

2 Kings 1–4

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha have often been contrasted. Elijah was a fiery prophet who suddenly appeared in a dramatic fashion, while Elisha was a pastor-prophet who ministered in a personal way to the people. Elijah belonged to the rugged hills, Elisha to the peaceful valleys. Elijah was a solitary servant, while Elisha enjoyed fellowship with the people. Broadly speaking, Elijah was a prophet of judgment who sought to turn the nation back to God, while Elisha was a minister of grace who called out “a remnant” before the nation was destroyed.

I. Elisha Succeeds Elijah (1–2)

A. *The judgment of fire (chap. 1).*

The last three verses in 1 Kings 22 inform us that King Ahaziah was a wicked man whose heart had been unmoved by the recent judgments of God. We see now that neither the rebellion of Moab nor the injuries from his fall brought Ahaziah to repentance. In fact, he even sent to the heathen gods to find out whether or not he would survive. The Lord instructed Elijah to send the messengers back with a true message from the Lord: the king would die. Then Elijah departed; see John 12:35–36 for a NT parallel. Rather than submit to Elijah's God, the king sought to slay the prophet, but fire from heaven destroyed his men. This judgment was from the Lord. It was not Elijah's doing. The prophet's motive was to glorify the Lord; see Luke 9:51–56 for the disciples' misuse of this event. The third company of soldiers humbled themselves (through fear, not faith), and God accepted them. Fearlessly, Elijah gave the king his message of doom—and the king died.

B. *The chariot of fire (chap. 2).*

In 1 Kings 19:20, Elisha had promised to follow Elijah faithfully; and this he did in spite of opportunities to depart. He had served his master about ten years when he was told that Elijah was going to leave him. Had Elisha taken the easy route and stayed behind, he would have missed all the blessing of vv. 9–15. It pays to be faithful to your calling. For the “double portion” of v. 9 see Deut. 21:17. Years before, Elijah had wanted to die in the wilderness. How wonderful that God did not honor that request. Instead, the prophet was carried to heaven in a whirlwind. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. Because Elisha saw his risen, glorified master, he received the double portion of the Spirit. In v. 12, Elisha compares Elijah to the armies of Israel: he was more important to the nation's safety than the horses and chariots. See also 13:14.

Elisha took Elijah's mantle (see 1 Kings 19:19) and dared to trust God for the power to do the impossible. It was one thing to cross Jordan with Elijah, but quite another to step out by faith by himself. But when you trust “the Lord God of Elijah,” you do not need Elijah too. This first miracle proved to the young men in the school of the prophets that Elisha was truly God's prophet, and they honored him. However, they were not so

sure that Elijah was really gone. In vv. 16–18 we have their unbelief and folly recorded. It is an illustration of people today who doubt the resurrection and bodily ascension of Christ, and who question the future rapture of the saints. The healing of the waters by the salt is quite a contrast to Elijah's miracle of stopping the rain for three and a half years.

Verses 23–25 have puzzled some people. Keep in mind that these were young men, not children, and therefore responsible for their deeds. Bethel was a headquarters for idolatry (1 Kings 12:28–33); this sacred place had been desecrated and the young men were actually ridiculing God's Word and God's servants. The fact that forty-two of them met together suggests an organized plan. Calling the prophet "baldhead" was one of the lowest forms of insults, and the words "go up" point to their ridicule of Elijah's rapture to heaven. The bears mauled them, but we do not know if any of the young men were killed. It was a divine rebuke to the flippant attitude of wicked men who should have known better.

II. Elisha Saves the Nation (3)

It was a sin for Jehoshaphat of Judah to ally himself with Ahab's wicked son, but he did it. The two of them lined up with Edom (another enemy) to fight the Moabites. Jehoram of Israel had to unite with Judah and Edom because his armies had to cross their lands to attack Moab. Alas, their journey was a failure and they ran out of water. Jehoshaphat turned to Elisha and the Lord, and the prophet recognized David's descendant, but refused to recognize Ahab's godless heir (vv. 13–14). God miraculously provided the water in the ditches they dug, and also routed the enemy before them. The account ends on a strange note; the helpless king of Moab offered his own son as a burnt offering, and Judah and Edom became so indignant against Israel (Jehoram) that they withdrew from the battle and went home. They should not have allied with Jehoram to begin with. It was the faithful prophet of God, not the wicked king, who saved the nation.

III. Elisha Serves the People (4)

During his "hidden years," Elijah had helped the people, but this was not his main ministry. Elijah was primarily a prophet of fire; Elisha was a "pastor" and a minister to the people. We see several miracles performed to assist the needy people.

A. The prophet's widow (vv. 1–7).

See Lev. 25:39–46. The Jews were not showing mercy to one another or obeying the OT laws concerning debt. God takes what we have and uses it to meet the need, if we trust him (Ex. 4:2). "Shut the door" reminds us of Matt. 6:6; note that Elisha often "shut the door" when asking for God's help (vv. 21 and 33). God filled as many vessels as the widow had faith to bring, and those who loaned her the vessels must have benefited too. "My God shall supply all your need ..." (Phil. 4:19)

B. The Shunammite woman (vv. 8–37).

Two miracles are recorded here: God gave the woman a son when her husband was old, and God raised the boy back to life when he was stricken. Shunem was about seven miles from Carmel. Elisha passed by the house often; he was finally invited in to break bread with the husband and wife. We see here that the prophet (unlike Elijah) was socially inclined. We may have here a parallel with John the Baptist and Christ: John was like Elijah, living alone; but Christ was like Elisha, visiting homes and enjoying meals with the people. The woman had true spiritual values, for she made a special room on the roof for the visiting prophet—a “prophet’s chamber.” To reward her, God gave her a son. But the son was stricken in the field (sunstroke?) and taken home dead. However, the mother did not despair; she immediately set out for Carmel to find the prophet. She would not deal with the prophet’s servant Gehazi, and when the servant tried to raise the boy, he failed. This may be because of the covetousness that was already in his heart and that showed itself later (5:20ff). Note that Gehazi even tried to get rid of her (v. 27; see Matt. 14:15 and 15:23). Elisha himself had to make the journey to raise the boy. Verse 34 is a beautiful illustration of the effort and love it takes to win a soul, for Elisha “died” with the boy as he prayed for him. See 1 Kings 17:21ff.

C. The school of the prophets (vv. 38–44).

This may have been started by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:10) and continued by Elijah (1 Kings 20:35). Not all of the young men were men of faith, and it is possible that there were rival “apostate schools” in the land; see 2:23–25. The dearth in the land meant a lack of food, so the young preachers were making some stew. One of the students was dissatisfied with the menu, so he went to find some vegetables to improve it. None of the others knew enough about food to reject the poisonous gourds he brought. The taste warned them of the danger, and their prayer brought action from Elijah: he added the meal and healed the pottage. Sad to say, in many colleges, “schools of the prophets,” and even some churches, there is “death in the pot.” The only thing that will cure the poisonous diet is the pure meal of the Word of God. In vv. 42–44, we find another problem: there was good food on hand, but not enough to go around. Elisha multiplied the food to meet the needs of all the men. See John 6.

Elisha the prophet was certainly a man of miracles. No matter what the need, God was able to work through him and meet it. He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Let’s trust Him!

2 Kings 5

I. Naaman’s Cure (5:1–19)

We have in this miracle a beautiful picture of salvation through faith in God’s Word. Every lost sinner can see himself in Naaman; he can also see the power of saving faith.

A. He was condemned.

He was a leper. His beautiful uniform and his mighty victories could not disguise the fact that Naaman was a dead man, for he had a disease that man could not cure. Read the notes on Lev. 13 and see how leprosy is an illustration of sin.

B. He was an enemy.

He had a Jewish maid serving in his home, a girl kidnapped during a raid. As a Gentile, Naaman was outside the blessings of Israel; see Eph. 2:11–22. God gave His Son for us while we were enemies (Rom. 5:6–10).

C. He heard a witness.

The little Jewish maid loved her master. Even though she was far from home, she did not forget her God and she was quick to witness of His great power. Had she not been a faithful worker in the house, she would not have been an effective witness, but because of her faithfulness, her witness was rewarded. How Christ needs witnesses today!

D. He tried to save himself.

Naaman made every mistake possible in seeking to get a cure for his leprosy. First, he went to the king of Syria, who, of course, could do nothing. Then he went to the king of Israel, who was also unable to do anything. How many lost sinners run from one person to another, seeking salvation, and all the while Christ is waiting to meet their need. Note that Naaman was also ignorant of grace, for he brought with him a great deal of wealth (v. 5). The lost sinner tries to purchase salvation or earn it, but this is impossible.

E. He was called by God.

Elisha heard about Naaman's plight and sent for him. No sinner deserves to be saved; it is only through the gracious calling of the Spirit that anyone comes to Christ; see John 6:37. In Luke 4:27, Jesus tells us that Naaman was one of many lepers, but the Lord chose him and healed him. This is grace.

F. He resisted God's simple way of salvation.

Elisha did not come out to see Naaman; the general was a leper and would have defiled the prophet. Elisha wanted Naaman to know he was a rejected, condemned man. He treated the proud general like a sinner, and Naaman was angry at such treatment. "Doesn't he know who I am?" he asked. Like sinners today, Naaman thought the prophet would put him through some ritual (v. 11) to make him well. He would not humble himself to go into the Jordan, the river of death. He thought that his lovely rivers closer to home were far superior.

G. He was cured by his obedient faith.

The humble servant in v. 13 had more sense than the great general. How unreasonable it is to resist God's simple way of salvation. When Naaman obeyed in faith, he was "born again" and came out of the waters with flesh as clean as that of a little child. The seven dips in the Jordan are not a picture of baptism, for nobody was ever saved by being baptized even once, let alone seven times. Naaman's faith was proved by his works; he trusted the Word and acted upon it.

H. He had assurance.

He had said, "Behold, I thought" (v. 11); but now he said, "Behold, now I know" (v. 15). He gave public testimony to the reality of God's power and the fact that Jehovah alone was the true God. So grateful was he that he offered wealth to Elisha, who, of course, refused to accept the gift. Had he accepted the gift, it would have ruined the lesson of salvation by grace and would have robbed God of all the glory.

I. He went home in peace (v. 19).

Naaman knew he would face problems back in Syria, since his king was an idol worshiper, but Naaman sought to obey the Lord and honor Him fully. Every true believer has "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1).

II. Gehazi's Covetousness (5:20–27)

Gehazi disagreed with God's Word; this was the beginning of his troubles and sins. Had he submitted to God's Word and judged the covetousness in his heart, he would never have become a leper. It is important that God's people honestly judge their own sins in their hearts. "I will" was the attitude Gehazi had, not "Your will."

Note how quick and efficient people can be when they are disobeying God's Word. Gehazi did not run in 4:29–31 to raise the dead boy, but here he runs to Naaman to get material wealth. If only Christians would be as concerned about spiritual things as material. We now have two lies:

A. He lied to Naaman (vv. 21–23).

"My master has sent me," he told the general. "Elisha needs the money, not for himself, but for one of the students at the school." Like Judas, Gehazi seemed concerned for the poor, when all the while he was interested only in himself (John 12:1–7). Of course, by taking the money, Gehazi robbed God of His glory, contradicted the word of the prophet, and gave the impression that salvation involved money and good works. His one selfish deed ruined the whole picture. Gehazi received so much wealth that two of Naaman's servants had to carry it back for him.

B. He lied to Elisha (vv. 25–27).

He went in and acted as though nothing had happened. But the prophet knew the truth and asked him where he had been. “Your servant did not go anywhere.” Another lie. Verse 26 suggests that Gehazi had planned to use the money to set himself up in a little homestead of his own. It is likely that Gehazi's covetousness was in his heart long before this event for in chapter 4 we saw how powerless the servant was to raise the dead boy. God judged Gehazi because he would not judge himself, and Naaman's leprosy clung to Gehazi and to his descendants. We find Gehazi again in 8:1–6, this time in the presence of the king. Some have suggested that he repented and was healed, but this has no support from the Scripture. Furthermore, the disease was to pass on to his children too. The answer is simple: the events recorded in 2 Kings are not necessarily given in their actual chronological order. This conversation between Gehazi and the king probably took place in the city gate as the king was hearing the complaints of the people.

How sad it is to see a devoted servant of the Lord brought into shame and rejection because of covetousness. It was not blasphemy (as with Peter), or even adultery (as with David), but the hidden sin of covetousness. Of course, covetousness can be the cause of all kinds of sins. If people covet something (or someone), there is no sin they will not commit to get what they want. Elisha, the servant of the Lord, did not live for material gain; he lived wholly for the glory of God. Gehazi could not serve two masters —money and Jehovah. Colossians 3:5 equates covetousness with idolatry. Jesus associates covetousness with the awful sins of the flesh (Mark 7:22), and Paul lists covetousness in his catalog of Gentile sins in Rom. 1:29. In Luke 12:13ff, the Lord clearly warns of the dangers of covetousness; and in Luke 16:13ff, He shows that this sin will take people to hell. See also Eph. 5:3.

It is interesting to contrast the servant girl of vv. 2–3 with Gehazi. She was a slave, yet joyfully witnessed for the Lord; he was a free man in his own land, yet was interested only in himself. She brought Naaman to the place of salvation; he ruined the message of grace by his sin. She had no material gain, but she did have the Lord's blessing; he went home with wealth, yet he lost everything.

2 Kings 6–8

In these chapters we have several miracles and ministries of Elisha, some done privately for God's people, some done publicly for the nation. In each case we see clearly that the man of God is never at a loss to know God's will or exercise God's power.

I. Elisha Restores the Axe Head (6:1–7)

It rejoices us to see that one of the schools of the prophets was growing and needed more space. These men were in a sense “home missionaries” being trained by Elisha to take the Word to the people. Evangelical schools that train our future workers are

important and merit the support of God's people. Note that Elisha was not too busy or too proud to share in the building activities. Certainly his presence encouraged the young men. The students were poor, and at least one of them had to borrow tools. When the axe head flew off into the water, the student was terrified; but Elisha restored it to him. It is no sin to borrow, provided what is borrowed is cared for and returned. God is certainly interested in the personal needs of his people, even those "little matters" that often burden our hearts.

II. Elisha Captures the Syrian Invaders (6:8–23)

The Syrian king was sending in bands of soldiers to raid Israel (see 5:2), but God kept revealing to Elisha every movement the enemy made. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," says Ps. 25:14. Though Elisha did not honor wicked King Jehoram (3:13–14), the prophet did have a heart for the people of Israel and wanted to protect them. The king was wise enough to listen to the man of God, and God protected Israel. When the king of Syria was told that Elisha was the "hidden spy," he sent a band of soldiers to capture the prophet. Elisha's servant (who apparently had replaced Gehazi) saw the army about their city and thought the end had come, but God opened the servant's eyes to see the hosts of angels ready to deliver Elisha. Verse 16 is as true for the Christian today as it was for the Jews in that day. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Elisha performed a dual miracle; he opened the eyes of his servant, but he blinded the eyes of the invaders. It was thus very easy to take the band to Samaria. Imagine the surprise of the Syrians when their eyes were opened to behold the enemy city. Elisha prohibited the King of Israel from slaying the soldiers: God had captured them and God alone was to get the glory. Elisha defeated them with kindness. See Rom. 12:20–21, Prov. 25:21–22, and Matt. 5:43–45. From that time on, Syria sent no more secret "commando" bands to raid the villages of Israel. God's people, if obeying His Word, never need fear the enemy; see Ps. 46.

III. Elisha Delivers the City (6:24–7:20)

We do not know how many years passed between verse 23 and verse 24. When Benhadad did decide to fight Israel, it was with a complete army and not with small bands of invaders. The capital city was besieged until there was very little food: the very worst food was selling for exorbitant prices. ("Dove's dung" in v. 25 probably means a very cheap kind of grain. However, it would not be unlikely that starving people would eat even animal refuse). Furthermore, some of the people were resorting to cannibalism. Wicked King Jehoram echoed his father Ahab's words when he blamed the famine on Elisha (6:31 and 1 Kings 18:17). The king sent a messenger (whom Elisha knew was coming) to receive a strange prediction from the man of God: by the next day, Samaria would be delivered, and there would be plenty to eat. In 7:1, Elisha predicted that they would be able to buy six times as much food for one-fifth the cost. One of the king's lords revealed his unbelief, and Elisha promised him judgment. See 7:17–20.

What weapons did God use to defeat the entrenched Syrian army? A noise and four lepers! Thinking that a hired army was coming upon them, the Syrians fled, leaving

wealth and food in the camp. With good reasoning, the four lepers decided it was better to eat as prisoners (or die quickly) than to starve in freedom. Verse 9 is certainly a Gospel text and a great missionary text. How Christians need to heed it today! When the imprisoned citizens of Samaria heard the good news, they rushed out—and trampled the unbelieving lord underfoot! He heard the good news, he saw the proof of the message, but he died before he could enjoy it. What a warning to the sinner who delays receiving Christ!

IV. Elisha Protects the Shunammite Woman (8:1–6)

Verse 1 should read, “Now Elijah had said ...”; that is, seven years before, the man of God had warned her about approaching famine over the whole land; see 4:38. This is not the local famine in the city of Samaria described in chapter 6. The fact that Gehazi is talking to the king indicates that this event occurred before the healing of Naaman (chap. 5). The woman had obeyed Elisha and forsaken her property, finding temporary help in the land of the Philistines. But when she returned to Israel, someone had confiscated her property. Imagine her surprise to discover Gehazi talking to the king at the very moment she came to press her case. God had ordained years before that her son should die and be raised (4:18–37) and that this miracle would make it possible for her to regain her lost land. We may never understand the reasons for our trials now, but certainly they are working together for our good (Rom. 8:28). How wonderful that believers have an inheritance that cannot be taken away (1 Peter 1:4; Eph. 1:11, 14).

V. Elisha Judges the King (8:7–29)

Back in the days of Elijah, God had told that prophet to anoint Hazael king of Syria (1 Kings 19:15). Elijah did anoint Elisha to be his successor as prophet, but it remained for Elisha to see Hazael established on the throne. God's Word is going to be fulfilled in spite of the failure of believers or the plans of unbelievers.

Ben-hadad had been an enemy of Israel, yet when a crisis came, he turned to the man of God for help. How like the people of the world today! He sent an elaborate and expensive gift to Elisha; we have no record that he accepted it. If he did, certainly he used it for the schools of the prophets. Note the cryptic reply Elisha gave to Hazael: (1) *Say to him*, “You shall certainly recover”; (2) However, the Lord has shown *me* (Elisha) that he will really die. The first statement Hazael quoted to his king in v. 14, elaborating it somewhat to make his recovery seem certain. The second statement Hazael fulfilled by murdering the king (v. 15).

Verses 11–13 must be studied carefully. After Elisha gave his strange answer to Hazael, the man of God stared at his visitor for a long time. Actually, Elisha was reading the thoughts of Hazael's wicked heart; he saw that his visitor was planning to murder the king. Hazael was so embarrassed by this peculiar behavior that he became ashamed; in return, Elisha wept. The wicked visitor tried to cover up the sins of his heart, but Elisha knew too much. “I know the evil you will do in Israel,” said Elisha as he wept, and he described his terrible crimes. Hazael was shocked at this announcement; yet, no one should be shocked at the wickedness of his own heart, for the heart is “desperately wicked.” Elisha's parting words were, “You will become king over Syria.”

Instead of allowing the Lord to accomplish the task, Hazael engineered matters himself by smothering the ailing king in his own bed. Later history reveals that Elisha's words were true, for Hazael was guilty of awful deeds during his reign; see 10:32–33, 13:3–7, 13:22.

The remaining verses of this chapter bring us up to date on Israel and Judah. It is likely that Joram and Jehoshaphat were co-regents during the last part of Jehoshaphat's reign. How sad to see the kings of these nations following the bad examples of Jeroboam and Ahab.

During those days of political decay and national sin, God was using Elisha to call out a believing remnant of people to obey God. The whole nation was not going to be saved, even as the whole world today is not going to be saved. God is calling out a people for His name. Our responsibility as believers is to be true to the Word of God and to seek to win others to Christ.

2 Kings 9–10

These two chapters are filled with violence, for in them we see the Lord executing His wrath on those who had long despised Him and disobeyed His Word. King Jehu was an instrument of vengeance in the hands of the Lord (9:7), although we must confess that his zeal for the Lord (10:16) perhaps was too fanatical. In Hosea 1:4 God announced that He would judge the house of Jehu because of his deeds of ruthless murder. Jehu called his activities “zeal for the Lord,” but we can see in his slaughters a carnal and sinful motive that did not honor the Lord.

I. The Anointing (9:1–13)

Ahab's son Joram (or Jehoram) was reigning over Israel, and Ahaziah was reigning over Judah. Both kings were allied to fight against Hazael, king of Syria (2 Kings 8:25–29). Joram had been wounded in battle and was recuperating in Jezreel, and Ahaziah went to visit him. Jehu was a respected captain in the army of Israel, probably one of the key leaders in the war. He had been one of Ahab's bodyguards years before when that evil king had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard (9:25–26).

Elisha did not go to anoint Jehu; he would be recognized and perhaps assaulted. Instead, he chose one of the sons of the prophets to run to Ramoth-gilead and anoint Jehu as king of Israel. This had been commanded by the Lord years before (1 Kings 19:15–17). The young prophet obeyed quickly; he suddenly appeared in the war council, asked Jehu to step into a private room where he anointed him and gave him God's message, and then left as quickly as he arrived. Jehu knew his commission: wipe out the family of Ahab and avenge the innocent blood shed by Ahab and Jezebel and their descendants. Compare v. 9 with 1 Kings 15:29 and 16:3–11.

The soldiers thought the prophet was a madman; Jehu thought the soldiers had arranged the whole affair. “You know the man and his commission,” Jehu said, thinking they had secretly set up an army rebellion against the king. But the officers admitted

they knew nothing, so Jehu told them what the Lord's messenger had said. Their immediate response was to submit to him and proclaim him king. In v. 15 the new king carefully arranged to keep his anointing a secret until he could accomplish his important task. Had the word been carried to the two kings in Jezreel, Jehu's sudden attack would have been thwarted.

II. The Avenging (9:14–10:28)

A. The slaying of King Joram (9:14–26).

The ailing king was at Jezreel, and Ahaziah was visiting him. God arranged for both kings to be together when the hour of judgment arrived. The king sent messengers to intercept Jehu, but he refused to stop for them or give them any information. This popular soldier was known for the "furious driving" of his chariot, and the watchman recognized him from a distance. Instead of waiting in the city where they would have had some protection, the two kings went out to meet Jehu, probably because they thought their great captain had good news from the battlefield. Jehu concentrated on Joram first, but his announcement only made the evil monarch turn to flee. Jehu killed him easily with an arrow in the back. The Word of God was fulfilled, for he died in that portion of ground Ahab had stolen from Naboth some twenty years before (1 Kings 21:17–24).

B. The slaying of King Ahaziah (9:27–29).

He too tried to run away, but Jehu's men followed him to the kingdom of Samaria (not the city) where he was slain in Megiddo (see 2 Chron. 22:9). His servants were permitted to bring him to Jerusalem for decent burial. Ahaziah was Joram's brother-in-law (8:18) and was thus included in the judgment against Ahab's house.

C. The slaying of Jezebel (9:30–37).

The Queen Mother still exercised a great deal of power in Israel, but her hour of judgment had arrived and nothing could protect her. She heard that Jehu was coming and boldly beautified herself to meet the new king. She "put her eyes in painting" and put a crown on her head. She was going to die like a queen. Her statement in v. 31 takes us back to 1 Kings 16:9–20, where Zimri killed the king and ruled only seven days. Was wicked Jezebel trying to bribe Jehu into sparing her and thus making his throne more secure? Several servants in the palace assisted Jehu by throwing the queen down from the upper window, and Jehu finished the job by riding over her body with his chariot. He then took over the palace and enjoyed a hearty meal. He instructed the men to bury the dead queen, but the dogs had already gone to work and eaten her body. See 1 Kings 21:23.

D. The slaying of Ahab's descendants (10:1–17).

Ahab had seventy descendants (e.g., sons, grandsons) living in Samaria, and Jehu turned his attention toward them. He wrote official letters to the elders (as Jezebel had done, 1 Kings 21:8–14) asking them to select champions from the family to fight Jehu and his men. The elders feared to fight and immediately sued for peace. Jehu's second letter suggested that they bring *only the heads* of the seventy sons. That evening the men arrived with the heads, and the next morning Jehu went to the city gate to see the horrible sight. In v. 9 he pretended to be innocent of their death, and in v. 10 he affirmed that the murders only fulfilled the Word of the Lord. Of course, in one sense Jehu was telling the truth, but we cannot help but think that he was more anxious to murder Ahab's family than to glorify the Lord. In vv. 12–14 he even killed forty-two cousins of Ahaziah. And in v. 17 we are told that Jehu destroyed the rest of Ahab's family in Samaria, the capital city. Indeed, he had a "zeal for the Lord."

E. The slaying of the Baal worshipers (10:18–28).

The end justified the means in Jehu's mind, so he felt no qualms of conscience when he deliberately lied to the people and claimed to be more ardent in his worship of Baal than was Ahab. He was joined in this plot by Jehonadab, a dedicated Jew who was anxious to rid the land of idolatry. See Jer. 35 for more about the family of Rechab. Having arrived in Samaria, Jehu announced his intention of establishing Baal worship, and the people believed him. Once he had the faithful followers of Baal gathered in the house of Baal, he set his soldiers outside and carefully examined the crowd to be sure no faithful follower of the Lord had mistakenly entered the heathen temple. Jehu himself did not participate in the worship. Once the service was ended, the guards killed the followers of Baal and destroyed the images and the temple. It was turned into a "dunghill" and therefore defiled permanently.

We may cringe at reading of these events, but we must remember that God had given the house of Ahab many opportunities to repent and escape judgment. While Jehu's zeal may have gotten out of control, and while his motives may not have been always spiritual, we must recognize the fact that he was God's instrument of wrath against a wicked family. God waited many years and His judgment "slumbered" while His mercy was extended to an undeserving nation. Let the sinner take heed lest he try the patience of God and sin away the day of grace.

III. The Abandoning (10:29–36)

God commended Jehu for his obedience and promised him a secure throne for four generations (see 15:1–12). However, Jehu took no heed to obey the Word of the Lord, but went back into idolatry, worshiping the golden calves. How prone we are to judge sins in the lives of other people while failing to see these same sins in our own lives; see Matt. 7:1–5. God had to chasten Jehu by allowing Hazael of Syria to capture territory from Israel. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years. The prophet Hosea (1:4) announced that God would avenge the blood of Jezreel upon Jehu's house, and this He

did. Jehu had abandoned the Lord, and now the Lord would have to abandon him and his seed after only four generations.

We can discover some basic lessons in this account. (1) God fulfills His work of judgment though His mercy may tarry long. The sinner often sinks into a false peace because the sword of judgment fails to come, but we can be sure of this: it will come. (2) Godless fathers often lead their children into sin and condemnation. Ahab's marriage to a heathen woman and his following of her worship of Baal led the family and the nation into darkness and doom. How many people died because one man led them into sin! (3) A servant may fulfill God's Word and then fail to obey completely himself. Had Jehu continued zealous for the Lord, his reign would have been especially blessed. His own idolatry condemned him and his family.

2 Kings 11–16

Thirteen different kings are mentioned in these chapters, five from Judah and eight from Israel. It is not necessary to examine the life of each king separately, so we will focus our attention on five kings in particular and seek to learn lessons from their lives.

I. Joash, the Boy King (11–12) (2 Chron. 22–24)

A. *Protected (11:1–3).*

When the Queen Mother Athaliah saw that her son Ahaziah was dead, she determined to wipe out the entire royal family lest any rival steal the throne from her. In the providence of God, one little boy was rescued and protected for seven years, and thus God fulfilled His promise to keep David's seed on the throne of Judah. Second Chronicles 22:11 tells us that the godly woman who saved Joash's life was actually his aunt, a half-sister to Azariah and wife to the godly high priest, Jehoiada. Satan's seed tried to exterminate God's seed (Gen. 3:15), but God won the battle.

B. *Proclaimed king (11:4–21).*

Jehoiada had the entire program arranged without the Queen Mother's knowledge of the plot. He had the Levites and the guards in their places before evil Athaliah could act, and when she did appear, it meant her death. Note that the guards used weapons from the temple that had been captured years before by David (v. 10). But it was more than a change in government; it was also a religious revival. Youthful Joash was given the Law (v. 12, and see Deut. 17:18), and the king vowed to serve the Lord and the people. Once his throne was secured, the king permitted Jehoiada to "clean house" and remove the Baal worshipers and their idols. Revival has its negative aspects of judgment as well as its positive steps of dedication.

C. Blessed by God (12:1–16).

The high priest Jehoiada was the young king's spiritual guide, and at the beginning of his reign, Joash was willing to follow. Baal-worshiping Athaliah had allowed the house of the Lord to fall into disrepair, so Jehoiada and the king went to work to repair it and restore its use. Their first plan for financing the program was to have the priests ask for contributions from the people who came to pay their vows and to bring sacrifices (vv. 4–5). But after a long time, this policy was abandoned. Since the priests had to live by the sacrifices and money paid for vows, it was difficult to ask for even more money on a freewill basis. The high priest put an offering box right by the brazen altar by the gate of the house of the Lord. The people responded generously so that soon there was enough money to complete the work. So honest and faithful were the workers that no special accounting was even made as the funds were spent.

D. Ruined by sin (12:17–21).

Second Chronicles 24:15–27 informs us that when godly Jehoiada died (at the age of 130), the king began to backslide and actually went into idolatry. Unfortunately, this leader's faith was tied to another leader and not to the Lord directly. God sent prophets to warn the king, but he would not listen. One of these prophets was Zechariah, the son of the high priest Jehoiada and Joash's cousin (2 Chron. 22:11); instead of listening to him, Joash commanded him to be stoned in the temple court. Jesus referred to this murder in Matt. 23:34–35. Being spiritually backslidden, Joash was unable to cope with the Syrian invasion, so he tried to bribe Hazael by giving him the wealth of God's house. How often God's people rob the Lord in trying to solve their problems, instead of turning to the Lord in confession. Alas, Joash himself was murdered by some of his own servants as they sought to avenge the deaths of Jehoiada's innocent sons.

II. Jehoash—Lost Opportunity (13)

In the first nine verses, we read of Jehoahaz, Jehoash's father. Do not confuse this Jehoash (or Joash) with the young king of Judah in chapters 11–12. This Jehoash was king of Israel and did what was evil in God's sight. We will see in 14:8–14 that this king defeated the king of Judah, Amaziah. During his reign, Jehoash came into contact with the prophet Elisha just before the man of God died. Elisha gave him a golden opportunity to defeat Syria once and for all, but he failed to use his opportunity. Verse 25 tells us that he won only three times. How tragic it is when we fail to take advantage of the great opportunities the Lord gives us. Wrong decisions today often mean defeat tomorrow. The unusual miracle of vv. 20–21 suggests the powerful influence a godly man can have even after his death.

III. Amaziah—Defeat by Pride (14) (2 Chron. 25)

This king got off to a good start by obeying the Lord and avenging the murder of his father Joash (v. 5, and see 12:20). Note his strict obedience to Deut. 24:16 in v. 6. God gave him great victories in Edom, but 2 Chron. 25:14–16 tells us that he brought back

with him the heathen gods of Edom and worshiped these gods of the defeated enemy. This combination of idolatry and pride led him to “meddle” with Jehoash, the king of Israel (see 13:10–13), and challenge him to a war (v. 8). The king of Israel was too wise to fear the threat. As his clever parable in vv. 9–10 indicates, Amaziah was but a little thistle. The result? “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Judah was soundly defeated by Israel; Jerusalem was partly destroyed, and the Lord’s treasury emptied. Had Amaziah remained in his own land and given God the glory for his victories, he would not have become captive to Israel. We are told that he was slain in a conspiracy (2 Chron. 25:25–28).

IV. Uzziah—Judah’s Great King (15) (2 Chron. 26)

Uzziah means “strength of the Lord”; his other name, Azariah, means “helped of Jehovah.” He was elevated to the throne at the age of sixteen, and under his sound leadership the nation took on new life and prosperity. His spiritual guide was Zechariah (2 Chron. 26:5); this is not the prophet who ministered to Joash (2 Chron. 24:17–22). God gave Uzziah great victories over the Philistines and the Arabian nations. He led the nation in great building programs, particularly in the area of the water supply. His military establishment was remarkable; he used the latest machinery for waging war. The prophet Isaiah received his call to service in the year that King Uzziah died; Isa. 6.

Pride brought about his ruin (2 Chron. 26:16): he went into the temple to burn incense, and the Lord smote him with leprosy. His son Jotham reigned with him for several years until Uzziah died. His death brought great mourning to Judah. He had ruled for fifty-two years and the nation enjoyed its greatest safety and prosperity since Solomon.

In 15:8–31 we have a brief record of five kings of Israel: Zachariah ruled only six months and was assassinated by Shallum. Shallum reigned one month and was killed by Menahem. Menahem reigned for ten years, doing wicked deeds even surpassing the heathen, and he was succeeded by Pekahiah who ruled for two years, up to the time of King Ahaz. Those were difficult days in Israel, for the nation had turned away from the Lord.

V. Ahaz—The Cost of Compromise (16) (2 Chron. 28)

So evil was this king of Judah that he even sacrificed his son to the god Moloch. He reigned for only sixteen years. One of his achievements was dedicating the Valley of the Son of Hinnom to Baal. Later, King Josiah desecrated that valley and made it a garbage dump, and the term “Ge-Hinnom” (“valley of Hinnom”) became “Gehenna” in the Greek, a name for hell. God punished Ahaz by bringing the Syrians against him, and, like some of his predecessors, Ahaz robbed the Lord’s house to bribe the Assyrians to fight for him.

His friendship with the Assyrian king led to more trouble. Ahaz saw a heathen altar at Damascus and tried to duplicate it in Jerusalem. In fact, his new altar replaced the God-ordained altar in the temple. How easy it is to imitate the world. Second Chronicles 28:20–27 tells us that this friendship with Assyria led Ahaz into idolatry, and that the king of Assyria took the money but in the end failed to help Judah at all. In vv. 17–18 we are

told that Ahaz hid the extra gold decorations from the king of Assyria to keep him from taking those also. At his death, his son Hezekiah took the throne, a godly man who sought the blessing of the Lord. Ahaz had tried to compromise and to “buy his way” to victory, but it only led to shame and defeat.

2 Kings 17

This long chapter is the record of Israel's last king and how he led the Northern Kingdom into captivity. Assyria captured Samaria (capital of the Northern Kingdom) in 722 B.C., after subduing the nation. What could have been a great victory to the glory of God turned out to be a defeat that brought the worship of the true God to a new low.

I. The Capture of Samaria (17:1–6)

Hoshea became king of Israel through the cooperation of Assyria, for he had promised to pay the king of Assyria tribute. See 2 Kings 15:27–31 for the story of Hoshea's conspiracy. We are told that Hoshea was an evil king (one of twenty evil kings in Israel's history) but that his sins were not as bad as those of his predecessors. Verse 2 suggests that Hoshea would have liked to lead the nation into a better way; 2 Chron. 30:6–11 indicates that he permitted his citizens to share in the “great Passover” called by godly King Hezekiah. But the king had sold himself to Assyria, and it was too late to change. Sad to say, he even revolted against Assyria by refusing to pay his annual tribute and by making a secret treaty with Egypt. How prone Israel was to “go down to Egypt” for help, just as now God's people look to “the world” for support. See Jer. 17:5–7 and Hosea 7:11–13 for the prophets' attitude toward Egyptian alliances.

Assyria did not take Hoshea's rebellion lightly. Their armies overran the Northern Kingdom and finally converged on the capital city of Samaria. It was a strongly fortified city; thus it took Assyria three years to capture it. But the case was hopeless: the nation had forsaken the Lord and He had decreed their captivity. It was the Assyrian policy to take the best citizens to their own land, and then to colonize the captive land with foreigners from other captivities. So it was, that after 250 years of constant sin and rebellion, the nation of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was taken captive by the enemy and left a barren wilderness of shame and defeat. Had Israel's first king, Jeroboam, walked in the ways of the Lord and led his nation to obey the Law, the history of Israel would have been different. Instead, we find Jeroboam disobeying the Lord and leading the nation away from God, and his successors walking in the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin” (see e.g., 1 Kings 16:19, 26; 2 Kings 3:3). Jeroboam's golden calves at Dan and Bethel led Israel astray (1 Kings 12:25–33).

II. The Causes of the Captivity (17:7–23)

History is never merely a series of accidental events, for behind every nation is the plan and purpose of God. In these verses, the Holy Spirit explains to us why Samaria fell.

We today had better take heed, for God is no respecter of nations; and if He so severely chastised His own people Israel, what must He do to nations today that rebel against Him? "History is His story."

A. The nation forgot God (v. 7).

God had redeemed them from Egyptian slavery and had purchased them to be His own people. The annual Passover feast was a reminder to them of God's grace. Yet they forgot all that God had done for them. Many times in Deuteronomy, Moses urged the people to remember the Lord and not to forget His mercies. See Deut. 6:10ff and 8:1ff.

B. The nation secretly disobeyed (vv. 8–9).

God had warned them not to mingle with the heathen nations in Canaan (Deut. 7), yet Israel secretly disobeyed. They lusted in their hearts and gradually yielded to the heathen worship around them.

C. The nation openly rebelled (vv. 10–12).

What begins as secret sin ultimately becomes open sin, and the nation deliberately provoked God. See Ex. 20:4 and Deut. 4:16 and 5:8.

D. The nation resisted God's call (vv. 13–15).

The Lord sent godly prophets to warn them and plead with them, but the people only stiffened their necks in stubborn rebellion (see Ex. 32:9 and 33:3; also Acts 7:51). They rejected the Law, which was written by the Lord and given to them for their blessing. Verse 15 is terrifying: "They followed vanity (empty idols), and became vain." We become like that which we worship; see Ps. 115:1–8.

E. The nation sold itself to do evil (vv. 16–23).

They became slaves of sin. Jeroboam established the golden calves, but even this was not enough for Israel's lustful heart. Not only did they worship the gods of the Canaanites, but they imported gods from the other nations. God divided the kingdom (v. 18), leaving David's family to rule Judah, but then even Judah went into sin. God turned the nation over to "spoilers" (v. 20), both from within their own land and from outside the land. Their kings robbed them and their enemies attacked them. God warned them through the prophets that judgment would come, but the people blindly went on from sin to sin.

The OT lists twenty kings for the nation of Israel, all of them wicked. It took about 250 years for the kingdom of Israel to fall into ruin. They heard preachers like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, yet refused to bow the knee to the Lord. There is no cure for apostasy. All God can do is judge, and then take a "believing remnant" and start over again.

III. The Colonization of Samaria (17:24–41)

After deporting the best of the people, the king of Assyria imported citizens from other nations under his rule, thereby preventing Israel from organizing and rebelling. These verses describe the origin of “the Samaritans,” that mixed people we read about in John 4 and Acts 8. Later on a “remnant” of believing Jews did return to Samaria, but orthodox Jews would have no dealings with this “half-breed” nation. Jesus told a Samaritan woman plainly that the Samaritans did not know what they were worshiping (John 4:22) and that salvation would come from the Jews.

At first, there was no religious faith in Samaria, so God had to send lions to bring fear into the hearts of the people (see v. 25). However, the leaders solved the problem in a most peculiar way: they imported a Jewish priest, learned the way of the Lord, and then had the people worship *both* Jehovah and their own national gods. “Every nation made gods of their own,” says v. 29. This was an OT ecumenical movement. Note the repetition of the phrase “they feared the Lord” (vv. 25, 28, 32–34, 41). They feared the Lord (as the “god of the land,” v. 27), but they worshiped and served their own gods (v. 33). Their worship of Jehovah was an empty formality, a mere outward show of allegiance; their true worship was of their own heathen gods. Jehovah was but another “god” in their collection of deities.

In other words, even after seeing the heavy hand of judgment on their land, the people that remained still persisted in disobeying the Lord. Ultimately this cancer of idolatry spread to Judah, and in 586 B.C. the Babylonians captured and destroyed Jerusalem. A remnant returned under Ezra and Nehemiah, and the nation began to blossom again. But when God sent His Son to His people, they rejected Him, and once again divine judgment had to fall. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed, and the nation scattered across the world.

“Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord.” These tragic events in the history of Israel ought to cause Christian citizens to fear for their country and pray for their leaders. Godless leaders produce godless generations of citizens (v. 41). Compromising priests lead worshipers farther away from the Lord. When the Word of the Lord is rejected (vv. 34–38), there is no hope for a nation’s future. There may be an extension of mercy (God bore with Israel for 250 years), but ultimately judgment must fall.

There is no cure for apostasy. Once God’s people have finally turned away from the Lord, God must judge. He will save for Himself a “remnant” of faithful believers and start His witness again, but He will not bless that part that has rejected His Word and refused His calls.

2 Kings 18–20

(Read also Isa. 36–39 and 2 Chron. 29–32.) We enter now into the study of one of the most exciting periods in Judah’s history, the reign of godly King Hezekiah. Samaria (Israel) had fallen to Assyria, and now the enemy was attacking Judah. Ahaz had made a covenant with Assyria years before (16:7–9), but Hezekiah rebelled against it (18:7; 13–16); and this invited an invasion from the enemy. Actually, the events in these

chapters are not recorded in their exact order, for Hezekiah's sickness occurred during the siege (see 20:6), and the visit from the Babylonian leaders followed his recovery. He reigned twenty-nine years (18:2). Since fifteen years were given him after his recovery, and the invasion took place in the fourteenth year of his reign (18:13), then his sickness and the invasion occurred at the same period in his life. We will note three enemies that Hezekiah had to face and how he dealt with them.

I. The Assyrian Invaders (18–19)

A. Hezekiah's reformation (18:1–8; 2 Chron. 29–32).

This godly king immediately set out to rid the land of idolatry and sin. He reopened and repaired the temple, cleaned out the rubbish that had gathered there, and *reestablished* the services. He was especially interested in the singers and the sacrifices. He also called the whole nation (Israel included) to a great Passover feast. It was a time of revival, but, unfortunately, it did not get into the hearts of the people. The changes were only on the surface. However, Hezekiah proved that he did love the Lord, and God blessed him for his service.

B. Rebellion (18:9–37).

For years, the nation had been under tribute to Assyria, but Hezekiah rebelled and refused to pay tribute. This brought the Assyrian army to Jerusalem, but instead of turning to God, Hezekiah feared the enemy and gave in (vv. 13–16), even to the point of robbing the temple to pay Assyria. There were actually three “parties” in Judah at this time: one wanted to capitulate to Assyria; another wanted to go to Egypt for help; and a third group (led by Isaiah) called the nation to trust in the Lord for deliverance. The king of Assyria took the money and then turned around and invaded Judah anyway. Isaiah called this move “treachery” (Isa. 33:1–8), for Assyria did not keep her promise. Three of the Assyrian officers taunted the Jews (v. 17—these are titles of offices, not personal names) and tried to undermine Hezekiah's faith and leadership. Verses 31–32 illustrate the deceitfulness of sin; he promised them peace and plenty until they were taken away into captivity. There is always an “until” to disobedience.

C. Request (19:1–19).

Unable to save himself, the king went to the temple to pray. Verse 2 is the first mention of the Prophet Isaiah in the Bible. The prophet sent the king an answer of peace: God would deliver Judah and defeat Assyria. Difficulties with other nations forced Assyria to pull back their forces, but Rabshakeh sent an arrogant letter to Hezekiah to frighten him into surrendering. The king took the letter to the temple and “spread it before the Lord.” Note that v. 19 emphasizes the glory of God, which is the real basis for prayer.

D. Reward (19:20–37).

What a wonderful combination—the Word of God and prayer. Hezekiah prayed and God sent the answer through Isaiah—He would judge Assyria and treat them as they had treated the nations. God gave Hezekiah the promise that after two years Judah would have harvests again (v. 29). (The Assyrians had devastated the land.) Note that God answered prayer for David's sake and not because Judah or the king deserved such mercy (v. 34). God killed 185,000 soldiers in one night, and later Sennacherib's own sons assassinated him. God was able to defeat the enemy without the help of Egypt. See Isa. 30–31.

II. Death (20:1–11)

Death is called “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). It must have been trying to the king to be very ill while Assyria was threatening to invade. Troubles many times come in pairs, but God is sufficient to meet them. We are not sure why God sent this sickness. It may have been because of Hezekiah's unbelief and willingness to pay the tribute (18:13–16). Or perhaps there was secret sin (see Isa. 38:17). Certainly the king's psalm of praise in Isa. 38:9–20 indicates that he was fearful of death and wanted to stay alive to finish his work of reformation. At any rate, he prayed to be spared, and God answered his prayer. Note that God uses means to heal His own (in this case a poultice), so it is not an evidence of unbelief to go to a doctor for help. God gave the king fifteen additional years. He strengthened the king's faith even more by causing the shadow to go back on the sundial ten degrees. (This sundial was perhaps a stone stairway with steps to mark out the hours. The king could see it from his palace window.)

Bible students have debated for years whether Hezekiah should have prayed for healing and whether his recovery was God's *perfect* will or His *permissive* will. Sometimes God does answer prayer when the answer is not the best thing for us (see Ps. 106:15). Those who feel Hezekiah was wrong, point out that the king's final fifteen years involved his sinful alliance with the Babylonians (20:12–21) and also the birth of Manasseh, who turned out to be Judah's most wicked king (chap. 21). Had Hezekiah died, Judah would have been spared the Babylonian compromise and the evil reign of Manasseh. However, Manasseh did repent and serve the Lord (2 Chron. 33:11–19).

On the other hand, others point out that Hezekiah had no heir to the throne when Isaiah gave the message of doom, so that his prayer was not for himself alone but for the nation. “Set your house in order” in 20:1 (nkjv) literally means, “Pick out a man to succeed you to the throne.” God had promised that Judah would always have a descendant of David on the throne, and Hezekiah was holding God to His promise. All of his sons were born in the closing fifteen years; see 20:18. It is true that Manasseh was a godless king (which is not to Hezekiah's honor as a father), but then we must admit that Josiah was a great man of God. Had Hezekiah died, there would have been no Josiah. Furthermore, we have indications in the Bible that during Hezekiah's last fifteen years of rule, he was busy with the “men of Hezekiah” (a group of scribes, Prov. 25:1) copying out the OT Scriptures and putting them in order. Many fine scholars believe that the “Songs of Degrees” (Pss. 120–134) were especially put together to commemorate Hezekiah's sickness and recovery. Also, you find the Hebrew letters “H Z

K” at the end of many OT books in the Hebrew manuscripts. It would seem that, in gratitude to God for what He did, Hezekiah devoted the last fifteen years of his life to putting the OT Scriptures in order for the people. As for Manasseh, to say that a man should die rather than beget a wicked son is to claim too much. David’s sons were wicked, including Solomon; why did God allow David to live? Does God slay a man because of the future sins of a child not yet conceived? Furthermore, the healing of the king and the deliverance of Jerusalem occurred at the same time (20:5–6). Would it have been to the glory of God to rescue the city and then slay their king?

III. The Babylonian Visitors (20:12–21)

What Assyria could not accomplish by force, Babylon accomplished by guile. Satan is either a lion or a serpent. Hezekiah’s pride after the healing and the deliverance of Jerusalem got him into a wicked alliance with Babylon. Read 2 Chron. 32:25–26, 31 and see that it was his pride that brought the chastening upon him after he was healed. For the king to let the enemy see his wealth and his weapons was certainly a foolish move, and the nation ultimately suffered for it. Note the king’s pride in v. 15: “my house ... my treasures.” The same prophet who brought him the joyful message of healing now had to convey a sad message of judgment: the treasures would go to Babylon, and so would his sons. In these experiences, God was testing Hezekiah’s heart (2 Chron. 32:31) to see if the king would glorify Him and trust Him, not his treasures or his own strength. Manasseh was taken to Babylon and imprisoned, but he humbled himself and God delivered him (2 Chron. 33:11–19). It is sad to see Hezekiah more concerned about his own day than the future of his nation. To rest on temporary peace when ultimate defeat is around the corner, is most unwise. But in spite of his mistakes and sins, Hezekiah has gone down in Jewish history as a great king. He fortified the city, improved its water system, cleansed the land of idols, and sought to lead the people back to the Lord. He was a man of prayer who knew how to “spread it out before the Lord.”

2 Kings 21–23

Five kings are mentioned in these chapters, but we will concern ourselves primarily with two: Manasseh and Josiah. King Amon reigned but two years (21:19–26); and Jehoahaz only three months (23:31–33). We will meet Jehoiakim in our next study. The interesting thing about Josiah and Manasseh is that their spiritual lives were exactly opposite each other. Manasseh began his reign in sin but ended it in humble repentance, while Josiah sought the Lord early in his life but ended his reign (and his life) in disobedience.

I. Manasseh’s Reign (21)

A. His rebellion (21:1–9).

Historians have calculated that Manasseh ruled jointly with godly Hezekiah for at least ten years. Manasseh was a wicked man, worse than any before him or after him. How strange that godly Hezekiah should reign but twenty-nine years while ungodly Manasseh reigned fifty-five years. But God was giving to the people just what they wanted and just what they deserved. No sooner was Hezekiah off the scene than Manasseh's true character was revealed. He built up what Hezekiah had torn down, and tore down what Hezekiah had built up. Contrast this with Isaac in Gen. 26:18. Instead of imitating godly Hezekiah, Manasseh followed the ways of King Ahab. Tradition tells us that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh; Heb. 11:37. Manasseh even carried his idolatry right into the courts of the temple. He rebelled against his godly father's example and against the Law of the Lord.

B. His removal (21:10–15).

Here we must read 2 Chron. 33:11–20 for the full story. God sent his prophets to warn the king, but the king would not listen. God announced to the nation that judgment and captivity were coming. Judah had witnessed God's judgment on Samaria, but that had not brought the people to repentance. God promised to treat the house of David the way he treated the house of Ahab (v. 13). The Assyrian captains took Manasseh to Babylon where he was put into prison.

C. His repentance (2 Chron. 33:12).

How typical this is of many people: "When he was in affliction he besought the Lord." God in His grace forgave the evil king and permitted him to return to his throne. God works on behalf of those who sincerely humble themselves and pray.

D. His reformation (2 Chron. 33:13–20; 2 Kings 21:17–26).

Manasseh's repentance was not a shallow "fox-hole" conversion, for once back on the throne, he immediately began to repair the damage he had done. He fortified Jerusalem against the enemy; he removed the idols and the strange altars; and he sought to lead the nation back to the Lord. Of course, it was impossible to undo all the damage he had done, but we must commend him for what he did accomplish before his death. Sad to say, God gave Manasseh the longest reign of any Hebrew king, yet he accomplished almost nothing. In fact, even his repentance did not stay God's hand of judgment; it was Manasseh's sins that moved God to send the nation into captivity (23:26–27).

King Manasseh had every opportunity to live a godly life and serve the Lord and his people with faithfulness. His father was perhaps Judah's greatest king (except for David); the prophet Isaiah was ministering in his day; yet Manasseh failed to find the Lord until the close of his life. We admire what he did after his conversion, but we cannot help but feel he did more damage in his earlier years than he ever repaired in his later years. Note that he was not buried with the kings, but rather in his private garden.

His son Amon was not affected by his father's late conversion; he imitated his father's sins, not his righteous acts. He lasted but two years, then was slain in a conspiracy and buried near his father.

II. Josiah's Reign (22–23)

The assassination of Amon brought Josiah to the throne at the young age of eight years. Four key events summarize this godly king's brief life and reign:

A. Salvation (22:1–2; 2 Chron. 34:3).

In the eighth year of his reign, when he was sixteen, Josiah began to seek the Lord. No doubt Hilkiah the high priest taught the lad the Word of God. It is interesting that his mother's name (Jedidah) is the same "pet name" that God gave to Solomon (2 Sam. 12:25). It means "beloved of the Lord" and may indicate that Josiah's mother was also a godly influence in his life. Jeremiah and Zephaniah were also ministering then.

B. Reformation (2 Chron. 34:3–7).

The king was now twenty years old and mature enough to start purifying the city and the land of the idolatry of Manasseh and Amon. Josiah's ultimate goal was to restore the temple and bring the nation back to the worship of the Lord, but he knew that he would have to destroy the old sins before he could establish new obedience. Unfortunately, "Josiah's revival" was a surface thing; it never did get to the hearts of the people. While Jeremiah the prophet wept much at Josiah's death (2 Chron. 35:25; Jer. 22:10–12), we do not find him commending the youthful king for his so-called "revival." Certainly the king and his council were sincere in their attempts at reform, but the people did not follow; they remained idolaters at heart.

C. Restoration (22:3–23:28).

Having purged away the idols, Josiah could now concentrate on re-establishing the true worship of Jehovah. It is not enough to tear down; we must also build up. He commanded the priests to gather money and repair the temple. See 2 Chron. 34:8–35:19. While repairing the temple, the high priest discovered a copy of the Law of Moses, long since discarded by an idolatrous nation. When he heard the Law read, Josiah immediately knew that Judah was in great danger, and he sent to inquire of the Lord what to do. Huldah the prophetess, who lived in the "second quarter" of the city ("college" in 22:14), gave the anxious king God's message: (1) Judah and Jerusalem would be judged for their sins, but (2) King Josiah would not see these judgments because he had humbled himself before the Lord. Josiah immediately shared the Word of God with all the elders of the land, and he led the way in a great service of dedication, reaffirming the Covenant of God. He continued further purges of the land, including the defiling of "Topheth"—the valley of the son of Hinnom where the people burned their children as sacrifices to Molech. As we noted earlier, the king made this valley a garbage dump and Ge-hinnom became, in the NT, "Gehenna"—a vivid

illustration of hell. The Mount of Olives had been a “mount of corruption” (23:13), but Josiah restored it. During his purge, Josiah uncovered the altar of wicked King Jeroboam as well as the tomb of the prophet who had warned him; and thus Josiah fulfilled the prophecy of 1 Kings 13:1–5. God’s Word never returns void. The king not only restored the temple and the Law, but he also restored the Passover feast that had long been neglected by the nation. He wanted to remind his people that they had been “bought with a price.”

What did Josiah’s reforms and restorations accomplish? During Josiah’s day, there was peace and blessing; but God did not withdraw His original promise of judgment because of the sins of Manasseh (23:26–27). Josiah’s godly life and ministry had stayed the hand of judgment a few more years, but captivity was coming and nothing could prevent it.

D. Assassination (23:29–37; 2 Chron. 35:20–27).

The Egyptian army probably came by sea and landed on the coast of Palestine. Pharaoh made it clear that he was not against Judah, but only moving on his way to attack Assyria. Josiah did not seek the mind of the Lord; in fact, it appears that he deliberately disobeyed God’s will; see 2 Chron. 35:22. Even his disguise could not protect him once he was out of the Lord’s will, and he was slain in battle. See Zech. 12:11 for an allusion to the great mourning at Megiddo for Josiah. The king should have heeded the wisdom of Prov. 20:3 and 26:17. Perhaps Judah was an ally of Assyria at this time and the king was obligated to act, but it is clear that Pharaoh would have preferred not to battle King Josiah. Josiah’s son Jehoahaz reigned only three months before Pharaoh deposed him and put him in bonds. Pharaoh chose another of Josiah’s sons, Eliakim, and made him king, giving him the new name of “Jehoiakim”—“whom Jehovah will raise up.” We will consider his life and reign in our next study.

2 Kings 24–25

The hour of judgment finally arrives, and God keeps His Word by bringing terrible wrath upon His people in the kingdom of Judah. God had given them a throne, a temple, a city, and a land, and upon each of these He poured out His anger. Read Jer. 25–34 if you wish sidelights on these chapters; also read 2 Chron. 36. Notice the judgments that fell on Judah.

I. The King Was Dethroned (24:1–12, 17–20)

After the reign of godly Josiah, the throne of David was occupied by a series of men who defied God by their persistent sins. Jehoahaz reigned three months, as did Jehoiachin (also called Coniah or Jeconiah, Jer. 22:24). Jehoiakim ruled for eleven years and in the third year of his reign rebelled against Babylon. (Babylon had defeated Egypt and was now the greatest nation among Judah’s enemies.) Jehoiakim became

subject to Babylon in 604 B.C., and in 601 he rebelled. It was this vile king who cut Jeremiah's prophecies to pieces and burned them in the fire (Jer. 36). In 597, Jehoiakim died, leaving the throne to his son Jehoiachin, who ruled for three months.

It was in 597 that the Babylonian army began its siege of Jerusalem. Of course, weak and faithless Jehoiachin immediately surrendered with his family and they were taken to Babylon. The king's uncle, Mattaniah, was made the next king and was given the new name of Zedekiah. See Jer. 52. He reigned eleven years, from 597 to 585. In the ninth year of his reign (588 B.C.), he made a secret alliance with Egypt and thus incurred the wrath of the Babylonians. It was this foolish move (which, by the way, was opposed by Jeremiah) that brought the Babylonian armies to Jerusalem for a final siege. In 25:27–30 we are told that banished King Jehoiachin was liberated from jail in Babylon halfway through the captivity.

The throne of David was now virtually empty. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. Had Zedekiah listened to the Word of Jeremiah, the final days of Jerusalem would have been different.

II. The People Were Deported (24:13–16)

There were actually three deportations: in 605 (when Daniel was included); in 597 (described in this passage); and in 587 (after the awful eighteen-month siege of the city). Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the second deportation. It was Babylon's policy to take the best of the people out of the land—the princes, nobles, soldiers, craftsmen, and royal family—and to leave the poorest of the people behind to manage things under the direction of their own governors. This way a captive nation would not be able to organize any resistance. Of course, this deportation was predicted by Jeremiah (chap. 25) as well as by Moses in the Law (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The people had defiled their God-given land with blood and with idols; they were no longer fit to live upon it. God had to “sweep them away” that He might be able to purify the land once again.

III. The City Was Destroyed (25:1–12)

Read the Book of Lamentations for Jeremiah's graphic description of the destruction of Jerusalem. The city was besieged for eighteen months, beginning January 15, 588. On July 19, 586, a breach was made in the walls and the citizens knew that the end was at hand. Zedekiah and his men tried to flee (vv. 4–6), but they were intercepted by the Babylonian army. Jeremiah 32:4–5 and 34:1–7, as well as Ezek. 12:13, predicted that Zedekiah would not escape. He would see the king of Babylon, but he would not see Babylon itself. He did see Nebuchadnezzar; then his eyes were put out and he was taken to Babylon a blind man. A month later, the Babylonians burned Jerusalem, broke down the walls, and destroyed the temple.

IV. The Temple Was Disgraced (25:13–17)

The Babylonian soldiers stripped the temple of all its wealth. The objects that were too large to carry whole, they broke into pieces. The brass, gold, and silver instruments were carried to a heathen land. In 24:13, we are told that Solomon's gold and the

treasures in the palace were included in the spoils. In Jer. 7 we note that the Jews thought God would protect them from invasion because of the presence of the temple. The false prophets and worldly priests had the people believing lies, just as people today believe their church or their religious rituals will save them from judgment. Instead of the vessels of the house of the Lord being used for God's glory, they were carried to Babylon to embellish the temples of the idols (2 Chron. 36:7).

The presence of the temple could not save the nation; there had to be sincere confession and repentance from the heart. But it was too late. The nation had "mocked the messengers of God ... till there was no remedy."

V. The Land Was Left Desolate (25:18–30)

One of the Babylonian officers gathered together the nobles that were left and had them slain (vv. 18–21). All that remained on the land were the poorest people. Nebuchadnezzar set up a system of governors over the land, making Gedaliah the first governor. His father had helped Jeremiah (Jer. 26:24; 39:14), and his family was devoted to the prophet (see Jer. 39–40). Gedaliah did establish a reasonable amount of safety, peace, and security for those left behind, but the jealousy of Ishmael (probably a distant relative of the king) led to a plot and the murder of the governor (Jer. 40–41). When the plot was revealed, many of the Jews fled to Egypt for safety.

Second Chronicles 36:20–21 informs us that the seventy years of captivity (Jer. 29:10) were calculated from the "sabbatical years" of Lev. 25. Every seventh year, the Jews were supposed to let the land rest, but they had not obeyed this law for centuries. See Jer. 38:8–22. Note also that God promised to punish them for their sins "seven times over" (Lev. 26:18, 21, 28), so the number seven plays an important role in the captivity. The twenty kings of Judah (during the divided kingdom) reigned altogether approximately 390 years; and the total years of David, Solomon, and Saul is 120, making a grand total of 510 years for the monarchy. However, in some instances a father and son reigned together so that years overlapped. This means that we have less than 500 years for the kingdom of Judah from Saul to Zedekiah, and 500 divided by seven (for the sabbatical years) gives us approximately 70 years. Just as Israel chose 40 years of wandering in the wilderness by spying out the land forty days, so her neglect of the sabbatical years for nearly five centuries brought her 70 years of captivity.

Everything that God had given the Jews was taken from them. They had no king on David's throne, nor do they have one today. They had no temple, for it had been burned and its sacred vessels confiscated. Today they have no temple. Their holy city was destroyed, and ever since that time has been the focal point for war and unrest in the Mideast. Their land was taken from them, and they were scattered among the nations. Of course, this awful siege was but a forerunner of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. "Be sure your sins will find you out."