, the son of Jabesh.
2. **Shallum the son of Jabesh**, reigned just one month before being assassinated by Menahem, the leader of the conspiracy against him.
3. **Menahem**, son of Gadi, reigned for ten years in Samaria but had his kingdom oppressed by the expanding kingdom of Assyria, which was ruled at that time by King Pul. Menahem had to collect heavy taxes from his people to appease King Pul so that he would remove his troops from Israel.
4. **Pekahiah son of Menahem**, reigned in Israel two years, during the final years of the long reign of Uzziah of Judah. He was assassinated by one of his own military leaders named Pekah, son of Remaliah, who had the support of fifty men of Gilead.
5. **Pekah** perhaps because of his support by the military, managed to avoid assassination for twenty years. However, his rule was far from trouble-free. He continued, as had all his predecessors, in the evils of idolatry. The judgment of God came in the form of the return of Assyria, now ruled by Tiglath-Pileser, and the conquering of some major areas of Israel, including Galilee and the area across the Jordan River called Gilead. Tiglath-Pileser took many captives back to Assyria. The fall of Israel had begun at last. Hoshea, son of Elah, formed a conspiracy, which was sympathetic to or at least compliant with the demands of Assyria, and then assassinated Pekah. Hoshea became the new king.
6. **Hoshea son of Elah**, was the last king of Israel, and his reign lasted nine years. Hoshea ruled in the constant shadow of the growing encroachment westward by Assyria. The Scriptures stated that

Hoshea was not quite as wicked as his predecessors (2 Kings 17:2), but the judgment prophesied to Israel for her years of national wickedness was imminent.

Israel's Exile (2 Kings 17:1–6)

Shalmaneser was the new king of Assyria, who made Israel his vassal and demanded tribute money be paid to him annually. One year after Hoshea failed to pay the annual tribute to him, Shalmaneser discovered Hoshea's secret appeal to Egypt for help. Shalmaneser had Hoshea arrested and imprisoned.

Shalmaneser then launched what was to be a three-year siege on Samaria. In the ninth year of King Hoshea, Samaria was finally overcome, and the king of Assyria, now King Sargon, carried even more captives from Samaria and Israel to exile in Assyria.

The captives from the northern kingdom who were taken to Assyria would not return to their own land in significant numbers as a recognizable group. While not "lost" as some historians describe them, the ten tribes of Israel were subsequently "scattered" world-wide.

Sad History of Israel Reviewed (2 Kings 17:7–23)

The sad record of all the years of the northern kingdom's spiritual disobedience was reported here. Israel's early compromise with the heathen and subsequent adoption of heathen idolatries led them ultimately to indulge in the most despicable actions of all—child-sacrifice. Though the leaders of Israel had had many warnings from godly prophets such as Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah, Oded, Amos, and Hosea, they had turned a deaf ear to the words of the God who had made them a nation. Their national deafness was brought on by their sin-hardened hearts.

Samaria Resettled by Immigrants (2 Kings 17:24–41)

To insure continued subjugation of a city or region, conquering nations often followed a certain procedure. They removed as many of the persons of the upper levels of society as could be transported and would leave the lower, poorer, less-educated, and therefore more controllable classes behind. The selected captives would be taken to the homeland of the victors to contribute to that society, while immigrants from other conquered lands would be brought in to repopulate the newly conquered territory. These immigrants would mix with the existing population, forming a citizenry that would presumably be loyal to its new government, having lost any shared sense of national history, tradition, or religion.

When this repopulation effort was started in Samaria, God sent lions into the area to kill some of the people who had no godly fear of Him. Interestingly, the newly-placed people quickly discerned that the problem with the lions had a spiritual cause. They reported to the king of Assyria that they needed help in finding out about the proper rituals of their new land. The king of Assyria sent them a priest to teach the ways of proper worship for the God of Israel, but whether the priest was one of Jeroboam's making or was a legitimate priest of the line of Aaron, the record does not make clear. The result was clear, however. The people just mixed the ways of Israel with their own pagan worship practices, merely adding to the pantheon they already recognized.

Sadly, this mixed religion was perpetuated for centuries, making the Samaritans in the New Testament a hated people group. Because they dared to mix Judaism with their own pagan practices,

they were considered unsuitable for any association with law-abiding Jews of Jesus' day. Some of the tension between Samaritans and Jews can be seen in the reaction of the woman at the well to Jesus' conversation with her and His offer to give her living water in John 4.

New King Ahaz (2 Kings 16:1–6)

Even though Uzziah and his son Jotham were considered good men and righteous kings, their descendant Ahaz proved to be a very wicked ruler in Judah. He surpassed the evil of any other king of Judah up to that time in that he indulged his paganism to the extent of sacrificing his own children to idols (2 Kings 16:3). In deliberate punishment for these and other ungodly activities, the Lord allowed Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, to come to Jerusalem to besiege it. This first effort failed, but the king of Syria did proceed to capture the city of Elath and drive the men of Judah out of there (2 Kings 16:6).

According to 2 Chronicles 28, a later effort by Syria was more successful. This attack resulted in a "great multitude" from Judah being taken captive to Damascus, Syria (2 Chronicles 28:5). In addition, Judah's sister nation Israel, before her fall, was allowed to defeat Judah "with a great slaughter," killing 120,000 in one day. Israel also took 200,000 women and children captive from Judah, in addition to a large amount of collected spoil (2 Chronicles 28:6–8).

While God had allowed Syria and Israel to defeat Judah "because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 28:6), He had not authorized Israel to take her own relatives captive. On their return to Samaria, the prophet Oded met the northern army to confront them about overdoing their victory. He warned them that the wrath of God would fall on them if they did not release the captives of Judah. The prophet was joined by some other named leaders who supported his message. So, the returning army released the captives and the spoil to the leaders of the assembly. The leaders used the spoil to feed and clothe the women and children, set the weak ones on donkeys, and then finally send them all south to reunite with their relatives at Jericho.

Ahaz' Error (2 Kings 16:7–20)

Instead of repenting of his idolatries and crying out for the mercy of God, Ahaz tried to buy protection from Tiglath-Pileser, the reigning king of Assyria when these attacks against him first started. Ahaz looted God's temple for the payment, and Tiglath-Pileser cooperated and took his forces to Damascus, claimed the city, and killed King Rezin. King Ahaz of Judah was evidently so enamored by the power of Tiglath-Pileser, that after visiting him in Assyria, he sent the design of a pagan altar he saw there to the priest Urijah to copy and place in the temple in Jerusalem. Ahaz himself made offerings on it and ordered it to be used for future sacrificial burnings. He had the existing bronze altar moved and announced that he would use that one "to inquire by." Ahaz also had other parts of the temple dismantled and relocated. The Scripture stated that he did this "on account of the king of Assyria" (2 Kings 16:18). Whether he did it in hopes of discouraging the King of Assyria from dismantling and moving the parts himself to his country, to pay him additional tribute, or to show a disregard for the God of Israel to please the Assyrian king is not made clear. For whatever reason, his alliance with the Assyrians did not last. The next time he called on Tiglath-Pileser for help against Edom and Philistia, the Assyrian king "distressed him, and did not assist him" (2 Chronicles 28:20). When that effort for help and relief failed, Ahaz still did not turn back to the Lord, who had blessed his father and grandfather. He foolishly decided instead to sacrifice to the gods of Damascus, whom he credited with causing his earlier defeat, even though Syria was subsequently defeated by Assyria. He robbed the temple of the Lord so thoroughly at this time that he even had the doors closed to further

access or use. Ahaz put his own altars “in every corner of Jerusalem” and increased the already numerous high places where incense could be offered to the pagan gods.

The Scriptural record simply stated that Ahaz died but was not accorded the same honor as the other kings: he was buried somewhere other than in the royal tombs.

Hezekiah Takes the Throne (2 Kings 18:1–8)

When Israel to the north was only six years away from being exiled to Assyria, Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, became king in Judah. He was twenty-five years old when he succeeded his father and ruled for twenty-nine years. He launched a righteous campaign to rid his nation of all forms of idolatry and to direct his people to right worship of God at the temple.

One interesting idol that was mentioned as being destroyed was called Nehushtan. It was the bronze serpent God had told Moses to make centuries earlier, which had been raised up on a pole for the snake-bitten Israelites to look upon and be healed. (Numbers 21:4–9.) Evidently the thing had been preserved over the centuries and elevated to the status of an idol to which the people burned incense.

Besides these energetic religious reforms, Hezekiah made a rather bold move politically at the beginning of his reign. He quit paying the tribute to Assyria, which his father Ahaz had paid (2 Kings 18:7). This decision would have later repercussions for Hezekiah and his nation.

Hezekiah Renovates and Reopens the Temple (2 Chronicles 29)

Hezekiah correctly discerned that Judah’s turning away from God and subsequent abandonment of His temple had caused God to withdraw His presence from her, allowing her to be attacked by other nations. To remedy this, Hezekiah first called for the priests and Levites to assemble, sanctify themselves, and begin cleansing the temple, which his father Ahaz had vandalized and closed. They obeyed him, working fervently for sixteen days. They removed the rubbish, sanctified the whole place, replaced the destroyed or misplaced articles of worship, and re-opened the temple doors.

As soon as it was ready, Hezekiah led the rulers of the city to the house of the Lord for the first worship service in the newly cleansed temple. Offerings were properly and generously made, music was played, and God was joyfully worshiped. The abundance of sacrifices overwhelmed the priests, so the Levites had to help with the duties required to prepare the offerings, too. The Scripture noted bluntly that not all of the priests had obediently prepared themselves for service, a condition which showed that some change of heart was still necessary in many individuals (2 Chronicles 29:34).

Hezekiah Brings Back the Celebration of Passover (2 Chronicles 30)

Even though Israel had been at war with Judah and was already falling prey to foreign invasion, Hezekiah issued an invitation from Beersheba to Dan, inviting all Israel to celebrate Passover at Jerusalem in the second month of the new year. The traditional time of celebration was the week starting the fourteenth day of the first month. However, because they had first to sanctify the temple and themselves properly, they moved it to the second month, which was allowed by the law (Numbers 9:10, 11). Although Passover was one of Israel’s major festivals, it had not been properly observed by either the northern or the southern kingdom in many years (2 Chronicles 30:5).

Some people in Israel laughed at the invitation to Passover, but others accepted it and traveled to Jerusalem to join with their kinsmen in the celebration. Perhaps because the northern kingdom had been without teaching priests and Levites since the time of Jeroboam, not all the visitors from Israel were familiar with the directions given in Scripture for preparation for worship. Because of this, some from Israel came and ate the Passover without taking the proper steps to sanctify themselves for it according to the law. When Hezekiah became aware of this, he prayed for them, asking God not to hold it against them. The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer and "healed the people" (2 Chronicles 30:20). Hezekiah encouraged the Levites in their renewed efforts to teach the people from the Scriptures, and the celebration continued for fourteen days, because of the joy of the people. Nothing like this had happened since the time of David. In keeping with 2 Chronicles 7:14, God had heard their prayers and brought healing to their land.

Reforms Continue (2 Chronicles 31)

That celebration of Passover resulted in an extensive revival. Those leaving Jerusalem to return to their homes broke down the pagan pillars, wooden images, high places, and altars on their way. Hezekiah proceeded to organize the priests and Levites into divisions for continued service. He also gave of his own possessions to provide proper offerings for continued daily worship, and then he called for the people to follow his example. They joyfully and generously complied, bringing their tithes and offerings for the next four months. With what was given, including the support of the priests and Levites, the work of the temple was able to continue at full funding. The Scriptural account commended Hezekiah's diligent leadership at that time: "And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered" (2 Chronicles 31:21).

Fall of Samaria, Captivity of Israel (2 Kings 18:9–12)

Shortly after Hezekiah's reorganization of right worship in Judah, in his fourth year as king, the northern kingdom's capital at Samaria was besieged by Assyria. After three years, Samaria was taken, and Israel fell. Many of Israel's citizens were taken captive to Assyria "because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant" (2 Kings 18:12).

Assyria Returns to Attack Judah (2 Kings 18:13–16)

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, about half-way through his twenty-nine years on the throne, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, "came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them" (2 Kings 18:13). Hezekiah's immediate response was to admit he was wrong, presumably for cutting off the tribute payment (verse 7) that his father had been making to Assyria, and to ask for another chance to pay. Sennacherib told him to send three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. To collect that huge sum, Hezekiah had to take money from the temple treasury as well as from his own funds and even strip the gold-plating from the temple's doors and pillars.

Hezekiah's Illness (2 Kings 20:1–11)

During this same period, even though this incident was placed later in the record, Hezekiah became very ill. The prophet Isaiah was dispatched to tell him to prepare to die. Hezekiah was not ready for such news and cried out to God to remember the acts of obedience he had performed and the loyal heart he had held toward Him. God had mercy on Hezekiah and had Isaiah return to tell him he would

recover in three days and live for fifteen more years. The rest of the good news was that God would personally defend and deliver Judah from the hands of Assyria.

God also told Isaiah to offer a sign to Hezekiah that day, to assure him that he would recover. A very interesting one was given: the sun-dial moved back ten degrees.

Hezekiah and the Babylonian Visitors (2 Kings 20:12–19)

Also at this time, Babylon, a nation rising to world-dominance, had a king who sent ambassadors with letters and a gift to Hezekiah. In his pride (2 Chronicles 32:25, 31), Hezekiah foolishly showed them not only all his valuable treasures but also all his military weaponry. God sent Isaiah to confront Hezekiah about this and to tell him that one day the army of Babylon would return to steal all those treasures and to take captive Hezekiah's own male heirs, castrating them to make them eunuchs, who would serve in the palace of Babylon. Hezekiah's response was disappointing in that he merely accepted the judgment and voiced thanks that it would not occur in his lifetime.

Assyria Returns (2 Kings 18:17–37)

The payment of gold and silver was not enough to keep Assyria away from Judah for long. They returned, but this time Hezekiah took some practical precautions such as blocking up the water sources the enemy might use and repairing walls and towers. He organized his people for war, assembled them together in the open square, and spoke encouragement to them. He assured them that "there are more with us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7) and assured them that God would fight their battles.

Sennacherib sent representatives with an open message for the people of Judah. The political titles of these men were given in the 2 Kings 18 reference: Tartan meant supreme commander; Rabsaris meant chief of the royal close advisors; and Rabshakeh was an Assyrian provincial governor or perhaps a field commander. The Rabshakeh was the spokesman and addressed the assembled people of Jerusalem who were sitting on the walls.

The Rabshakeh, in a pompous manner, told the crowd they were foolish to listen to the plans of Hezekiah or to try to get help from Egypt. They were not even to think they could trust their God, because Hezekiah had systematically torn down His high places and scattered His altars. Here, of course, the Rabshakeh was in error, since the destruction of those pagan places had been in obedience to the true God. This lack of knowledge about the nature and character of the God of Israel by the pagan nations who surrounded her was just another result of Israel and Judah's years of neglect of their own true faith. They had not been a witness to the nations or a light in the thick darkness of paganism. The Rabshakeh continued his rantings, even claiming to have God's approval for what Assyria was doing against Judah at that time (2 Kings 18:25). Isaiah also had prophesied God's punishment of Assyria: "Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks'" (Isaiah 10:12).

The Rabshakeh continued his speech by warning them of the horrors of a coming siege, specifically speaking to those "who will eat and drink their own waste" (2 Kings 18:27). The Rabshakeh again urged them to ignore Hezekiah and listen to his terms for peace. If they would surrender, they would be allowed to live peacefully until they were transported to Assyria to "a land like [their] own" (verse 32). He made his final point by asking them if any of the gods of the other lands Assyria had

conquered had been able to prevail. He called on them to give up on their God and surrender to the forces of Assyria. The people of Judah, as instructed, made no response.

Hezekiah's Reaction (2 Kings 19:1–34)

However, when Hezekiah heard this, he tore his garments, put on sackcloth, and sought the Lord at the temple. He sent word to Isaiah to pray for the nation. Isaiah sent back a message to Hezekiah that God had heard the blasphemy against His name by the servants of the Assyrian king and would cause them to hear a rumor that would make them return home immediately. God also promised that Sennacherib would “fall by the sword in his own land.”

Just as God said, the Rabshakeh did hear of an impending attack by Ethiopia against Assyria and left the area, but not without first sending a letter to Hezekiah warning him not to believe that Israel's God could save them. Assyria would return, he wrote, to show its superiority once more over yet another nation's deity.

This time Hezekiah spread the letter out before the Lord. He prayed, beginning by praising God and describing His greatness. He called on God to hear his cry and save the land. God sent His response by Isaiah. In summary, God replied that the Assyrians had chosen to threaten the wrong nation. Judah was “the daughter of Zion,” and the God who made the whole world could ably defend her, putting a hook in Assyria's nose and a bridle in Assyria's mouth to return its armies to their own land. Judah, God promised, would recover. In three years she would be planting and reaping as usual. He promised always to keep a remnant of her nation safe. As for the details of Assyria's defeat, God said that they would be sent back the way they came without so much as an arrow being shot at Jerusalem or a siege mound being built around her walls.

God's Sovereign Protection (2 Kings 19:35–37)

How did God defeat Assyria? He sent the angel of the Lord to the Assyrian camp, and in one night the angel killed 185,000 Assyrians. When the rest of the army awakened in the morning and found the corpses, they retreated to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Once there, in fulfillment of God's earlier word through Isaiah, Sennacherib was slain by his own sons with the sword while he was worshipping his god (2 Kings 19:7).

Hezekiah's Tunnel (2 Chronicles 32:27–30)

Among the several entries in the list of Hezekiah's accomplishments was this statement: “This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David.” The project began at the pool of Siloam and at the spring of Gihon, but workmen began at opposite ends of solid rock to dig this 1700-foot tunnel, meeting in the center. It provided Jerusalem a dependable water supply and was one of Hezekiah's greatest construction accomplishments.

The Death of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20–21)

After a twenty-nine-year reign, at the age of fifty-four, Hezekiah died. The record of his faith and goodness was given a large space in Scripture. Not only did the writers of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles record the details, but the book of Isaiah, Chapters 36–39, preserved them also. With a clear

conscience, Hezekiah summarized his own life in prayer to God: “I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight” (2 Kings 20:3).

Judah Moves Toward Judgment

Manasseh Plunges the Nation into Evil (2 Kings 21:1–16)

The righteous reforms undertaken during the twenty-nine years of Hezekiah’s reign were tragically undone by his son Manasseh. Manasseh ruled jointly with his father for the first ten years of his reign, making him twenty-two when Hezekiah died, although he became king at age twelve. If that is correct, it is all the more tragic that Manasseh, having been exposed daily to his father’s righteous leadership, turned so completely against the direction Hezekiah had taken the nation. While it is not uncommon even in our day to see children rebel against the values and accumulated successes of their parents, such behavior still shocks and saddens all godly witnesses to it.

As if on a mission, Manasseh systematically filled Jerusalem and Judah with idolatry. No pagan practice was omitted. From worshipping the hosts of heaven with astrology, to consulting mediums and spiritists in witchcraft, to sacrificing his own sons in the Valley of Hinnom, and finally erecting an idol inside the temple, Manasseh seduced the people to evil and widened the gap between Judah and her true God. God had sent prophets to warn Manasseh and the people (2 Kings 21:10–15), but they had not listened. Even the death of the prophet Isaiah, who was reportedly sawn in two, was credited to orders from Manasseh (Hebrews 11:37).

Manasseh Punished (2 Chronicles 33:11–19)

Second Chronicles included a report about Manasseh that was not found in Second Kings. Evidently, after refusing to repent at the word of the prophets, Manasseh had to face an early judgment from God for his wickedness. The Lord allowed some Assyrian captains to arrest Manasseh and take him to exile in Babylon, which was at that time under Assyrian authority. With hooks in his nose and chains on his body, Manasseh was led away. While suffering in that situation, Manasseh “humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” Displaying His characteristic mercy for the truly repentant, God heard him, forgave him, and restored him to his throne in Jerusalem.

He spent his remaining years trying to undo the evil he had promoted earlier. He removed all the idols he had set up, even the one in the temple, and repaired the altar of the Lord, putting it back into its proper service.

Death of Manasseh, Assassination of Amon (2 Kings 21:17–26)

Manasseh finished his fifty-five-year reign as a changed man, but, after his death, his son Amon quickly plunged the nation back into idolatry, putting back what his father had taken down. He reigned only for two years in this evil manner, however, before he was assassinated by his own servants. The people of Judah avenged his death by executing his murderers and then made his son Josiah their next king.

Josiah, Judah’s Last Good King (2 Kings 22)

Josiah was only eight years old when he took the throne of Judah, and although characterized from the start as a righteous person, he did not initiate spiritual reform until he was sixteen. At that age “he

began to seek the God of his father David,” and by twenty started actively purging Jerusalem and Judah of idolatry. He personally supervised the destruction of the Baals, the pagan altars of incense, and the molded images, having the dust of them scattered on the graves of their pagan worshipers. At age twenty-six, Josiah took on the renovation and cleansing of the temple. Shaphan, the scribe, and Hilkiah, the high priest, were in charge and handled the finances and the oversight of the workmen. In the process, Hilkiah discovered the Book of the Law and told Shaphan, who read it and then took it to King Josiah. When Josiah heard its words, he reacted in great grief, suddenly aware of just how far from God the nation had gone and certain that the punishment promised by the Scriptures was not far off.

Josiah quickly sent his officers to consult the prophetess Huldah about the wrath of the Lord, which the Scriptures had described. Huldah’s response from the Lord was two-fold. First, she announced that God certainly would bring judgment, just as the Scriptures promised, for all the evil that had been done in Judah. Then, personally to Josiah, she announced that because he had humbled himself before the Lord when he read the law and had maintained a tender heart towards God, the Lord would postpone the judgment until after his death. Josiah’s godliness had brought a respite for the nation.

Josiah’s Reform (2 Kings 23:1–25)

In the years he had left, Josiah continued to move his people back to the Lord. His first action was to gather the people together and have the Scriptures read to all of them. Then he made a covenant with the Lord to follow Him and obey His commandments with his whole heart. Josiah also made all who were present with him from Judah and Benjamin stand and do the same (2 Chronicles 34:32). Next, he ordered a renewed cleansing of the temple with the removal of anything related to idolatry. After that, the priests who had participated in the pagan astrology and occultic rites were removed from service. While they were allowed to eat bread with the others, they were no longer allowed to serve in the temple. The tents that had been put up to house cultic prostitution for the Sodomites [the literal translation for “perverted persons”] in the house of the Lord were removed (2 Kings 23:7); their presence there revealed how far the people had fallen from holy worship. Josiah also made a strong effort to stop the child sacrifices offered to the pagan god Topheth. He had the site of that abomination, the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, turned into the city garbage dump. It later was called Gehenna and became synonymous with a description of the fires of hell.

That was not all Josiah did. He continued the reformation with the removal of the horses stationed at the front of the temple, which had been dedicated to the sun god, and ordered their chariots to be burned. Pagan altars, which had been placed on the roof and upper levels of the temple by Ahaz, were ground into dust and thrown into the Brook Kidron. Some of the high places which Solomon had built were still standing, but Josiah defiled them. Another interesting altar that Josiah broke down was at least three hundred years old and had been the scene where a man of God prophesied about Josiah’s future birth and judgment on Jeroboam’s pagan priests (1 Kings 13:1, 2). Josiah fulfilled that prophecy by burning the bones of the pagan prophets buried near it, as well as executing the current priests of the high places.

The last of Josiah’s major reforms was the reinstatement of the Passover. He made detailed preparations to make sure that everything was done in exact accordance with God’s law. He provided 33,000 sacrifices, and then his brothers and other leaders gave even more. The Levites and priests provided music, and the gatekeepers were faithfully on duty. The whole effort was thus summarized:

“Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” (2 Kings 23:22).

Josiah Dies in Battle (2 Kings 23:26–30)

With the time of God’s judgment nearing, Josiah must have become anxious when King Necho of Egypt came up the border of Judah to join Assyria in attacking Babylon across the Euphrates River. Without the Lord’s direction or approval, and in spite of the warning by King Necho that not only had God commanded him to go but also that Josiah’s interference would cost him his life, Josiah persisted in trying to stop King Necho’s forces when they entered the Valley of Megiddo, the future site of Armageddon. He disguised himself for protection but was still fatally wounded by an arrow. He was taken by chariot to Jerusalem where he died. The nation mourned for him, and even the prophet Jeremiah publicly lamented his death. All his good works were recorded in the annals of Jewish history. With the removal of the salt and light of Josiah’s witness from Judah, the corruption and darkness of sin quickly returned, hastening the promised judgment.

Egypt Overrules Judah (2 Kings 23:31–37)

After Josiah’s death, the king of Egypt began to exercise more control over Judah. Josiah’s son Jehoahaz was allowed to rule only three months before Pharaoh Necho had him deposed and imprisoned in Riblah until he could be transported to Egypt where he would die. Judah was also forced to pay a large tribute to Egypt, a sum of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. Her new king was another of Josiah’s sons named Eliakim, or as the pharaoh renamed him, Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim collected the Egyptian tribute from the people, assessing everyone a certain amount to raise the total. He ruled eleven years, leading the nation right back into evil.

Judgment on Judah

King Jehoahaz and the Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Kings 23:31–37)

Following the death of King Josiah of Judah at Meggido after his failed attempt to stop Pharaoh Necho from joining forces with Assyria against Babylon, the victorious Pharaoh Necho imprisoned Josiah’s son Jehoahaz who had only ruled for three months. The prophet Jeremiah, in active ministry at this time, referred to Jehoahaz as Shallum, which translated means “retribution.” With the imprisonment of Jehoahaz [Shallum] in Egypt, Jeremiah announced that the retribution against the sins of Judah had begun: “For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: ‘He shall not return here anymore, but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more’” (Jeremiah 22:11, 12).

After dethroning Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Necho put Judah under tribute to himself, at a rate of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold, and let another son of Josiah’s, Eliakim, renamed Jehoiakim, reign as the new king of Judah. He was expected to collect the money forcibly for the tribute payment, which he did. Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he started as king and reigned until he was thirty-six, doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

King Jehoiakim and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1, 7 and Daniel 1:1–5)

Judah soon felt the oppression of the fast-growing empire of Babylon. In 612 B.C. Babylon conquered Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, pushing itself to the forefront of world power. Later Babylon successfully pushed back the influence of Egypt. Then Nebuchadnezzar, who had recently replaced his father Nabopolassar as king of Babylon, arrived in 605 B.C. to besiege Jerusalem. The prophet Daniel was taken captive at this time, and he recorded what happened in Daniel 1:1–5:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy of judgment announced by Isaiah to Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:17, 18:

Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

In 2 Kings 24:1, the record simply stated that Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal for three years. After this, for some unstated reason, Jehoiakim decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, presumably stopping the payment of tribute. Historians think that Jehoiakim was encouraged to rebel against Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar sustained heavy losses in a battle against Egypt in 601 B.C. As she had done repeatedly in her past, Judah put her hopes in Egypt to deliver her, but the power of Egypt was diminishing: "And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates" (2 Kings 24:7).

Judah Harassed by Raiding Bands (2 Kings 24:2–6)

Babylon did not return immediately to put Judah back under subjection, but God allowed raiding bands of enemies to begin to harass and destroy parts of Judah at this time. This particular judgment began to intensify, according to 2 Kings 24:3, 4, because of the earlier evil idolatry of Jehoiakim's great-grandfather Manasseh and his filling Jerusalem with the blood of innocent people.

Nebuchadnezzar Returns to Arrest Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:5–8)

In the eleventh year of Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar came against him again, looted more of the temple valuables, and bound Jehoiakim in fetters to be transported to Babylon. Whether or not Jehoiakim actually made it all the way to Babylon was not made clear, but he probably did not since Jeremiah had prophesied this about his death:

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: "They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my sister!' They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, master!' or 'Alas, his glory!' He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:18, 19).

Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8–16)

Jehoiachin, when he was just a youth, replaced his father Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah. He had reigned only three months but had already earned the label of “evil” by the chroniclers, when Nebuchadnezzar returned in 597 B.C. to besiege Jerusalem for the second time. Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon at this time, along with ten thousand others, including members of the royal family, military leaders, craftsmen, and blacksmiths. As had been done when Assyria took Israel into captivity, only the poorest people were left. The prophet Ezekiel was among the captives in this trip into exile (Ezekiel 1:2).

Jehoiachin’s Reprieve (2 Kings 25:27–30)

After thirty-seven years in a Babylonian prison, Jehoiachin was released by the new king of Babylon, Evil-Merodach, and allowed to resume a life of dignity as a perpetually honored guest at the royal table. Some see in this action the mercy of God in allowing the line of David to continue, but actually no one from the line of Jehoiachin (called Coniah or Jeconiah in the prophecies of Jeremiah) was ever to assume the throne again:

“As I live,” says the LORD, “though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off; and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whose face you fear—the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans. So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you shall die.” Thus says the LORD: ‘Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah’” (Jeremiah 22:24–26, 30).

Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:17–20)

After taking Jehoiachin captive to Babylon in the second wave of Judah’s exile, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah, another of Josiah’s sons and the uncle of Jehoiachin, king of Judah. Zedekiah (also known as Mattaniah) was just twenty-one at the time but went quickly forward in the evil of his nephew and brothers. In Zedekiah’s ninth year as king of Judah, in January 588 B.C., the Babylonian forces returned for a devastating eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah had urged Zedekiah to surrender and save the remaining population and the city structures, but he would not listen (Jeremiah 38:17–23). Jeremiah was abused and imprisoned during this time (Jeremiah 32:1–5), but Zedekiah later came secretly to him for a word from the Lord. However, he never obeyed it (Jeremiah 37:17).

The Siege

A siege was a terrible thing at anytime, but Babylonian sieges, like those mounted by the Assyrians, were terrifying experiences. The Babylonians did not stop at simply conquering outlying fortress cities and surrounding the main target city to cut off supplies. They piled up dirt against the besieged city’s walls for ramps to mount battering rams for breaking down the walls. They also raised high platforms above the walls from which they could hurl down arrows, fire, or stones right into the city. In addition, they kept up a chatter of communication to urge people inside to defect to them, which did occur at this time in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 38:19). But the worst of all suffering was that inflicted by the famine that resulted. Jeremiah described this in Lamentations 4:9–10: “Those slain by the sword are better

off than those who die of hunger; for these pine away, stricken for lack of the fruits of the field. The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

The City Taken, Zedekiah Captured (2 Kings 25:1–21)

In July 586 B.C., the wall of Jerusalem was penetrated, and the city was captured. Zedekiah tried to escape, but just as Ezekiel had prophesied, Zedekiah was soon caught (Ezekiel 12:8–13). The last line of Ezekiel’s prophecy announced that Zedekiah would be taken to Babylon but never see it. That was what happened. He saw Nebuchadnezzar as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jeremiah 32:4, 5), and he saw his sons killed. Afterwards, however, his eyes were put out, so that when he was carried to Babylon with the final group of captives, he never saw the country of his exile.

About a month later, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, oversaw the final looting and destruction of Jerusalem. The big items of bronze like the laver or sea which held purification water for the temple, the carts, and the huge supporting pillars of the whole temple structure were cut apart and taken to Babylon. Then the city was systematically destroyed and burned, including the temple, palace buildings, houses, and city walls. Many temple and city officials were also executed.

Governor Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:22–26 and Jeremiah 40–44)

In an effort to make the captured territory somewhat productive for its new owners, Gedaliah, a man of Judah with a godly heritage, was appointed governor over the remaining population. In accordance with God’s will as revealed through Jeremiah, Gedaliah urged the people to cooperate with the Babylonian government, so that things would go well for them. However, as written in the extensive record of this time found in Jeremiah 40–44, there was opposition to Gedaliah’s leadership from some pro-Egyptian factions, and he was assassinated by a man named Ishmael. The frightened population soon fled to Egypt, refusing to obey the warnings of Jeremiah, thus guaranteeing themselves judgment from God.

Seventy Years (2 Chronicles 36:21)

Right before closing the tragic record of the fall of Jerusalem and final captivity of Judah, the chronicler reminded the reader of Jeremiah’s prophecies (Jeremiah 25:11, 12 and 29:10), which had set the limit on Judah’s exile at seventy years. The Jewish kingdom from Saul to Zedekiah had lasted about five hundred years, but besides the sins of idolatry, failure to listen to the prophets, and ungodliness in leadership, the nation had also neglected to let their land rest every seventh year as commanded in the law (Leviticus 25). If the 500 years of the kingdom were divided by 7, the result would be the number of sabbatical years the nation should have observed. The figure was right at seventy, and that was what their sentence in Babylon would be, so that the land could enjoy its promised rest and God’s justice could find its satisfaction.

The Return (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23)

Second Chronicles began with the building of the temple and ended with its destruction, but the final verses promised that the exiles would return and build it again. The leader of a yet future world power was named as the one who would make this happen: Cyrus, king of Persia. The Medes and the Persians would conquer Babylon and move up to world supremacy. Cyrus would release the captives of Judah to go back to their homeland and rebuild. Major prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

and Daniel echoed the promises of return and renewal. In God's judgment, He had surely remembered mercy (Habakkuk 3:2).

Soli Deo Gloria!