2 KINGS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Elijah's chariot of fire, Elisha's miracles, the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem, and God's promise to David kept alive

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 2 Kings. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

2 Kings is the story of two kingdoms that lost their land. It opens with Elijah taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and Elisha picking up his cloak, and it is full of some of the best-known miracles in the Old Testament: the widow's oil, the Shunammite's son raised to life, Naaman washed clean in the Jordan, the axe head that floated, and the hills full of chariots of fire. It also tells of kings who led God's people into idolatry, prophets who warned them again and again, and the day the LORD finally let Samaria and then Jerusalem fall. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 2 Kings. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 2 Kings. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings were one book, so 2 Kings picks up in the middle of the story. Solomon's kingdom has split in two: Israel in the north, with its capital at Samaria, and Judah in the south, with Jerusalem and the temple. Every king of Israel kept the golden calves Jeroboam set up at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26-30), and Ahab and Jezebel brought in the worship of Baal. Everything in 2 Kings rests on what came before it: God's covenant with Israel and its warnings of exile (Deuteronomy 28), His promise to David of a lasting house and throne (2 Samuel 7), and the prophets He sent, beginning with Elijah. If we read the miracles without that context, they look like a string of wonder stories. Read in context, they are God's mercy to a faithful remnant in a dark time, and His last calls to a nation that would not listen.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. 2 Kings is history, and this study takes it at its word: Elijah really was taken up to heaven, Elisha really did raise the dead, and God really did send Israel and Judah

into exile for their sins, just as He warned. The New Testament reads it the same way. Jesus pointed to Naaman the Syrian and to Elisha's day (Luke 4:27), James calls Elijah "a man of like nature to us" (James 5:17), and Elijah himself stood with Moses on the mountain talking with Jesus (Matthew 17:3). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. A note on the names of the kings: several kings of Israel and Judah had the same names at nearly the same time. The SLB usually calls the king of Israel Joram and the king of Judah Jehoram, but both forms are the same name, and the text sometimes uses the other one. I point it out in the study where it could confuse.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. 2 Kings has 25 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: twenty-five weeks, or about six months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of about thirteen weeks: take two chapters a week, keeping stories that belong together in the same meeting (chapters 6 and 7 on the siege of Samaria, 9 and 10 on Jehu, 11 and 12 on Joash, 18 and 19 on Sennacherib, 22 and 23 on Josiah, and 24 and 25 on the fall of Jerusalem).

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be

answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 2 Kings are hard to read. Fire falls on soldiers sent to arrest Elijah (1:9-12). Two bears maul a crowd of young men who mock Elisha (2:23-25). A king of Moab offers his son as a burnt offering on a wall (3:27), and later kings of Israel and Judah do the same (16:3; 17:17; 21:6). During the siege of Samaria, mothers eat a child (6:24-31). Jehu wipes out the house of Ahab, and God commends him and later judges his house for the blood he shed (chapters 9 and 10). A grandmother kills her grandchildren to take a throne (11:1). The chapters on the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem tell of war, exile and cruelty (17; 25). I do not skip these passages, and I try to explain them honestly in their context, without dwelling on the details. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may have lost a child, lived through war or famine, or been hurt by people who used God's name to justify cruelty. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 2 Kings. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 2 Kings

2 Kings is the twelfth book of the Bible. It is one of the historical books of the Old Testament, which run from Joshua through Esther. In the Hebrew Bible it is the last of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings), the books that tell Israel's history from God's point of view. First and Second Kings were one book in Hebrew. The Greek translation of the Old Testament divided it in two, and our Bibles follow that division.

In Israel's history, 2 Kings covers nearly three hundred years, from the death of Ahab about 853 B.C. to the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon about 560 B.C. 1 Kings told of Solomon's glory, the temple, the split of the kingdom about 930 B.C., and Elijah's stand against Ahab and Baal. 2 Kings follows both kingdoms downhill. Israel in the north never had a king who removed Jeroboam's calves, and it fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. Judah in the south had some godly kings, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah among them, but it too turned away, and it fell to Babylon in 586 B.C., when the temple was burned. 1 and 2 Chronicles tell much of the same history again, from the side of Judah and the temple.

The theme of 2 Kings is that God is patient, but He judges unrepentant sin. He sent prophet after prophet to call His people back. When Samaria falls, the writer stops to explain why:

2 Kings 17:13 (SLB)

"And the LORD warned Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn back from your evil ways, and keep My commandments, My statutes, according to all the law that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by the hand of My servants the prophets.""

Alongside that theme runs a second one. God keeps His promise to David. Again and again, when a king of Judah deserves to lose everything, the LORD spares Judah "for the sake of David His servant" (8:19). The book ends with David's descendant still alive in Babylon, released from prison and given a seat at the king's table (25:27-30).

2 Kings has 25 chapters and 719 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Ministry of Elisha (chapters 1 to 8)

- Chapter 1: Ahaziah and the Fire from Heaven
- Chapter 2: Elijah Taken Up and Elisha Succeeds Him
- Chapter 3: The War Against Moab
- Chapter 4: The Widow's Oil and the Shunammite's Son
- Chapter 5: Naaman Healed and Gehazi Struck
- Chapter 6: The Floating Axe Head, the Blinded Army, and the Siege of Samaria
- Chapter 7: The Siege Lifted
- Chapter 8: The Shunammite's Land, Hazael, and the Kings of Judah

Part Two: Israel and Judah to the Fall of Samaria (chapters 9 to 17)

- Chapter 9: Jehu Anointed and the End of Joram and Jezebel
- Chapter 10: Jehu Destroys the House of Ahab and the Worship of Baal
- Chapter 11: Athaliah and the Boy King Joash
- Chapter 12: Joash Repairs the Temple
- Chapter 13: Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and the Death of Elisha
- Chapter 14: Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel
- Chapter 15: Azariah, Jotham, and the Last Kings of Israel
- Chapter 16: Ahaz and the Altar from Damascus
- Chapter 17: The Fall of Samaria and the Exile of Israel

Part Three: Judah to the Fall of Jerusalem (chapters 18 to 25)

- Chapter 18: Hezekiah and the Threat of Assyria
- Chapter 19: The LORD Delivers Jerusalem from Sennacherib
- Chapter 20: Hezekiah's Illness and the Envoys from Babylon
- Chapter 21: Manasseh and Amon
- Chapter 22: Josiah and the Book of the Law
- Chapter 23: Josiah's Reforms and the Last Kings Before the Exile
- Chapter 24: Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and the First Exile
- Chapter 25: The Fall of Jerusalem

Where this book points to Christ: Elijah, taken up at the start of the book, was promised again in Malachi 4:5 before the day of the LORD, and Jesus said John the Baptist came in that role (Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17). Elisha's miracles are a small picture of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus Himself pointed to Naaman as a sign that God's grace reaches outsiders (Luke 4:27). Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves (4:42-44), and Jesus fed five thousand with five (John 6:9-13). Elisha raised a mother's son near Shunem, and Jesus raised a widow's son at Nain, just over the hill (Luke 7:11-17). Above all, 2 Kings shows God keeping David's lamp burning. When Athaliah tried to wipe out the royal line, one baby was saved (11:2). When Jerusalem fell, King Jehoiachin was spared, and he is named in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:12, where he is called Jeconiah). God's promise to give David a son whose throne would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16) did not die in Babylon. It led to Jesus, the Son of David, whose kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Background of the Book

Author: The book does not name its author. Jewish tradition holds that Jeremiah wrote Kings, and some of the closing chapters are very close to Jeremiah 52. Whoever wrote it was a prophet or a man who thought like the prophets, and he used older records, which he names: "the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel" (1:18) and the same book for the kings of Judah (8:23). Many modern critical scholars see Kings as the last part of a longer history running from Deuteronomy through Kings, put together and edited during or after the exile by several hands. I take the book as it presents itself: a true record, written by one inspired writer from reliable sources, and treated as history by Jesus and the apostles.

Who it was written to: The people of Judah in exile in Babylon, and the generations after them. They had lost their land, their king and their temple, and they needed to know why. 2 Kings answers that it was not because the LORD was weak, but because His people would not listen. It also gave them hope, because God's promise to David still stood (25:27-30).

Setting: The northern kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Samaria and its royal city at Jezreel, and the southern kingdom of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem. Around them were Syria (Aram) with its capital at Damascus to the north, Moab and Edom to the east and south, and the Philistines on the coast. Behind them rose the great empires: first Assyria, which took Samaria, and then Babylon, which took Jerusalem. Egypt to the south was a constant temptation to trust in horses and chariots instead of the LORD.

When it was written: After the last event in the book, the release of Jehoiachin in the first year of Evil-merodach king of Babylon, about 560 B.C. (25:27). The book says nothing of the return from exile under Cyrus in 538 B.C., so most conservative scholars date it during the exile, about 560 to 540 B.C.

When the events happened: From the death of Ahab about 853 B.C. to Jehoiachin's release about 560 B.C. The great turning points are the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722 B.C., Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C., the first deportation to Babylon in 605 B.C., the deportation of King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C., and the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in 586 B.C.

Dates of the kings: The writer dates each king by the reign of the king in the other kingdom (for example, 8:16 dates Jehoram of Judah by the fifth year of Joram of Israel). Some of these numbers seem not to fit at first. Most of the differences are explained by co-regencies, when a son reigned alongside his father for some years, and by the two kingdoms counting a king's first partial year in different ways. Scholars give slightly different dates. In this study I follow one standard set, the dates worked out by Edwin Thiele and those who built on his work, and I give them as "about."

The kings in 2 Kings: Here are the kings of the two kingdoms in the order they appear, with their approximate dates. Overlapping dates mean a co-regency.

Kings of Israel (the northern kingdom):

- Ahaziah, son of Ahab: about 853 to 852 B.C. (1 Kings 22:51 to 2 Kings 1:18)
- Joram (Jehoram), son of Ahab: about 852 to 841 B.C. (chapters 3 to 9)
- Jehu: about 841 to 814 B.C. (chapters 9 and 10)
- Jehoahaz, son of Jehu: about 814 to 798 B.C. (chapter 13)
- Jehoash (Joash), son of Jehoahaz: about 798 to 782 B.C. (chapters 13 and 14)
- Jeroboam II, son of Jehoash: about 793 to 753 B.C. (chapter 14)
- Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II: 753 B.C., six months (chapter 15)
- Shallum: 752 B.C., one month (chapter 15)
- Menahem: about 752 to 742 B.C. (chapter 15)
- Pekahiah, son of Menahem: about 742 to 740 B.C. (chapter 15)
- Pekah: about 752 to 732 B.C., counted from when he first claimed the throne (chapter 15)
- Hoshea: about 732 to 722 B.C., the last king of Israel (chapter 17)

Kings and one queen of Judah (the southern kingdom):

- Jehoshaphat: about 872 to 848 B.C. (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 3)
- Jehoram (Joram), son of Jehoshaphat: about 853 to 841 B.C. (chapter 8)
- Ahaziah, son of Jehoram: 841 B.C. (chapters 8 and 9)
- Athaliah, Ahab's daughter: about 841 to 835 B.C. (chapter 11)
- Joash (Jehoash), son of Ahaziah: about 835 to 796 B.C. (chapters 11 and 12)
- Amaziah, son of Joash: about 796 to 767 B.C. (chapter 14)
- Azariah (Uzziah), son of Amaziah: about 792 to 740 B.C. (chapters 14 and 15)
- Jotham, son of Azariah: about 750 to 732 B.C. (chapter 15)
- Ahaz, son of Jotham: about 735 to 715 B.C. (chapter 16)
- Hezekiah, son of Ahaz: about 715 to 686 B.C. (chapters 18 to 20)
- Manasseh, son of Hezekiah: about 697 to 642 B.C. (chapter 21)
- Amon, son of Manasseh: about 642 to 640 B.C. (chapter 21)
- Josiah, son of Amon: about 640 to 609 B.C. (chapters 22 and 23)
- Jehoahaz, son of Josiah: 609 B.C., three months (chapter 23)
- Jehoiakim, son of Josiah: about 609 to 598 B.C. (chapters 23 and 24)
- Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim: about 598 to 597 B.C., three months (chapter 24)
- Zedekiah, son of Josiah: about 597 to 586 B.C., the last king of Judah (chapters 24 and 25)

The prophets: 2 Kings is as much about prophets as about kings. Elijah and Elisha fill the first half. Jonah is named in 14:25, Isaiah stands beside Hezekiah in chapters 19 and 20, and Huldah the prophetess speaks to Josiah in chapter 22. Several prophets whose books are in our Bibles also

preached during these years: Amos and Hosea in Israel; Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah in Judah. Reading 2 Kings alongside them helps both make sense.

Kings and Chronicles: 1 and 2 Chronicles retell much of this history, mostly from Judah's side, and often add details. I note these parallels briefly where they help. Now and then the two books give different numbers or details, such as the age of King Ahaziah (8:26; 2 Chronicles 22:2). Where that happens I say so honestly. Most such differences come from errors in copying numbers over the centuries or from the writers counting in different ways, and none of them touches any teaching of the faith.

Purpose: To show why Israel and Judah went into exile: not because God failed, but because His people broke His covenant and would not listen to His prophets (17:7-23). It measures every king by one standard, whether he did right in the eyes of the LORD as David did. It shows God's patience, His mercy to the faithful few, His power over the nations, and His faithfulness to His promise to David. And it calls every reader to turn back to the LORD while there is time.

Chapter 1: Ahaziah and the Fire from Heaven

Scripture

1:1-8 And Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. And Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper room which ***was*** in Samaria, and he became ill. And he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will live from this sickness." And the angel of the LORD spoke to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and speak to them: 'Is ***it*** because there is no God in Israel ***that*** you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' And therefore thus says the LORD: 'The bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'" And Elijah went. And the messengers returned to him, and he said to them, "Why ***is*** this, ***that*** you have returned?" And they said to him, "A man came up to meet us, and he said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you, and you will speak to him: "Thus says the LORD: 'Is ***it*** because there is no God in Israel ***that*** you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore the bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'"'" And he spoke to them, "What ***was*** the appearance of the man who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" And they said to him, "A man, a possessor of hair, and a belt of leather girded on his loins." And he said, "That ***is*** Elijah the Tishbite."

1:9-18 And he sent to him a commander of fifty and his fifty. And he went up to him, and look, he ***was*** sitting on the top of the hill. And he spoke to him, "Man of God, the king has spoken: 'Come down!'" And Elijah answered and spoke to the commander of the fifty, "And if I ***am*** a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty." And fire came down from the heavens and consumed him and his fifty. And he returned and sent to him another commander of fifty and his fifty. And he answered and spoke to him, "Man of God, thus says the king: 'Come down quickly!'" And Elijah answered and spoke to them, "If I ***am*** a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty." And the fire of God came down from the heavens and consumed him and his fifty. And he returned and sent a third commander of fifty and his fifty. And the third commander of fifty went up, and he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and he pleaded for favor with him and spoke to him, "Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your eyes. Look, fire has come down from the heavens and has consumed the two former commanders of fifties and their fifties; and now let my life be precious in your eyes." And the angel of the LORD spoke to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." And he arose and went down with him to the king. And he spoke to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, is ***it*** because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore the bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'" And he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Joram reigned in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, for he had no son. And the rest of the matters of Ahaziah which he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel?

Chapter 1 Preview

Ahab is dead, killed in battle just as the LORD said (1 Kings 22:37-38), and his son Ahaziah sits on the throne of Israel in Samaria. He falls through a lattice in his upper room and is badly hurt. Instead of asking the LORD whether he will recover, he sends messengers to ask Baal-Zebub, a Philistine god in the city of Ekron. The LORD sends Elijah to stop them on the road with a hard question: "Is it because there is no God in Israel?"

The king answers by sending soldiers to arrest the prophet. Two captains come with their fifty men and order the man of God to come down. Fire falls from heaven and consumes them. A third captain comes on his knees and begs for his life, and he is spared. Elijah goes to the king and tells him to his face that he will die, and he does. This chapter shows how seriously God takes it when His people turn to other gods, and it shows the difference between a proud heart and a humble one.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *And Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.*

"And Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab." This short verse opens 2 Kings. First and Second Kings were one book in the Hebrew Bible, so the story picks up right where 1 Kings ended. Moab, the country east of the Dead Sea, had been under Israel's control since David (2 Samuel 8:2) and paid Israel a heavy tribute in sheep and wool (3:4). With Ahab gone, Moab broke free. Chapter 3 tells how Israel tried to take it back.

Why mention it here? It shows that Israel's power was slipping. Ahab and his house had led Israel into Baal worship, and the blessing of God was leaving them. When a people turn from the LORD, things begin to come apart, sometimes slowly, sometimes all at once.

1:2 *And Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper room which* ***was*** *in Samaria, and he became ill. And he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will live from this sickness."*

Ahaziah, Ahab's son, "fell through the lattice in his upper room" in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. A lattice was a wooden screen over a window or on a roof, there for shade and air. He was badly hurt.

He wanted to know if he would live, so he sent messengers to "inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron." Ekron was one of the five cities of the Philistines, near the coast. Baal-Zebub means lord of the flies. It may have been a mocking change by Israel of a name like Baal-Zebul, which means Baal the prince. By New Testament times, Beelzebul had become a name for Satan, the ruler of the demons (Matthew 12:24-26).

Think about what Ahaziah did. He was king of Israel, the people of the LORD. He knew about Elijah. He had seen Mount Carmel, or at least heard of it, when fire fell from heaven and the people cried out that the LORD is God (1 Kings 18:39). And still he went to a foreign idol. That is how deep Baal worship had sunk into the house of Ahab.

1:3-4 *And the angel of the LORD spoke to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and speak to them: 'Is **it** because there is no God in Israel **that** you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' And therefore thus says the LORD: 'The bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'" And Elijah went.*

"The angel of the LORD spoke to Elijah the Tishbite." Elijah was from Tishbe in Gilead, east of the Jordan (1 Kings 17:1). He was the prophet who stood against Ahab and Jezebel and the prophets of Baal. A prophet was a man who spoke for God, bringing God's word to the people and their kings.

The LORD sent him to meet the messengers on the road with a question: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" That question cuts right to the heart. Ahaziah acted as if the God of Israel did not exist, or did not matter.

Then came the answer to the king's question, though not from the god he asked: "The bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die."

We can ask ourselves the same question. When trouble comes, where do we turn first? A horoscope, a psychic, a feeling, the internet? Or the living God who has spoken in His Word? He is not hard to find, and He invites us to come to Him (James 1:5).

1:5-8 *And the messengers returned to him, and he said to them, "Why **is** this, **that** you have returned?" And they said to him, "A man came up to meet us, and he said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you, and you will speak to him: "Thus says the LORD: 'Is **it** because there is no God in Israel **that** you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore the bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'"'" And he spoke to them, "What **was** the appearance of the man who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" And they said to him, "A man, a possessor of hair, and a belt of leather girded on his loins." And he said, "That **is** Elijah the Tishbite."*

The messengers turned back. When the king asked why they had come back so soon, they told him a man had met them on the road with a message from the LORD. They did not know his name. They repeated his words exactly.

Ahaziah asked, "What was the appearance of the man?" They answered, "A man, a possessor of hair, and a belt of leather girded on his loins." That may mean a hairy man, or a man wearing a rough garment of hair, as prophets often did (Zechariah 13:4). Either way, the king knew at once: "That is Elijah the Tishbite." He had known this man his whole life as his father's enemy.

Centuries later John the Baptist wore camel's hair and "a leather belt around his waist" (Matthew 3:4). Jesus said John was the Elijah who was to come (Matthew 11:14), and the angel said John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

1:9-10 *And he sent to him a commander of fifty and his fifty. And he went up to him, and look, he **was** sitting on the top of the hill. And he spoke to him, "Man of God, the king has spoken: 'Come down!'" And Elijah answered and spoke to the commander of the fifty, "And if I **am** a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty." And fire came down from the heavens and consumed him and his fifty.*

Instead of repenting, Ahaziah sent soldiers. A "commander of fifty and his fifty" was a captain with a company of fifty men. He found Elijah "sitting on the top of the hill." The captain called him "Man of God," but then gave him an order: "the king has spoken: 'Come down!'" He used a holy title with no respect for the God behind it. He came to arrest God's prophet and bring him to a king who had just turned to Baal.

Elijah answered, "And if I am a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty." And fire came down. This was the same sign God gave on Mount Carmel. It proved who the true God was and who His true prophet was.

1:11-12 *And he returned and sent to him another commander of fifty and his fifty. And he answered and spoke to him, "Man of God, thus says the king: 'Come down quickly!'" And Elijah answered and spoke to them, "If I **am** a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty." And the fire of God came down from the heavens and consumed him and his fifty.*

Ahaziah did not learn. He sent a second captain with fifty more men, and this one was worse. He said, "Come down quickly!" Again fire fell: "the fire of God came down from the heavens and consumed him and his fifty."

This is a hard passage. A hundred and two men died. How do we read it? First, Elijah did not have power to call down fire on his own. He said "if I am a man of God," and God answered. The fire was God's judgment, not the prophet's temper. Second, this was not about Elijah's pride. It was about a king who had openly turned from the LORD to an idol and then sent armed men to seize the one who spoke for God. The captains were not forced to obey that order. The third captain shows there was another way. Third, God had been warning Israel through Elijah for years: the drought, Mount Carmel, the word against Ahab. These were not men who had never heard.

And yet this is not a pattern for us. When a village of Samaria refused to receive Jesus, James and John asked, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elijah also did?" Jesus "rebuked them" (Luke 9:54-55). He came to save, not to destroy. Elijah's fire was a sign of God's judgment in that day. Our calling now is to carry the gospel, love our enemies, and leave judgment to God (Romans 12:19).

1:13-14 *And he returned and sent a third commander of fifty and his fifty. And the third commander of fifty went up, and he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and he pleaded for favor with him and spoke to him, "Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your eyes. Look, fire has come down from the heavens and has consumed the two former commanders of fifties and their fifties; and now let my life be precious in your eyes."*

The third captain came differently. He "bowed down on his knees before Elijah," and he "pleaded for favor with him." He said, "please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your eyes." He had heard what happened to the others. He did not come with orders. He came with humility.

This is the heart of the chapter. Two men came in pride and died. One came humbly and lived. God "opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). That was true on that hill, and it is true for every one of us before God today.

1:15-16 *And the angel of the LORD spoke to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." And he arose and went down with him to the king. And he spoke to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, is **it** because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore the bed to which you have gone up, you will not come down from it, for you will surely die.'"*

"Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." The angel of the LORD told Elijah he was safe now. Elijah went with the captain, walked straight into the palace of the king who wanted him, and delivered the same message a third time, now to the king's face. "Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?" The sentence did not change: "you will surely die."

Elijah had once run from Jezebel in fear (1 Kings 19:3). Here he stands before her son without fear. God had restored His servant. He can do the same for us after our own failures.

1:17-18 *And he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Joram reigned in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, for he had no son. And the rest of the matters of Ahaziah which he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel?*

"And he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken." Ahaziah reigned only about two years (1 Kings 22:51), from about 853 to 852 B.C. He had no son, so his brother "Joram reigned in his place." In this study I call the king of Israel Joram and the king of Judah Jehoram, as the SLB usually does, though in Hebrew both names are the same and mean the LORD is exalted. It can be confusing, because the two kingdoms had kings named Joram, Jehoram and Ahaziah at nearly the same time, and they were related by marriage.

Joram began to reign "in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah," but 3:1 says it was in "the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat." Both can be true. Jehoram began to

reign alongside his father Jehoshaphat for a few years before Jehoshaphat died, and the writer counts from both. Kings often shared the throne with a son this way, called a co-regency.

"The book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel" was the royal record of the northern kingdom. It has not survived. The writer of Kings used it as a source, but he chose what to tell us by asking one question: how did each king stand before the LORD?

Chapter 1 Summary

After Ahab died, Moab rebelled against Israel. Ahab's son Ahaziah fell through a lattice in Samaria and sent messengers to ask Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he would recover. The angel of the LORD sent Elijah to meet them and ask whether there was no God in Israel, and to say that the king would die in his bed. Ahaziah knew from their description that it was Elijah, and he sent a captain with fifty men to bring him down. Fire came down from heaven and consumed the first captain and his fifty, and then a second. The third captain fell on his knees and begged for mercy, and the angel of the LORD told Elijah to go with him. Elijah told the king to his face that he would die, and Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD. His brother Joram became king in his place.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Where did Ahaziah send to ask whether he would recover, and why was that so wrong? (1:2-3)

2. What question did Elijah ask the messengers? (1:3, 6)

3. How did Ahaziah recognize Elijah from the description, and who in the New Testament dressed the same way? (1:8; Matthew 3:4)

4. How did the first two captains speak to Elijah, and what happened to them? (1:9-12)

5. How was the third captain different, and what happened to him? (1:13-15)

6. Why did Jesus rebuke James and John when they wanted to call down fire like Elijah? (Luke 9:54-56)

7. Did the king's sentence change when Elijah spoke to him face to face? What does that teach about God's word? (1:16-17)

8. Elijah once ran from Jezebel, and here he walks into the palace without fear. What changed? (1:15; 1 Kings 19)

9. When trouble or sickness comes, where do you tend to turn first for answers?

10. The proud captains died and the humble one lived. Where in your own life is God asking you to come to Him humbly rather than on your own terms?

Chapter 2: Elijah Taken Up and Elisha Succeeds Him

Scripture

2:1-14 And it was, when the LORD ***was about*** to take up Elijah by the whirlwind to the heavens, and Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me to Bethel." And Elisha said, "***As*** the LORD lives, and ***as*** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And they went down ***to*** Bethel. And the sons of the prophets who ***were in*** Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD is about to take your master from over your head?" And he said, "I also, I know; be silent." And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me ***to*** Jericho." And he said, "***As*** the LORD lives, and ***as*** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And they came ***to*** Jericho. And the sons of the prophets who ***were*** in Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD is about to take your master from over your head?" And he said, "I also, I know; be silent." And Elijah said to him, "Remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "***As*** the LORD lives, and ***as*** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And the two of them went. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite, at a distance; and the two of them stood by the Jordan. And Elijah took his cloak and rolled ***it*** up and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there; and the two of them passed over on the dry ground. And it was, when they had passed over, and Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "And please let ***there*** be a double portion of your spirit to me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. If you see me taken from you, let it be so to you; and if not, it will not be." And it was, they ***were*** walking, walking on, and speaking; and look, a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they separated between the two of them; and Elijah went up in the whirlwind to the heavens. And Elisha ***was*** seeing, and he ***was*** crying out, "My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!" And he did not see him again. And he took hold of his clothes and tore them into two pieces. And he took up the cloak of Elijah which had fallen from him, and he went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. And he took the cloak of Elijah which had fallen from him and struck the waters, and he said, "Where ***is*** the LORD, the God of Elijah?" He also struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, and Elisha passed over.

2:15-25 And the sons of the prophets who ***were*** in Jericho saw him from opposite, and they said, "The spirit of Elijah has rested on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed down to him to the ground. And they said to him, "Look, please, there are with your servants fifty men, sons of valor. Please let them go and search for your master, lest the Spirit of the LORD has carried him off and cast him on one of the mountains or into one of the valleys." And he said, "You shall not send." And they urged him until ***he was*** ashamed, and he said, "Send." And they sent fifty men, and they searched three days and did not find him. And they returned to him, and he ***was*** remaining in Jericho; and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?" And the men of the city said to Elisha, "Look, please, the location of the city ***is*** good, just as my lord sees; and the waters ***are*** bad, and the land ***is*** causing miscarriage." And he said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt there." And they brought ***it*** to him. And he went out to the outlet of the waters and threw salt there, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'I have healed these waters; there will not be from there again death and miscarriage.'" And the waters were healed until this day, according to the word of Elisha

which he spoke. And he went up from there ***to*** Bethel; and he ***was*** going up on the way, and young lads came out from the city, and they mocked him and said to him, "Go up, bald ***one***! Go up, bald ***one***!" And he turned behind him and saw them, and he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out from the forest and tore forty-two boys of them. And he went from there to the mountain of Carmel, and from there he returned ***to*** Samaria.

Chapter 2 Preview

Elijah's work on earth is finished, and everyone seems to know it: Elijah, Elisha, and the groups of prophets in Bethel and Jericho. Three times Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind, and three times Elisha refuses to leave him. At the Jordan, Elijah strikes the water with his cloak and the two cross on dry ground. Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit. Then a chariot of fire and horses of fire separate them, and Elijah goes up in the whirlwind to heaven without dying.

Elisha picks up the fallen cloak, strikes the Jordan, and it parts for him too. The LORD's power has passed to the next man. Elisha heals the bad water of Jericho, and on the road to Bethel a crowd of young men mock him, and two bears come out of the woods. This chapter is about faithfulness to the end, about God's work going on after His servants are gone, and about how seriously God takes His word and His messengers.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And it was, when the LORD **was about** to take up Elijah by the whirlwind to the heavens, and Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal.*

"When the LORD was about to take up Elijah by the whirlwind to the heavens." The writer tells us the ending first. This chapter is not a surprise. God had planned it. A whirlwind is a violent storm wind. God often showed Himself in storm and wind (Job 38:1; Nahum 1:3).

Only one other man in Scripture left the earth without dying: Enoch, who "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Elijah is the second. Elisha the son of Shaphat had been Elijah's servant since Elijah threw his cloak on him at the plow (1 Kings 19:19-21). Now the two of them set out from Gilgal for the last time.

2:2-3 *And Elijah said to Elisha, "Remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me to Bethel." And Elisha said, "**As** the LORD lives, and **as** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And they went down **to** Bethel. And the sons of the prophets who **were in** Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD is about to take your master from over your head?" And he said, "I also, I know; be silent."*

"Remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me to Bethel." Why did Elijah tell Elisha to stay? Maybe he wanted to spare him the parting. Maybe he was testing him. Scripture doesn't say. But Elisha's answer was firm: "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." That is an oath. He would not be talked out of it.

At Bethel, "the sons of the prophets" came out. These were groups of prophets who lived and learned together, something like a school or fellowship of prophets, with Elijah and later Elisha as their leaders. They knew the LORD was about to take Elijah. Elisha answered, "I also, I know; be silent." He did not want to talk about it. He wanted to stay close to his master.

Bethel was the place where Jeroboam had set up a golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-29). Even there, God had a faithful group of prophets.

2:4-6 *And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me **to** Jericho." And he said, "**As** the LORD lives, and **as** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And they came **to** Jericho. And the sons of the prophets who **were** in Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD is about to take your master from over your head?" And he said, "I also, I know; be silent." And Elijah said to him, "Remain here, please, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "**As** the LORD lives, and **as** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And the two of them went.*

The same thing happened twice more. Elijah said the LORD had sent him to Jericho, and then to the Jordan. Each time Elisha gave the same oath: "I will not leave you." Each time the prophets at Jericho told him what he already knew.

Three times Elisha could have stopped, and three times he kept going. That is a picture of faithful discipleship. It is easy to follow when the road is short. It takes a settled heart to follow all the way to the river. Ruth said something like this to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), and Jesus asks the same kind of loyalty from His followers (Luke 9:62).

2:7-8 *And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite, at a distance; and the two of them stood by the Jordan. And Elijah took his cloak and rolled **it** up and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there; and the two of them passed over on the dry ground.*

"Fifty men of the sons of the prophets" stood at a distance to watch. They would be witnesses of what happened next.

"And Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there." The cloak, or mantle, was the outer robe a prophet wore, and it had become a sign of Elijah's office as a prophet. When the water parted, "the two of them passed over on the dry ground." Every Israelite would think of Moses at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22) and of Joshua at this same river (Joshua 3:15-17). God was showing that He was with Elijah as He had been with Moses and Joshua.

2:9-10 *And it was, when they had passed over, and Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "And please let **there** be a double portion of your spirit to me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. If you see me taken from you, let it be so to you; and if not, it will not be."*

On the far side of the Jordan, Elijah said, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "please let there be a double portion of your spirit to me."

That was not greed. Under the Law, the firstborn son received a double portion of his father's inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). Elisha was asking to be treated as Elijah's firstborn, his true heir, so that he could carry on his work. He knew he could not do it in his own strength.

Elijah said, "You have asked a hard thing." It was not Elijah's to give. Only God could give it. The sign would be this: "If you see me taken from you, let it be so to you." Elisha had to keep his eyes on his master to the very end.

2:11 *And it was, they **were** walking, walking on, and speaking; and look, a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they separated between the two of them; and Elijah went up in the whirlwind to the heavens.*

"And look, a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they separated between the two of them; and Elijah went up in the whirlwind to the heavens."

I take this just as it is written. God sent a chariot and horses of fire, signs of His presence and His heavenly armies, and Elijah was taken up alive, body and all, into heaven. He did not die. The fifty prophets could not find his body (2:16-17), because there was no body to find. Later, Elijah appeared with Moses on the mountain, talking with Jesus (Matthew 17:3), so we know he was alive with God.

Notice what carried Elijah up. The chariot separated the two men, but it was the whirlwind that took him up. A chariot of fire may make us think of judgment, but here it is the honor guard of heaven coming for God's servant. One day believers who are alive when Christ comes for His church will also be caught up without dying, "in an instant, in the blink of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Elijah's going up is a small picture of that day, though the New Testament does not name it as one. And it points to a greater going up. Jesus did not need to be carried. He rose from the dead and went up into heaven Himself, and He "will come in the same manner" (Acts 1:11).

Malachi said God would send "Elijah the prophet" before the great and awesome day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5). Jesus said John the Baptist came in that role (Matthew 11:14; 17:11-13). Many Bible teachers also believe Elijah himself will come again before Christ's return, possibly as one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

2:12 *And Elisha **was** seeing, and he **was** crying out, "My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!" And he did not see him again. And he took hold of his clothes and tore them into two pieces.*

"My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!" Elisha called Elijah his father, as a disciple called his teacher. And he called him the chariots and horsemen of Israel. He meant that Elijah, a man of God, had been Israel's real strength and defense, worth more than all the king's army. Years later King Jehoash would say the same words over Elisha on his deathbed (13:14).

"And he did not see him again." Elisha tore his clothes in two, a sign of grief. He had lost his master and friend.

2:13-14 *And he took up the cloak of Elijah which had fallen from him, and he went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. And he took the cloak of Elijah which had fallen from him and struck the waters, and he said, "Where **is** the LORD, the God of Elijah?" He also struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, and Elisha passed over.*

"And he took up the cloak of Elijah which had fallen from him." Elijah had thrown that cloak over Elisha years earlier as a call. Now it was his to keep. Elisha went back to the Jordan, struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?"

That is the question that matters. The power was never in the cloak. It was in the LORD. Elijah was gone, but the God of Elijah was not. "And they were divided here and there, and Elisha passed over."

When a faithful pastor, parent or teacher goes home to the Lord, we can feel the way Elisha did. But God's work does not die with His servants. The same God is still here, and He is still looking for people who will take up the work.

2:15-18 *And the sons of the prophets who **were** in Jericho saw him from opposite, and they said, "The spirit of Elijah has rested on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed down to him to the ground. And they said to him, "Look, please, there are with your servants fifty men, sons of valor. Please let them go and search for your master, lest the Spirit of the LORD has carried him off and cast him on one of the mountains or into one of the valleys." And he said, "You shall not send." And they urged him until **he was** ashamed, and he said, "Send." And they sent fifty men, and they searched three days and did not find him. And they returned to him, and he **was** remaining in Jericho; and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?"*

The prophets at Jericho saw it and said, "The spirit of Elijah has rested on Elisha." They bowed down to him, accepting him as their new leader.

Then they wanted to send fifty strong men to look for Elijah, "lest the Spirit of the LORD has carried him off and cast him on one of the mountains or into one of the valleys." That had happened before. Obadiah once told Elijah that he feared the Spirit of the LORD would carry him away (1 Kings 18:12). Elisha said no, but "they urged him until he was ashamed," and he gave in. They searched three days and found nothing. Elisha said, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?" Their search proved what had really happened. Elijah was not on a mountain. He was with God.

2:19-22 *And the men of the city said to Elisha, "Look, please, the location of the city **is** good, just as my lord sees; and the waters **are** bad, and the land **is** causing miscarriage." And he said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt there." And they brought **it** to him. And he went out to the outlet of the waters and threw salt there, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'I have healed these waters; there will not be from there again death and miscarriage.'" And the waters were healed until this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.*

The men of Jericho told Elisha their city was well placed, "and the waters are bad, and the land is causing miscarriage." The spring was bad, and the land and perhaps the people and animals suffered for it. Joshua had pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild Jericho

(Joshua 6:26), and Hiel had rebuilt it in Ahab's day at the cost of his sons (1 Kings 16:34). Now the city's people asked for help.

Elisha asked for "a new bowl" with salt, threw the salt into the spring, and spoke the word of the LORD: "I have healed these waters." Salt did not heal the spring. A little salt could never do that. The LORD did, and Elisha said so plainly. "And the waters were healed until this day." Visitors to Jericho today are still shown a spring called Elisha's Spring.

Elisha's first miracle after Elijah left was a healing. His ministry would be full of help for ordinary people: widows, a mother, sick men, hungry prophets.

2:23-25 *And he went up from there **to** Bethel; and he **was** going up on the way, and young lads came out from the city, and they mocked him and said to him, "Go up, bald **one**! Go up, bald **one**!" And he turned behind him and saw them, and he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out from the forest and tore forty-two boys of them. And he went from there to the mountain of Carmel, and from there he returned **to** Samaria.*

This is one of the hardest passages in the Bible to read, and people often ask about it, so I want to go slowly.

Elisha "went up from there to Bethel." Bethel was the center of the golden calf worship of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 12:28-33). As he went, "young lads came out from the city, and they mocked him." They shouted, "Go up, bald one! Go up, bald one!"

Who were they? The Hebrew words are often translated little children in older Bibles, and that makes the story sound like a prophet cursing toddlers. But the word for lad, na'ar, is used for Joseph at seventeen (Genesis 37:2), for David when he faced Goliath (1 Samuel 17:33), and for grown servants and soldiers. These were young people, likely teens and young men, and there were a lot of them, since forty-two were hurt and more may have been there. They came out of the city of the calf, as a mob, to jeer at the LORD's prophet.

What did they mean? "Bald one" was an insult. "Go up" may have mocked the report that Elijah had gone up to heaven: go up like your master, if you can, and get out of here. They were not mocking a man's looks so much as the LORD and His messenger.

"And he cursed them in the name of the LORD." Elisha did not curse them in his own name or by his own power. He handed the matter to God. "And two female bears came out from the forest and tore forty-two boys of them." The text says they were mauled. It does not say how many died, and I will not add to it.

Why would God do this? The Law had warned Israel that if they kept rejecting Him, He would send wild animals among them (Leviticus 26:21-22). Bethel had rejected the LORD for generations, and here its young people came out to drive off His prophet at the start of his work. This was God's judgment on a city's open contempt for Him, and a warning to all Israel that Elisha spoke for the LORD as Elijah had. God does not take mocking of Himself lightly (Galatians 6:7).

And yet, as with the fire in chapter 1, this is not a pattern for us. We do not call down curses on people who mock us. Jesus told us to "bless those who curse you" (Luke 6:28), and when He was mocked on the cross, He prayed for those who did it (Luke 23:34). Judgment belongs to God.

Then Elisha went to Mount Carmel, where Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal, and from there back to Samaria, the capital. His ministry had begun in earnest.

Chapter 2 Summary

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho and to the Jordan. Three times Elijah told Elisha to stay behind, and three times Elisha refused to leave him. Elijah struck the Jordan with his cloak, the waters parted, and they crossed on dry ground. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, and Elijah said he would have it if he saw him taken. A chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them, and Elijah went up in the whirlwind to heaven. Elisha took up Elijah's cloak, struck the Jordan, asked where the LORD, the God of Elijah, was, and the waters parted for him. The prophets at Jericho saw that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and their three-day search for Elijah found nothing. Elisha healed the bad waters of Jericho with salt by the word of the LORD. On the way to Bethel a crowd of young men mocked him, he cursed them in the name of the LORD, and two bears mauled forty-two of them. Elisha went on to Mount Carmel and then to Samaria.

A pastor helped me through a season of shame and hurt. He showed me a path based on his own life and on what God had done for him. Then he walked me through the steps of reconciliation. Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle. I want to pass on what that pastor gave me.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. How many times did Elijah tell Elisha to stay behind, and what did Elisha answer each time? (2:2-6)

2. What did Elijah do at the Jordan, and what earlier events does that remind us of? (2:8; Exodus 14; Joshua 3)

3. What did Elisha ask for, and what did a double portion mean under the Law? (2:9; Deuteronomy 21:17)

4. How was Elijah taken up, and why did the search party not find him? (2:11, 16-18)

5. What question did Elisha ask when he struck the waters, and why does it matter? (2:14)

6. Who healed the waters of Jericho, according to Elisha's own words? (2:21)

7. Who were the "young lads" at Bethel, and what were they really mocking? (2:23-24)

8. How does Jesus teach us to respond to people who mock or curse us? (Luke 6:28; 23:34)

9. Elisha refused to leave Elijah even when he was told to. Where is God asking you to keep following when it would be easier to stop?

10. Think of someone who taught you the faith and has gone home to the Lord or moved on. How can you take up the work they left?

Chapter 3: The War Against Moab

Scripture

3:1-12 And Joram the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like his father and like his mother; and he removed the sacred pillar of the Baal which his father had made. Only he clung to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he caused Israel to sin; he did not turn aside from it. And Mesha the king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and he would render to the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams, ***with their*** wool. And it was, when Ahab died, and the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. And King Joram went out on that day from Samaria, and he mustered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me against Moab for battle?" And he said, "I will go up. As I ***am***, so ***are*** you; as my people, so ***are*** your people; as my horses, so ***are*** your horses." And he said, "Which ***is*** the way ***by which*** we will go up?" And he said, "The way of the wilderness of Edom." And the king of Israel and the king of Judah and the king of Edom went, and they went around, a journey of seven days; and there was no water for the camp and for the animals that ***were*** at their feet. And the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?" And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat ***is*** here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." And Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

3:13-27 And Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What ***is there*** to me and to you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." And Elisha said, "***As*** the LORD of armies lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I lift up the face of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you, and I would not see you. And now, bring me a musician." And it was, when the musician played, and the hand of the LORD was on him. And he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Make this wadi ditches, ditches.' For thus says the LORD: 'You will not see wind, and you will not see rain, and that wadi will be filled ***with*** water, and you will drink, you and your livestock and your animals.' And this is a light thing in the eyes of the LORD, and He will give Moab into your hand. And you will strike every fortified city and every choice city, and every good tree you will fell, and all the springs of water you will stop up, and every good portion of land you will ruin with stones." And it was in the morning, at the offering up of the grain offering, and look, water ***was*** coming from the direction of Edom, and the land was filled ***with*** the water. And all Moab had heard that the kings had come up to fight against them; and they were called together, from everyone girding on a belt and upward, and they stood at the border. And they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, and Moab saw the water opposite ***them*** red like blood. And they said, "This ***is*** blood! The kings have surely fought one another, and they have struck each his neighbor. And now, to the plunder, Moab!" And they came to the camp of Israel, and Israel rose up and struck Moab, and they fled before them; and they struck into it, even

striking Moab. And they tore down the cities, and on every good portion of land they threw each his stone and filled it, and every spring of water they stopped up, and every good tree they felled, until he left ***only*** its stones in Kir-hareseth; and the slingers surrounded ***it*** and struck it. And the king of Moab saw that the battle was too strong for him, and he took with him seven hundred men drawing the sword to break through to the king of Edom; and they were not able. And he took his firstborn son who would reign in his place and offered him up ***as*** a burnt offering on the wall. And there was great wrath against Israel; and they departed from him and returned to the land.

Chapter 3 Preview

Joram, the son of Ahab, is now king of Israel. He is not as bad as his father and mother, but he still holds on to the golden calves of Jeroboam. When Mesha, king of Moab, stops paying his tribute, Joram sets out to bring him back under control. He asks Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, to join him, and the king of Edom comes along. They take the long road around the south end of the Dead Sea, and after seven days the water runs out.

Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet of the LORD, and they find Elisha. For Jehoshaphat's sake, Elisha gives them the LORD's word: dig ditches, and God will fill them with water without wind or rain. He does, and the morning sun turning the water red tricks Moab into charging the camp. Israel wins, but the chapter ends with one of the darkest scenes in Kings, when the king of Moab offers his own son as a burnt offering on the city wall.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-3 *And Joram the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like his father and like his mother; and he removed the sacred pillar of the Baal which his father had made. Only he clung to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he caused Israel to sin; he did not turn aside from it.*

"Joram the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria." He reigned twelve years, from about 852 to 841 B.C. He "did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like his father and like his mother." That is faint praise. He "removed the sacred pillar of the Baal which his father had made." A sacred pillar was a standing stone set up as an object of worship. Baal was the Canaanite god of storm and rain whose worship Jezebel had pushed on Israel. Joram took down at least one of his father's idols.

"Only he clung to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat." Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, had set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan so his people would not go to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:26-30). Every king of Israel kept them. Joram made a partial reform, but he never came back to the LORD with his whole heart. Partial obedience is still disobedience.

3:4-8 *And Mesha the king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and he would render to the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams,* ***with their*** *wool. And it was, when Ahab died, and the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. And King Joram went out on that day from Samaria, and he mustered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me against Moab for battle?" And he said, "I will go up. As I* ***am****, so* ***are*** *you; as my people, so* ***are*** *your people; as my horses, so* ***are*** *your horses." And he said, "Which* ***is*** *the way* ***by which*** *we will go up?" And he said, "The way of the wilderness of Edom."*

Mesha, king of Moab, "was a sheep breeder." He paid the king of Israel "a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams, with their wool" as tribute. That was a crushing burden, and when Ahab died, Moab rebelled (1:1).

Mesha's own record of this rebellion has been found. It is called the Moabite Stone, or the Mesha Stele, a black stone found in Moab in the 1800s. On it Mesha boasts that Omri and his son had oppressed Moab, and that his god Chemosh gave him freedom. It is one of the best-known finds that names people from the Bible.

Joram gathered Israel and asked Jehoshaphat to come with him. Jehoshaphat said, "As I am, so are you; as my people, so are your people." He had made this same mistake with Ahab, Joram's father, and nearly died for it (1 Kings 22:4, 32-33). He also joined Ahaziah in a shipping venture that God judged (2 Chronicles 20:35-37). Jehoshaphat was a good king who kept making alliances with wicked men. Paul warns us not to be bound together with unbelievers in ways that pull us away from God (2 Corinthians 6:14).

They chose "the way of the wilderness of Edom," around the south end of the Dead Sea, to attack Moab from the south, where it was weaker.

3:9-12 *And the king of Israel and the king of Judah and the king of Edom went, and they went around, a journey of seven days; and there was no water for the camp and for the animals that* ***were*** *at their feet. And the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?" And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat* ***is*** *here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." And Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.*

The kings of Israel, Judah and Edom marched "a journey of seven days," and "there was no water for the camp and for the animals." In that dry land, no water meant death. Joram said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." He blamed God for a plan God never gave.

Jehoshaphat asked the right question: "Is there not here a prophet of the LORD?" A servant answered that "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." That was a way of saying he had been Elijah's servant. Elisha had followed the army. Jehoshaphat said,

"The word of the LORD is with him," and all three kings went down to him. Kings did not usually go to prophets. Prophets were summoned to kings. Need has a way of humbling us.

3:13-15 *And Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What **is there** to me and to you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." And Elisha said, "**As** the LORD of armies lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I lift up the face of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you, and I would not see you. And now, bring me a musician." And it was, when the musician played, and the hand of the LORD was on him.*

Elisha was blunt with Joram: "What is there to me and to you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." In other words, you serve Baal and the calves, so ask them. Joram said again that the LORD had brought them out to die.

Elisha said, "As the LORD of armies lives, before whom I stand." The LORD of armies is a name that means God commands the armies of heaven. "Were it not that I lift up the face of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you." For the sake of one godly king, God would help the whole army. That is how one faithful person can bring blessing to many around them.

"Bring me a musician." When the musician played, "the hand of the LORD was on him." Music did not force God to speak. But it seems to have quieted Elisha's heart after his anger at Joram, so he could listen. David's music once calmed Saul (1 Samuel 16:23), and music has long been used in worship to turn the heart toward God (1 Chronicles 25:1).

3:16-19 *And he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Make this wadi ditches, ditches.' For thus says the LORD: 'You will not see wind, and you will not see rain, and that wadi will be filled **with** water, and you will drink, you and your livestock and your animals.' And this is a light thing in the eyes of the LORD, and He will give Moab into your hand. And you will strike every fortified city and every choice city, and every good tree you will fell, and all the springs of water you will stop up, and every good portion of land you will ruin with stones."*

"Make this wadi ditches, ditches." A wadi is a dry stream bed that fills with water only after rain. God told them to dig pits all through it, and then He would fill them. "You will not see wind, and you will not see rain." The water would come from somewhere else, by God's power.

"And this is a light thing in the eyes of the LORD." What looked impossible to the kings was nothing to God. And He would do more than give water. "He will give Moab into your hand." They would take the cities, cut the good trees, stop the springs, and ruin the fields with stones. Normally the Law told Israel not to cut down fruit trees in a siege (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). That law was about cities Israel would live among in its own land. Here God gave a special word for this campaign against a rebel nation outside the land.

The digging took faith. They had to work for water they could not yet see. God often asks us to prepare for the blessing before it comes.

3:20-25 *And it was in the morning, at the offering up of the grain offering, and look, water **was** coming from the direction of Edom, and the land was filled **with** the water. And all Moab had heard that the kings had come up to fight against them; and they were called together, from everyone girding on a belt and upward, and they stood at the border. And they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, and Moab saw the water opposite **them** red like blood. And they said, "This **is** blood! The kings have surely fought one another, and they have struck each his neighbor. And now, to the plunder, Moab!" And they came to the camp of Israel, and Israel rose up and struck Moab, and they fled before them; and they struck into it, even striking Moab. And they tore down the cities, and on every good portion of land they threw each his stone and filled it, and every spring of water they stopped up, and every good tree they felled, until he left **only** its stones in Kir-hareseth; and the slingers surrounded **it** and struck it.*

"In the morning, at the offering up of the grain offering," water came "from the direction of Edom." The grain offering was the morning offering at the temple in Jerusalem, so this was early morning. It may be that rain fell far away in the hills of Edom and flash flooded down the wadi. Either way, it came just as God said, with no storm where they were.

The Moabites gathered every man able to fight at the border. When they "rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water," they saw it "red like blood." The red soil and the low morning sun made the pools look like blood. They had seen no rain, so water never crossed their minds. They thought the three kings had turned on one another. "And now, to the plunder, Moab!" They rushed into the camp, and Israel was waiting.

Israel struck them and drove them back into their land. They tore down the cities and did what Elisha said, until only Kir-hareseth, Moab's strong city, was left, and the slingers surrounded it. God used the very thing that saved Israel, the water, to fool Moab.

3:26-27 *And the king of Moab saw that the battle was too strong for him, and he took with him seven hundred men drawing the sword to break through to the king of Edom; and they were not able. And he took his firstborn son who would reign in his place and offered him up **as** a burnt offering on the wall. And there was great wrath against Israel; and they departed from him and returned to the land.*

Mesha saw the battle was lost. He tried to break through toward the king of Edom with seven hundred swordsmen, and he failed.

"And he took his firstborn son who would reign in his place and offered him up as a burnt offering on the wall." This is a terrible scene. In his despair, the king of Moab sacrificed his own heir to his god Chemosh in full view of both armies. The Law called this an abomination to the LORD (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). It was the worst thing the pagan nations did, and God would later judge Israel and Judah for doing the same (17:17; 21:6).

"And there was great wrath against Israel; and they departed from him and returned to the land." What does this mean? The text does not say whose wrath it was, and good Bible teachers read it in different ways. Some believe it was the fury of the Moabites, driven to a frenzy by the king's act, so that they fought back so fiercely that Israel withdrew. Some believe Israel itself was filled with

horror and disgust, and the allies broke off the siege. Others believe it was the LORD's displeasure against Israel, perhaps because the army had pushed things to the point of such an act, or because of Joram's own sin. One thing it does not mean: it does not mean Chemosh had any real power. There is no God but the LORD (Isaiah 45:5). Whatever the wrath was, the campaign ended without Moab being brought back under Israel.

What do we take from this? The kings had won a great victory by God's word, yet they went home without what they came for. Joram's partial faith gave partial results. And the scene on the wall shows us the darkness of idolatry. False gods always demand more and give nothing. The true God did the opposite. He did not ask us to give our son. He gave His own Son for us (John 3:16; Romans 8:32).

Chapter 3 Summary

Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel and did evil, though not like his parents: he removed a pillar of Baal but kept the sins of Jeroboam. Mesha king of Moab stopped paying his heavy tribute, and Joram set out against him with Jehoshaphat king of Judah and the king of Edom by the way of Edom. After seven days they ran out of water. Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of the LORD, and they went to Elisha, who spoke only for Jehoshaphat's sake. While a musician played, the LORD's word came: dig ditches in the wadi, and God would fill them without wind or rain and give Moab into their hand. In the morning water came from Edom. The Moabites saw the water red in the sunrise, thought the kings had killed each other, and rushed in to plunder, but Israel struck them and ravaged their land up to Kir-hareseth. The king of Moab failed to break out, offered his firstborn son as a burnt offering on the wall, and there was great wrath against Israel, so the allies withdrew and went home.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. How was Joram better than his father and mother, and how was he still like them? (3:2-3)

2. Why did Jehoshaphat's alliance with Joram repeat an old mistake? (3:7; 1 Kings 22:4)

3. Who asked for a prophet of the LORD, and why did Elisha agree to speak? (3:11-14)

4. What did God tell the kings to do, and what did He promise? (3:16-19)

5. How did God use the water to defeat Moab? (3:20-24)

6. What did the king of Moab do on the wall, and what does God's Law say about that? (3:27; Deuteronomy 12:31)

7. How does God giving His Son differ from the king of Moab giving his? (John 3:16; Romans 8:32)

8. Why is partial obedience still disobedience? Where do you see Joram's pattern in people today? (3:2-3)

9. Are there partnerships or friendships in your life that keep pulling you away from God, the way Jehoshaphat's alliances did?

10. God told the kings to dig ditches before there was any water. What is God asking you to prepare for in faith before you can see His answer?

Chapter 4: The Widow's Oil and the Shunammite's Son

Scripture

4:1-7 And a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant was fearing the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children for himself as slaves." And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil." And he said, "Go, ask for yourself vessels from outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels; do not get few. And you shall go in and shut the door behind you and behind your sons, and you shall pour out into all these vessels, and the full ***one*** you shall set aside." And she went from him and shut the door behind her and behind her sons; they ***were*** bringing ***vessels*** to her, and she ***was*** pouring out. And it was, when the vessels were full, and she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." And the oil stopped. And she came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons will live on the remainder."

4:8-24 And it was the day, and Elisha passed over to Shunem; and there ***was*** a great woman there, and she urged him to eat bread. And it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn aside there to eat bread. And she said to her husband, "Look, please, I know that he ***is*** a holy man of God who passes by us continually. Please let us make a small walled upper room, and let us put for him there a bed and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it will be, when he comes to us, he will turn aside there." And it was the day, and he came there, and he turned aside to the upper room and lay down there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." And he called her, and she stood before him. And he said to him, "Say, please, to her, 'Look, you have taken care for us ***with*** all this care. What ***is there*** to do for you? Is there ***something*** to speak for you to the king or to the commander of the army?'" And she said, "I am dwelling in the midst of my own people." And he said, "And what ***is there*** to do for her?" And Gehazi said, "Truly, she has no son, and her husband is old." And he said, "Call her." And he called her, and she stood in the doorway. And he said, "At this appointed time, when the time revives, you ***will be*** embracing a son." And she said, "No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." And the woman conceived and bore a son at this appointed time, when the time revived, which Elisha had spoken to her. And the child grew, and it was the day, and he went out to his father, to the reapers. And he said to his father, "My head, my head!" And he said to the servant, "Carry him to his mother." And he carried him and brought him to his mother, and he sat on her knees until noon, and he died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and she shut ***the door*** behind him and went out. And she called to her husband and said, "Send me, please, one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and return." And he said, "Why are you going to him today? ***It is*** not a new moon and not a Sabbath." And she said, "Peace." And she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Drive and go; do not hold back for me in riding unless I say to you."

4:25-37 And she went and came to the man of God at the mountain of Carmel. And it was, when the man of God saw her from opposite, and he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, that Shunammite ***is there***. Now, run, please, to meet her, and say to her, 'Is it peace with you? Is it peace with your husband? Is it peace with the child?'" And she said, "Peace." And she came to the man of God at

the mountain, and she took hold of his feet; and Gehazi drew near to push her away. And the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is bitter within her, and the LORD has hidden ***it*** from me and has not told me." And she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" And he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet a man, do not bless him; and if a man blesses you, do not answer him. And you shall put my staff on the face of the lad." And the mother of the lad said, "***As*** the LORD lives, and ***as*** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And he arose and went after her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and he put the staff on the face of the lad; and there was no sound, and there was no attention. And he went back to meet him, and he told him, saying, "The lad has not awakened." And Elisha came into the house, and look, the lad ***was*** dead, laid on his bed. And he went in and shut the door behind the two of them, and he prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and he put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his palms on his palms, and he crouched over him; and the flesh of the child became warm. And he went back and walked in the house, once here and once there; and he went up and crouched over him. And the lad sneezed up to seven times, and the lad opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." And he called her, and she came to him. And he said, "Take up your son." And she came and fell at his feet and bowed down to the ground; and she took up her son and went out.

4:38-44 And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and the famine ***was*** in the land; and the sons of the prophets ***were*** sitting before him. And he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot, and cook stew for the sons of the prophets." And one went out to the field to gather herbs, and he found a vine of the field and gathered from it gourds of the field, the fullness of his garment; and he came and sliced ***them*** into the pot of stew, for they did not know ***them***. And they poured ***it*** out for the men to eat. And it was, when they were eating from the stew, and they cried out and said, "Death ***is*** in the pot, man of God!" And they were not able to eat. And he said, "Then bring flour." And he threw ***it*** into the pot, and he said, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat." And there was no bad thing in the pot. And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and he brought to the man of God bread of firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh grain in his sack. And he said, "Give to the people, that they may eat." And his attendant said, "What, shall I set this before a hundred men?" And he said, "Give to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the LORD: '***They*** will eat and leave over.'" And he set ***it*** before them, and they ate and left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Chapter 4 Preview

This chapter is a string of Elisha's miracles, and almost all of them are for ordinary people in need. A prophet's widow is about to lose her two sons to a creditor, and God fills every jar she can borrow with oil. A wealthy woman in Shunem builds a room for Elisha, and God gives her the son she had stopped hoping for. Years later the boy dies in her lap, and she rides to Elisha and will not let him go until he comes. Elisha prays, and the boy lives.

Then come two meal miracles during a famine. A pot of stew is poisoned by wild gourds, and a handful of flour makes it safe. Twenty barley loaves feed a hundred men with food left over. In each story God meets real needs in a dark time, when Israel's kings had largely turned from Him. He had not left His faithful people.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *And a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant was fearing the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children for himself as slaves."*

"A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha." The prophets were not all single men living apart. Some had wives and children. This woman's husband had died, and she reminded Elisha that he "was fearing the LORD." To fear the LORD means to honor Him with reverence and trust and to obey Him.

Now "the creditor has come to take my two children for himself as slaves." Under the Law, a man in debt could sell himself or his family into service to pay it off, but only for a limited time, and he was to be treated as a hired worker, not ruled harshly (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:39-43). Even so, losing her sons would leave this widow with nothing. God cares about widows and orphans and commanded His people to protect them (Exodus 22:22-24; James 1:27).

4:2-4 *And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil." And he said, "Go, ask for yourself vessels from outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels; do not get few. And you shall go in and shut the door behind you and behind your sons, and you shall pour out into all these vessels, and the full **one** you shall set aside."*

"What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" Elisha started with what she had. She said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil." Olive oil was used for cooking, lamps and skin care. A small jar was almost nothing.

Elisha told her to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors, "do not get few." Then she was to shut the door, pour into each one, and set the full ones aside. The size of the miracle would depend on the size of her faith. How many jars would you have borrowed?

God often starts with what we already have, however small. Moses had a staff. The boy in John 6 had five barley loaves and two small fish. God asks us to give Him what is in our hands.

4:5-7 *And she went from him and shut the door behind her and behind her sons; they **were** bringing **vessels** to her, and she **was** pouring out. And it was, when the vessels were full, and she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." And the oil stopped. And she came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons will live on the remainder."*

She did it. Behind a shut door, her sons brought jars and she poured. The oil kept flowing until she asked for another and her son said, "There is not another vessel." "And the oil stopped." The oil did not run out. The jars did.

Elisha told her, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons will live on the remainder." God gave her more than enough. He paid her debt and provided for her future. That

is how God gives. Paul says He "is able to do above all things, far more abundantly than what we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

The miracle happened behind closed doors, with no crowd. God often does His deepest work in private, in the home, between Himself and those who trust Him.

4:8-10 *And it was the day, and Elisha passed over to Shunem; and there **was** a great woman there, and she urged him to eat bread. And it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn aside there to eat bread. And she said to her husband, "Look, please, I know that he **is** a holy man of God who passes by us continually. Please let us make a small walled upper room, and let us put for him there a bed and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it will be, when he comes to us, he will turn aside there."*

Shunem was a town in the valley of Jezreel. There lived "a great woman," which means a woman of wealth and standing. She urged Elisha to eat at her house, and after that, whenever he passed by, he stopped there.

She told her husband, "I know that he is a holy man of God who passes by us continually." She saw something different in him. She asked to build "a small walled upper room" with "a bed and a table and a chair and a lampstand." It was a simple room, but it was exactly what a traveling prophet needed.

This woman gave without being asked and without expecting anything back. That is real hospitality. Hebrews 13:2 tells us not to forget to show hospitality, and Jesus said whoever receives a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward (Matthew 10:41).

4:11-17 *And it was the day, and he came there, and he turned aside to the upper room and lay down there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." And he called her, and she stood before him. And he said to him, "Say, please, to her, 'Look, you have taken care for us **with** all this care. What **is there** to do for you? Is there **something** to speak for you to the king or to the commander of the army?'" And she said, "I am dwelling in the midst of my own people." And he said, "And what **is there** to do for her?" And Gehazi said, "Truly, she has no son, and her husband is old." And he said, "Call her." And he called her, and she stood in the doorway. And he said, "At this appointed time, when the time revives, you **will be** embracing a son." And she said, "No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." And the woman conceived and bore a son at this appointed time, when the time revived, which Elisha had spoken to her.*

Elisha wanted to thank her. Through his servant Gehazi he asked if he could speak for her "to the king or to the commander of the army." She said, "I am dwelling in the midst of my own people." She was content. She did not want favors from the powerful.

Gehazi pointed out that "she has no son, and her husband is old." In that world, a woman with no son had no one to care for her in old age and no heir for the family land. Elisha called her and said, "At this appointed time, when the time revives, you will be embracing a son." That means about this time next year.

"No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." She had given up hoping, and the hope hurt. But God did what He said: "the woman conceived and bore a son at this appointed time." It is much like God's promise to Sarah (Genesis 18:10-14). Nothing is too hard for the LORD.

4:18-21 *And the child grew, and it was the day, and he went out to his father, to the reapers. And he said to his father, "My head, my head!" And he said to the servant, "Carry him to his mother." And he carried him and brought him to his mother, and he sat on her knees until noon, and he died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and she shut* ***the door*** *behind him and went out.*

"And the child grew." One day during the harvest, he went out to his father in the field and cried, "My head, my head!" It may have been sunstroke in the heat of harvest, or some other sudden illness. A servant carried him to his mother. He "sat on her knees until noon, and he died."

Every parent who has lost a child knows a little of what is in that verse. I won't try to say more than the text does.

She did not wail or call the neighbors. She "laid him on the bed of the man of God, and she shut the door behind him and went out." She put him in the prophet's room and went to find the prophet. That was an act of faith. She was not ready to give up.

4:22-24 *And she called to her husband and said, "Send me, please, one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and return." And he said, "Why are you going to him today?* ***It is*** *not a new moon and not a Sabbath." And she said, "Peace." And she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Drive and go; do not hold back for me in riding unless I say to you."*

She asked her husband for a servant and a donkey to go to the man of God. He asked, "Why are you going to him today? It is not a new moon and not a Sabbath." People seem to have gone to the prophets on holy days, the new moon festival at the start of each month and the Sabbath, the seventh day of rest. He did not know the boy was dead. She answered only, "Peace," which is the Hebrew shalom. It means it will be well. She said nothing more.

She told the servant to drive the donkey hard and not slow down. Mount Carmel was about fifteen to twenty miles away. She rode it without stopping.

4:25-28 *And she went and came to the man of God at the mountain of Carmel. And it was, when the man of God saw her from opposite, and he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, that Shunammite* ***is there****. Now, run, please, to meet her, and say to her, 'Is it peace with you? Is it peace with your husband? Is it peace with the child?'" And she said, "Peace." And she came to the man of God at the mountain, and she took hold of his feet; and Gehazi drew near to push her away. And the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is bitter within her, and the LORD has hidden* ***it*** *from me and has not told me." And she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?"*

Elisha saw her coming and sent Gehazi to ask if all was well with her, her husband and the child. Again she said, "Peace." She would not tell her grief to the servant. She would tell it only to the man of God.

When she reached him, "she took hold of his feet." Gehazi tried to push her away, but Elisha said, "Let her alone, for her soul is bitter within her, and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." Even a great prophet did not know everything. God reveals what He chooses, when He chooses.

Then her words came out: "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" She had not asked for this child. Hope had been given to her, and now it seemed taken away. It is honest grief, and God was not offended by it. Scripture is full of people who brought their bitter questions to God, and He listened.

4:29-31 *And he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet a man, do not bless him; and if a man blesses you, do not answer him. And you shall put my staff on the face of the lad." And the mother of the lad said, "**As** the LORD lives, and **as** your soul lives, I will not leave you." And he arose and went after her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and he put the staff on the face of the lad; and there was no sound, and there was no attention. And he went back to meet him, and he told him, saying, "The lad has not awakened."*

Elisha sent Gehazi ahead with his staff, telling him not to stop to greet anyone on the road. A greeting in that world could take a long time. He was to lay the staff on the boy's face.

But the mother said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." Those are the same words Elisha said to Elijah three times (2:2, 4, 6). She would not settle for the servant and the staff. She wanted the man of God himself. "And he arose and went after her."

Gehazi laid the staff on the boy, "and there was no sound, and there was no attention." The staff had no power of its own. Gehazi came back and said, "The lad has not awakened."

4:32-35 *And Elisha came into the house, and look, the lad **was** dead, laid on his bed. And he went in and shut the door behind the two of them, and he prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and he put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his palms on his palms, and he crouched over him; and the flesh of the child became warm. And he went back and walked in the house, once here and once there; and he went up and crouched over him. And the lad sneezed up to seven times, and the lad opened his eyes.*

Elisha came into the house, and "the lad was dead, laid on his bed." He "shut the door behind the two of them, and he prayed to the LORD." Elisha did what he had seen Elijah do in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:19-22). He prayed first.

Then he lay on the child, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. "The flesh of the child became warm." He got up, walked back and forth in the house, and stretched himself over the boy again. "And the lad sneezed up to seven times, and the lad opened his eyes." The boy had been dead, and now he was alive.

Why lie on the boy? Scripture doesn't tell us. It was not a medical method. Perhaps it was a way of showing complete identification with the child in prayer. The life came from God, in answer to prayer.

4:36-37 *And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." And he called her, and she came to him. And he said, "Take up your son." And she came and fell at his feet and bowed down to the ground; and she took up her son and went out.*

"Take up your son." She fell at Elisha's feet, bowed to the ground, took her son and went out. She had given hospitality, and God gave her a son. She had refused to give up, and God gave her son back.

Hebrews 11:35 remembers women like her: "Women received their dead by resurrection." Centuries later, Jesus raised a widow's only son at Nain, a village very near Shunem (Luke 7:11-17). The people there said, "A great prophet has been raised up among us." But Elisha had to pray and work. Jesus simply touched the bier and said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." He is the Lord of life Himself.

4:38-41 *And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and the famine **was** in the land; and the sons of the prophets **were** sitting before him. And he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot, and cook stew for the sons of the prophets." And one went out to the field to gather herbs, and he found a vine of the field and gathered from it gourds of the field, the fullness of his garment; and he came and sliced **them** into the pot of stew, for they did not know **them**. And they poured **it** out for the men to eat. And it was, when they were eating from the stew, and they cried out and said, "Death **is** in the pot, man of God!" And they were not able to eat. And he said, "Then bring flour." And he threw **it** into the pot, and he said, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat." And there was no bad thing in the pot.*

Elisha went back to Gilgal during a famine. "The sons of the prophets were sitting before him," which means they were gathered to learn from him. He had a large pot of stew made for them. One man went out to gather herbs and came back with wild gourds, likely a poisonous wild melon. Nobody recognized them.

When they started eating, they cried out, "Death is in the pot, man of God!" Elisha said, "Then bring flour." He threw it in and said, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat." "And there was no bad thing in the pot."

The flour did not cure the poison. God did, as with the salt at Jericho (2:21). In a hungry time, God protected those who trusted Him even from their own mistakes.

4:42-44 *And a man came from Baal-shalishah, and he brought to the man of God bread of firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh grain in his sack. And he said, "Give to the people, that they may eat." And his attendant said, "What, shall I set this before a hundred men?" And he said, "Give to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the LORD: '**They** will eat and leave over.'" And he set **it** before them, and they ate and left over, according to the word of the LORD.*

A man from Baal-shalishah brought Elisha "bread of firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley." The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest, which the Law said belonged to the LORD and went to the priests (Numbers 18:13; Deuteronomy 18:4). The true priests were in Jerusalem, far away, and the northern kingdom had its own false priests at the calf shrines. This man brought his offering to God's prophet instead.

Elisha said, "Give to the people, that they may eat." His servant said, "What, shall I set this before a hundred men?" Barley loaves were small, like flat rolls. Elisha said, "Thus says the LORD: 'They will eat and leave over.'" And they did, "according to the word of the LORD."

It is hard to read this without thinking of Jesus. He fed five thousand men with "five barley loaves and two small fish," and the disciples picked up twelve baskets left over (John 6:9-13). The servant's question is almost the same as the one the apostle Andrew asked: "what are they for so many?" Elisha fed a hundred with twenty loaves. Jesus fed thousands with five. Elisha's miracle is a small picture of what the Son of God would do.

Chapter 4 Summary

A prophet's widow cried to Elisha because her husband's creditor was coming to take her two sons as slaves. Elisha told her to borrow empty vessels and pour her one jar of oil into them, and the oil flowed until the vessels ran out, so she could pay her debt and live on the rest. A wealthy woman of Shunem built a room for Elisha, and he promised her a son, who was born a year later. When the boy grew, he died suddenly in his mother's lap. She laid him on the prophet's bed, rode to Elisha at Mount Carmel and would not leave him. Gehazi laid Elisha's staff on the boy with no result, but Elisha shut the door, prayed to the LORD, and stretched himself on the child, and the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. At Gilgal during a famine, a stew poisoned by wild gourds was made harmless when Elisha threw in flour. Twenty barley loaves of firstfruits fed a hundred men, and there was food left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What did the widow have in her house, and what did Elisha tell her to do with it? (4:2-4)

2. When did the oil stop flowing, and what does that teach about faith? (4:6)

3. How did the Shunammite woman show hospitality to Elisha, and what did she ask in return? (4:8-13)

4. What did she do when her son died, and what did she say to her husband and to Gehazi? (4:21-26)

5. Why did the staff not wake the boy, and what did Elisha do first when he came? (4:31-33)

6. How does Jesus raising the widow's son at Nain compare with this miracle? (4:34-37; Luke 7:11-17)

7. What did Elisha do with the poisoned stew and with the twenty loaves? How do these point to Jesus? (4:38-44; John 6:9-13)

8. God started with the widow's one jar of oil. What small thing do you have that you could offer to God?

9. The Shunammite woman gave without expecting anything back. Who could you show that kind of hospitality to this month?

10. She brought her bitter grief straight to God's servant and would not let go. What grief or question do you need to bring honestly to God in prayer?

Chapter 5: Naaman Healed and Gehazi Struck

Scripture

5:1-14 And Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man before his master and highly regarded, for by him the LORD had given salvation to Syria; and the man was a mighty man of valor, leprous. And Syria had gone out ***in*** raiding bands, and they had taken captive from the land of Israel a young girl, and she was before the wife of Naaman. And she said to her mistress, "Oh that my master ***were*** before the prophet who ***is*** in Samaria! Then he would recover him from his leprosy." And he went in and told his master, saying, "Like this and like this the girl who ***is*** from the land of Israel spoke." And the king of Syria said, "Go, go in, and let me send a letter to the king of Israel." And he went and took in his hand approximately 750 pounds (ten talents) of silver and approximately 150 pounds (six thousand ***shekels***) of gold and ten changes of garments. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now, when this letter comes to you, look, I have sent to you Naaman my servant, and you shall recover him from his leprosy." And it was, when the king of Israel read the letter, and he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this ***man*** is sending to me to recover a man from his leprosy? For surely know, please, and see that he is seeking an occasion against me." And it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, and he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come, please, to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." And Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and he stood at the entrance of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall return to you, and be clean." And Naaman was angry and went, and he said, "Look, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leprous ***one***.' Are not Amana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" And he turned and went in a rage. And his servants drew near and spoke to him and said, "My father, ***if*** the prophet had spoken a great thing to you, would you not do ***it***? And how much more when he has said to you, 'Wash and be clean'?" And he went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh returned like the flesh of a young lad, and he was clean.

5:15-27 And he went back to the man of God, he and all his camp, and he came and stood before him, and he said, "Look, please, I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. And now, please accept a blessing from your servant." And he said, "***As*** the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will not accept ***it***." And he urged him to accept ***it***, and he refused. And Naaman said, "And if not, please let there be given to your servant a load of a pair of mules ***of*** soil; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering and sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. In this matter may the LORD forgive your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to bow down there, and he is leaning on my hand, and I bow down ***in*** the house of Rimmon, when I bow down ***in*** the house of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant in this matter." And he said to him, "Go in peace." And he went from him some distance of land. And Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Aramean from accepting from his hand what he brought. ***As*** the LORD lives, surely I will run after him and accept something from

him." And Gehazi pursued after Naaman. And Naaman saw ***one*** running after him, and he got down from the chariot to meet him, and he said, "Is it peace?" And he said, "Peace. My master has sent me, saying, 'Look, just now two young men from the hill country of Ephraim, of the sons of the prophets, have come to me. Please give them approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of silver and two changes of garments.'" And Naaman said, "Be willing, take approximately 150 pounds (two talents)." And he urged him, and he bound approximately 150 pounds (two talents) of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and he gave ***them*** to two of his servants, and they carried ***them*** before him. And he came to the Ophel, and he took ***them*** from their hand and deposited ***them*** in the house; and he sent the men away, and they went. And he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, "From where ***have you come***, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant has not gone here or there." And he said to him, "Did my heart not go ***with you*** when a man turned from on his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to accept the silver and to accept clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and cattle and male servants and maidservants? And the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your offspring forever." And he went out from before him leprous like snow.

Chapter 5 Preview

Naaman is the top general of Syria, a great man with one problem he cannot fix: he has leprosy. A young Israelite girl, taken captive in a raid and now a servant in his house, tells his wife about the prophet in Samaria. Naaman comes to Israel with a fortune in silver and gold, and Elisha does not even come out to meet him. He sends word to go wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman is insulted and almost goes home angry, but his servants talk him into it. He comes up out of the water with skin like a little boy's, and he confesses that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.

Elisha refuses any payment. But Gehazi, his servant, runs after Naaman, lies to get silver and clothing, and lies again to Elisha. The leprosy that left Naaman clings to Gehazi. Jesus Himself pointed to this chapter (Luke 4:27). It is a picture of grace: free, undeserved, for anyone who humbles himself, and never for sale.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *And Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man before his master and highly regarded, for by him the LORD had given salvation to Syria; and the man was a mighty man of valor, leprous.*

Naaman was "the commander of the army of the king of Syria." Syria, also called Aram, was the kingdom to the north of Israel with its capital at Damascus. It was Israel's enemy for most of this period.

He was "a great man before his master and highly regarded," and the writer tells us why: "by him the LORD had given salvation to Syria." That is a striking line. The LORD, Israel's God, had given victory to Syria through Naaman. God rules over all nations, not only Israel (Daniel 4:17). Naaman did not know it yet.

"And the man was a mighty man of valor, leprous." The verse builds him up and then ends with one word that changes everything. Leprosy in the Bible covers a range of serious skin diseases, not only what we call Hansen's disease today. In Israel it made a person unclean, cut off from worship and from the community (Leviticus 13:45-46). For all his power, Naaman could not heal himself.

Every one of us has something like Naaman's "but." We may be gifted and respected, but we all have sin we cannot cure (Romans 3:23).

5:2-4 *And Syria had gone out **in** raiding bands, and they had taken captive from the land of Israel a young girl, and she was before the wife of Naaman. And she said to her mistress, "Oh that my master **were** before the prophet who **is** in Samaria! Then he would recover him from his leprosy." And he went in and told his master, saying, "Like this and like this the girl who **is** from the land of Israel spoke."*

Syrian raiders had "taken captive from the land of Israel a young girl," and she became a servant to Naaman's wife. We never learn her name. She had been torn from her home and family. She had every reason to be bitter, and she could have been glad to see her master suffer.

Instead she said, "Oh that my master were before the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would recover him from his leprosy." She believed God could heal, and she cared enough about her enemy to say so. Naaman told the king what "the girl who is from the land of Israel" had said.

God used a nameless slave girl to bring a great general to Himself. You never know how God may use a few words of faith spoken in a hard place. Peter tells us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15).

5:5-7 *And the king of Syria said, "Go, go in, and let me send a letter to the king of Israel." And he went and took in his hand approximately 750 pounds (ten talents) of silver and approximately 150 pounds (six thousand **shekels**) of gold and ten changes of garments. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now, when this letter comes to you, look, I have sent to you Naaman my servant, and you shall recover him from his leprosy." And it was, when the king of Israel read the letter, and he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this **man** is sending to me to recover a man from his leprosy? For surely know, please, and see that he is seeking an occasion against me."*

The king of Syria sent Naaman with a letter to the king of Israel, along with ten talents of silver (about 750 pounds), six thousand shekels of gold (about 150 pounds), and ten sets of clothing. It was a king's ransom. Naaman thought healing could be bought, and he went to the palace, not the prophet.

The letter said, "you shall recover him from his leprosy." The king of Israel, most likely Joram, "tore his clothes" and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" He thought Syria was picking a fight. He did not even think of Elisha. The king of Israel had less faith than the captive girl.

5:8-10 *And it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, and he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come, please, to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." And Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and he stood at the entrance of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall return to you, and be clean."*

Elisha heard and sent word: "Let him come, please, to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." That was the point. God would show this foreign general who the true God was.

Naaman pulled up "with his horses and with his chariot" at Elisha's door. All that power and wealth stood waiting. And Elisha did not come out. He "sent a messenger to him." The message was simple: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan." The promise was plain: "your flesh shall return to you, and be clean."

Why did Elisha not come out? Naaman needed to learn that the healing was not from a prophet's show or his own importance. It was from God, received by simple faith and obedience.

5:11-12 *And Naaman was angry and went, and he said, "Look, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leprous **one**.' Are not Amana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" And he turned and went in a rage.*

"And Naaman was angry." He had a picture in his mind of how it would go: Elisha would "come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place." He wanted a ceremony fit for a great man.

And why the Jordan? "Are not Amana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" The rivers near Damascus were clear and cold, coming down from the mountains. The Jordan was muddy. "And he turned and went in a rage."

Naaman's pride almost kept him from healing. Many people stumble over the gospel the same way. It is too simple. They want to do something great, pay something, earn something. But God's way is humbling: come as you are and trust Him.

5:13-14 *And his servants drew near and spoke to him and said, "My father, **if** the prophet had spoken a great thing to you, would you not do **it**? And how much more when he has said to you, 'Wash and be clean'?" And he went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh returned like the flesh of a young lad, and he was clean.*

His servants came to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had spoken a great thing to you, would you not do it? And how much more when he has said to you, 'Wash and be clean'?" Once again, servants with no names give wise advice. If Elisha had asked for something hard, Naaman would have done it gladly. Why not something easy?

"And he went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God." Seven times, no less. Perhaps nothing happened after the first or the fifth. He had to keep obeying. "And his flesh returned like the flesh of a young lad, and he was clean."

The power was not in the water. It was in God's word, received by faith. Paul says salvation is "not from works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:9). Naaman went down proud and came up clean, with skin like a child. Jesus said that unless we turn and become like little children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).

5:15-16 *And he went back to the man of God, he and all his camp, and he came and stood before him, and he said, "Look, please, I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. And now, please accept a blessing from your servant." And he said, "**As** the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will not accept **it**." And he urged him to accept **it**, and he refused.*

Naaman went back to Elisha, "he and all his camp." This time he did not wait in his chariot. He "stood before him." And he confessed, "Look, please, I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel." That is a confession of faith. The Syrian general now knew the LORD as the only true God.

He offered Elisha "a blessing," which here means a gift. Elisha answered, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will not accept it." Naaman urged him, and he still refused. Why? Because Naaman must know that God's grace is free. It cannot be bought, and God's servant would not let anyone think it could. Jesus told His disciples, "freely you received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Jesus pointed to this moment in His first sermon at Nazareth. He said "many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). The people of His hometown were so angry they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29). Why? Because Jesus was saying that God's grace was reaching past proud insiders to humble outsiders, even to an enemy general. It still does. Salvation is offered to anyone, of any nation, who will come to God on His terms.

5:17-19 *And Naaman said, "And if not, please let there be given to your servant a load of a pair of mules **of** soil; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering and sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. In this matter may the LORD forgive your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to bow down there, and he is leaning on my hand, and I bow down **in** the house of Rimmon, when I bow down **in** the house of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant in this matter." And he said to him, "Go in peace." And he went from him some distance of land.*

Naaman asked for "a load of a pair of mules of soil" to take home. In his world, people thought each god belonged to his own land. Naaman wanted to worship the LORD on Israel's soil, even in Syria. His understanding was still young, but his heart was right: "your servant will no longer offer burnt offering and sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD."

Then he asked about one thing that troubled his conscience. His master, the king, worshiped in "the house of Rimmon," the temple of Syria's storm god. Naaman's duty was to give the king his arm, and when the king bowed, Naaman had to bow too. He asked, "may the LORD forgive your servant in this matter."

Elisha said, "Go in peace." He did not give a long lecture. He did not approve of idol worship, and Naaman was not asking to worship Rimmon. He was asking God's mercy for an outward duty he

could not escape. Elisha left him in God's hands to grow. Bible teachers have long discussed this verse, and it is wise not to build a rule on it. What is clear is that Naaman's heart now belonged to the LORD alone, and that new believers need patience and grace as they learn.

5:20-24 *And Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Aramean from accepting from his hand what he brought. **As** the LORD lives, surely I will run after him and accept something from him." And Gehazi pursued after Naaman. And Naaman saw **one** running after him, and he got down from the chariot to meet him, and he said, "Is it peace?" And he said, "Peace. My master has sent me, saying, 'Look, just now two young men from the hill country of Ephraim, of the sons of the prophets, have come to me. Please give them approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of silver and two changes of garments.'" And Naaman said, "Be willing, take approximately 150 pounds (two talents)." And he urged him, and he bound approximately 150 pounds (two talents) of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and he gave **them** to two of his servants, and they carried **them** before him. And he came to the Ophel, and he took **them** from their hand and deposited **them** in the house; and he sent the men away, and they went.*

Now the story turns. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, thought his master had been foolish. "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Aramean." Notice the contempt. To Gehazi, Naaman was still just a foreigner and an enemy. "As the LORD lives, surely I will run after him and accept something from him." He used the LORD's name to swear an oath to do something greedy.

He ran after Naaman, who got down from his chariot to meet him. That was humility and respect from a man who had just been healed. Gehazi lied: two young prophets had arrived, and Elisha asked for a talent of silver (about 75 pounds) and two sets of clothes. Naaman gladly gave him two talents and sent two servants to carry them. Near the hill where Elisha lived, Gehazi took the bags and hid them in the house.

Gehazi had seen every miracle. He had been with Elisha at Shunem and at Gilgal. And still his heart was set on money. Being close to God's work is not the same as having a heart for God. Judas walked with Jesus and stole from the money bag (John 12:6).

5:25-27 *And he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, "From where **have you come**, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant has not gone here or there." And he said to him, "Did my heart not go **with you** when a man turned from on his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to accept the silver and to accept clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and cattle and male servants and maidservants? And the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your offspring forever." And he went out from before him leprous like snow.*

Gehazi went in and stood before Elisha as if nothing had happened. "From where have you come, Gehazi?" He said, "Your servant has not gone here or there." A second lie.

Elisha said, "Did my heart not go with you when a man turned from on his chariot to meet you?" God had shown him everything. "Is it a time to accept the silver and to accept clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and cattle and male servants and maidservants?" Gehazi may

have been dreaming of what he would buy. And he had made it look as if God's grace had a price, undoing the very lesson Elisha had taught.

"And the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your offspring forever." Gehazi "went out from before him leprous like snow." The foreigner who humbled himself went home clean. The Israelite insider who served himself went out unclean.

That is a sobering end. Sin can hide for a while, but Moses warned, "know your sin, that it will find you" (Numbers 32:23). We will meet Gehazi again in 8:4-5, talking with the king about Elisha's miracles.

Chapter 5 Summary

Naaman, commander of the army of Syria, was a great and mighty man, but he had leprosy. A young Israelite girl, captive in his house, told his wife that the prophet in Samaria could heal him. The king of Syria sent Naaman to the king of Israel with silver, gold, clothing and a letter, and the king of Israel tore his clothes in fear. Elisha sent for Naaman, but did not come out to him. He sent word to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman was angry, but his servants persuaded him, and when he dipped seven times his flesh became like a young boy's and he was clean. Naaman returned and confessed that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Elisha refused his gift. Naaman took soil to worship the LORD in Syria and asked pardon for bowing beside his king in the house of Rimmon, and Elisha said, "Go in peace." Gehazi ran after Naaman, lied to get silver and clothing, hid it, and lied to Elisha, and Naaman's leprosy came on Gehazi.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What did the writer say about Naaman before he mentioned his leprosy, and who had given Syria victory through him? (5:1)

2. How did the captive girl respond to her master's need? (5:2-3)

3. How did the king of Israel react to the letter, and how did Elisha? (5:7-8)

4. Why was Naaman angry, and what changed his mind? (5:11-14)

5. What did Naaman confess after he was healed? (5:15)

6. Why did Elisha refuse Naaman's gift? (5:16; Matthew 10:8)

7. What did Gehazi do, and what did it cost him? (5:20-27)

8. Jesus mentioned Naaman in Luke 4:27. What point was He making about God's grace to outsiders?

9. Naaman almost missed his healing because the answer was too simple and too humbling. Is there pride in you that resists God's simple way?

10. The captive girl spoke a word of faith in a hard place. Who in your life needs to hear about the God who heals and saves?

Chapter 6: The Floating Axe Head, the Blinded Army, and the Siege of Samaria

Scripture

6:1-7 And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look, please, the place where we are dwelling before you is too narrow for us. Please let us go to the Jordan, and let us take from there each one beam, and let us make for ourselves a place there to dwell there." And he said, "Go." And the one said, "Be willing, please, and go with your servants." And he said, "I, I will go." And he went with them, and they came to the Jordan, and they cut down the trees. And it was, the one ***was*** felling the beam, and the iron fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, my lord! And it was borrowed!" And the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place; and he cut off a stick and threw ***it*** there, and he made the iron float. And he said, "Take ***it*** up for yourself." And he stretched out his hand and took it.

6:8-23 And the king of Syria was fighting against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, "At such and such a place ***will be*** my camp." And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Take care not to pass by this place, for Syria ***is*** going down there." And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God had told him; and he warned him, and he was on guard there, not once and not twice. And the heart of the king of Syria was enraged over this matter; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not tell me who of those who ***are*** ours ***is*** for the king of Israel?" And one of his servants said, "No, my lord the king; for Elisha the prophet who ***is*** in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in the chamber of your bed." And he said, "Go and see where he ***is***, that I may send and take him." And it was told to him, saying, "Look, ***he is*** in Dothan." And he sent there horses and chariotry and a heavy army; and they came by night and surrounded the city. And the attendant of the man of God rose early to arise, and he went out, and look, an army ***was*** surrounding the city, and horse and chariotry. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my lord! How shall we do?" And he said, "Do not be afraid, for more ***are*** those who ***are*** with us than those who ***are*** with them." And Elisha prayed and said, "LORD, please open his eyes, that he may see." And the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; and look, the mountain ***was*** full of horses and chariotry of fire all around Elisha. And they came down to him, and Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Please strike this nation with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, "This ***is*** not the way, and this ***is*** not the city. Come after me, and let me lead you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. And it was, when they came ***to*** Samaria, and Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these ***men***, that they may see." And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and look, ***they were*** in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said to Elisha when he saw them, "Shall I strike ***them*** down? Shall I strike ***them*** down, my father?" And he said, "You shall not strike ***them*** down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." And he prepared for them a great feast, and they ate and drank; and he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the raiding bands of Syria did not again come into the land of Israel.

6:24-33 And it was after this, and Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his camp, and he went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria; and look, they ***were*** besieging it, until the head of a donkey was ***sold*** for approximately 2 pounds (eighty ***shekels***) of silver, and approximately 1/3 quart (a fourth of a kab) of doves' dung for approximately 2 ounces (five ***shekels***) of silver. And the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, and a woman cried out to him, saying, "Save, my lord the king!" And he said, "***If*** the LORD does not save you, from where shall I save you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" And the king said to her, "What ***is the matter*** with you?" And she said, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and my son we will eat tomorrow.' And we cooked my son and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; and she has hidden her son." And it was, when the king heard the words of the woman, and he tore his clothes; and he ***was*** passing by on the wall, and the people saw, and look, the sackcloth ***was*** on his flesh underneath. And he said, "Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!" And Elisha ***was*** sitting in his house, and the elders ***were*** sitting with him. And ***the king*** sent a man from before him. Before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see that this son of a murderer has sent to remove my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and press him back with the door. Is not the sound of the feet of his master behind him?" He ***was*** still speaking with them, and look, the messenger ***was*** coming down to him. And he said, "Look, this evil ***is*** from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

Chapter 6 Preview

This chapter moves from a small kindness to a great deliverance to a terrible siege. First, a young prophet loses a borrowed axe head in the Jordan, and God makes the iron float. Then the king of Syria keeps setting ambushes for Israel, and Elisha keeps warning Israel's king where they are. The Syrians send an army by night to capture Elisha at Dothan. His servant panics, but Elisha prays for his eyes to be opened, and he sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire. God strikes the Syrians blind, Elisha leads them into Samaria, and instead of killing them he has them fed and sent home.

Then the mood turns dark. Ben-hadad besieges Samaria, and the famine inside grows so terrible that two mothers agree to eat their own children. The king hears it, tears his clothes, and swears to kill Elisha. This is one of the hardest scenes in the Bible, and I handle it briefly. It shows what happens to a nation that turns from God, just as the Law had warned, and it sets up the great rescue of chapter 7.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-3 *And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look, please, the place where we are dwelling before you is too narrow for us. Please let us go to the Jordan, and let us take from there each one beam, and let us make for ourselves a place there to dwell there." And he said, "Go." And the one said, "Be willing, please, and go with your servants." And he said, "I, I will go."*

The sons of the prophets said, "the place where we are dwelling before you is too narrow for us." The group was growing. Even in a dark time in Israel, God was raising up people who wanted to learn His word. They asked to go to the Jordan, where trees grew thick along the banks, and each cut a beam to build a bigger place.

Elisha said, "Go." One of them asked Elisha to come along, and he said, "I, I will go." Elisha was not too important to go on a work trip with his students. Good leaders stay close to the people they serve.

6:4-7 *And he went with them, and they came to the Jordan, and they cut down the trees. And it was, the one **was** felling the beam, and the iron fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, my lord! And it was borrowed!" And the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place; and he cut off a stick and threw **it** there, and he made the iron float. And he said, "Take **it** up for yourself." And he stretched out his hand and took it.*

While one man was cutting, "the iron fell into the water." He cried, "Alas, my lord! And it was borrowed!" Iron tools were costly in those days. A poor prophet could not easily replace it, and he may have had to work off the debt. He was worried about what he owed someone else.

"Where did it fall?" Elisha cut a stick, threw it in at that spot, "and he made the iron float." Iron does not float. God made it float. "Take it up for yourself," and the man reached out and took it.

Why would God do a miracle over a lost axe head? Because He cares about small things. This was not a matter of life and death. It was one man's honest worry over a borrowed tool. Peter tells us to cast all our anxiety on Him, "because He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7). Nothing that worries you is too small to bring to God.

6:8-10 *And the king of Syria was fighting against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, "At such and such a place **will be** my camp." And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Take care not to pass by this place, for Syria **is** going down there." And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God had told him; and he warned him, and he was on guard there, not once and not twice.*

"And the king of Syria was fighting against Israel." This was a time of raids and ambushes along the border. The king of Syria would plan with his officers: "At such and such a place will be my camp." And every time, "the man of God sent to the king of Israel" with a warning: "Take care not to pass by this place." The king of Israel checked, and it was true. This happened "not once and not twice," which means many times.

God knows every plan made against His people. He told Elisha what was said in the war councils of Damascus.

6:11-14 *And the heart of the king of Syria was enraged over this matter; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not tell me who of those who **are** ours **is** for the king of Israel?" And one of his servants said, "No, my lord the king; for Elisha the prophet who **is** in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in the chamber of your bed." And he said, "Go and see where he **is**, that I may send and take him." And it was told to him, saying, "Look, **he is** in Dothan." And he sent there horses and chariotry and a heavy army; and they came by night and surrounded the city.*

The king of Syria was furious. He thought he had a traitor. "Will you not tell me who of those who are ours is for the king of Israel?" One officer said, "Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in the chamber of your bed." Even in his bedroom, the king had no secrets from God.

His answer was foolish: "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." He planned to capture a man who knew all his plans! Elisha was "in Dothan," a town about ten miles north of Samaria. The king sent "horses and chariotry and a heavy army," and they "came by night and surrounded the city." All that for one prophet.

6:15-17 *And the attendant of the man of God rose early to arise, and he went out, and look, an army **was** surrounding the city, and horse and chariotry. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my lord! How shall we do?" And he said, "Do not be afraid, for more **are** those who **are** with us than those who **are** with them." And Elisha prayed and said, "LORD, please open his eyes, that he may see." And the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; and look, the mountain **was** full of horses and chariotry of fire all around Elisha.*

Elisha's servant got up early, went out, and saw the army all around the city. "Alas, my lord! How shall we do?" We have all felt that kind of fear.

Elisha said, "Do not be afraid, for more are those who are with us than those who are with them." The servant could count the enemy. He could not see anyone on their side.

"LORD, please open his eyes, that he may see." Elisha did not pray for the army to go away. He prayed for his servant to see what was already there. "And look, the mountain was full of horses and chariotry of fire all around Elisha." The armies of heaven were there the whole time.

This is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. The danger we see is real, but it is never the whole picture. God's angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth for service for the sake of those who are about to inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). John says, "greater is the One in you than the one in the world" (1 John 4:4). When you are afraid, ask God to open your eyes to what faith knows is true.

6:18-20 *And they came down to him, and Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Please strike this nation with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, "This **is** not the way, and this **is** not the city. Come after me, and let me lead you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. And it was, when they came **to** Samaria, and Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these **men**, that they may see." And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and look, **they were** in the midst of Samaria.*

As the Syrians came down, Elisha prayed again: "Please strike this nation with blindness." God did. The word may mean a kind of confusion or dazzling, so that they could not recognize where they were, more than total loss of sight. Then Elisha said, "This is not the way, and this is not the city. Come after me, and let me lead you to the man whom you seek." That was true enough. He was the man, and he did lead them to him, only not where they expected. He "led them to Samaria," Israel's capital, about ten miles away.

Inside the city, Elisha prayed a third time: "LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." They looked around and found themselves in the middle of Samaria, surrounded by Israel's army. The hunters had become the captives.

6:21-23 *And the king of Israel said to Elisha when he saw them, "Shall I strike **them** down? Shall I strike **them** down, my father?" And he said, "You shall not strike **them** down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." And he prepared for them a great feast, and they ate and drank; and he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the raiding bands of Syria did not again come into the land of Israel.*

The king of Israel was eager: "Shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down, my father?" He called Elisha his father, showing respect, and he wanted permission to kill them.

Elisha said, "You shall not strike them down." You would not kill prisoners taken in battle, so why kill these? "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." The king threw them "a great feast" and sent them home.

That is grace to enemies. Solomon wrote that if one who hates you is hungry, you should give him bread to eat (Proverbs 25:21), and Paul quotes it (Romans 12:20). Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). And it worked: "the raiding bands of Syria did not again come into the land of Israel." Kindness did what swords could not. Those soldiers went home with a story about the God of Israel.

6:24-25 *And it was after this, and Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his camp, and he went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria; and look, they **were** besieging it, until the head of a donkey was **sold** for approximately 2 pounds (eighty **shekels**) of silver, and approximately 1/3 quart (a fourth of a kab) of doves' dung for approximately 2 ounces (five **shekels**) of silver.*

"And it was after this" means some time later. The raids had stopped, but now "Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his camp" and besieged Samaria in a full war. Ben-hadad was a royal name in Damascus. This is likely the same Ben-hadad who fought Ahab (1 Kings 20).

A siege meant surrounding a city so that no food could get in. Soon "there was a great famine in Samaria." The writer gives the prices to show how bad it was. "The head of a donkey" sold for "eighty shekels) of silver," about two pounds of silver. A donkey was unclean food under the Law (Leviticus 11:2-7), and the head was the worst part. A small measure of "doves' dung," less than half a quart, sold for five shekels. It may have been used for fuel or eaten in desperation, or it may be a common name for a kind of wild seed or bulb. Either way, people were paying a fortune for things no one would normally touch.

6:26-29 *And the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, and a woman cried out to him, saying, "Save, my lord the king!" And he said, "**If** the LORD does not save you, from where shall I save you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" And the king said to her, "What **is the matter** with you?" And she said, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and my son we will eat tomorrow.' And we cooked my son and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; and she has hidden her son."*

The king was walking on the city wall, inspecting the defenses, when "a woman cried out to him." She said, "Save, my lord the king!" He answered bitterly, "If the LORD does not save you, from where shall I save you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" There was no grain on the threshing floor and no wine in the press. He had nothing to give.

Then he asked what was wrong, and she told him. She and another woman had agreed to eat their sons, one on one day and one the next. They had done it with her son, and now the other woman had hidden hers.

This is a horror, and I will not linger on it. Why is it in the Bible? Because God had warned Israel that this would happen if they turned away from Him. In the Law, Moses said that in a siege of judgment, the people would eat the flesh of their own sons and daughters (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57). This was not God being cruel. It was the curse of the covenant they had broken coming true, exactly as He said. Israel had refused the LORD for generations, and when He removed His protection, what was left was this.

Notice that the woman was not asking the king for justice for her dead child. She was upset that the other woman had not kept her side of the bargain. That shows how far a people can fall when God is pushed out. Sin does not only hurt us. It hardens us. Jeremiah would see the same thing in the fall of Jerusalem (Lamentations 4:10).

If you lead a group, this passage may be painful for some, especially parents and anyone who has lost a child. Read it with care. God never wanted this for His people. He sent prophet after prophet to call them back (17:13).

6:30-31 *And it was, when the king heard the words of the woman, and he tore his clothes; and he **was** passing by on the wall, and the people saw, and look, the sackcloth **was** on his flesh underneath. And he said, "Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!"*

When the king heard her, "he tore his clothes," and as he walked along the wall, the people saw "the sackcloth was on his flesh underneath." Sackcloth was rough cloth worn to show grief or repentance. The king had been wearing it in secret.

But his next words show what was really in his heart. "Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!" That was an oath to kill the prophet. He blamed Elisha for the siege. Perhaps Elisha had told him to hold out and trust God, and he was tired of waiting. Sackcloth on the outside did not mean a changed heart on the inside. Real repentance turns to God. It does not turn on God's messenger.

6:32-33 *And Elisha **was** sitting in his house, and the elders **were** sitting with him. And **the king** sent a man from before him. Before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see that this son of a murderer has sent to remove my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and press him back with the door. Is not the sound of the feet of his master behind him?" He **was** still speaking with them, and look, the messenger **was** coming down to him. And he said, "Look, this evil **is** from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"*

Elisha was "sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him." The leaders of the city had come to him. God showed Elisha that the king had sent a man to cut off his head, and he told the elders, "Do you see that this son of a murderer has sent to remove my head?" The king was the son of Ahab, who had murdered Naboth (1 Kings 21). He told them to hold the door shut, because the king himself was coming right behind the messenger.

The messenger arrived, and with him the king's words: "Look, this evil is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" The king knew the siege was God's judgment. But instead of repenting, he gave up on God.

Have you ever felt that way, asking why you should keep waiting on God? That is the moment to hold on, not let go. The king did not know it, but deliverance was one day away. Chapter 7 begins with Elisha's answer.

Chapter 6 Summary

The sons of the prophets went to the Jordan to cut beams for a larger dwelling, and when a borrowed axe head fell into the water, Elisha threw in a stick and made the iron float. Elisha kept warning the king of Israel about Syria's ambushes, and when the king of Syria learned it, he sent an army by night to Dothan to seize him. Elisha's servant was afraid, but Elisha prayed, and the

LORD opened his eyes to see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. God struck the Syrians with blindness, and Elisha led them into Samaria, where their eyes were opened. Elisha told the king not to kill them but to feed them, and after a great feast they went home, and the raids stopped. Later Ben-hadad besieged Samaria, and the famine became so terrible that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels and two mothers agreed to eat their sons. The king tore his clothes, showing sackcloth underneath, and swore to kill Elisha. He sent a messenger, saying that the evil was from the LORD and asking why he should wait for the LORD any longer.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Why was the young prophet so upset when the axe head fell into the water, and what did God do? (6:5-7)

2. How did the king of Israel keep escaping Syria's ambushes? (6:8-12)

3. What did Elisha's servant see the first time he looked, and what did he see after Elisha prayed? (6:15-17)

4. How did Elisha treat the Syrian soldiers once they were captured, and what was the result? (6:21-23; Romans 12:20)

5. How bad was the famine in Samaria, and what had God warned in the Law about such a time? (6:25-29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57)

6. What did the king's sackcloth show, and what did his oath against Elisha show? (6:30-31)

7. What did the king mean when he said, "Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" (6:33)

8. God cared about a lost axe head. What small worry do you need to bring to Him today? (1 Peter 5:7)

9. When you are afraid, what helps you see that "more are those who are with us than those who are with them"? (6:16)

10. Is there an enemy or someone who has hurt you whom God may be asking you to treat with kindness, as Elisha did the Syrians?

Chapter 7: The Siege Lifted

Scripture

7:1-11 And Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the LORD: 'About this time tomorrow approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour ***will be*** for a shekel, and approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'" And the officer who ***belonged*** to the king, on whose hand he leaned, answered the man of God and said, "Look, ***if*** the LORD ***were*** making windows in the heavens, could this thing be?" And he said, "Look, you will see ***it*** with your eyes, and from there you will not eat." And four men were leprous ***at*** the entrance of the gate; and they said each to his neighbor, "Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, 'We will enter the city,' and the famine ***is*** in the city, and we will die there; and if we sit here, we will die. And now, come, and let us fall over to the camp of Syria. If they let us live, we will live; and if they put us to death, we will die." And they arose in the twilight to go to the camp of Syria; and they came to the edge of the camp of Syria, and look, there was not a man there. And the Lord had caused the camp of Syria to hear a sound of chariotry, a sound of horses, a sound of a great army; and they said each to his brother, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us." And they arose and fled in the twilight, and they abandoned their tents and their horses and their donkeys, the camp just as it ***was***, and they fled for their life. And these lepers came to the edge of the camp, and they went into one tent and ate and drank, and they carried off from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid ***them***; and they returned and went into another tent and carried off from there, and went and hid ***them***. And they said each to his neighbor, "We are not doing right. This day ***is*** a day of good news, and we are keeping silent. If we wait until the light of the morning, iniquity will find us. And now, come, and let us go and tell the house of the king." And they came and called to the gatekeeper of the city, and they told them, saying, "We came to the camp of Syria, and look, there was not a man there, or the sound of mankind, but the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they ***were***." And he called the gatekeepers, and they told ***it*** to the house of the king within.

7:12-20 And the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "Let me tell you, please, what Syria has done to us. They know that we ***are*** hungry, and they have gone out from the camp to hide in the field, saying, 'When they come out from the city, we will seize them alive, and we will go into the city.'" And one of his servants answered and said, "Please let ***some*** take five of the remaining horses that are left in it; look, they ***are*** like all the multitude of Israel that are left in it; look, they ***are*** like all the multitude of Israel that have come to an end; and let us send and see." And they took two chariots ***with*** horses, and the king sent ***them*** after the camp of Syria, saying, "Go and see." And they went after them to the Jordan, and look, all the way ***was*** full of clothes and equipment which Syria had thrown away in their haste. And the messengers returned and told the king. And the people went out and plundered the camp of Syria. And ***there*** was approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour for a shekel and approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. And the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned over the gate; and the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had spoken, who spoke when the king came down to him. And it was, as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, and

approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour for a shekel, will be about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria," and the officer had answered the man of God and said, "And look, ***if*** the LORD ***were*** making windows in the heavens, could ***it*** be according to this word?" And he said, "Look, you will see ***it*** with your eyes, and from there you will not eat." And it happened to him so; and the people trampled him in the gate, and he died.

Chapter 7 Preview

The king has just given up on God, and Elisha answers with the word of the LORD: by this time tomorrow, food will be cheap in the gate of Samaria. The king's officer laughs at the idea, and Elisha tells him he will see it but not eat it. That night God makes the Syrian army hear the sound of a huge army coming, and they run for their lives, leaving everything behind.

The first to find out are four men with leprosy, sitting outside the gate with nothing to lose. They eat, drink and hide treasure, then realize they cannot keep this good news to themselves. The king suspects a trap, but scouts find the road to the Jordan littered with what the Syrians threw away. The people pour out and plunder the camp, food sells at exactly the price Elisha said, and the officer who scoffed is trampled in the gate. God keeps His word, both His promise and His warning.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *And Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the LORD: 'About this time tomorrow approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour **will be** for a shekel, and approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'"*

"Hear the word of the LORD." The king had just asked why he should wait for the LORD any longer (6:33). This is God's answer. "About this time tomorrow" a seah of fine flour, about seven quarts, would sell for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, "in the gate of Samaria." The gate was the city's marketplace. Compare that with the donkey's head at eighty shekels (6:25). Overnight, famine prices would crash to ordinary prices.

God often brings His deliverance at the very moment His people have given up. When we come to the end of ourselves, we are right where He can show His power.

7:2 *And the officer who **belonged** to the king, on whose hand he leaned, answered the man of God and said, "Look, **if** the LORD **were** making windows in the heavens, could this thing be?" And he said, "Look, you will see **it** with your eyes, and from there you will not eat."*

The king's officer, the man "on whose hand he leaned," his right-hand man, scoffed. "Look, if the LORD were making windows in the heavens, could this thing be?" Windows in the heavens was a way of speaking about rain or blessing pouring from the sky (Genesis 7:11; Malachi 3:10). He meant that even if God opened heaven itself, it could not happen by tomorrow.

Elisha answered, "Look, you will see it with your eyes, and from there you will not eat." Unbelief has a cost. The officer would be there when the promise came true, but he would not share in it. Hebrews says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

7:3-4 *And four men were leprous **at** the entrance of the gate; and they said each to his neighbor, "Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, 'We will enter the city,' and the famine **is** in the city, and we will die there; and if we sit here, we will die. And now, come, and let us fall over to the camp of Syria. If they let us live, we will live; and if they put us to death, we will die."*

"And four men were leprous at the entrance of the gate." Lepers had to live outside the city (Leviticus 13:46), so they were cut off from what little food there was inside. They did the math. If they went into the city, they would starve. If they stayed where they were, they would starve. "And now, come, and let us fall over to the camp of Syria." To fall over meant to surrender. "If they let us live, we will live; and if they put us to death, we will die."

It was not faith. It was desperation. But God used the most unlikely people in Samaria, men nobody wanted near them, to find His deliverance first.

7:5-7 *And they arose in the twilight to go to the camp of Syria; and they came to the edge of the camp of Syria, and look, there was not a man there. And the Lord had caused the camp of Syria to hear a sound of chariotry, a sound of horses, a sound of a great army; and they said each to his brother, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us." And they arose and fled in the twilight, and they abandoned their tents and their horses and their donkeys, the camp just as it **was**, and they fled for their life.*

They went "in the twilight," as it grew dark, and when they reached the edge of the camp, "there was not a man there."

Here is why: "the Lord had caused the camp of Syria to hear a sound of chariotry, a sound of horses, a sound of a great army." The Syrians thought Israel had hired "the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt" against them. The Hittites here were kingdoms to the north in what is now Syria and Turkey. So the Syrians "arose and fled in the twilight," at about the same hour the lepers were setting out, leaving "their tents and their horses and their donkeys, the camp just as it was."

God did not need Israel's army. He did not even need real chariots. A sound was enough. In chapter 6, God opened eyes to see His chariots of fire. Here He opened Syrian ears to hear an army that frightened them away. The Lord fights for His people in ways they never imagine.

7:8 *And these lepers came to the edge of the camp, and they went into one tent and ate and drank, and they carried off from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid **them**; and they returned and went into another tent and carried off from there, and went and hid **them**.*

The lepers walked into one tent, "ate and drank," then carried off "silver and gold and clothes" and hid it. Then they went into another tent and did it again. Can you blame them? They had been starving, and suddenly they had more than they could carry.

7:9 *And they said each to his neighbor, "We are not doing right. This day **is** a day of good news, and we are keeping silent. If we wait until the light of the morning, iniquity will find us. And now, come, and let us go and tell the house of the king."*

Then their consciences caught up with them. "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent." Meanwhile, inside the walls, people were dying of hunger. "If we wait until the light of the morning, iniquity will find us." They knew it would be sin to keep the news to themselves. "And now, come, and let us go and tell the house of the king."

This is one of the clearest pictures in the Bible of what we who know Christ should do. We were outsiders with nothing, and God gave us everything in Jesus. We have found bread in a world that is starving. The good news, the gospel, is not ours to hide. Paul said he was under obligation to share it with everyone (Romans 1:14-16). Who around you is starving and doesn't know there is bread just outside the gate?

7:10-11 *And they came and called to the gatekeeper of the city, and they told them, saying, "We came to the camp of Syria, and look, there was not a man there, or the sound of mankind, but the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they **were**." And he called the gatekeepers, and they told **it** to the house of the king within.*

They called to the gatekeeper and told him exactly what they found: no one there, "but the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they were." The gatekeepers passed the word "to the house of the king within."

7:12 *And the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "Let me tell you, please, what Syria has done to us. They know that we **are** hungry, and they have gone out from the camp to hide in the field, saying, 'When they come out from the city, we will seize them alive, and we will go into the city.'"*

The king got up in the night and did not believe it. "They know that we are hungry, and they have gone out from the camp to hide in the field." He thought it was a trick to draw the people out so the Syrians could take the city. It was a reasonable military worry. But Elisha had said food would be cheap by tomorrow, and the king did not connect the two. He was still the man who had given up waiting on the LORD.

7:13-15 *And one of his servants answered and said, "Please let **some** take five of the remaining horses that are left in it; look, they **are** like all the multitude of Israel that are left in it; look, they **are** like all the multitude of Israel that have come to an end; and let us send and see." And they took two chariots **with** horses, and the king sent **them** after the camp of Syria, saying, "Go and see." And they went after them to the Jordan, and look, all the way **was** full of clothes and equipment which Syria had thrown away in their haste. And the messengers returned and told the king.*

One of his servants had a sensible idea. Take five of the horses that were left and send men to see. If they died, they were no worse off than everyone else in the city. The repeated words in the verse

sound like a tired man saying the same thing twice: the horses and their riders would share the fate of all Israel either way.

They sent two chariots after the Syrian camp. The scouts followed the trail "to the Jordan," about twenty-five miles east, "and look, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which Syria had thrown away in their haste." The Syrians had not set a trap. They had run so hard they threw away whatever slowed them down.

7:16 *And the people went out and plundered the camp of Syria. And **there** was approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour for a shekel and approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.*

"And the people went out and plundered the camp of Syria." The city that was starving at night was feasting by morning. A seah of fine flour sold for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel, "according to the word of the LORD." Not close to it. Exactly what God said.

7:17-20 *And the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned over the gate; and the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had spoken, who spoke when the king came down to him. And it was, as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Approximately 14 quarts (two seahs) of barley for a shekel, and approximately 7 quarts (a seah) of fine flour for a shekel, will be about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria," and the officer had answered the man of God and said, "And look, **if** the LORD **were** making windows in the heavens, could **it** be according to this word?" And he said, "Look, you will see **it** with your eyes, and from there you will not eat." And it happened to him so; and the people trampled him in the gate, and he died.*

The king had put his officer, the one who scoffed, in charge of the gate. Thousands of hungry people rushed through it, "and the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had spoken."

The writer slows down and repeats the whole exchange from verses 1 and 2 so that we cannot miss it. Elisha had promised the cheap food. The officer had mocked, saying even windows in heaven could not do it. Elisha had said, "you will see it with your eyes, and from there you will not eat." "And it happened to him so."

God's word came true twice in one day, in blessing for the people and in judgment for the scoffer. Both the promises and the warnings of God are sure. Peter warns that in the last days scoffers will come and mock the promise of Christ's coming (2 Peter 3:3-4). But the Lord is not slow about His promise. He will do just what He said.

Chapter 7 Summary

Elisha spoke the word of the LORD: by the next day, a seah of fine flour and two seahs of barley would each sell for a shekel in the gate of Samaria. The king's officer scoffed that it could not happen even if the LORD made windows in heaven, and Elisha said he would see it but not eat of it. Four lepers at the gate decided to surrender to the Syrians, and at twilight they found the camp

empty, because the Lord had made the Syrians hear the sound of a great army and they had fled. The lepers ate and hid plunder, then realized they must not keep silent on a day of good news, and they told the gatekeepers. The king feared a trap, but scouts followed a trail of thrown away clothing and equipment to the Jordan. The people plundered the camp, food sold at the very price the LORD had said, and the officer was trampled in the gate and died, just as the man of God had spoken.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What did Elisha promise would happen by the next day? (7:1)

2. How did the king's officer respond, and what did Elisha say would happen to him? (7:2)

3. Why did the four lepers decide to go to the Syrian camp? (7:3-4)

4. What made the Syrian army run away? (7:6-7)

5. What did the lepers realize after they had eaten and hidden treasure? (7:9)

6. Why did the king think the empty camp was a trap? (7:12)

7. How did God's word come true in both blessing and judgment that day? (7:16-20)

8. The officer saw the blessing but did not share in it. What does that teach about unbelief? (7:2, 19-20; Hebrews 11:6)

9. The lepers said, "This day is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent." Who in your life needs to hear the good news of Jesus from you? (7:9)

10. Is there a situation where you have given up waiting on God, like the king? What would it look like to trust Him one more day?

Chapter 8: The Shunammite's Land, Hazael, and the Kings of Judah

Scripture

8:1-15 And Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go, you and your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for the famine, and it will also come to the land seven years." And the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God; and she went, she and her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And it was at the end of seven years, and the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went out to cry out to the king for her house and for her field. And the king ***was*** speaking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Please recount to me all the great things that Elisha has done." And it was, he ***was*** recounting to the king how he had restored the dead to life, and look, the woman whose son he had restored to life ***was*** crying out to the king for her house and for her field. And Gehazi said, "My lord the king, this ***is*** the woman, and this ***is*** her son whom Elisha restored to life." And the king asked the woman, and she recounted ***it*** to him. And the king assigned to her a certain official, saying, "Restore all that ***was*** hers, and all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land until now." And Elisha came ***to*** Damascus, and Ben-hadad the king of Syria ***was*** sick; and it was told to him, saying, "The man of God has come here." And the king said to Hazael, "Take a gift in your hand, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD through him, saying, 'Will I live through this sickness?'" And Hazael went to meet him, and he took a gift in his hand, even every good thing of Damascus, the load of forty camels; and he came and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad the king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I live through this sickness?'" And Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You will surely live'; and the LORD has shown me that he will surely die." And he fixed his face and set ***it*** until ***he was*** ashamed; and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, "Why ***is*** my lord weeping?" And he said, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their fortresses you will send into fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their infants you will dash in pieces, and their pregnant women you will rip open." And Hazael said, "But what ***is*** your servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?" And Elisha said, "The LORD has shown me you ***as*** king over Syria." And he went from Elisha and came to his master, and he said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he said, "He said to me, 'You will surely live.'" And it was on the next day, and he took the coverlet and dipped ***it*** in water and spread ***it*** over his face, and he died. And Hazael reigned in his place.

8:16-29 And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat ***was*** king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah became king. He was a son of thirty-two years when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, just as He had said to him to give him a lamp for his sons all the days. In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king over themselves. And Joram passed over to Zair, and all the chariotry with him. And it was, he arose by night and struck Edom, which was surrounding him, and the commanders of the chariotry; and

the people fled to their tents. And Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day. Then Libnah rebelled at that time. And the rest of the matters of Joram and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Joram lay down with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place. In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram the king of Judah became king. Ahaziah ***was*** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother ***was*** Athaliah the daughter of Omri the king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for he ***was*** a son-in-law of the house of Ahab. And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the battle against Hazael the king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans wounded Joram. And Joram the king returned to be healed in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael the king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram the king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, for he ***was*** sick.

Chapter 8 Preview

This chapter ties up threads and sets up what comes next. Elisha warns the woman of Shunem to leave the land before a seven-year famine. When she comes back, her house and field have been taken, and she goes to the king for help at the very moment Gehazi is telling him how Elisha raised her son. The king gives her back everything.

Then Elisha goes to Damascus, where Ben-hadad lies sick and sends his officer Hazael to ask if he will recover. Elisha stares at Hazael and weeps, because the LORD has shown him the evil Hazael will do to Israel as king. The next day Hazael kills Ben-hadad and takes the throne. The chapter ends in Judah, where two kings in a row walk in the ways of Ahab's house, because they married into it. Only God's promise to David keeps Judah from being destroyed.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-2 *And Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go, you and your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for the famine, and it will also come to the land seven years." And the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God; and she went, she and her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.*

Elisha spoke to "the woman whose son he had restored to life," the Shunammite of chapter 4. "Arise and go, you and your household," because "the LORD has called for the famine, and it will also come to the land seven years." This may have happened before the events of chapters 5 to 7, since the writer arranges the Elisha stories by subject more than by date.

Notice that the famine came because "the LORD has called for" it. Famine was one of the warnings God had promised for a people who turned from Him (Deuteronomy 28:23-24). But God cared for this faithful woman and warned her ahead of time. She obeyed and went to "the land of

the Philistines" on the coast for seven years. That is a picture of how God cares for His own even in a time of judgment. He knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19).

8:3-6 *And it was at the end of seven years, and the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went out to cry out to the king for her house and for her field. And the king **was** speaking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Please recount to me all the great things that Elisha has done." And it was, he **was** recounting to the king how he had restored the dead to life, and look, the woman whose son he had restored to life **was** crying out to the king for her house and for her field. And Gehazi said, "My lord the king, this **is** the woman, and this **is** her son whom Elisha restored to life." And the king asked the woman, and she recounted **it** to him. And the king assigned to her a certain official, saying, "Restore all that **was** hers, and all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land until now."*

After seven years she came back and went "to cry out to the king for her house and for her field." While she was gone, someone had taken them, maybe a neighbor or the crown itself.

At that moment the king was talking with Gehazi, who was telling him "all the great things that Elisha has done." Gehazi was right in the middle of the story of the boy raised from the dead, "and look," in walked the woman and her son. Gehazi said, "My lord the king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life."

Was this luck? No. God had arranged the timing to the minute. The king heard her story from her own lips and appointed an official to restore "all that was hers, and all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land until now." She got back not only her land but seven years of its harvest.

We may wonder how Gehazi, now a leper (5:27), was talking to the king. Perhaps this happened before chapter 5, or perhaps the king met him outdoors at a distance. Scripture doesn't say. What we see is that God works through the right person at the right time to take care of those who trust Him (Romans 8:28).

8:7-9 *And Elisha came **to** Damascus, and Ben-hadad the king of Syria **was** sick; and it was told to him, saying, "The man of God has come here." And the king said to Hazael, "Take a gift in your hand, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD through him, saying, 'Will I live through this sickness?'" And Hazael went to meet him, and he took a gift in his hand, even every good thing of Damascus, the load of forty camels; and he came and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad the king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I live through this sickness?'"*

Elisha went to Damascus, the capital of Syria, the land of Israel's enemies. Ben-hadad was sick. When he heard "The man of God has come here," he sent Hazael, one of his top officials, with a gift to "inquire of the LORD through him." Ben-hadad had fought Israel for years and had sent an army to capture Elisha (6:13-14). Now he wanted to hear from the God of Israel. Hard times change how people see God's servants.

Hazael brought "every good thing of Damascus, the load of forty camels." It was a lavish gift. He stood before Elisha and said, "Your son Ben-hadad the king of Syria has sent me to you." That was the polite language of a servant to a father.

Years earlier, God had told Elijah at Mount Horeb to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15). Elijah never did it in person. Now Elijah's successor finishes the task.

8:10-11 *And Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You will surely live'; and the LORD has shown me that he will surely die." And he fixed his face and set **it** until **he was** ashamed; and the man of God wept.*

"Go, say to him, 'You will surely live'; and the LORD has shown me that he will surely die." How can both be true? The sickness would not kill Ben-hadad. He would recover from it. But he would still die, by another cause. Elisha told Hazael the truth on both counts.

Then Elisha "fixed his face" on Hazael and stared at him "until he was ashamed." Hazael felt that the prophet saw right into him. "And the man of God wept."

8:12-13 *And Hazael said, "Why **is** my lord weeping?" And he said, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their fortresses you will send into fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their infants you will dash in pieces, and their pregnant women you will rip open." And Hazael said, "But what **is** your servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?" And Elisha said, "The LORD has shown me you **as** king over Syria."*

"Why is my lord weeping?" Elisha answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel." He described the cruelty of war in that age: fortresses burned, young men killed, and violence against children and pregnant women. I will not dwell on those words. They are the kinds of horrors armies of that time did, and they would fall on Israel. We see some of this fulfilled in 10:32-33 and 13:3, 7.

Elisha wept because he loved his people. God's prophets did not deliver judgment with dry eyes. Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He foresaw its destruction (Luke 19:41-44).

Hazael said, "But what is your servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?" Was that humble surprise or false modesty? Elisha answered plainly, "The LORD has shown me you as king over Syria." God was not making Hazael do evil. God knew what was in Hazael's heart, and He would use even this cruel man as a rod to discipline Israel for its sins (Isaiah 10:5).

8:14-15 *And he went from Elisha and came to his master, and he said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he said, "He said to me, 'You will surely live.'" And it was on the next day, and he took the coverlet and dipped **it** in water and spread **it** over his face, and he died. And Hazael reigned in his place.*

Hazael went back and told Ben-hadad only half of what Elisha said: "He said to me, 'You will surely live.'" He left out the rest.

"And it was on the next day, and he took the coverlet and dipped it in water and spread it over his face, and he died. And Hazael reigned in his place." A coverlet was a thick cloth. Most Bible teachers believe Hazael smothered the sick king with a wet cloth and took his throne. Some think the cloth was meant to cool a fever, and the king died anyway. The flow of the story, and Hazael's half truth, point to murder. Hazael ruled Syria from about 842 B.C. to the end of the century and was a constant scourge to Israel.

8:16-17 *And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat **was** king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah became king. He was a son of thirty-two years when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.*

Now the writer turns to Judah. Jehoram, son of the good king Jehoshaphat, "became king" in Jerusalem. He was thirty-two and reigned eight years. The writer dates his reign "in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel," and adds that "Jehoshaphat was king of Judah." That means Jehoram began to reign while his father was still alive, as a co-regent, sharing the throne (see 1:17). In the dates I use in this study, Jehoram reigned with his father from about 853 B.C. and alone from about 848 to 841 B.C. 2 Chronicles 21 tells his reign in more detail.

8:18-19 *And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, just as He had said to him to give him a lamp for his sons all the days.*

"And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife." His wife was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and probably Jezebel. Jehoshaphat had made peace with Ahab and sealed it with this marriage (2 Chronicles 18:1). The good father's alliance became the son's ruin. Chronicles adds that when Jehoram took the throne he killed all his brothers (2 Chronicles 21:4). Marriage is a covenant that shapes a family for generations. That is why God told His people not to marry those who would turn their hearts from Him (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

"And the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, just as He had said to him to give him a lamp for his sons all the days." The lamp means a light that keeps burning, a living descendant on David's throne. God had promised David that his house and kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). No matter how bad a king of Judah was, God would not let David's line go out. That promise leads straight to Jesus, the Son of David, whose kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32-33).

8:20-22 *In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king over themselves. And Joram passed over to Zair, and all the chariotry with him. And it was, he arose by night and struck Edom, which was surrounding him, and the commanders of the chariotry; and the people fled to their tents. And Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day. Then Libnah rebelled at that time.*

"In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king over themselves." Edom, south and east of the Dead Sea, had been under Judah since David (2 Samuel 8:14). Back in

chapter 3 Edom was still a junior partner. Now it broke away. Isaac had told Esau, the father of Edom, that one day he would break his brother's yoke from his neck (Genesis 27:40), and so it happened.

"Joram passed over to Zair." Here the writer uses the short form of the name, Joram, for Jehoram of Judah. His army was surrounded by the Edomites, and he broke out by night, but his soldiers fled home. Edom stayed free "until this day." Libnah, a town on Judah's western border, also rebelled. Jehoram's kingdom was shrinking, and Chronicles explains why: "because he had forsaken the LORD" is the reason it gives for Libnah's revolt (2 Chronicles 21:10).

8:23-24 *And the rest of the matters of Joram and all that he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Joram lay down with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.*

Jehoram died and was buried "in the city of David," Jerusalem. Chronicles tells us he died of a terrible disease and that no one was sorry when he died (2 Chronicles 21:18-20). His son Ahaziah became king. That is two kings named Ahaziah in this book, one in Israel (chapter 1) and now one in Judah.

8:25-27 *In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram the king of Judah became king. Ahaziah **was** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother **was** Athaliah the daughter of Omri the king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for he **was** a son-in-law of the house of Ahab.*

Ahaziah of Judah became king "in the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab," about 841 B.C. He was twenty-two and "reigned one year in Jerusalem." 2 Chronicles 22:2 gives his age as forty-two in the Hebrew text. That cannot be right, since his father died at forty (8:17), so most scholars believe a copyist made an error in the number in Chronicles. Many English Bibles follow the twenty-two of Kings in both places.

"The name of his mother was Athaliah the daughter of Omri the king of Israel." Omri was Ahab's father, so daughter here means granddaughter, a female descendant. Athaliah was the power behind the throne. Chronicles says his mother was his counselor to do evil (2 Chronicles 22:3). Ahaziah "walked in the way of the house of Ahab," for he was "a son-in-law of the house of Ahab." Jezebel's influence had now reached into Jerusalem itself.

8:28-29 *And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the battle against Hazael the king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans wounded Joram. And Joram the king returned to be healed in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael the king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram the king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, for he **was** sick.*

Ahaziah joined his uncle Joram of Israel in battle against Hazael "at Ramoth-gilead," a fortress city east of the Jordan. This was where Ahab had died fighting Syria (1 Kings 22). Joram was

wounded and went back to Jezreel, the royal city in the valley, to recover. Ahaziah went down to visit him.

It looks like a family visit. But the next chapter shows that God was bringing both kings of the house of Ahab to the same place at the same time. Judgment was about to fall.

Chapter 8 Summary

Elisha warned the Shunammite woman of a seven-year famine, and she went to live in the land of the Philistines. When she returned and appealed to the king for her house and field, Gehazi was telling him how Elisha had raised her son, and the king restored all her property and its produce. Elisha went to Damascus, where the sick Ben-hadad sent Hazael with forty camel loads of gifts to ask whether he would recover. Elisha said he would recover from the sickness but would surely die, then stared at Hazael and wept, because the LORD had shown him the evil Hazael would do to Israel as king of Syria. The next day Hazael smothered Ben-hadad with a wet cloth and became king. In Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat reigned eight years and walked in the ways of Ahab's house, because he had married Ahab's daughter, but the LORD would not destroy Judah for David's sake. Edom and Libnah rebelled. Jehoram's son Ahaziah reigned one year and also followed the house of Ahab. He joined Joram of Israel against Hazael at Ramoth-gilead, and when Joram was wounded, Ahaziah went to visit him in Jezreel.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Why did Elisha tell the Shunammite woman to leave the land, and where did she go? (8:1-2)

2. How did God arrange the timing of her return to the king? (8:4-6)

3. What did Elisha tell Hazael about Ben-hadad's sickness, and how were both parts true? (8:10, 14-15)

4. Why did Elisha weep when he looked at Hazael? (8:11-12)

5. Why did Jehoram of Judah walk in the ways of the house of Ahab? (8:18)

6. Why did the LORD not destroy Judah, and how does that promise point to Jesus? (8:19; 2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:32-33)

7. How did Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab hurt his son and grandson? (8:18, 26-27)

8. Elisha wept over the judgment he saw coming. How should we feel about people who are far from God?

9. God took care of the Shunammite woman in a time of famine and restored what she lost. Where have you seen God's timing at work in your life?

10. The choices one generation makes, especially in marriage, shape the next. What choices are you making today that will help or hurt those who come after you?

Chapter 9: Jehu Anointed and the End of Joram and Jezebel

Scripture

9:1-13 And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, "Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go ***to*** Ramoth-gilead. And you shall go in there, and look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi; and you shall go in and make him rise from the midst of his brothers, and bring him into a chamber within a chamber. And you shall take the flask of oil and pour ***it*** on his head and say, 'Thus says the LORD: "I have anointed you as king over Israel."' And you shall open the door and flee, and you shall not wait." And the young man, the young man the prophet, went ***to*** Ramoth-gilead. And he came, and look, the commanders of the army ***were*** sitting. And he said, "I have a word for you, commander." And Jehu said, "For which of all of us?" And he said, "For you, commander." And he arose and went into the house, and he poured the oil on his head and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I have anointed you as king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of the LORD from the hand of Jezebel. And the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab ***every*** one who urinates against a wall, and ***the one*** shut up and ***the one*** left free in Israel. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall devour Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and there will be no one burying ***her***.'" And he opened the door and fled. And Jehu went out to the servants of his master, and ***one*** said to him, "Is it peace? Why did this madman come to you?" And he said to them, "You know the man and his talk." And they said, "A lie! Tell us, please." And he said, "Like this and like this he spoke to me, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I have anointed you as king over Israel."'" And they hurried, and they took each his garment and put ***it*** under him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet and said, "Jehu is king!"

9:14-26 And Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. And Joram had been keeping guard at Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael the king of Syria; and Joram the king had returned to be healed in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him when he fought against Hazael the king of Syria. And Jehu said, "If it is your will, let no escapee go out from the city to go to tell ***it*** in Jezreel." And Jehu rode and went to Jezreel, for Joram ***was*** lying there; and Ahaziah the king of Judah had come down to see Joram. And the watchman ***was*** standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and he said, "I see a company." And Joram said, "Take a horseman and send ***him*** to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'" And the rider of the horse went to meet him and said, "Thus says the king: 'Is it peace?'" And Jehu said, "What ***is there*** to you and to peace? Turn around behind me." And the watchman reported, saying, "The messenger came to them, and he has not returned." And he sent a second rider of a horse, and he came to them and said, "Thus says the king: 'Peace?'" And Jehu said, "What ***is there*** to you and to peace? Turn around behind me." And the watchman reported, saying, "He came to them, and he has not returned; and the driving ***is*** like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives with madness." And Joram said,

"Harness." And ***one*** harnessed his chariot. And Joram the king of Israel and Ahaziah the king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu; and they found him in the portion of land of Naboth the Jezreelite. And it was, when Joram saw Jehu, and he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" And he said, "What peace, while the prostitutions of Jezebel your mother and her sorceries ***are*** many?" And Joram turned his hands and fled, and he said to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" And Jehu filled his hand with the bow, and he struck Joram between his arms, and the arrow went out from his heart, and he sank down in his chariot. And he said to Bidkar his officer, "Pick ***him*** up, throw him into the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, I and you were riding in pairs behind Ahab his father, and the LORD lifted up this oracle against him: 'Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' declares the LORD, 'and I will repay you in this portion of land,' declares the LORD. And now, pick ***him*** up, throw him into the portion of land, according to the word of the LORD."

9:27-37 And Ahaziah the king of Judah saw, and he fled ***by*** the way of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued after him and said, "Him also, strike him down in the chariot," at the ascent of Gur, which ***is*** by Ibleam. And he fled ***to*** Megiddo and died there. And his servants made him ride to Jerusalem, and they buried him in his grave with his fathers in the city of David. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king over Judah. And Jehu came ***to*** Jezreel, and Jezebel heard; and she put eye paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and she looked down through the window. And Jehu came in at the gate, and she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of his master?" And he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who ***is*** with me? Who?" And two ***or*** three officials looked down at him. And he said, "Let her fall." And they let her fall, and ***some*** of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her. And he went in and ate and drank, and he said, "Attend, please, to this cursed ***woman*** and bury her, for she ***is*** a king's daughter." And they went to bury her, and they did not find ***anything*** of her except the skull and the feet and the palms of the hands. And they returned and told him, and he said, "It ***is*** the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that they will not say, "This ***is*** Jezebel."'"

Chapter 9 Preview

Years before, God told Elijah at Mount Horeb that Jehu would be king of Israel and would bring judgment on the house of Ahab (1 Kings 19:16-17). Elijah had also told Ahab, after the murder of Naboth, that dogs would eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel and that every male of Ahab's house would be cut off (1 Kings 21:19-24). Now the time has come. Elisha sends a young prophet to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu, an army commander, and to give him his orders. The officers spread their cloaks for him and blow the trumpet.

Jehu drives his chariot hard to Jezreel, where King Joram is recovering from his wounds and King Ahaziah of Judah has come to visit. Jehu shoots Joram on the very land that Ahab stole from Naboth. Ahaziah flees and is struck down. Then Jehu rides into Jezreel, and Jezebel, painted and proud, mocks him from a window. Her own servants throw her down, and when they go to bury her, there is almost nothing left, just as Elijah said. This is a violent chapter. It is the LORD's

judgment on a house that had filled Israel with idols and innocent blood, and I will try to read it soberly.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-3 *And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, "Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go **to** Ramoth-gilead. And you shall go in there, and look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi; and you shall go in and make him rise from the midst of his brothers, and bring him into a chamber within a chamber. And you shall take the flask of oil and pour **it** on his head and say, 'Thus says the LORD: "I have anointed you as king over Israel."' And you shall open the door and flee, and you shall not wait."*

Elisha called "one of the sons of the prophets" and sent him with "this flask of oil" to Ramoth-gilead, where Israel's army was holding the fortress against Hazael (8:28). Anointing with oil set a person apart for a task from God, especially a king or priest. Saul and David were both anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13).

He was to find "Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi." This Jehoshaphat was not the king of Judah; it was a common name. Jehu was a commander in the army. The young prophet was to take him into an inner room, pour the oil on his head, say, "Thus says the LORD," and then "open the door and flee." It was dangerous work. Anointing a new king while the old king lived was treason in the eyes of the court.

9:4-10 *And the young man, the young man the prophet, went **to** Ramoth-gilead. And he came, and look, the commanders of the army **were** sitting. And he said, "I have a word for you, commander." And Jehu said, "For which of all of us?" And he said, "For you, commander." And he arose and went into the house, and he poured the oil on his head and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I have anointed you as king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of the LORD from the hand of Jezebel. And the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab **every** one who urinates against a wall, and **the one** shut up and **the one** left free in Israel. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall devour Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and there will be no one burying **her**.'" And he opened the door and fled.*

The young prophet found the commanders sitting together. "I have a word for you, commander." Jehu asked, "For which of all of us?" "For you, commander." Inside, he poured the oil on Jehu's head and gave him the word of "the LORD, the God of Israel." It was this: "I have anointed you as king over the people of the LORD, over Israel." Notice that God still called them "the people of the LORD." Even in their sin, Israel belonged to Him.

Then came the charge. "You shall strike the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of the LORD from the hand of Jezebel." Jezebel had killed the LORD's prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13), and with Ahab she had murdered Naboth and his sons to take a vineyard (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9:26). That blood cried out to God, and He had not forgotten it.

"The whole house of Ahab shall perish." Like the royal houses of Jeroboam and Baasha before it (1 Kings 15:29; 16:11-12), Ahab's dynasty would be wiped out. "And the dogs shall devour Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and there will be no one burying her." Then the prophet "opened the door and fled."

This is the hard truth of this chapter. Ahab's house had been warned again and again. Elijah had preached, fire had fallen, drought had come and gone, and Ahab had even humbled himself for a while and been given more time (1 Kings 21:27-29). God is patient, but His patience is not endless. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Here He used Jehu as His instrument.

9:11-13 *And Jehu went out to the servants of his master, and **one** said to him, "Is it peace? Why did this madman come to you?" And he said to them, "You know the man and his talk." And they said, "A lie! Tell us, please." And he said, "Like this and like this he spoke to me, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I have anointed you as king over Israel."'" And they hurried, and they took each his garment and put **it** under him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet and said, "Jehu is king!"*

Jehu went back out to the other officers, and one asked, "Why did this madman come to you?" The soldiers seem to have thought little of prophets. Jehu tried to brush it off, "You know the man and his talk," but they would not let it go. "A lie! Tell us, please." So he told them what the LORD had said: "I have anointed you as king over Israel."

Their response was immediate. "They took each his garment and put it under him on the bare steps." Spreading garments was a sign of honor for a king. It is much like the crowds who spread their garments before Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:8). "They blew the trumpet," and they shouted, "Jehu is king!" Joram had lost his army's loyalty.

9:14-16 *And Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. And Joram had been keeping guard at Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael the king of Syria; and Joram the king had returned to be healed in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him when he fought against Hazael the king of Syria. And Jehu said, "If it is your will, let no escapee go out from the city to go to tell **it** in Jezreel." And Jehu rode and went to Jezreel, for Joram **was** lying there; and Ahaziah the king of Judah had come down to see Joram.*

Jehu "conspired against Joram." Joram was in Jezreel, about forty miles away, recovering from wounds he took fighting Hazael. Jehu ordered that no one slip out of Ramoth-gilead to warn him. Then he "rode and went to Jezreel." Ahaziah king of Judah was there too, visiting his uncle (8:29).

9:17-20 *And the watchman **was** standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and he said, "I see a company." And Joram said, "Take a horseman and send **him** to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'" And the rider of the horse went to meet him and said, "Thus says the king: 'Is it peace?'" And Jehu said, "What **is there** to you and to peace? Turn around behind me." And the watchman reported, saying, "The messenger came to them, and he has not returned." And he sent a second rider of a horse, and he came to them and said, "Thus says the king: 'Peace?'" And Jehu said, "What **is there** to you and to peace? Turn around behind me." And the watchman reported, saying, "He came to them, and he has not returned; and the driving **is** like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives with madness."*

"The watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel." He saw a company coming. Joram sent a horseman to ask, "Is it peace?" Jehu said, "What is there to you and to peace? Turn around behind me." The rider joined him. Joram sent a second, and the same thing happened.

The watchman said, "the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives with madness." Jehu was known for driving his chariot like a wild man. Even at a distance, they knew him by how he came.

9:21-24 *And Joram said, "Harness." And **one** harnessed his chariot. And Joram the king of Israel and Ahaziah the king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu; and they found him in the portion of land of Naboth the Jezreelite. And it was, when Joram saw Jehu, and he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" And he said, "What peace, while the prostitutions of Jezebel your mother and her sorceries **are** many?" And Joram turned his hands and fled, and he said to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" And Jehu filled his hand with the bow, and he struck Joram between his arms, and the arrow went out from his heart, and he sank down in his chariot.*

"Harness." Joram and Ahaziah went out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu, "and they found him in the portion of land of Naboth the Jezreelite." Of all the places to meet. That field was where Ahab's sin had been committed, and it would be where his son's judgment fell.

"Is it peace, Jehu?" Jehu answered, "What peace, while the prostitutions of Jezebel your mother and her sorceries are many?" In the Bible, prostitution is often a word for idolatry, because worshiping other gods is unfaithfulness to the LORD, like adultery in a marriage (Hosea 2:2-5). Sorceries are witchcraft and dealing with false spiritual powers. There can be no real peace where sin is welcomed and unrepented.

Joram turned and fled, shouting, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" Jehu drew his bow with full strength "and he struck Joram between his arms, and the arrow went out from his heart." Joram died in his chariot.

9:25-26 *And he said to Bidkar his officer, "Pick **him** up, throw him into the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, I and you were riding in pairs behind Ahab his father, and the LORD lifted up this oracle against him: 'Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' declares the LORD, 'and I will repay you in this portion of land,' declares the LORD. And now, pick **him** up, throw him into the portion of land, according to the word of the LORD."*

Jehu told his officer Bidkar to throw the body into Naboth's field. Then he reminded him of a day years before, when the two of them were "riding in pairs behind Ahab his father," and they heard the LORD's word against Ahab: "Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons," and "I will repay you in this portion of land." Jehu had never forgotten that prophecy. Now he was carrying it out, "according to the word of the LORD."

This tells us something 1 Kings 21 did not. Jezebel and Ahab killed Naboth's sons too, so no heir could claim the vineyard. God saw it all, and He remembered. No injustice is hidden from Him. If you have been wronged and no one on earth has made it right, you can be sure that God has seen, and He will repay (Hebrews 10:30).

9:27-29 *And Ahaziah the king of Judah saw, and he fled **by** the way of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued after him and said, "Him also, strike him down in the chariot," at the ascent of Gur, which **is** by Ibleam. And he fled **to** Megiddo and died there. And his servants made him ride to Jerusalem, and they buried him in his grave with his fathers in the city of David. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king over Judah.*

"Ahaziah the king of Judah saw, and he fled." Jehu pursued him and ordered, "Him also, strike him down in the chariot." He was wounded "at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam," south of Jezreel, and "he fled to Megiddo and died there." His servants carried his body to Jerusalem and buried him in the city of David.

2 Chronicles 22:7-9 tells the same event from another angle. It says that his downfall "was from God" because he went to Joram, and that he hid in Samaria, was found, brought to Jehu, and put to death. The two accounts give different details. Many scholars put them together like this: Ahaziah fled, was wounded near Ibleam, got to Megiddo and hid there or in the region of Samaria, and was found and killed. Scripture gives us the main facts plainly: he was of Ahab's house by his mother, and he fell with it.

"In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king." In 8:25 it says the twelfth year. The difference likely comes from two ways of counting a king's first partial year, which Israel and Judah did not always do the same way.

9:30-31 *And Jehu came **to** Jezreel, and Jezebel heard; and she put eye paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and she looked down through the window. And Jehu came in at the gate, and she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of his master?"*

"And Jehu came to Jezreel, and Jezebel heard." She knew what was coming. She "put eye paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and she looked down through the window." She did not run, and she did not repent. She dressed as a queen to meet death on her own terms.

"Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of his master?" Zimri was the commander who had murdered King Elah and taken the throne, and he lasted only seven days before he died in the burning palace (1 Kings 16:9-18). Jezebel was mocking Jehu and warning him: you will not last either. She was proud and defiant to the end.

9:32-35 *And he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who **is** with me? Who?" And two **or** three officials looked down at him. And he said, "Let her fall." And they let her fall, and **some** of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her. And he went in and ate and drank, and he said, "Attend, please, to this cursed **woman** and bury her, for she **is** a king's daughter." And they went to bury her, and they did not find **anything** of her except the skull and the feet and the palms of the hands.*

Jehu looked up and called, "Who is with me? Who?" Two or three officials looked down. These were servants of the palace, likely men who had served Jezebel and perhaps suffered under her. Jehu said, "Let her fall." They threw her down, and she died there. Jehu rode over her.

Then he "went in and ate and drank." He was cold about it. Afterward he said, "Attend, please, to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). But when they went to bury her, "they did not find anything of her except the skull and the feet and the palms of the hands." The dogs had come, as Elijah said.

I don't want to linger on the details. The writer does not tell this for shock. He tells it to show that God's word came true exactly.

9:36-37 *And they returned and told him, and he said, "It **is** the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that they will not say, "This **is** Jezebel."'"*

"It is the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah the Tishbite." Elijah had said it more than ten years before (1 Kings 21:23). Elijah was in heaven now, but his word had not died with his ministry. "The corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field," so that no one could say, "This is Jezebel." The proud queen who had ruled Israel's religion and murdered God's servants had no tomb and no grave marker.

What does this teach us? God's word does not fail. His warnings are as sure as His promises. And pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). Jezebel's name lived on only as a warning. In Revelation 2:20, Jesus uses it for a false teacher in the church at Thyatira who led His servants into idolatry and immorality. He gave her time to repent, and she refused. God is still patient, and judgment still comes. Today is the day to turn to Him.

Chapter 9 Summary

Elisha sent a young prophet to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi king over Israel. The prophet poured oil on his head and gave him the LORD's charge to strike the house of Ahab and avenge the blood of the prophets shed by Jezebel, and he said that dogs would

eat Jezebel in Jezreel. The officers spread their garments under Jehu and proclaimed him king. Jehu drove furiously to Jezreel, where Joram was recovering and Ahaziah of Judah was visiting. The two kings met him in Naboth's field, and when Joram asked if it was peace, Jehu named Jezebel's idolatry and sorceries and shot Joram through the heart, and his body was thrown into Naboth's field as the LORD had said. Ahaziah fled and was struck down, died at Megiddo, and was buried in Jerusalem. Jezebel painted her eyes and mocked Jehu from a window, calling him Zimri. Her own officials threw her down, and when they went to bury her, only her skull, feet and hands were found, fulfilling the word of the LORD through Elijah.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Who did Elisha send to anoint Jehu, and what was the young man told to do afterward? (9:1-3)

2. What charge did the LORD give Jehu, and whose blood would He avenge? (9:6-10)

3. How did the army respond when they heard Jehu had been anointed? (9:13)

4. Where did Jehu meet Joram and Ahaziah, and why does that place matter? (9:21, 25-26; 1 Kings 21)

5. What did Jehu say when Joram asked, "Is it peace, Jehu?" (9:22)

6. What new fact do we learn in 9:26 about Naboth's family?

7. How did Jezebel meet Jehu, and how was Elijah's prophecy fulfilled? (9:30-37; 1 Kings 21:23)

8. God remembered Naboth's blood for years. How does it help you to know that God sees every injustice? (Hebrews 10:30)

9. Jehu said there could be no peace while Jezebel's idolatry continued. Is there something in your life you are hoping God will be at peace with while you keep holding on to it?

10. Jezebel faced death proud and unrepentant. What does God's patience with you, even now, call you to do?

Chapter 10: Jehu Destroys the House of Ahab and the Worship of Baal

Scripture

10:1-17 And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters and sent ***them to*** Samaria, to the officials of Jezreel, the elders, and to the guardians of Ahab, saying, "And now, when this letter comes to you, and the sons of your master ***are*** with you, and the chariotry and the horses ***are*** with you, and a fortified city and the weaponry, then you shall select the good and the upright of the sons of your master and set ***him*** on the throne of his father, and fight for the house of your master." And they were very, very afraid, and they said, "Look, the two kings did not stand before him; and how shall we stand, we?" And the one who ***was*** over the house, and the one who ***was*** over the city, and the elders and the guardians sent to Jehu, saying, "We ***are*** your servants, and all that you say to us we will do. We will not make anyone king; do what ***is*** good in your eyes." And he wrote to them a second letter, saying, "If you ***are*** mine, and you are listening to my voice, take the heads of the men, the sons of your master, and come to me about this time tomorrow ***to*** Jezreel." And the sons of the king, seventy men, ***were*** with the great men of the city, who were bringing them up. And it was, when the letter came to them, and they took the sons of the king and slaughtered seventy men, and they put their heads in baskets and sent ***them*** to him ***to*** Jezreel. And the messenger came and told him, saying, "They have brought the heads of the sons of the king." And he said, "Put them ***in*** two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning." And it was in the morning, and he went out and stood, and he said to all the people, "You ***are*** righteous. Look, I conspired against my master and killed him; but who struck down all these? Know then that nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, will fall to the ground; and the LORD has done what He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah." And Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he had not left him a survivor. And he arose and came and went ***to*** Samaria. He ***was at*** Beth-eked of the shepherds on the way, and Jehu found the brothers of Ahaziah the king of Judah, and he said, "Who ***are*** you?" And they said, "We ***are*** the brothers of Ahaziah, and we have come down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother." And he said, "Seize them alive." And they seized them alive and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two men; and he did not leave a man of them. And he went from there, and he found Jonadab the son of Rechab ***coming*** to meet him; and he blessed him and said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart ***is*** with your heart?" And Jonadab said, "It is." "And ***if*** it is, give your hand." And he gave his hand, and he took him up to himself into the chariot. And he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." And they made him ride in his chariot. And he came ***to*** Samaria, and he struck down all who remained of Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken to Elijah.

10:18-36 And Jehu gathered all the people and said to them, "Ahab served the Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. And now, call to me all the prophets of the Baal, all who serve him and all his priests; let not a man be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for the Baal. Anyone who is missing shall not live." And Jehu acted with cunning, in order to destroy those who serve the Baal. And Jehu said, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for the Baal." And they proclaimed ***it***. And Jehu sent

through all Israel, and all who serve the Baal came, and there was not a man left who did not come. And they went into the house of the Baal, and the house of the Baal was filled from end to end. And he said to the one who ***was*** over the wardrobe, "Bring out clothing for all who serve the Baal." And he brought out the clothing for them. And Jehu went, and Jonadab the son of Rechab, ***into*** the house of the Baal; and he said to those who serve the Baal, "Search and see, lest there be here with you ***any*** of the servants of the LORD, but only those who serve the Baal by themselves." And they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. And Jehu had stationed for himself eighty men outside, and he had said, "The man who escapes from the men whom I am bringing into your hands, his life ***shall be*** in place of his life." And it was, when he had finished offering the burnt offering, and Jehu said to the runners and to the officers, "Go in, strike them down; let not a man come out." And they struck them down by the mouth of the sword, and the runners and the officers threw ***them*** out; and they went to the city of the house of the Baal. And they brought out the sacred pillars of the house of the Baal and burned it. And they pulled down the sacred pillar of the Baal, and they pulled down the house of the Baal, and they made it into latrines until this day. And Jehu destroyed the Baal from Israel. Only the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he caused Israel to sin, Jehu did not turn aside from after them: the calves of gold that ***were in*** Bethel and that ***were*** in Dan. And the LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing what ***is*** right in My eyes, ***and*** according to all that ***was*** in My heart you have done to the house of Ahab, sons of the fourth ***generation*** shall sit for you on the throne of Israel." And Jehu did not take care to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam, with which he caused Israel to sin. In those days the LORD began to cut off in Israel; and Hazael struck them in all the territory of Israel, from the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites and the Reubenites and the Manassites, from Aroer, which ***is*** by the wadi Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan. And the rest of the matters of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehu lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place. And the days that Jehu reigned over Israel ***were*** twenty-eight years in Samaria.

Chapter 10 Preview

Jehu finishes what he started. He writes to the leaders of Samaria, daring them to crown one of Ahab's seventy sons and fight. They are terrified and do the opposite: they kill the sons and send Jehu their heads. Jehu wipes out the rest of Ahab's house and his officials, kills forty-two relatives of King Ahaziah of Judah on the road, and takes Jonadab son of Rechab with him to see his "zeal for the LORD." Then he tricks the worshipers of Baal into gathering in Baal's temple, has them all killed, and turns the temple into a latrine. Baal worship is wiped out of Israel.

But Jehu never lets go of Jeroboam's golden calves, and he does not walk with the LORD with all his heart. God commends what he did against Ahab's house and promises his sons the throne for four generations. Yet nearly a hundred years later the prophet Hosea says God will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel. How can both be true? This chapter is one of the hardest in Kings, and I will try to give the full picture honestly.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-3 *And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters and sent **them to** Samaria, to the officials of Jezreel, the elders, and to the guardians of Ahab, saying, "And now, when this letter comes to you, and the sons of your master **are** with you, and the chariotry and the horses **are** with you, and a fortified city and the weaponry, then you shall select the good and the upright of the sons of your master and set **him** on the throne of his father, and fight for the house of your master."*

"And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria." Sons here likely means sons and grandsons, the male descendants of the royal house. They were being raised by guardians among the leading men of the capital. Seventy was a large royal family, and any one of them could become a rallying point against Jehu.

Jehu wrote a letter to the officials, the elders and the guardians. It was a challenge: you have the king's sons, chariots, horses, a fortified city and weapons. "Select the good and the upright of the sons of your master and set him on the throne of his father, and fight for the house of your master." It was really a threat. Jehu was forcing them to choose sides.

10:4-5 *And they were very, very afraid, and they said, "Look, the two kings did not stand before him; and how shall we stand, we?" And the one who **was** over the house, and the one who **was** over the city, and the elders and the guardians sent to Jehu, saying, "We **are** your servants, and all that you say to us we will do. We will not make anyone king; do what **is** good in your eyes."*

"And they were very, very afraid." They said, "Look, the two kings did not stand before him; and how shall we stand, we?" Joram and Ahaziah were both dead. The leaders of Samaria had no stomach for a fight.

The palace manager, the city governor, the elders and the guardians sent back: "We are your servants, and all that you say to us we will do. We will not make anyone king." Their loyalty to the house of Ahab had been about power, not principle. When the power shifted, so did they.

10:6-8 *And he wrote to them a second letter, saying, "If you **are** mine, and you are listening to my voice, take the heads of the men, the sons of your master, and come to me about this time tomorrow **to** Jezreel." And the sons of the king, seventy men, **were** with the great men of the city, who were bringing them up. And it was, when the letter came to them, and they took the sons of the king and slaughtered seventy men, and they put their heads in baskets and sent **them** to him **to** Jezreel. And the messenger came and told him, saying, "They have brought the heads of the sons of the king." And he said, "Put them **in** two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning."*

Jehu wrote a second letter: "If you are mine, and you are listening to my voice, take the heads of the men, the sons of your master, and come to me about this time tomorrow to Jezreel." The leaders did it. They killed the seventy and sent their heads to Jezreel in baskets. Jehu had them piled "in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning." That was the way of ancient warfare, a public warning that the old dynasty was finished.

I do not want to read past how dark this is. Seventy men died because of the family they were born into, and the men who were supposed to protect them killed them to save themselves.

10:9-11 *And it was in the morning, and he went out and stood, and he said to all the people, "You **are** righteous. Look, I conspired against my master and killed him; but who struck down all these? Know then that nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, will fall to the ground; and the LORD has done what He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah." And Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he had not left him a survivor.*

In the morning Jehu stood before the people. "You are righteous. Look, I conspired against my master and killed him; but who struck down all these?" He was clever. He admitted killing Joram, but he pointed out that the leaders of Samaria had killed the seventy. The blame was spread, and the people were now part of it.

Then he gave the reason: "nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, will fall to the ground." Nothing God says falls to the ground, which means it never fails to happen. That was true. Elijah's prophecy was coming to pass (1 Kings 21:21-24).

But then Jehu "struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he had not left him a survivor." God's word had named Ahab's house. Jehu went further, to Ahab's officials, friends and priests. Many Bible teachers see this as the point where Jehu's zeal began to run past God's command and into ambition, clearing away anyone who might threaten his own throne.

10:12-14 *And he arose and came and went **to** Samaria. He **was at** Beth-eked of the shepherds on the way, and Jehu found the brothers of Ahaziah the king of Judah, and he said, "Who **are** you?" And they said, "We **are** the brothers of Ahaziah, and we have come down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother." And he said, "Seize them alive." And they seized them alive and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two men; and he did not leave a man of them.*

On the road to Samaria, at a place called Beth-eked of the shepherds, Jehu met "the brothers of Ahaziah the king of Judah," forty-two men. Brothers here means relatives, since Chronicles calls them the sons of Ahaziah's brothers (2 Chronicles 22:8), and Ahaziah's older brothers had been killed earlier by raiders (2 Chronicles 22:1). They were traveling to visit the royal family of Israel, not knowing what had happened. Jehu said, "Seize them alive," and they killed all forty-two at the pit.

These men were of the house of David, Judah's royal line, though they were also related to Ahab through Athaliah. God's word against Ahab did not name them. This, too, many see as Jehu going beyond what God commanded. It also had a terrible result in Judah. With so many men of the royal family dead, Athaliah would be able to seize the throne in Jerusalem (11:1).

10:15-17 *And he went from there, and he found Jonadab the son of Rechab **coming** to meet him; and he blessed him and said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart **is** with your heart?" And Jonadab said, "It is." "And **if** it is, give your hand." And he gave his hand, and he took him up to himself into the chariot. And he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." And they made him ride in his chariot. And he came **to** Samaria, and he struck down all who remained of Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken to Elijah.*

"Jonadab the son of Rechab" came to meet him. Jonadab was the leader of a family called the Rechabites, who lived a simple life in tents, drank no wine, and were known for their faithfulness to the LORD and to their father's rules for generations (Jeremiah 35:6-10). Jehu asked, "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?" Jonadab said, "It is," and Jehu pulled him up into his chariot.

"Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." Zeal means burning eagerness. Jehu wanted a godly man as a witness and a supporter, someone whose name would give his revolution a holy face. And notice the words: "see my zeal." Real zeal for God does not need to be seen. Jesus warned against doing our good deeds "before men in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1).

In Samaria, Jehu "struck down all who remained of Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken to Elijah."

10:18-21 *And Jehu gathered all the people and said to them, "Ahab served the Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. And now, call to me all the prophets of the Baal, all who serve him and all his priests; let not a man be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for the Baal. Anyone who is missing shall not live." And Jehu acted with cunning, in order to destroy those who serve the Baal. And Jehu said, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for the Baal." And they proclaimed **it**. And Jehu sent through all Israel, and all who serve the Baal came, and there was not a man left who did not come. And they went into the house of the Baal, and the house of the Baal was filled from end to end.*

Now Jehu turned to Baal worship. He announced, "Ahab served the Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much." It was a lie. He called "all the prophets of the Baal, all who serve him and all his priests" to a great sacrifice and threatened death to anyone who stayed away. "And Jehu acted with cunning, in order to destroy those who serve the Baal."

Scripture records Jehu's trick. It does not praise his lie. God's people are called to speak the truth (Ephesians 4:25). Jehu's methods were his own.

Baal's worshipers came from all over Israel and filled "the house of the Baal," the temple of Baal that Ahab built in Samaria (1 Kings 16:32), "from end to end."

10:22-24 *And he said to the one who **was** over the wardrobe, "Bring out clothing for all who serve the Baal." And he brought out the clothing for them. And Jehu went, and Jonadab the son of Rechab, **into** the house of the Baal; and he said to those who serve the Baal, "Search and see, lest there be here with you **any** of the servants of the LORD, but only those who serve the Baal by themselves." And they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. And Jehu had stationed for himself eighty men outside, and he had said, "The man who escapes from the men whom I am bringing into your hands, his life **shall be** in place of his life."*

Jehu had the keeper of the wardrobe bring out special clothing for the worshipers. This marked every Baal worshiper clearly. Then he and Jonadab went in and had the crowd search themselves to be sure no "servants of the LORD" were among them, "but only those who serve the Baal by themselves." No one who belonged to the LORD would be caught in what came next.

As the sacrifices were offered, eighty men waited outside. Jehu warned them that if anyone escaped, the guard who let him go would pay with his own life.

10:25-28 *And it was, when he had finished offering the burnt offering, and Jehu said to the runners and to the officers, "Go in, strike them down; let not a man come out." And they struck them down by the mouth of the sword, and the runners and the officers threw **them** out; and they went to the city of the house of the Baal. And they brought out the sacred pillars of the house of the Baal and burned it. And they pulled down the sacred pillar of the Baal, and they pulled down the house of the Baal, and they made it into latrines until this day. And Jehu destroyed the Baal from Israel.*

When the burnt offering was finished, Jehu told the guards and officers, "Go in, strike them down; let not a man come out." They killed the worshipers of Baal, then went into the inner room of the temple. They brought out the sacred pillars, burned them, tore down the main pillar of Baal and the temple itself, "and they made it into latrines until this day." It was the most shameful thing they could do to it.

"And Jehu destroyed the Baal from Israel." The Law commanded that anyone who led Israel to serve other gods must die (Deuteronomy 13:6-11; 17:2-5). Elijah had done the same to the prophets of Baal at the brook Kishon (1 Kings 18:40). Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel was a nation under God's direct rule, and idolatry was treason against her King. We do not live under that covenant as a nation. Christ's people fight with the word of God and prayer, not the sword (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:12). But the passage still teaches how seriously God takes the worship of false gods.

10:29 *Only the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he caused Israel to sin, Jehu did not turn aside from after them: the calves of gold that **were in** Bethel and that **were** in Dan.*

"Only the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he caused Israel to sin, Jehu did not turn aside from after them." The writer names them: "the calves of gold that were in Bethel and that were in Dan." Jehu tore down Baal, but he kept Jeroboam's calves. Why? Probably for the same reason Jeroboam built them. If the people went to Jerusalem to worship, they might go back to the house of David. Jehu's religion was useful to him. It served his throne.

That is a warning to us. It is possible to fight hard against one sin while holding on to another, especially the one that keeps us comfortable and in control.

10:30-31 *And the LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing what **is** right in My eyes, **and** according to all that **was** in My heart you have done to the house of Ahab, sons of the fourth **generation** shall sit for you on the throne of Israel." And Jehu did not take care to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam, with which he caused Israel to sin.*

"And the LORD said to Jehu," and His words were these: "Because you have done well in doing what is right in My eyes, and according to all that was in My heart you have done to the house of Ahab, sons of the fourth generation shall sit for you on the throne of Israel." God commended what Jehu did in carrying out His judgment on Ahab's house and on Baal. The promise came true: Jehu's son Jehoahaz, grandson Jehoash, great-grandson Jeroboam II, and great-great-grandson Zechariah all reigned. The writer points out its fulfillment in 15:12.

But the next verse tells the rest of the story. "And Jehu did not take care to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart." He did the job, but he never gave God his heart.

Now here is the hard question. Nearly a hundred years later, the LORD told the prophet Hosea to name his son Jezreel, "for yet a little while, and I will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu" (Hosea 1:4). How could God commend Jehu and then judge his house for the very bloodshed He commanded?

Bible teachers answer in a few ways, and they fit together. First, Jehu went beyond what God commanded. God named Ahab's house. Jehu also killed Ahab's officials, friends and priests, and forty-two men of the royal house of Judah. Second, Jehu's motives were not pure. He did the right act with a heart set on his own power, and God judges the heart as well as the act (1 Samuel 16:7). Third, Jehu's dynasty kept the calves and went on in the same sins, so the blood shed in Jezreel was never truly done for the LORD. A good result does not make every means good, and doing God's work God's way matters. God's approval of the judgment on Ahab was not approval of Jehu's heart.

God kept both words. Jehu's house had its four generations. Then Zechariah, the fourth, was murdered after six months on the throne (15:8-12), about 752 B.C., and the house of Jehu ended in blood, as Hosea said. Thirty years later, the northern kingdom itself fell.

10:32-33 *In those days the LORD began to cut off in Israel; and Hazael struck them in all the territory of Israel, from the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites and the Reubenites and the Manassites, from Aroer, which **is** by the wadi Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.*

"In those days the LORD began to cut off in Israel." God began to shrink the kingdom. Hazael of Syria, just as Elisha foresaw with tears (8:12), struck Israel and took all the land east of the Jordan: "all the land of Gilead, the Gadites and the Reubenites and the Manassites," from the Arnon River

in the south to Bashan in the north. These were the lands Moses had given to two and a half tribes (Numbers 32). God was using a foreign king to discipline His people.

10:34-36 *And the rest of the matters of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehu lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place. And the days that Jehu reigned over Israel **were** twenty-eight years in Samaria.*

"And all his might" was written in the royal records of Israel. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years, from about 841 to 814 B.C., longer than any king of Israel before him. His son Jehoahaz followed him.

An Assyrian monument called the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, now in the British Museum, shows Jehu, or his envoy, bowing to the ground before the king of Assyria and paying tribute. Kings does not mention it. It is a reminder that the man who drove like a madman and took Israel's throne by force still bowed before a greater earthly power. Only a heart that bows to the LORD is truly free.

Chapter 10 Summary

Jehu wrote to the leaders of Samaria, daring them to crown one of Ahab's seventy sons. They were afraid and submitted, and at his second letter they killed the seventy and sent their heads to Jezreel. Jehu told the people that the LORD's word against Ahab's house had not failed, and he killed all that remained of Ahab's house in Jezreel with his officials, friends and priests. On the road he killed forty-two relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah. He took Jonadab son of Rechab into his chariot to see his zeal for the LORD and killed the rest of Ahab's house in Samaria. Then he pretended to serve Baal, gathered all Baal's worshipers into his temple, had them killed, and turned the temple into a latrine, so that Baal worship was destroyed from Israel. But Jehu kept the golden calves at Bethel and Dan and did not walk in the LORD's law with all his heart. The LORD promised his sons the throne to the fourth generation for carrying out His judgment on Ahab's house. In Jehu's days the LORD began to cut off Israel's territory, and Hazael took all the land east of the Jordan. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years, and his son Jehoahaz reigned after him.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. How did the leaders of Samaria respond to Jehu's two letters, and what does that show about their loyalty? (10:1-7)

2. What did Jehu say about the word of the LORD concerning Ahab's house? (10:10)

3. Whom did Jehu kill beyond Ahab's own family? (10:11, 13-14)

4. What did Jehu say to Jonadab, and what does the phrase "see my zeal" reveal? (10:15-16)

5. How did Jehu destroy the worship of Baal in Israel? (10:18-28)

6. Which sin did Jehu keep, and why might he have kept it? (10:29, 31)

7. What did the LORD promise Jehu, and how was it fulfilled? (10:30; 15:12)

8. How can God commend Jehu in 10:30 and still judge his house in Hosea 1:4? (1 Samuel 16:7)

9. Jehu fought one sin hard while keeping another that served him. Is there a sin you keep because it is useful or comfortable?

10. Jehu did God's work with his own heart and methods. Where are you tempted to do something good in a way that serves yourself more than God?

Chapter 11: Athaliah and the Boy King Joash

Scripture

11:1-12 And Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the offspring of the kingdom. And Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, the sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him from among the sons of the king who were being put to death, him and his nurse, in the chamber of the beds; and they hid him from before Athaliah, and he was not put to death. And he was with her ***in*** the house of the LORD, hiding himself six years, and Athaliah ***was*** reigning over the land. And in the seventh year Jehoiada sent and took the commanders of the hundreds of the Carites and of the runners, and he brought them to himself ***into*** the house of the LORD; and he made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the LORD, and he showed them the son of the king. And he commanded them, saying, "This ***is*** the thing that you shall do: the third of you who come in ***on*** the Sabbath and keep the watch of the house of the king, and the third ***shall be*** at the Gate of Sur, and the third at the gate behind the runners; and you shall keep the watch of the house by turns. And the two divisions among you, all who go out ***on*** the Sabbath, they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD for the king. And you shall surround the king all around, each man and his weapons in his hand; and the one who comes into the ranks shall be put to death. And be with the king when he goes out and when he comes in." And the commanders of the hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded; and they took each man his men, those who came in ***on*** the Sabbath with those who went out ***on*** the Sabbath, and they came to Jehoiada the priest. And the priest gave to the commanders of the hundreds the spear and the shields that ***had belonged*** to King David, which ***were*** in the house of the LORD. And the runners stood, each man and his weapons in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, to the altar and to the house, by the king all around. And he brought out the son of the king and put on him the crown and the testimony; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped ***their*** hands and said, "Let the king live!"

11:13-21 And Athaliah heard the sound of the runners, the people, and she came to the people ***at*** the house of the LORD. And she looked, and look, the king ***was*** standing by the pillar according to the custom, and the commanders and the trumpets ***were*** with the king, and all the people of the land ***were*** rejoicing and blowing on trumpets. And Athaliah tore her clothes and called out, "Conspiracy! Conspiracy!" And Jehoiada the priest commanded the commanders of the hundreds, the appointed ***officers*** of the army, and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks, and the one who comes after her, put ***him*** to death with the sword." For the priest had said, "Let her not be put to death ***in*** the house of the LORD." And they laid hands on her, and she went ***by*** the way of the entrance of the horses ***to*** the house of the king, and she was put to death there. And Jehoiada made the covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, to become a people for the LORD, and between the king and the people. And all the people of the land went ***to*** the house of the Baal and tore it down; its altars and its images they broke in pieces thoroughly, and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars. And the priest appointed overseers over the house of the LORD. And he took the commanders of the hundreds and the Carites and the runners and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD and

came ***by*** the way of the gate of the runners ***to*** the house of the king; and he sat on the throne of the kings. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet; and Athaliah they had put to death with the sword ***at*** the house of the king. Jehoash ***was*** a son of seven years when he became king.

Chapter 11 Preview

When Athaliah, Ahab's daughter and the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, hears that her son is dead, she sets out to kill the whole royal family of Judah and take the throne for herself. But one baby is rescued. His aunt Jehosheba steals the infant Joash away and hides him in the house of the LORD, and for six years the true heir of David grows up in secret while Athaliah rules.

In the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest brings the commanders of the guard into the temple, shows them the king's son, and lays a careful plan. On a Sabbath, with the guards ringing the boy, Jehoiada crowns him and anoints him, and the people shout, "Let the king live!" Athaliah rushes in crying treason and is taken out and put to death. Jehoiada leads the king and people in a covenant with the LORD, and they tear down the temple of Baal in Jerusalem. The lamp of David, which had almost gone out, is burning again.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the offspring of the kingdom.*

"And Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the offspring of the kingdom." Jehu had killed her son Ahaziah (9:27) and many of Judah's royal men (10:13-14). Instead of grieving, Athaliah grabbed for power. She killed her own grandchildren and every male of the royal house she could find. She was Jezebel's daughter in more than blood.

Think about what was at stake. God had promised David that his house and his throne would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). The Messiah was to come from David's line. If every descendant of David died, that promise would fail. Athaliah's purge was an attack on the promise of God itself. From the beginning, the enemy has tried to destroy the seed of the woman, the line that leads to the Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). Pharaoh tried it, and Herod would try it again in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16). Every time, God kept one child safe.

11:2-3 *And Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, the sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him from among the sons of the king who were being put to death, him and his nurse, in the chamber of the beds; and they hid him from before Athaliah, and he was not put to death. And he was with her **in** the house of the LORD, hiding himself six years, and Athaliah **was** reigning over the land.*

"And Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, the sister of Ahaziah, took Joash." Here the SLB uses Joram for Jehoram of Judah, Athaliah's husband. Jehosheba was the baby's aunt, and she was likely Athaliah's stepdaughter by another wife. Chronicles adds that she was "the wife of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chronicles 22:11). She "stole him from among the sons of the king who were being

put to death," along with his nurse, and hid them in a bedroom. Then they hid him "in the house of the LORD" for six years.

Jehosheba risked her life. If Athaliah had found out, she and her husband would have died with the child. God used one brave woman to save David's line. We never know how much may hang on one act of courage done quietly for God.

And notice where Joash was hidden: in the house of the LORD. Athaliah worshiped Baal and had no interest in the LORD's temple. The safest place for God's king was in God's house.

11:4-8 *And in the seventh year Jehoiada sent and took the commanders of the hundreds of the Carites and of the runners, and he brought them to himself **into** the house of the LORD; and he made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the LORD, and he showed them the son of the king. And he commanded them, saying, "This **is** the thing that you shall do: the third of you who come in **on** the Sabbath and keep the watch of the house of the king, and the third **shall be** at the Gate of Sur, and the third at the gate behind the runners; and you shall keep the watch of the house by turns. And the two divisions among you, all who go out **on** the Sabbath, they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD for the king. And you shall surround the king all around, each man and his weapons in his hand; and the one who comes into the ranks shall be put to death. And be with the king when he goes out and when he comes in."*

"In the seventh year Jehoiada sent and took the commanders of the hundreds of the Carites and of the runners." Jehoiada was the high priest. The Carites were likely foreign soldiers in the royal guard, and the runners were the king's bodyguard who ran before his chariot. Jehoiada brought their officers into the temple, "made a covenant with them," and put them under oath. Then "he showed them the son of the king." Imagine the moment those hardened soldiers saw a seven-year-old boy and learned that David's line was alive.

Jehoiada's plan used the Sabbath change of the guard. On the Sabbath, one group came on duty and another went off. Instead of sending the off-duty men home, Jehoiada kept both groups at the temple. That doubled his forces without raising suspicion. The guards were to "surround the king all around, each man and his weapons in his hand," and anyone who broke into their ranks was to die. "Be with the king when he goes out and when he comes in."

Jehoiada did not act rashly. He waited six years, then planned carefully and used lawful authority. Faith and wisdom go together.

11:9-11 *And the commanders of the hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded; and they took each man his men, those who came in **on** the Sabbath with those who went out **on** the Sabbath, and they came to Jehoiada the priest. And the priest gave to the commanders of the hundreds the spear and the shields that **had belonged** to King David, which **were** in the house of the LORD. And the runners stood, each man and his weapons in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, to the altar and to the house, by the king all around.*

The commanders did "according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded." Jehoiada gave them "the spear and the shields that had belonged to King David, which were in the house of the LORD." David's own weapons would guard David's heir. It was a sign that this was the true king of David's house.

The guards stood in a line across the front of the temple court, "from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, to the altar and to the house, by the king all around."

11:12 *And he brought out the son of the king and put on him the crown and the testimony; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped **their** hands and said, "Let the king live!"*

"And he brought out the son of the king and put on him the crown and the testimony." The testimony was most likely a copy of God's law, or of the covenant, given to the king. The Law said that every king of Israel was to have his own copy of the law and read it all his life (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). A king of God's people was to rule under God's word.

"And they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands." The people shouted, "Let the king live!" After six years of a usurper on the throne, David's son was king again.

11:13-14 *And Athaliah heard the sound of the runners, the people, and she came to the people **at** the house of the LORD. And she looked, and look, the king **was** standing by the pillar according to the custom, and the commanders and the trumpets **were** with the king, and all the people of the land **were** rejoicing and blowing on trumpets. And Athaliah tore her clothes and called out, "Conspiracy! Conspiracy!"*

Athaliah heard the noise and came to the temple. "And look, the king was standing by the pillar according to the custom," the place where the king stood on official occasions. The commanders and trumpeters were with him, and "all the people of the land were rejoicing." The people of the land means the common people of Judah, not only the leaders.

"And Athaliah tore her clothes," and she cried, "Conspiracy! Conspiracy!" That was rich coming from her. She had taken the throne by murdering children. Now she called it treason when the rightful heir was crowned. The wicked often accuse others of the very things they have done.

11:15-16 *And Jehoiada the priest commanded the commanders of the hundreds, the appointed* ***officers*** *of the army, and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks, and the one who comes after her, put* ***him*** *to death with the sword." For the priest had said, "Let her not be put to death* ***in*** *the house of the LORD." And they laid hands on her, and she went* ***by*** *the way of the entrance of the horses* ***to*** *the house of the king, and she was put to death there.*

Jehoiada ordered the commanders to take her out "between the ranks" and kill anyone who followed her. "Let her not be put to death in the house of the LORD." He would not have the temple defiled with her blood. They took her out by the horse gate to the palace, "and she was put to death there."

Athaliah had reigned six years, from about 841 to 835 B.C. She was the only person not of David's line to rule in Jerusalem in the whole history of the kingdom of Judah. Her end was like her mother's: a violent death at the hands of those she had ruled.

11:17 *And Jehoiada made the covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, to become a people for the LORD, and between the king and the people.*

"And Jehoiada made the covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, to become a people for the LORD, and between the king and the people." A covenant is a binding agreement. This was really two covenants. First, the king and people promised the LORD that they would be His people. Then the king and people made promises to each other, a king to rule justly and a people to be loyal.

This was not just a change of rulers. It was a turning back to God. Real change in a nation, a church or a family begins when people return to God and renew their commitment to Him.

11:18 *And all the people of the land went* ***to*** *the house of the Baal and tore it down; its altars and its images they broke in pieces thoroughly, and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars. And the priest appointed overseers over the house of the LORD.*

"All the people of the land went to the house of the Baal and tore it down;" Athaliah had brought Baal worship to Jerusalem, as her mother had in Samaria. The people smashed its altars and images, "and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars." Under the Law, those who led God's people into worshiping other gods were to be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). Jehoiada also "appointed overseers over the house of the LORD" to restore proper worship.

11:19-20 *And he took the commanders of the hundreds and the Carites and the runners and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD and came* ***by*** *the way of the gate of the runners* ***to*** *the house of the king; and he sat on the throne of the kings. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet; and Athaliah they had put to death with the sword* ***at*** *the house of the king.*

They brought the king in procession from the temple to the palace "by the way of the gate of the runners," and "he sat on the throne of the kings." "And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet." After years of fear, there was peace in Jerusalem. When God's rightful King takes

His throne, there is joy and rest. That is a small picture of the day when Jesus, the Son of David, will sit on David's throne and reign in righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33).

11:21 *Jehoash **was** a son of seven years when he became king.*

"Jehoash was a son of seven years when he became king." He is called both Jehoash and Joash, the long and short forms of the same name, which means the LORD has given. In the Hebrew Bible this verse is the first verse of chapter 12. The SLB follows the English verse numbers.

It is striking that Matthew's list of Jesus' ancestors skips Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah, going straight from Jehoram to Uzziah (Matthew 1:8). Some Bible teachers think Matthew left out these three kings because of their tie to Ahab's house, or simply to keep his list in groups of fourteen (Matthew 1:17). Either way, Joash's rescue kept the line alive, and Jesus came from it.

Chapter 11 Summary

When Athaliah saw that her son Ahaziah was dead, she killed all the royal offspring of Judah and took the throne. But Jehosheba, King Joram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister, rescued the baby Joash with his nurse and hid him in the house of the LORD for six years. In the seventh year Jehoiada the priest brought the commanders of the guard into the temple, put them under oath, and showed them the king's son. He planned the crowning for the Sabbath change of guard, armed the commanders with King David's spear and shields, and stationed the guards around the king. He brought out Joash, put the crown and the testimony on him, and anointed him, and the people clapped and shouted, "Let the king live!" Athaliah came in crying conspiracy, and Jehoiada had her taken out of the temple and put to death at the palace. Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, the king and the people, and the people tore down the temple of Baal and killed Mattan its priest. Joash took his seat on the throne at seven years old, the people rejoiced, and the city was quiet.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What did Athaliah do when she heard that her son was dead? (11:1)

2. Why was her attack on the royal family an attack on God's promise to David? (11:1; 2 Samuel 7:16)

3. Who rescued Joash, and where was he hidden? (11:2-3; 2 Chronicles 22:11)

4. How did Jehoiada use the Sabbath change of guard in his plan? (11:5-9)

5. What did Jehoiada put on the young king, and why did that matter? (11:12; Deuteronomy 17:18-20)

6. What did Athaliah cry out, and why was it ironic? (11:14)

7. What covenants did Jehoiada make, and what did the people do afterward? (11:17-18)

8. How does the crowning of David's heir picture the coming reign of Jesus Christ? (11:19-20; Luke 1:32-33)

9. Jehosheba quietly risked her life to protect one child. What act of quiet courage might God be asking of you?

10. Jehoiada waited six years for the right time. Are you waiting on God for something? How can you use the waiting faithfully?

Chapter 12: Joash Repairs the Temple

Scripture

12:1-8 In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Zibiah from Beersheba. And Jehoash did the right in the eyes of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Only the high places were not removed; the people ***were*** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places. And Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money of the holy things that is brought ***into*** the house of the LORD, the money of ***one who*** passes over, the money of each man ***for*** the souls of his valuation, all the money that comes up on the heart of a man to bring ***into*** the house of the LORD, let the priests take ***it*** for themselves, each man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breach of the house wherever a breach is found there." And it was, in the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breach of the house. And King Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest and for the priests, and he said to them, "Why are you not repairing the breach of the house? And now, do not take money from your acquaintances, for you shall give it for the breach of the house." And the priests agreed not to take money from the people and not to repair the breach of the house.

12:9-21 And Jehoiada the priest took one chest and bored a hole in its lid, and he put it beside the altar, on the right side as a man comes ***into*** the house of the LORD; and the priests who kept the threshold put there all the money that was brought ***into*** the house of the LORD. And it was, when they saw that the money in the chest ***was*** much, and the scribe of the king and the high priest came up, and they tied up and counted the money that was found ***in*** the house of the LORD. And they gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of the doers of the work who were appointed ***over*** the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the craftsmen of wood and to the builders who were working ***on*** the house of the LORD, and to the masons and to the cutters of stone, and to buy timber and hewn stones to repair the breach of the house of the LORD, and for all that went out on the house to repair ***it***. Only, there were not made ***for*** the house of the LORD basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, any article of gold and article of silver, from the money that was brought ***into*** the house of the LORD; for they gave it to the doers of the work, and they repaired the house of the LORD with it. And they did not settle accounts with the men into whose hand they gave the money to give to the doers of the work, for they ***were*** working in faithfulness. The money of guilt offering and the money of sin offerings was not brought ***into*** the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests. Then Hazael the king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and captured it; and Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem. And Jehoash the king of Judah took all the holy things that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah, his fathers, the kings of Judah, had consecrated, and his own holy things, and all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king, and he sent ***them*** to Hazael the king of Syria; and he went up from against Jerusalem. And the rest of the matters of Joash and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And his servants arose and conspired a conspiracy, and they struck down Joash ***at*** Beth-millo, which goes down ***to*** Silla. And Jozabad the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants,

struck him down, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 12 Preview

Joash, the boy who was hidden in the temple, now reigns in Jerusalem for forty years. As long as Jehoiada the priest teaches him, he does what is right in the eyes of the LORD. His great project is repairing the house of the LORD, which had been neglected and damaged in Athaliah's time. His first plan, letting the priests handle the money, goes nowhere for twenty-three years. So Jehoiada sets out a chest with a hole in its lid beside the altar, the people give, and honest workmen repair the temple.

But the chapter ends on a sad note. When Hazael of Syria threatens Jerusalem, Joash pays him off with the temple's treasures. Then his own servants murder him. Kings does not tell us why, but 2 Chronicles 24 does: after Jehoiada died, Joash turned away from the LORD and had Jehoiada's son killed. Joash is a picture of a man whose faith leaned on someone else's.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Zibiah from Beersheba.*

"In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem." That was about 835 to 796 B.C. Jehoash and Joash are two forms of the same name. "And the name of his mother was Zibiah from Beersheba," a town in the far south of Judah. The writer of Kings usually names the mother of each king of Judah, because the queen mother had real influence in the court, as Athaliah's story shows.

12:2-3 *And Jehoash did the right in the eyes of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Only the high places were not removed; the people **were** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places.*

"And Jehoash did the right in the eyes of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him." That is high praise with a quiet warning built in. He did right as long as Jehoiada taught him. Jehoiada had saved his life and raised him, and Joash followed his lead.

"Only the high places were not removed." High places were hilltop places of worship. Some were used for idols. Others were used to worship the LORD, but outside the temple God had chosen, against His command (Deuteronomy 12:5-14). Even good kings of Judah often left them standing until Hezekiah and Josiah tore them down. Joash's reform was real, but it was not complete.

12:4-5 *And Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money of the holy things that is brought **into** the house of the LORD, the money of **one who** passes over, the money of each man **for** the souls of his valuation, all the money that comes up on the heart of a man to bring **into** the house of the LORD, let the priests take **it** for themselves, each man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breach of the house wherever a breach is found there."*

Joash told the priests to collect "all the money of the holy things" brought to the temple: money from the census, when each man counted gave a half shekel (Exodus 30:12-16); money paid when someone dedicated a person by vow and then paid its value instead (Leviticus 27:1-8); and freewill gifts, "all the money that comes up on the heart of a man." The priests were to take it from the people they knew and use it to "repair the breach of the house wherever a breach is found." Breach means a crack or damage. Chronicles tells us that Athaliah's sons had broken into the temple and used its holy things for the Baals (2 Chronicles 24:7).

It was Joash, not the priests, who pushed for this. The boy who grew up in the temple loved the house of God.

12:6-8 *And it was, in the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breach of the house. And King Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest and for the priests, and he said to them, "Why are you not repairing the breach of the house? And now, do not take money from your acquaintances, for you shall give it for the breach of the house." And the priests agreed not to take money from the people and not to repair the breach of the house.*

But "in the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breach of the house." Joash was now about thirty. Year after year the money came in, and the work never got done. Scripture doesn't tell us why. Perhaps the priests used the money for their own needs, or maybe there was just no system for getting it to the workers.

Joash called in Jehoiada and the priests: "Why are you not repairing the breach of the house?" He took the job out of their hands. They would no longer take money from the people, and they would no longer be responsible for repairs. "And the priests agreed."

Even godly leaders need accountability. Good intentions do not fix walls. It is no shame to set up a better system when the old one isn't working.

12:9-12 *And Jehoiada the priest took one chest and bored a hole in its lid, and he put it beside the altar, on the right side as a man comes **into** the house of the LORD; and the priests who kept the threshold put there all the money that was brought **into** the house of the LORD. And it was, when they saw that the money in the chest **was** much, and the scribe of the king and the high priest came up, and they tied up and counted the money that was found **in** the house of the LORD. And they gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of the doers of the work who were appointed **over** the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the craftsmen of wood and to the builders who were working **on** the house of the LORD, and to the masons and to the cutters of stone, and to buy timber and hewn stones to repair the breach of the house of the LORD, and for all that went out on the house to repair **it**.*

"And Jehoiada the priest took one chest and bored a hole in its lid, and he put it beside the altar." It was simple and visible. The priests at the door put all the money given into the chest. When it filled up, "the scribe of the king and the high priest" came together to count it. Two officials, one from the palace and one from the temple, counted the money side by side. That protected everyone.

They weighed the money out to the supervisors of the work, who paid the carpenters, builders, masons and stonecutters, and bought timber and cut stone. Coins as we know them were not yet in use, so silver was weighed. Chronicles adds that the people "rejoiced" and gave gladly until the chest was full again and again (2 Chronicles 24:10-11).

Paul handled the gift for the poor in Jerusalem the same careful way, with trusted men from the churches, so that no one could blame him (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). Churches today should be just as careful with what God's people give.

12:13-16 *Only, there were not made **for** the house of the LORD basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, any article of gold and article of silver, from the money that was brought **into** the house of the LORD; for they gave it to the doers of the work, and they repaired the house of the LORD with it. And they did not settle accounts with the men into whose hand they gave the money to give to the doers of the work, for they **were** working in faithfulness. The money of guilt offering and the money of sin offerings was not brought **into** the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests.*

While the repairs went on, the money did not go to "basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets," or other articles of gold and silver. Every bit went into fixing the building. Chronicles adds that once the work was finished, the leftover money was used to make new articles for the temple (2 Chronicles 24:14). The two accounts fit: first the walls, then the furnishings.

"And they did not settle accounts with the men into whose hand they gave the money," the writer says, "for they were working in faithfulness." The supervisors were so honest that no one needed to check their books. That is a high compliment. Trust is built by faithfulness over time.

The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings still went to the priests, as the Law allowed (Leviticus 5:16; 7:7). The guilt offering was a sacrifice for wrongs that needed payment as well as forgiveness, and the sin offering was for sins done without meaning to. Joash did not take from the priests what was rightly theirs.

12:17-18 *Then Hazael the king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and captured it; and Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem. And Jehoash the king of Judah took all the holy things that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah, his fathers, the kings of Judah, had consecrated, and his own holy things, and all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king, and he sent* ***them*** *to Hazael the king of Syria; and he went up from against Jerusalem.*

"Then Hazael the king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and captured it." Gath was a Philistine city near Judah's western border. Then "Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem."

Joash did not pray or seek the LORD, at least not that we are told. He took "all the holy things" that his fathers Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah had dedicated, his own dedicated gifts, and all the gold in the treasuries of the temple and palace, and he sent them to Hazael. Hazael withdrew. The temple Joash had worked so hard to restore was stripped to buy off an enemy. Chronicles says a small Syrian army defeated Judah's large one because Judah had forsaken the LORD (2 Chronicles 24:23-24).

This happened late in his reign, after Jehoiada was gone. When the man who had taught him was no longer there, Joash reached for gold instead of God.

12:19-21 *And the rest of the matters of Joash and all that he did,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And his servants arose and conspired a conspiracy, and they struck down Joash* ***at*** *Beth-millo, which goes down* ***to*** *Silla. And Jozabad the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, struck him down, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Amaziah his son reigned in his place.*

"And his servants arose and conspired a conspiracy, and they struck down Joash at Beth-millo." The Millo was a raised area or fortification in Jerusalem. Two of his officials, Jozabad and Jehozabad, killed him. He was buried "with his fathers in the city of David," and his son Amaziah became king.

Kings does not say why, but 2 Chronicles 24:17-25 fills it in. After Jehoiada died, the officials of Judah came and flattered Joash, and he turned to idols. God sent prophets, and Joash would not listen. When Zechariah, Jehoiada's own son, stood up and warned the people, Joash had him stoned in the temple court. Chronicles says the king "did not remember the steadfast love which Jehoiada his father had done with him." His servants killed him "for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest." Many Bible teachers believe this Zechariah is the one Jesus spoke of who "perished between the altar and the house" (Luke 11:51).

What a sad end for the boy who was saved in the temple. Joash's faith was real enough while he had someone to lean on. But it seems it was never fully his own. Every one of us needs a faith that is our own, rooted in the LORD Himself and not only in a parent, pastor or friend. Paul told Timothy to continue in what he had learned, knowing who taught him, and to hold to the Scriptures that make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14-15). The people who teach us will not always be there. God will.

Chapter 12 Summary

Joash became king of Judah in the seventh year of Jehu and reigned forty years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD as long as Jehoiada the priest taught him, though the high places remained. He ordered the priests to use the temple's holy money to repair the damage to the house of the LORD, but by his twenty-third year the work was not done. So the priests stopped collecting the money, and Jehoiada set a chest with a hole in its lid beside the altar. The king's scribe and the high priest counted the gifts together, and the money was paid to honest supervisors and workmen to repair the temple, while the guilt and sin offering money stayed with the priests. When Hazael of Syria took Gath and turned toward Jerusalem, Joash sent him all the dedicated treasures and gold of the temple and palace, and Hazael withdrew. Joash's servants conspired and killed him at Beth-millo, and his son Amaziah reigned in his place.

When I think about helping someone younger build a faith that lasts, it comes down to three things. Lead by example. Pour love into them. Share your faith openly. Joash did well while Jehoiada lived. I want the people I teach to stand on their own faith.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. How long did Joash reign, and how long did he do what was right? (12:1-2)

2. What did Joash leave standing, and why did that matter? (12:3; Deuteronomy 12:5-14)

3. What was Joash's first plan to repair the temple, and why did it fail? (12:4-8)

4. How did Jehoiada's chest work, and how did it protect everyone involved? (12:9-12)

5. What does it say about the supervisors that no one settled accounts with them? (12:15)

6. What did Joash do when Hazael threatened Jerusalem? (12:17-18)

7. What does 2 Chronicles 24:17-22 add about why Joash was killed?

8. Churches and ministries handle money that God's people give. What can we learn from Joash's chest and from Paul about doing it honestly? (12:9-15; 2 Corinthians 8:20-21)

9. Joash did right while Jehoiada was there to teach him. Whose faith have you leaned on, and is your faith your own?

10. If you teach or lead someone younger in the faith, how can you help them build a faith that will stand when you are no longer there?

Chapter 13: Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and the Death of Elisha

Scripture

13:1-13 In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, the king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, seventeen years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked after the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin; he did not turn aside from it. And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hand of Hazael the king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all the days. And Jehoahaz entreated the face of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for He saw the oppression of Israel, that the king of Syria oppressed them. And the LORD gave Israel a savior, and they went out from under the hand of Syria; and the sons of Israel dwelt in their tents as yesterday ***and*** the day before. Nevertheless they did not turn aside from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin; in it he walked. And also the Asherah remained standing in Samaria. For he had not left to Jehoahaz a people except fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust for trampling. And the rest of the matters of Jehoahaz and all that he did, and his might, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehoahaz lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Joash his son reigned in his place. In the thirty-seventh year of Joash the king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, sixteen years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin; in it he walked. And the rest of the matters of Joash and all that he did, and his might, how he fought with Amaziah the king of Judah, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Joash lay down with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne; and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

13:14-25 And Elisha had become sick with his sickness of which he would die. And Joash the king of Israel went down to him and wept over his face, and he said, "My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!" And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." And he took to himself a bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, "Make your hand ride on the bow." And he made his hand ride ***on it***, and Elisha put his hands on the hands of the king. And he said, "Open the window eastward." And he opened ***it***. And Elisha said, "Shoot." And he shot. And he said, "An arrow of salvation of the LORD, and an arrow of salvation against Syria; and you will strike Syria in Aphek until making an end ***of them***." And he said, "Take the arrows." And he took ***them***. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike toward the ground." And he struck three times and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him and said, "***You should have*** struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria until making an end ***of them***. And now three times you will strike Syria." And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of Moab would come into the land ***at the*** coming of a year. And it was, they ***were*** burying a man, and look, they saw the band, and they threw the man into the grave of Elisha; and the man went and touched the bones of Elisha, and he lived and rose up on his feet. And Hazael the king of Syria had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and He was not willing

to destroy them, and He did not throw them from His face until now. And Hazael the king of Syria died, and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his place. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz returned and took the cities from the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, which he had taken from the hand of Jehoahaz his father in the battle. Three times Joash struck him, and he restored the cities of Israel.

Chapter 13 Preview

The house of Jehu goes on reigning in Israel, and so do the golden calves. Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, does evil, and the LORD hands Israel over to Hazael of Syria until the army is nearly gone. Then Jehoahaz prays, and the LORD hears him and sends a savior. His son Jehoash follows him on the throne and in the same sins.

The heart of the chapter is the death of Elisha. Elisha has not been named since he sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu (9:1), more than forty years earlier. Now, on his deathbed, he has the king shoot an arrow out the window and strike the ground with arrows. The king strikes three times and stops, and Elisha is angry. Then Elisha dies, and even in the grave God gives life through him: a dead man thrown into his tomb touches his bones and stands up. The chapter closes by telling us why God kept showing mercy to such a stubborn nation: His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-3 *In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, the king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, seventeen years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked after the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin; he did not turn aside from it. And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hand of Hazael the king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all the days.*

"In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, the king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, seventeen years." That was about 814 to 798 B.C. He is the first of the four generations God promised Jehu (10:30).

The verdict is the one we will hear over and over for the kings of Israel: "he walked after the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat." Jeroboam, the first king of the north, set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan so his people would not go to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:26-30). Every king after him kept them.

"And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel." He gave them into the hand of Hazael, and later Hazael's son Ben-hadad, "all the days." This is what Elisha wept over when he first met Hazael (8:12). God was using a cruel foreign king as a rod to discipline His people, just as He warned in the Law (Leviticus 26:17).

13:4-6 *And Jehoahaz entreated the face of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for He saw the oppression of Israel, that the king of Syria oppressed them. And the LORD gave Israel a savior, and they went out from under the hand of Syria; and the sons of Israel dwelt in their tents as yesterday* ***and*** *the day before. Nevertheless they did not turn aside from the sins of the house of Jeroboam,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin; in it he walked. And also the Asherah remained standing in Samaria.*

"And Jehoahaz entreated the face of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him." It is a surprising verse. An evil king prays, and God listens, "for He saw the oppression of Israel." God's mercy was moved by His people's suffering, even when their king was not walking with Him.

"And the LORD gave Israel a savior." Scripture doesn't name him. Some think it was Jehoash, who won back cities from Syria (13:25). Others think of Jeroboam II, who restored Israel's borders (14:25-27). Many also point to the king of Assyria, who attacked Damascus about this time and took the pressure off Israel. The people "dwelt in their tents as yesterday and the day before," which means they could live in their homes in peace again.

"Nevertheless they did not turn aside from the sins of the house of Jeroboam." And "the Asherah remained standing in Samaria." An Asherah was a wooden pole or image for the Canaanite goddess of that name. Ahab had set one up (1 Kings 16:33), and even Jehu's purge left it standing. God rescued them, and they went right back to the same sins. How often do we pray hard in trouble and forget God when the trouble passes?

13:7-9 *For he had not left to Jehoahaz a people except fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust for trampling. And the rest of the matters of Jehoahaz and all that he did, and his might,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehoahaz lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Joash his son reigned in his place.*

How weak had Israel become? Jehoahaz was left with "fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers." Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots (1 Kings 10:26), so this was almost nothing. The king of Syria had made them "like the dust for trampling."

The rest of Jehoahaz's reign was written in the royal records of Israel. He died, was buried in Samaria, and his son Joash reigned in his place. Joash and Jehoash are two forms of the same name, and the text uses both. This is Jehoash of Israel, not the Joash of Judah from chapters 11 and 12, though they reigned at the same time.

13:10-13 *In the thirty-seventh year of Joash the king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, sixteen years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin; in it he walked. And the rest of the matters of Joash and all that he did, and his might, how he fought with Amaziah the king of Judah,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Joash lay down with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne; and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.*

"In the thirty-seventh year of Joash the king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, sixteen years." That was about 798 to 782 B.C. Again the verdict: "he did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat."

The writer gives Jehoash's death and burial right away, though the story of his visit to Elisha comes next and his war with Amaziah comes in chapter 14. That is the writer's way: he sums up a king, then goes back to tell the stories that matter most. Jehoash was buried "with the kings of Israel," and Jeroboam his son, the one we call Jeroboam II, sat on his throne.

13:14 *And Elisha had become sick with his sickness of which he would die. And Joash the king of Israel went down to him and wept over his face, and he said, "My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!"*

"And Elisha had become sick with his sickness of which he would die." Elisha had served as a prophet for more than fifty years, from the days of Ahab's sons to the grandson of Jehu. Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. Elisha died of an illness, in an ordinary way. God chooses how each of His servants finishes, and both endings honored Him.

King Jehoash came down and wept over him. "My father, my father, the chariotry of Israel and its horsemen!" These were the very words Elisha cried when Elijah was taken up (2:12). The king was saying that this old prophet had been Israel's real strength, worth more than all their chariots. He was right. The tragedy is that he knew it and still kept Jeroboam's calves.

13:15-17 *And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." And he took to himself a bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, "Make your hand ride on the bow." And he made his hand ride* ***on it****, and Elisha put his hands on the hands of the king. And he said, "Open the window eastward." And he opened* ***it****. And Elisha said, "Shoot." And he shot. And he said, "An arrow of salvation of the LORD, and an arrow of salvation against Syria; and you will strike Syria in Aphek until making an end* ***of them****."*

Elisha gave the king one last acted-out message. "Take a bow and arrows." Then, "Make your hand ride on the bow," and Elisha laid his own hands on the king's hands. The power behind the shot would be God's, not the king's.

"Open the window eastward." East was toward Gilead and Syria, the land Hazael had taken (10:32-33). "Shoot." The king shot. And Elisha said, "An arrow of salvation of the LORD, and an arrow of salvation against Syria." In Hebrew, Syria is called Aram. Salvation here means victory,

rescue in battle. The prophet promised that the king would strike Syria at Aphek, east of the Sea of Galilee, where Ahab once won a great victory (1 Kings 20:26-30).

13:18-19 *And he said, "Take the arrows." And he took **them**. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike toward the ground." And he struck three times and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him and said, "**You should have** struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria until making an end **of them**. And now three times you will strike Syria."*

"Take the arrows." Then, "Strike toward the ground." The king "struck three times and stopped."

"And the man of God was angry with him." Why? It seems a small thing. But the king had just heard that the arrows stood for victory over Syria. He went through the motions half-heartedly, as if it did not much matter. Elisha said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria until making an end of them. And now three times you will strike Syria."

The king's small faith set a limit on what he received. God is not stingy, but He often gives in answer to faith and eagerness. James says, "you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). Do we pray and serve with our whole heart, or do we strike the ground three times and stop?

13:20-21 *And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of Moab would come into the land **at the** coming of a year. And it was, they **were** burying a man, and look, they saw the band, and they threw the man into the grave of Elisha; and the man went and touched the bones of Elisha, and he lived and rose up on his feet.*

"And Elisha died, and they buried him." Raiding bands from Moab came into the land each spring, the season when kings went out to war.

Some time later, a group of men were burying a man when they saw one of those raiding bands coming. In a hurry, they threw the body into Elisha's tomb, a cave or rock-cut grave. "And the man went and touched the bones of Elisha, and he lived and rose up on his feet."

This is the last miracle connected with Elisha, and it came after he was dead. Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2:9), and Scripture records about twice as many miracles for him. What was God saying? The power was never in Elisha. It was in the God who sent him, and His word through Elisha was still alive even after the prophet was gone. That fit the moment, too: Elisha had just promised victory to a weak and nearly dead nation.

Does this mean there is power in the bones of holy people? No. This is the only time Scripture records anything like it, and nobody in Israel made a shrine of Elisha's grave. The Bible never tells us to seek help from the remains of the dead. The life came from God. It also points ahead. The God who could raise a dead man by a dead prophet's bones would one day raise His own Son, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

13:22-23 *And Hazael the king of Syria had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and He was not willing to destroy them, and He did not throw them from His face until now.*

"And Hazael the king of Syria had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz." The writer steps back to sum up the long hard years.

Then comes one of the most tender verses in Kings. "And the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." A covenant is a binding promise or agreement. God had promised Abraham a land and a nation (Genesis 15:18; 17:7-8). Israel did not deserve mercy, but God kept His word. "He was not willing to destroy them, and He did not throw them from His face until now."

"Until now." The writer knew how the story ended. He was writing after Samaria had fallen and Israel had been carried away (17:23). But for these many years God held back. His patience is long, but it is not endless (2 Peter 3:9). And His covenant with Abraham still stands. Paul says God's gifts and calling are irrevocable, and God has a future for the nation of Israel (Romans 11:25-29).

13:24-25 *And Hazael the king of Syria died, and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his place. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz returned and took the cities from the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, which he had taken from the hand of Jehoahaz his father in the battle. Three times Joash struck him, and he restored the cities of Israel.*

Hazael died, and his son Ben-hadad reigned. Syria's great oppressor was gone, and its new king was weaker. Jehoash "took the cities from the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael," the ones taken from his father. "Three times Joash struck him, and he restored the cities of Israel."

Three times, just as Elisha said. Not five or six. Elisha's word came true to the number. God kept His promise of victory, and the king's half-hearted faith kept the victory partial.

Chapter 13 Summary

Jehoahaz son of Jehu reigned seventeen years over Israel and kept Jeroboam's sins, so the LORD gave Israel into the hand of Hazael and Ben-hadad of Syria. When Jehoahaz entreated the LORD, He listened and gave Israel a savior, but the people did not turn from their sins, and the Asherah stayed in Samaria. Syria had left Jehoahaz only a tiny army. His son Jehoash reigned sixteen years and did the same evil. When Elisha was dying, Jehoash wept over him, calling him the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Elisha had him shoot an arrow east as a sign of the LORD's victory over Syria, then strike the ground, and when the king struck only three times, Elisha was angry and told him he would defeat Syria only three times. Elisha died and was buried, and later a dead man thrown into his grave came to life when he touched Elisha's bones. The LORD was gracious to Israel because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After Hazael died, Jehoash defeated Ben-hadad three times and recovered Israel's cities.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What sin did Jehoahaz and Jehoash both keep, and where did it come from? (13:2, 11; 1 Kings 12:26-30)

2. What happened when Jehoahaz entreated the LORD, and did the people change? (13:4-6)

3. What did King Jehoash say when he visited Elisha, and what did he mean by it? (13:14; 2:12)

4. What did the arrow shot out the eastern window stand for? (13:17)

5. Why was Elisha angry when the king struck the ground three times? (13:18-19)

6. What happened when the dead man touched Elisha's bones, and what does that teach us about where the power came from? (13:20-21)

7. Why was the LORD gracious to Israel, according to verse 23? (13:23; Romans 11:29)

8. How did Elisha's word about the three victories come true? (13:25)

9. Jehoahaz prayed in trouble, and the people went back to their sins when the trouble passed. Have you ever done the same? What would it look like to keep seeking God after He answers?

10. Is there an area of your life where you are striking three times and stopping, going through the motions instead of trusting God with your whole heart?

Chapter 14: Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel

Scripture

14:1-16 In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, the king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jehoaddan from Jerusalem. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, only not like David his father; according to all that Joash his father had done, he did. Only the high places were not removed; the people ***were*** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places. And it was, as soon as the kingdom was firm in his hand, and he struck down his servants who had struck down the king his father. And the sons of those who struck ***him*** down he did not put to death, according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; but each man shall be put to death for his sin." He struck down Edom in the Valley of Salt, ten thousand, and seized Sela in the battle, and he called its name Joktheel to this day. Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, the king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another ***in the*** face." And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah the king of Judah, saying, "The thornbush that ***was*** in Lebanon sent to the cedar that ***was*** in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife.' And the living thing of the field that ***was*** in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thornbush. You have certainly struck down Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be honored, and stay at your house; and why should you engage in strife to ***your*** harm, and fall, you and Judah with you?" And Amaziah did not listen. And Jehoash the king of Israel went up, and they looked one another ***in the*** face, he and Amaziah the king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which ***belongs*** to Judah. And Judah was defeated before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents. And Amaziah the king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, Jehoash the king of Israel seized at Beth-shemesh; and he came ***to*** Jerusalem and made a breach in the wall of Jerusalem, at the Gate of Ephraim as far as the Gate of the Corner, approximately 600 feet (four hundred cubits). And he took all the gold and the silver and all the articles that were found ***in*** the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king, and the hostages, and he returned to Samaria. And the rest of the matters of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah the king of Judah, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash lay down with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place.

14:17-29 And Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived after the death of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel, fifteen years. And the rest of the matters of Amaziah, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; and they sent after him to Lachish and put him to death there. And they carried him on the horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. And all the people of Judah took Azariah, and he ***was*** a son of sixteen years, and they made him king in place of his father Amaziah. He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king lay down with his fathers. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, the king of Israel, became king in Samaria,

forty-one years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who ***was*** from Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, ***that it was*** very bitter; and ***there was*** none shut up and none left, and ***there was*** no helper for Israel. And the LORD had not spoken to wipe out the name of Israel from under the heavens; and He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. And the rest of the matters of Jeroboam and all that he did, and his might, how he fought and how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jeroboam lay down with his fathers, with the kings of Israel; and Zechariah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 14 Preview

Amaziah, the son of Joash, becomes king of Judah. He does right, but not like David. He keeps the law of Moses when he punishes his father's murderers, and he wins a great victory over Edom. Then success goes to his head. He challenges Jehoash king of Israel to war, Jehoash answers with a short parable about a thornbush and a cedar, and Amaziah will not listen. Judah is beaten, Amaziah is captured, part of Jerusalem's wall is torn down, and the temple treasures are carried to Samaria. Years later Amaziah, like his father, is murdered by conspirators.

In Israel, Jeroboam II reigns forty-one years, the longest reign of any king of the north. He keeps the old sins, yet God uses him to restore Israel's borders, just as the prophet Jonah had said. This chapter shows us that pride goes before a fall, and that God's mercy sometimes reaches people who have done nothing to deserve it.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-4 *In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, the king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jehoaddan from Jerusalem. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, only not like David his father; according to all that Joash his father had done, he did. Only the high places were not removed; the people **were** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places.*

"In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, the king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, became king." Joahaz is a short form of Jehoahaz. Amaziah was twenty-five and reigned twenty-nine years, about 796 to 767 B.C. His mother was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.

"And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, only not like David his father." David is the measuring line for every king of Judah. Amaziah was like his father Joash: right on the outside, half-hearted within. Chronicles says he did right, "only not with a complete heart" (2 Chronicles 25:2), and it tells us that later he even brought home the gods of Edom and worshiped them (2 Chronicles 25:14).

"Only the high places were not removed." High places were hilltop places of worship, often used for the LORD but outside the place He chose, and easily mixed with idolatry.

14:5-6 *And it was, as soon as the kingdom was firm in his hand, and he struck down his servants who had struck down the king his father. And the sons of those who struck **him** down he did not put to death, according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; but each man shall be put to death for his sin."*

Once Amaziah was firmly in power, he executed the officials who had murdered his father (12:20-21). That was justice.

"And the sons of those who struck him down he did not put to death." Ancient kings often wiped out a traitor's whole family. Amaziah did not, "according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses." The writer quotes Deuteronomy 24:16: "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; but each man shall be put to death for his sin."

This is worth noticing. Jehu had killed whole families. Amaziah, for all his faults, held back because God's Word said so. Each person answers to God for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:20). God's Word should set the limits on what we do, even when our anger says otherwise.

14:7 *He struck down Edom in the Valley of Salt, ten thousand, and seized Sela in the battle, and he called its name Joktheel to this day.*

"He struck down Edom in the Valley of Salt, ten thousand." Edom had broken away from Judah in the days of Jehoram (8:20-22). The Valley of Salt was likely south of the Dead Sea. Amaziah also captured Sela, a rock fortress in Edom whose name means "rock," and renamed it Joktheel. Many think Sela was at or near the later city of Petra.

14:8-10 *Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, the king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another **in the** face." And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah the king of Judah, saying, "The thornbush that **was** in Lebanon sent to the cedar that **was** in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife.' And the living thing of the field that **was** in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thornbush. You have certainly struck down Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be honored, and stay at your house; and why should you engage in strife to **your** harm, and fall, you and Judah with you?"*

Fresh from his victory, Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash king of Israel: "Come, let us look one another in the face." It was a challenge to battle. Chronicles adds a reason: Israelite soldiers Amaziah had hired and then sent home had raided the towns of Judah on their way back (2 Chronicles 25:10, 13).

Jehoash answered with a fable. A thornbush in Lebanon asked a mighty cedar for its daughter as a wife for his son, as if they were equals, and a wild animal walked by and trampled the thornbush. The meaning was plain and insulting. Judah was the thornbush. Israel was the cedar.

Then Jehoash said it straight: "You have certainly struck down Edom, and your heart has lifted you up." It was good advice from a bad man. "Be honored, and stay at your house." Enjoy your win and stay home. "Why should you engage in strife to your harm, and fall, you and Judah with you?"

Pride had grown in Amaziah's heart after one victory. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18).

14:11-14 *And Amaziah did not listen. And Jehoash the king of Israel went up, and they looked one another **in the** face, he and Amaziah the king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which **belongs** to Judah. And Judah was defeated before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents. And Amaziah the king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, Jehoash the king of Israel seized at Beth-shemesh; and he came **to** Jerusalem and made a breach in the wall of Jerusalem, at the Gate of Ephraim as far as the Gate of the Corner, approximately 600 feet (four hundred cubits). And he took all the gold and the silver and all the articles that were found **in** the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king, and the hostages, and he returned to Samaria.*

"And Amaziah did not listen." The armies met at Beth-shemesh, a town in Judah west of Jerusalem. "And Judah was defeated before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents."

Jehoash captured Amaziah himself, marched to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall "at the Gate of Ephraim as far as the Gate of the Corner," a stretch of about 600 feet on the north side of the city, the side facing Israel. A broken wall left the city open and humbled.

He took all the gold and silver and articles in the house of the LORD and in the palace treasuries, "and the hostages," and returned to Samaria. Hostages were taken to make sure Judah behaved. Just a few years earlier, Amaziah's father had stripped the temple to pay off Hazael (12:18). Now his son lost it all to Israel because of pride. Chronicles says this came from God, because Amaziah had sought the gods of Edom (2 Chronicles 25:20).

14:15-16 *And the rest of the matters of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah the king of Judah, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash lay down with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place.*

The writer closes the account of Jehoash of Israel a second time, repeating what he said in 13:12-13. It is the formal ending of his reign, placed here because his war with Amaziah has now been told. Jehoash was buried in Samaria, and Jeroboam his son reigned.

14:17-20 *And Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived after the death of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel, fifteen years. And the rest of the matters of Amaziah, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; and they sent after him to Lachish and put him to death there. And they carried him on the horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.*

Amaziah outlived Jehoash by fifteen years. But his end was no better than his father's. "And they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish." Lachish was a strong

fortress city southwest of Jerusalem. The conspirators followed him there and killed him. They carried his body back on horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem "with his fathers in the city of David."

Scripture doesn't tell us exactly who conspired or why. Chronicles links it to his turning away from the LORD (2 Chronicles 25:27). Two kings of Judah in a row, father and son, were murdered by their own people. Half-hearted faith did not protect either one.

14:21-22 *And all the people of Judah took Azariah, and he **was** a son of sixteen years, and they made him king in place of his father Amaziah. He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king lay down with his fathers.*

"And all the people of Judah took Azariah, and he was a son of sixteen years, and they made him king." Azariah is also called Uzziah (15:13, 32). Many scholars believe he began to reign alongside his father while Amaziah was still alive, perhaps after Amaziah's defeat and capture, about 792 B.C. That would explain how the dates of their reigns overlap.

Azariah "built Elath and restored it to Judah." Elath was a port on the Gulf of Aqaba at the southern tip of the land, the gateway to trade by sea. With Edom beaten, Judah could use it again.

14:23-24 *In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, the king of Israel, became king in Samaria, forty-one years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, **with** which he caused Israel to sin.*

"In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, the king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, the king of Israel, became king in Samaria, forty-one years." We call him Jeroboam II, to tell him apart from the first Jeroboam. His forty-one years are counted from about 793 B.C., when he began to share the throne with his father, to 753 B.C.

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD." He bore the name of the man who set up the calves, and he kept them.

14:25-27 *He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who **was** from Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, **that it was** very bitter; and **there was** none shut up and none left, and **there was** no helper for Israel. And the LORD had not spoken to wipe out the name of Israel from under the heavens; and He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.*

"He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the sea of the Arabah." Lebo-hamath was the entrance to Hamath in the far north, and the sea of the Arabah is the Dead Sea. These were close to the borders of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kings 8:65). Syria had been weakened, and Assyria was busy elsewhere, and Jeroboam took back what had been lost.

It happened "according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-hepher." This is the same

Jonah whom God later sent to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1). Gath-hepher was a town in Galilee, a few miles from Nazareth. Jesus Himself spoke of Jonah's three days in the great fish as a sign of His own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).

Why would God bless an evil king? "For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter." Everyone was suffering, "none shut up and none left," which means no one at all, slave or free, was spared, "and there was no helper for Israel." God's compassion moved before Israel repented. "And the LORD had not spoken to wipe out the name of Israel from under the heavens; and He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

This was grace, one more chance. Sadly, Israel used its new wealth for luxury and injustice. The prophets Amos and Hosea preached in Jeroboam's days (Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1). Amos warned the rich who lay on beds of ivory while the poor were crushed (Amos 6:4), and he said plainly that the house of Jeroboam would fall by the sword (Amos 7:9). Good times are not proof that God approves. Sometimes they are His patience giving us room to repent (Romans 2:4).

14:28-29 *And the rest of the matters of Jeroboam and all that he did, and his might, how he fought and how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Jeroboam lay down with his fathers, with the kings of Israel; and Zechariah his son reigned in his place.*

Jeroboam also "restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel." The wording is hard, and Bible teachers read it in a few ways. It may mean he brought these areas, which had once belonged to David and Solomon's united kingdom, back under Israel's control. Jeroboam died, and Zechariah his son reigned. Zechariah would be the fourth generation of Jehu, the last one God had promised (10:30).

Chapter 14 Summary

Amaziah son of Joash became king of Judah and reigned twenty-nine years. He did right, but not like David, and the high places remained. He executed his father's murderers but spared their sons, as the law of Moses commanded. He defeated Edom in the Valley of Salt and took Sela. Proud of his victory, he challenged Jehoash king of Israel, who warned him with the fable of the thornbush and the cedar. Amaziah would not listen. Judah was defeated at Beth-shemesh, Amaziah was captured, a long stretch of Jerusalem's wall was broken down, and the treasures of the temple and palace and hostages were taken to Samaria. Amaziah lived fifteen years after Jehoash, then fled a conspiracy to Lachish and was killed there. The people made sixteen-year-old Azariah king, and he rebuilt Elath. In Israel, Jeroboam II reigned forty-one years and did evil, but the LORD saw Israel's bitter suffering and used him to restore Israel's borders from Lebo-hamath to the Dead Sea, as He had spoken through Jonah the prophet. Jeroboam died, and his son Zechariah reigned.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. How does the writer compare Amaziah to David and to his father Joash? (14:3)

2. What did Amaziah do with the sons of his father's murderers, and why? (14:5-6; Deuteronomy 24:16)

3. What did the parable of the thornbush and the cedar mean? (14:9-10)

4. What did Amaziah lose because he would not listen? (14:11-14)

5. Who was Jonah son of Amittai, and what had he prophesied? (14:25; Jonah 1:1)

6. Why did the LORD save Israel through Jeroboam II, even though he did evil? (14:26-27)

7. What did the prophets Amos and Hosea say about the wealth of Jeroboam's days? (Amos 6:4; 7:9)

8. Amaziah's heart was lifted up after one big victory. When has success made you less willing to listen to wise advice?

9. Amaziah obeyed God's Word when it held back his anger. Is there a situation where God's Word is asking you to hold back?

10. God's kindness in good times is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). How are you using the good times God has given you?

Chapter 15: Azariah, Jotham, and the Last Kings of Israel

Scripture

15:1-12 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of sixteen years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jecoliah from Jerusalem. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done. Only the high places were not removed; the people ***were*** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places. And the LORD struck the king, and he was leprous until the day of his death, and he dwelt in the house of separateness. And Jotham the son of the king ***was*** over the house, judging the people of the land. And the rest of the matters of Azariah and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Azariah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David; and Jotham his son reigned in his place. In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria, six months. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down before the people and put him to death, and he reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Zechariah, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel. That ***was*** the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, "Sons of the fourth ***generation*** shall sit for you on the throne of Israel." And it was so.

15:13-26 Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah the king of Judah, and he reigned a month of days in Samaria. And Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah and came ***to*** Samaria, and he struck down Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and put him to death, and he reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he conspired, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel. Then Menahem struck Tiphsah and all who ***were*** in it and its territories from Tirzah, for it did not open; and he struck ***it***; all its pregnant women he ripped open. In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, ten years in Samaria. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin, all his days. Pul the king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave to Pul approximately 75,000 pounds (a thousand talents) of silver, for his hands to be with him, to strengthen the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the silver from Israel, from all the mighty men of wealth, to give to the king of Assyria, approximately 20 ounces (fifty shekels) of silver for each man. And the king of Assyria returned and did not remain there in the land. And the rest of the matters of Menahem and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Menahem lay down with his fathers, and Pekahiah his son reigned in his place. In the fiftieth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, two years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin. And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his officer, conspired against him and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the house of

the king, with Argob and with Arieh; and with him ***were*** fifty men of the sons of the Gileadites. And he put him to death and reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Pekahiah and all that he did, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel.

15:27-38 In the fifty-second year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, twenty years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, ***with*** which he caused Israel to sin. In the days of Pekah the king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria came and took Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them into exile to Assyria. And Hoshea the son of Elah conspired a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him down and put him to death, and he reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. And the rest of the matters of Pekah and all that he did, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel. In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD; according to all that Uzziah his father had done, he did. Only the high places were not removed; the people ***were*** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD. And the rest of the matters of Jotham which he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah. And Jotham lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 15 Preview

This chapter moves fast. In Judah, two kings reign a long time and do right, though they leave the high places standing: Azariah, also called Uzziah, who reigns fifty-two years and is struck with leprosy, and his son Jotham. In Israel, the picture is chaos. After the long, prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, five kings follow in about twenty years, and four of them are murdered. Zechariah, the last of Jehu's line, lasts six months. Shallum lasts one month. Menahem takes the throne by force and buys off the king of Assyria. Pekahiah is murdered by Pekah, and Pekah is murdered by Hoshea.

Behind it all a new power is rising. Assyria, the great empire on the Tigris River, comes west, and in Pekah's days it carries off the people of Galilee and Gilead. The end of the northern kingdom is near. Hosea, who preached in these years, said it well: "They have made kings, and not from Me" (Hosea 8:4).

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-4 *In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of sixteen years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jecoliah from Jerusalem. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done. Only the high places were not removed; the people **were** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places.*

"In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, the king of Judah, became king." He was sixteen and reigned fifty-two years, about 792 to 740 B.C., counting the years he shared the throne with his father and later with his son. His mother was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

"And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done." Chronicles, which calls him Uzziah, tells us much more: he built towers, dug wells, loved farming, built a strong army, and "was seeking God in the days of Zechariah," a man who taught him, "and in the days that he sought the LORD, God made him prosper" (2 Chronicles 26:5). Judah grew stronger under him than at any time since Solomon. Again, "only the high places were not removed."

15:5-7 *And the LORD struck the king, and he was leprous until the day of his death, and he dwelt in the house of separateness. And Jotham the son of the king **was** over the house, judging the people of the land. And the rest of the matters of Azariah and all that he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Azariah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David; and Jotham his son reigned in his place.*

"And the LORD struck the king, and he was leprous until the day of his death." Leprosy in the Bible covers several serious skin diseases. Under the Law, a person with it was unclean, which means unfit to come near God's house or live among the people (Leviticus 13:45-46). So Azariah "dwelt in the house of separateness," a house set apart, and his son Jotham ran the palace and judged the people.

Kings gives the fact. Chronicles gives the reason. When Uzziah became strong, his heart was lifted up, and he went into the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense, a work God gave only to the priests. Eighty priests stood against him, and as he raged at them, leprosy broke out on his forehead (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). It is the same sin as his father's: pride after success.

Isaiah saw his great vision of the Lord "In the year of the death of King Uzziah" (Isaiah 6:1). The earthly king who had tried to push into God's presence was dead, and Isaiah saw the true King on His throne.

15:8-12 *In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria, six months. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down before the people and put him to death, and he reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Zechariah, look, they* ***are*** *written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel. That* ***was*** *the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, "Sons of the fourth* ***generation*** *shall sit for you on the throne of Israel." And it was so.*

Now the story turns to Israel. "In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria, six months." That was 753 B.C. He "did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done."

"And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down before the people." He was killed in public, and Shallum took the throne.

The writer stops to point out what this means: "That was the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, Sons of the fourth generation shall sit for you on the throne of Israel. And it was so." Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II and Zechariah. God's promise to Jehu came true exactly (10:30). So did His warning through Hosea about the bloodshed of Jezreel (Hosea 1:4). The house of Jehu began in blood and ended in blood.

15:13-15 *Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah the king of Judah, and he reigned a month of days in Samaria. And Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah and came* ***to*** *Samaria, and he struck down Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and put him to death, and he reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he conspired, look, they* ***are*** *written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel.*

"Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah the king of Judah, and he reigned a month of days in Samaria." That was 752 B.C. Then "Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah," the old capital of Israel before Samaria, and killed him. One month. The man who seized the throne by murder lost it the same way. Jesus said that "all who take a sword will perish by a sword" (Matthew 26:52).

15:16 *Then Menahem struck Tiphsah and all who* ***were*** *in it and its territories from Tirzah, for it did not open; and he struck* ***it****; all its pregnant women he ripped open.*

"Then Menahem struck Tiphsah," a town that refused to open its gates to him. The writer tells us that Menahem attacked it and all its territory and, as some armies of that day did, killed even the pregnant women in the cruelest way. I will not dwell on it. The Bible records it so we know how far Israel had fallen. An Israelite king was now doing to his own people the kind of thing Elisha had wept to think Hazael would do (8:12). The prophet Amos condemned the Ammonites for the very same crime (Amos 1:13). When a nation turns from God, it soon turns on the weak. God sees, and He judges such cruelty.

15:17-22 *In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, ten years in Samaria. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin, all his days. Pul the king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave to Pul approximately 75,000 pounds (a thousand talents) of silver, for his hands to be with him, to strengthen the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the silver from Israel, from all the mighty men of wealth, to give to the king of Assyria, approximately 20 ounces (fifty shekels) of silver for each man. And the king of Assyria returned and did not remain there in the land. And the rest of the matters of Menahem and all that he did,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel? And Menahem lay down with his fathers, and Pekahiah his son reigned in his place.*

"In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, ten years in Samaria." That was about 752 to 742 B.C. He kept Jeroboam's sins "all his days."

"Pul the king of Assyria came against the land." Pul is another name for Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian king who built Assyria into a great empire (1 Chronicles 5:26 uses both names). Menahem paid him a thousand talents of silver, about 75,000 pounds, "for his hands to be with him, to strengthen the kingdom in his hand." He bought Assyria's support to keep his shaky throne.

Where did the money come from? Menahem charged it to "all the mighty men of wealth," fifty shekels of silver each, about 20 ounces. Some have figured this means about sixty thousand wealthy men were taxed. The king of Assyria went home, for now.

This was a turning point. Israel was now paying tribute to Assyria. Hosea put it this way: Ephraim, another name for Israel, had become "like a silly dove without heart," calling to Egypt and going to Assyria (Hosea 7:11). Israel looked everywhere for help except to the LORD.

15:23-26 *In the fiftieth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, two years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin. And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his officer, conspired against him and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the house of the king, with Argob and with Arieh; and with him* ***were*** *fifty men of the sons of the Gileadites. And he put him to death and reigned in his place. And the rest of the matters of Pekahiah and all that he did, look, they* ***are*** *written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel.*

"In the fiftieth year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, two years." That was about 742 to 740 B.C. Same verdict, same sins.

"And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his officer, conspired against him." Pekah was one of his own officers. With fifty men from Gilead, he killed Pekahiah in the citadel, the strongest part of the palace. Two men named Argob and Arieh died with the king, or helped kill him; the Hebrew can be read either way. Pekah took the throne.

15:27-28 *In the fifty-second year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, twenty years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,* ***with*** *which he caused Israel to sin.*

"In the fifty-second year of Azariah the king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, twenty years." His twenty years are hard to fit if they started here, since Israel fell less than twenty years later. Many scholars believe Pekah had already set himself up as a rival king in Gilead, east of the Jordan, about 752 B.C., when Menahem took Samaria, and that his twenty years are counted from then. In the end he took the whole kingdom. He too kept Jeroboam's sins.

15:29 *In the days of Pekah the king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria came and took Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them into exile to Assyria.*

"In the days of Pekah the king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria came." He took a string of cities in the north, "and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them into exile to Assyria." This was about 733 to 732 B.C. Exile means being carried away from your homeland to live as captives in a foreign land. Assyria did this to conquered peoples to break their strength and their will to rebel.

This was the first great exile of Israel. The north and the east went first. Isaiah, who preached in these years, spoke of this very land: "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" were humbled first, but one day "Galilee of the nations" would see a great light (Isaiah 9:1-2). Matthew tells us that light came when Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, the land that had gone into darkness first (Matthew 4:13-16).

15:30-31 *And Hoshea the son of Elah conspired a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him down and put him to death, and he reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. And the rest of the matters of Pekah and all that he did, look, they* ***are*** *written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Israel.*

"And Hoshea the son of Elah conspired a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him down." Hoshea became the last king of Israel. Four of the last six kings of Israel were murdered by the men who took their place.

The date is given as "in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah." Jotham reigned sixteen years (15:33), so this seems odd. Many scholars believe Jotham's son Ahaz had taken over most of the power by then, and the writer kept counting from the start of Jotham's reign.

15:32-35 *In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD; according to all that Uzziah his father had done, he did. Only the high places were not removed; the people **were** still sacrificing and burning incense on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD.*

The story goes back to Judah. "In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, the king of Judah, became king." He was twenty-five and reigned sixteen years. His reign is counted from about 750 B.C., when he took charge for his leprous father, to about 732 B.C. His mother was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok, which may mean she came from a priestly family.

"And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD." Chronicles adds that he did not go into the temple as his father had done, and that "he had set his ways before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 27:2, 6). He learned from his father's mistake. "Only the high places were not removed." He built "the upper gate of the house of the LORD," which may be the upper Benjamin gate of Jeremiah 20:2.

15:36-38 *And the rest of the matters of Jotham which he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah. And Jotham lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.*

"In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah." Notice who sends them: the LORD. Syria and Israel were forming an alliance against Assyria and wanted Judah to join. When Judah would not, they turned against her. The full attack comes in the next chapter.

Jotham died and was buried in the city of David, "and Ahaz his son reigned in his place." With Ahaz, Judah would take a long step downward.

Chapter 15 Summary

Azariah, also called Uzziah, became king of Judah at sixteen and reigned fifty-two years, doing right as his father had, though the high places remained. The LORD struck him with leprosy, and he lived in a separate house while his son Jotham governed. In Israel, Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned six months before Shallum killed him, fulfilling the LORD's word that Jehu's sons would reign to the fourth generation. Shallum reigned one month before Menahem killed him. Menahem attacked Tiphsah with great cruelty, reigned ten years, and paid Pul king of Assyria a thousand talents of silver, taxing Israel's wealthy men. His son Pekahiah reigned two years before his officer Pekah killed him. In Pekah's days Tiglath-pileser of Assyria took Gilead, Galilee and all Naphtali and carried the people into exile, and Hoshea killed Pekah and reigned. In Judah, Jotham reigned sixteen years and did right, though the high places remained, and he built the upper gate of the temple. The LORD began to send Rezin of Syria and Pekah against Judah, and Jotham's son Ahaz reigned after him.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. How did the LORD's word to Jehu about four generations come true? (15:8-12; 10:30)

2. What happened to Azariah, and what does 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 say was the reason? (15:5)

3. How many of Israel's kings in this chapter were murdered, and by whom? (15:10, 14, 25, 30)

4. Who was Pul, and why did Menahem pay him so much silver? (15:19-20)

5. What happened to the people of Galilee and Naphtali in Pekah's days? (15:29)

6. How does Matthew 4:13-16 connect Galilee's darkness with Jesus? (Isaiah 9:1-2)

7. What did Jotham learn from his father, according to 2 Chronicles 27:2, 6? (15:34)

8. Israel looked to Assyria and Egypt for help instead of the LORD (Hosea 7:11). Where are you tempted to look for security apart from God?

9. Uzziah's success led to pride, and pride led to a fall. How can we guard our hearts when God blesses us?

10. Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne in the year an earthly king died (Isaiah 6:1). When earthly leaders fail or are gone, how does it help to remember who truly reigns?

Chapter 16: Ahaz and the Altar from Damascus

Scripture

16:1-9 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, the king of Judah, became king. Ahaz ***was*** a son of twenty years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do the right in the eyes of the LORD his God like David his father. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and he even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree. Then Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up ***to*** Jerusalem for battle; and they besieged Ahaz, and they were not able to fight. At that time Rezin the king of Syria restored Elath to Syria, and he cleared out the Judeans from Eloth; and the Edomites came ***to*** Elath and dwelt there to this day. And Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria, saying, "I ***am*** your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." And Ahaz took the silver and the gold that was found ***in*** the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king, and he sent ***it*** to the king of Assyria ***as*** a bribe. And the king of Assyria listened to him, and the king of Assyria went up to Damascus and seized it, and he carried it into exile to Kir, and Rezin he put to death.

16:10-20 And King Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria ***at*** Damascus, and he saw the altar that ***was*** in Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest the likeness of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship. And Uriah the priest built the altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus; so Uriah the priest did, until King Ahaz came from Damascus. And the king came from Damascus, and the king saw the altar; and the king drew near to the altar and offered up on it. And he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering, and he poured out his drink offering, and he sprinkled the blood of the peace offerings that ***were*** his on the altar. And the bronze altar that ***was*** before the LORD, he brought near from the front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and he put it on the side of the altar northward. And King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, "On the great altar burn the burnt offering of the morning and the grain offering of the evening, and the burnt offering of the king and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land and their grain offering and their drink offerings; and all the blood of a burnt offering and all the blood of a sacrifice you shall sprinkle on it. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire ***by***." And Uriah the priest did according to all that King Ahaz commanded. And King Ahaz cut off the rims of the stands and removed the laver from on them; and the sea he took down from on the bronze oxen that ***were*** under it, and he put it on a pavement of stones. And the covered way of the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the outer entrance of the king, he turned ***from*** the house of the LORD because of the king of Assyria. And the rest of the matters of Ahaz which he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Ahaz lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 16 Preview

Ahaz is one of the worst kings Judah ever had. He walks in the ways of the kings of Israel, and he even makes his son pass through the fire, a phrase that means child sacrifice. When Syria and Israel come against Jerusalem, he does not turn to the LORD. He turns to Assyria, calls himself the Assyrian king's servant and son, and pays him with silver and gold from the temple. Assyria crushes Damascus, and Ahaz goes there to bow before his new master.

In Damascus, Ahaz sees a foreign altar he likes. He sends home a pattern, has a copy built, and pushes the LORD's bronze altar off to the side. He strips the temple furnishings and rearranges the house of God to please the king of Assyria. Isaiah 7 tells us that during this same crisis God offered Ahaz a sign, and Ahaz refused it. That sign was the promise of the virgin's Son, Immanuel.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-2 *In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, the king of Judah, became king. Ahaz **was** a son of twenty years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do the right in the eyes of the LORD his God like David his father.*

"In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, the king of Judah, became king." He was twenty and reigned sixteen years. His reign is counted from about 735 B.C., when he began to share power with his father Jotham, to about 715 B.C.

"And he did not do the right in the eyes of the LORD his God like David his father." His grandfather Uzziah and his father Jotham, for all their faults, did right. Ahaz did not. Notice that the writer calls the LORD "his God." The LORD was still the God of Ahaz by covenant, whether Ahaz honored Him or not.

16:3 *And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and he even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel.*

"And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel." That was bad enough. Then the writer says something worse: "he even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel."

What does "pass through the fire" mean? Most Bible teachers take it as child sacrifice, offering a child to a false god by burning. That is how 2 Chronicles 28:3 describes it: Ahaz "burned his sons in the fire" in the valley of the son of Hinnom, the valley just south of Jerusalem. A few scholars think the phrase could mean a ritual of passing a child through flames to dedicate him to a god, not always ending in death. But Chronicles and the prophets make it plain that real children died (Jeremiah 7:31; Ezekiel 16:20-21).

God had forbidden this in the strongest words. The Canaanites did it, and it was one reason He drove them out (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). Now a king of David's line was doing it in the shadow of the temple.

How could a father do this? Fear and desperation, probably. Ahaz was under attack, and he wanted the help of any god who might save him. False gods always demand more than they give, and in the end they take the very lives they promised to protect. The LORD is the opposite. He did not demand our children. He gave His own Son for us (Romans 8:32). This is a hard verse to read, and if you lead a group, read it with care. We will see the same sin in Israel (17:17) and in Manasseh (21:6).

16:4 *And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree.*

"And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree." Luxuriant means green and leafy. The Canaanites worshiped their gods under green trees and on hilltops, believing these places were full of life and fertility. Ahaz did not just leave the high places standing as earlier kings had. He worshiped at them himself, everywhere.

16:5-6 *Then Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up **to** Jerusalem for battle; and they besieged Ahaz, and they were not able to fight. At that time Rezin the king of Syria restored Elath to Syria, and he cleared out the Judeans from Eloth; and the Edomites came **to** Elath and dwelt there to this day.*

"Then Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem for battle." Syria and Israel had joined together against Assyria, and when Judah would not join them, they decided to replace Ahaz with a king of their own choosing (Isaiah 7:6). "They besieged Ahaz, and they were not able to fight." That means they could not win the battle or take the city.

Chronicles tells us they killed many in Judah and took many captives, before a prophet named Oded persuaded Israel to send the captives home (2 Chronicles 28:5-15). Rezin also took back Elath, the port Azariah had rebuilt (14:22), and the Edomites moved in.

Isaiah 7 tells us what happened in Jerusalem at this time. The hearts of Ahaz and his people shook "as the trees of the forest" in the wind (Isaiah 7:2). God sent Isaiah to meet Ahaz and tell him not to fear these "two tails of smoking firebrands" (Isaiah 7:4), burned-out sticks, and to trust Him. "If you do not believe, surely you will not be established" (Isaiah 7:9). God offered Ahaz any sign he wanted, and Ahaz refused, pretending he did not want to test the LORD (Isaiah 7:10-12). So God gave a sign anyway, to the whole house of David: "Look, the virgin is pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew tells us this was fulfilled when Jesus was born of the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:22-23). Immanuel means "God with us." The faithless king refused God's sign, and God gave it anyway, and it pointed to the King who would never fail.

16:7-9 *And Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria, saying, "I **am** your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." And Ahaz took the silver and the gold that was found **in** the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king, and he sent **it** to the king of Assyria **as** a bribe. And the king of Assyria listened to him, and the king of Assyria went up to Damascus and seized it, and he carried it into exile to Kir, and Rezin he put to death.*

Instead of trusting God, "Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria, saying, I am your servant and your son." Those were the words of a vassal, a lesser king who gives up his freedom to a greater one. "Come up and save me." Ahaz asked a pagan king to do what only the LORD could do.

He paid for it with "the silver and the gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king." The writer calls it what it was: a bribe.

Assyria came. Tiglath-pileser took Damascus, carried its people away to Kir, and killed Rezin. This was about 732 B.C. In one sense Ahaz's plan worked. But Judah now belonged to Assyria, and Assyria would soon come for Judah too (18:13). Chronicles says plainly that the king of Assyria "distressed him, and he did not strengthen him" (2 Chronicles 28:20). Isaiah had warned that the LORD would bring the king of Assyria on Judah like a flood (Isaiah 8:7-8). When we turn from God to the world for help, the world always sends a bill.

16:10-11 *And King Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria **at** Damascus, and he saw the altar that **was** in Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest the likeness of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship. And Uriah the priest built the altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus; so Uriah the priest did, until King Ahaz came from Damascus.*

"And King Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria at Damascus." He went to pay homage to his new master. While there, "he saw the altar that was in Damascus." Scripture doesn't tell us whether it was an Assyrian altar or a Syrian one. Ahaz liked it and sent "the likeness of the altar and its pattern" to Uriah the priest in Jerusalem.

"And Uriah the priest built the altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus." He had it done before the king even got home. Uriah is named by Isaiah as a reliable witness (Isaiah 8:2), so he may have been a respected man. But here he went along with the king without a word. Compare him with the eighty priests who stood up to Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:17-18). God had given Moses the pattern for His altar (Exodus 27:1-8). The priest's job was to guard it, not to copy one from a pagan city.

16:12-14 *And the king came from Damascus, and the king saw the altar; and the king drew near to the altar and offered up on it. And he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering, and he poured out his drink offering, and he sprinkled the blood of the peace offerings that **were** his on the altar. And the bronze altar that **was** before the LORD, he brought near from the front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and he put it on the side of the altar northward.*

"And the king came from Damascus, and the king saw the altar." He went up to it and offered his burnt offering, grain offering, drink offering, and the blood of his peace offerings on it. A burnt offering was wholly burned up as an act of worship and surrender. A grain offering was flour or bread given in thanks. A drink offering was wine poured out. A peace offering was shared in a meal of fellowship with God. Ahaz went through all the right forms, on the wrong altar.

Then he moved "the bronze altar that was before the LORD." This was the altar Solomon had made, standing in front of the temple. Ahaz moved it out of the way, "on the side of the altar northward." God's altar was pushed to the side to make room for the king's new one.

That is a picture of what happens in many hearts. We may not throw God out. We just move Him to the side and put something we like better in the center.

16:15-16 *And King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, "On the great altar burn the burnt offering of the morning and the grain offering of the evening, and the burnt offering of the king and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land and their grain offering and their drink offerings; and all the blood of a burnt offering and all the blood of a sacrifice you shall sprinkle on it. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire **by**." And Uriah the priest did according to all that King Ahaz commanded.*

Ahaz commanded Uriah: "On the great altar burn the burnt offering of the morning and the grain offering of the evening." All the regular worship, the king's offerings and the people's offerings, would now go on the new altar. "And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by."

That last phrase likely means Ahaz kept the old altar for himself, to seek omens or guidance. Some think he meant he would decide later what to do with it. Either way, the LORD's altar, the one place where God had promised to meet His people through sacrifice, was set aside.

"And Uriah the priest did according to all that King Ahaz commanded." It is a sad line about a priest. He obeyed the king rather than God.

16:17-18 *And King Ahaz cut off the rims of the stands and removed the laver from on them; and the sea he took down from on the bronze oxen that **were** under it, and he put it on a pavement of stones. And the covered way of the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the outer entrance of the king, he turned **from** the house of the LORD because of the king of Assyria.*

Ahaz went further. He cut off the rims of the bronze stands, removed the lavers from them, and took the great bronze "sea," the huge basin for the priests' washing, down from the twelve bronze oxen Solomon had set under it (1 Kings 7:23-39), and put it on a stone pavement. The bronze was probably sent as more tribute to Assyria.

He also changed "the covered way of the Sabbath" and "the outer entrance of the king" in the temple "because of the king of Assyria." Scripture doesn't explain exactly what these were. It seems the king's private way into the temple was closed or moved, perhaps to show that he no longer acted as a free king, or to please his Assyrian master. Chronicles adds that he finally shut the doors of the house of the LORD and made altars on every corner of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 28:24).

The house of God was being rearranged to please a man. That is always a dangerous thing, in a temple or in a church.

16:19-20 *And the rest of the matters of Ahaz which he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Ahaz lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.*

Ahaz died and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. Chronicles says he was not buried in the tombs of the kings (2 Chronicles 28:27). Either way, his life is a warning.

"And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place." Here is a wonder of God's grace. The worst king so far had a son who would become one of the best. A child does not have to follow his father's sins. Hezekiah would reopen the temple doors his father shut (2 Chronicles 29:3).

Chapter 16 Summary

Ahaz son of Jotham became king of Judah at twenty and reigned sixteen years, and he did not do right like David. He walked in the ways of Israel's kings, made his son pass through the fire, and sacrificed on the high places and under every green tree. When Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel besieged Jerusalem, they could not take it, but Rezin took Elath. Ahaz sent to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, calling himself his servant and son, and paid him with silver and gold from the temple and palace. Assyria took Damascus, exiled its people and killed Rezin. When Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser at Damascus, he saw an altar there and sent its pattern to Uriah the priest, who built a copy. Ahaz offered on the new altar, moved the LORD's bronze altar aside, commanded that all offerings be made on the new one, and kept the bronze altar for himself to inquire by. He stripped the bronze stands and the sea and changed the temple entrances because of the king of Assyria. Ahaz died, and his son Hezekiah reigned in his place.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. How does the writer compare Ahaz to David? (16:2)

2. What does "made his son pass through the fire" mean, and how does 2 Chronicles 28:3 describe it? (16:3)

3. Whom did Ahaz turn to when Syria and Israel attacked, and what did it cost? (16:7-8)

4. What sign did God give the house of David in Ahaz's day, and how was it fulfilled? (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23)

5. What did Ahaz do with the altar he saw in Damascus, and with the LORD's bronze altar? (16:10-15)

6. How did Uriah the priest respond to the king's commands? (16:11, 16)

7. Why did Ahaz change the temple's entrances and furnishings? (16:17-18)

8. Ahaz called himself the servant and son of the king of Assyria. Whom or what are you tempted to depend on in a crisis instead of God?

9. Ahaz moved the LORD's altar to the side to make room for one he liked better. Is there anything in your life that has pushed God out of the center?

10. Hezekiah, the son of a wicked father, became a godly king. How does that encourage you if you came from a hard family, or if you are praying for your children?

Chapter 17: The Fall of Samaria and the Exile of Israel

Scripture

17:1-12 In the twelfth year of Ahaz the king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king in Samaria over Israel, nine years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like the kings of Israel who were before him. Against him Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up; and Hoshea became a servant to him and rendered him tribute. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So the king of Egypt, and he had not brought up tribute to the king of Assyria as year by year; and the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him ***in*** a house of prison. And the king of Assyria came up into all the land, and he went up ***to*** Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel into exile to Assyria, and he made them dwell in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and ***in*** the cities of Media. And it was so, because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who brought them up from the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and they feared other gods, and they walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they made. And the sons of Israel did secretly things that ***were*** not right against the LORD their God, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from a tower of watchmen to a city of fortification. And they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree. And they burned incense there on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD carried into exile from before them; and they did evil things to provoke the LORD to anger. And they served the idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

17:13-23 And the LORD warned Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets ***and*** every seer, saying, "Turn back from your evil ways, and keep My commandments, My statutes, according to all the law that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by the hand of My servants the prophets." And they did not listen, and they hardened their neck like the neck of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies with which He warned them; and they walked after vanity and became vain, and after the nations that ***were*** around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. And they forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God, and they made for themselves a molten image, two calves; and they made an Asherah, and they bowed down to all the host of the heavens, and they served the Baal. And they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and they divined divinations and practiced omens, and they sold themselves to do the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. And the LORD was very angry with Israel, and He removed them from His face; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, and they walked in the statutes of Israel which they had made. And the LORD rejected all the offspring of Israel, and He afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had thrown them from before Him. For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drove Israel away from after the LORD and caused them to sin a great sin. And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam that he did; they

did not turn aside from it, until the LORD removed Israel from His face, as He had spoken by the hand of all His servants the prophets. And Israel went into exile from its ground to Assyria to this day.

17:24-33 And the king of Assyria brought ***people*** from Babylon and from Cuth and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and he made ***them*** dwell in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel; and they possessed Samaria and dwelt in its cities. And it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD; and the LORD sent the lions among them, and they were killing among them. And they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations that you carried into exile and made dwell in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the God of the land; and He has sent the lions among them, and look, they are killing them, because they do not know the custom of the God of the land." And the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Take there one of the priests whom you carried into exile from there, and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the custom of the God of the land." And one of the priests whom they had carried into exile from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and he was teaching them how they should fear the LORD. And they were making, nation ***by*** nation, its own gods, and they put ***them*** in the house of the high places that the Samaritans had made, nation ***by*** nation in their cities in which they ***were*** dwelling. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites ***were*** burning their sons in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. And they were fearing the LORD, and they appointed for themselves from among all of them priests of high places, and they were making ***offerings*** for them in the house of the high places. The LORD they were fearing, and their own gods they were serving, according to the custom of the nations from which they had carried them into exile.

17:34-41 To this day they are doing according to the former customs; they are not fearing the LORD, and they are not doing according to their statutes and according to their judgment and according to the law and according to the commandment which the LORD commanded the sons of Jacob, whose name He made Israel. And the LORD made a covenant with them and commanded them, saying, "You shall not fear other gods, and you shall not bow down to them, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not sacrifice to them; but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, and to Him you shall bow down, and to Him you shall sacrifice. And the statutes and the judgments and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to do all the days; and you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I made with you, you shall not forget; and you shall not fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear, and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies." And they did not listen, but according to their former custom they ***were*** doing. And these nations were fearing the LORD, and their idols they were serving; also their sons and the sons of their sons, as their fathers did, they are doing to this day.

Chapter 17 Preview

This is the end of the northern kingdom. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, pays tribute to Assyria, then secretly turns to Egypt for help. The king of Assyria finds out, puts him in prison, and lays

siege to Samaria for three years. In 722 B.C. the city falls, and the people of Israel are carried away to distant lands. After about two hundred years, the kingdom Jeroboam started is gone.

Then the writer does something he does nowhere else in Kings. He stops the story and preaches. In verses 7 to 23 he tells us why Israel fell. It was not that Assyria was too strong or that the LORD was too weak. It was sin: other gods, high places, idols, child sacrifice, witchcraft, and above all a stubborn refusal to listen to the prophets God kept sending. The last part of the chapter tells how the king of Assyria filled the empty land with foreign peoples who worshiped the LORD and their own gods at the same time. From them and from the Israelites left in the land came the Samaritans, the people we meet in the Gospels, including the woman Jesus met at the well in John 4.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-2 *In the twelfth year of Ahaz the king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king in Samaria over Israel, nine years. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like the kings of Israel who were before him.*

"In the twelfth year of Ahaz the king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king in Samaria over Israel, nine years." That was about 732 to 722 B.C. Hoshea had killed Pekah to take the throne (15:30).

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like the kings of Israel who were before him." Hoshea was not as bad as the others. Scripture doesn't tell us how. Some think he did not stop his people from going to Jerusalem to worship. It is a sobering thought that the kingdom fell under one of its less wicked kings. Judgment had been building for two centuries. Hoshea was simply the king when the bill came due.

17:3-4 *Against him Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up; and Hoshea became a servant to him and rendered him tribute. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So the king of Egypt, and he had not brought up tribute to the king of Assyria as year by year; and the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him* ***in*** *a house of prison.*

"Against him Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up." Shalmaneser V had followed Tiglath-pileser on the Assyrian throne. Hoshea became his servant and paid him tribute, which means a yearly payment from a weaker king to a stronger one, the price of being left alone.

Then Hoshea tried to break free. He "had sent messengers to So the king of Egypt," and he stopped paying tribute. Scripture doesn't tell us much about So, and scholars are not sure which Egyptian ruler he was. Egypt was weak and divided at the time, and no help came. Hosea had warned about this kind of politics: Israel was calling to Egypt and going to Assyria like a silly dove (Hosea 7:11).

"And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea." He seized Hoshea and put him in prison. Israel's last king vanishes from the story in chains.

17:5-6 *And the king of Assyria came up into all the land, and he went up **to** Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel into exile to Assyria, and he made them dwell in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and **in** the cities of Media.*

"And the king of Assyria came up into all the land, and he went up to Samaria and besieged it three years." Samaria was built on a hill and well fortified (1 Kings 16:24), and it held out a long time. "In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria." That was 722 B.C.

Which king of Assyria took it? Shalmaneser V began the siege, and he died about the time it ended. His successor, Sargon II, later claimed the victory in his own records and carried out the deportation. Kings simply says "the king of Assyria." Isaiah names Sargon in another place (Isaiah 20:1).

The king of Assyria "carried Israel into exile to Assyria." He settled them in Halah, on the Habor, "the river of Gozan," in what is now northern Syria and Iraq, and in the cities of Media, in what is now northwest Iran. They were scattered hundreds of miles from home, among people with other languages and other gods.

This is exactly what Moses warned would happen if Israel turned from the LORD: "And the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from the end of the earth to the end of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:64). Amos and Hosea had said the same in these very years (Amos 5:27; Hosea 9:3). God's warnings are not empty.

17:7-8 *And it was so, because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who brought them up from the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and they feared other gods, and they walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they made.*

"And it was so, because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God." Here the writer begins his sermon. Why did Samaria fall? The first answer is about the relationship. The LORD was the one "who brought them up from the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt." He had rescued them, and "they feared other gods." To fear a god in this sense means to worship and revere him.

They "walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed," which means they lived by the religious customs of the Canaanites God had driven out because of those very customs. And they walked in the statutes "of the kings of Israel, which they made," the calves and the false worship Jeroboam started. Man-made religion took the place of God's Word.

That is how sin begins with God's people. It starts with forgetting what He has done for us.

17:9-12 *And the sons of Israel did secretly things that **were** not right against the LORD their God, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from a tower of watchmen to a city of fortification. And they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree. And they burned incense there on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD carried into exile from before them; and they did evil things to provoke the LORD to anger. And they served the idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."*

"And the sons of Israel did secretly things that were not right against the LORD their God." Secretly can also mean covering things over, doing wrong while pretending to be right. Their idolatry was everywhere, in every town, "from a tower of watchmen to a city of fortification," from the smallest lookout post to the largest walled city.

They set up "pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree." Pillars were standing stones used in Canaanite worship. Asherim is the plural of Asherah, wooden poles or images for the goddess Asherah. They "burned incense there on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD carried into exile from before them." The writer's point is plain. The Canaanites lost the land for these sins. Now Israel was losing it for the same ones.

"And they served the idols, of which the LORD had said to them, You shall not do this thing." It was not a matter of not knowing. God had told them plainly in the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-5).

17:13-14 *And the LORD warned Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets **and** every seer, saying, "Turn back from your evil ways, and keep My commandments, My statutes, according to all the law that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by the hand of My servants the prophets." And they did not listen, and they hardened their neck like the neck of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.*

This is the key verse of the whole book. "And the LORD warned Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets and every seer." A prophet is someone who speaks God's message, and a seer is an older name for a prophet, one who sees what God shows (1 Samuel 9:9). God's message was always the same: "Turn back from your evil ways, and keep My commandments, My statutes, according to all the law that I commanded your fathers."

Think of all the prophets God sent to Israel: Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and many whose names we do not know. God did not judge without warning. He warned for two hundred years.

"And they did not listen, and they hardened their neck like the neck of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God." A hard neck is the picture of an ox that will not bend to the yoke. God had called Israel "a people stiff of neck" in the wilderness (Exodus 32:9). Notice the root of it: they "did not believe." Unbelief always comes before disobedience. The writer of Hebrews says the same about Israel in the wilderness: they could not enter because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).

17:15-17 *And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies with which He warned them; and they walked after vanity and became vain, and after the nations that **were** around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. And they forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God, and they made for themselves a molten image, two calves; and they made an Asherah, and they bowed down to all the host of the heavens, and they served the Baal. And they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and they divined divinations and practiced omens, and they sold themselves to do the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.*

"And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers." The covenant at Mount Sinai was like a marriage between God and Israel, and they walked out on it. "And they walked after vanity and became vain." Vanity means emptiness, something with no weight or worth. Here is a deep truth: we become like what we worship. Psalm 115:8 says those who make idols will become like them. If we chase emptiness, we become empty.

They forsook all God's commandments and made "two calves," the ones at Bethel and Dan. They made an Asherah. "They bowed down to all the host of the heavens," the sun, moon and stars, worshiped as gods. "And they served the Baal."

"And they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire." This is child sacrifice, the same evil Ahaz did (16:3). "And they divined divinations and practiced omens." Divination is trying to learn the future or the will of the gods through signs, and omens are signs read from things like the flight of birds or the insides of animals. God forbade all of it (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). "And they sold themselves to do the evil." They gave themselves over to sin like slaves sold to a master. Ahab had done the same (1 Kings 21:25). Paul says whatever we give ourselves to obey becomes our master (Romans 6:16).

17:18-20 *And the LORD was very angry with Israel, and He removed them from His face; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, and they walked in the statutes of Israel which they had made. And the LORD rejected all the offspring of Israel, and He afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had thrown them from before Him.*

"And the LORD was very angry with Israel, and He removed them from His face." God's anger is not like a man's temper. It is His settled, holy opposition to evil. To be removed from His face means to be sent away from His presence and His land, where His blessing rested. "None was left but the tribe of Judah alone." Judah here includes Benjamin and those from other tribes who had moved south over the years.

Then a sad warning: "Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God." The writer was looking ahead. Judah had watched Israel fall and was walking down the same road. Judah's turn would come in 586 B.C.

"And the LORD rejected all the offspring of Israel, and He afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had thrown them from before Him." This did not happen all at once.

For years God let enemies afflict them, hoping they would turn back. Only at the end did He let them go.

Does this mean God was finished with Israel forever? No. God disciplined His people, but He never broke His promises to Abraham. The prophets who foretold the exile also foretold a return and a future day when God would gather all Israel, north and south, as one nation under one King (Ezekiel 37:15-28; Hosea 3:4-5). Paul says God has not rejected His people, and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:1-2, 26).

17:21-23 *For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drove Israel away from after the LORD and caused them to sin a great sin. And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam that he did; they did not turn aside from it, until the LORD removed Israel from His face, as He had spoken by the hand of all His servants the prophets. And Israel went into exile from its ground to Assyria to this day.*

The writer goes back to where it began. "For He tore Israel from the house of David." God Himself had split the kingdom after Solomon's sin (1 Kings 11:11, 31). Israel made "Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drove Israel away from after the LORD and caused them to sin a great sin." The great sin was the calves at Bethel and Dan. One man's choice, made to protect his own throne (1 Kings 12:26-28), set the course for nineteen kings and two hundred years.

"And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam that he did; they did not turn aside from it." Not one king of Israel ever removed the calves. Not even Jehu.

"Until the LORD removed Israel from His face, as He had spoken by the hand of all His servants the prophets." Ahijah the prophet had warned Jeroboam's own wife that the LORD would uproot Israel and scatter it beyond the River because of Jeroboam's sins (1 Kings 14:15-16). It took about two hundred years, but it came true. "And Israel went into exile from its ground to Assyria to this day."

What can we learn from this sermon? God is patient, but His patience has a purpose. He waits so we will turn. Paul writes that these things happened as examples and "were written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). The same God who judged Israel's sin judged our sin at the cross, where Jesus took the punishment we deserved. The warning to us is not to harden our necks. The good news is that the way back is still open: "Turn back from your evil ways" (17:13).

17:24-26 *And the king of Assyria brought **people** from Babylon and from Cuth and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and he made **them** dwell in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel; and they possessed Samaria and dwelt in its cities. And it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD; and the LORD sent the lions among them, and they were killing among them. And they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations that you carried into exile and made dwell in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the God of the land; and He has sent the lions among them, and look, they are killing them, because they do not know the custom of the God of the land."*

Now the writer tells what happened to the land. "The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon and from Cuth and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim." This was Assyria's way. It moved conquered peoples from one end of the empire to the other, so that no nation would stay in its homeland long enough to rebel. These newcomers "possessed Samaria and dwelt in its cities." Samaria here means the whole region, not just the city. Ezra tells us later kings of Assyria brought in still more peoples (Ezra 4:2, 10).

"At the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD; and the LORD sent the lions among them." The land had been emptied, and wild animals had multiplied, just as God warned in the Law (Leviticus 26:22; Exodus 23:29). But the writer says plainly that the LORD sent them. The land still belonged to Him, even with His people gone.

The settlers reported to the king of Assyria that they did "not know the custom of the God of the land." In their thinking, every land had its own god, and you had to keep that god happy. They thought of the LORD as just another local god.

17:27-28 *And the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Take there one of the priests whom you carried into exile from there, and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the custom of the God of the land." And one of the priests whom they had carried into exile from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and he was teaching them how they should fear the LORD.*

The king's answer was simple. Send back one of the exiled priests to "teach them the custom of the God of the land." One priest came and lived at Bethel, "and he was teaching them how they should fear the LORD."

Notice where he settled: Bethel, the home of Jeroboam's golden calf. He was likely a priest of the northern kingdom's mixed religion, not a Levite from Jerusalem. He taught them to add the LORD to their gods, but there is no sign he taught them that the LORD is the only God. A teacher who does not know the true God fully cannot lead others to Him.

17:29-31 *And they were making, nation **by** nation, its own gods, and they put **them** in the house of the high places that the Samaritans had made, nation **by** nation in their cities in which they **were** dwelling. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites **were** burning their sons in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.*

"And they were making, nation by nation, its own gods." Each group set up its own idols in "the house of the high places that the Samaritans had made." This is the first time the word Samaritans appears in the Bible. Here it means the people of the region of Samaria, the Israelites who had built those shrines.

The writer names the gods: Succoth-benoth for the men of Babylon, Nergal for Cuth, Ashima for Hamath, Nibhaz and Tartak for the Avvites. Not much is known about some of these. And "the Sepharvites were burning their sons in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." Child sacrifice again, in the land God had given Israel. The new settlers brought the very sin that had helped bring Israel's exile.

17:32-33 *And they were fearing the LORD, and they appointed for themselves from among all of them priests of high places, and they were making **offerings** for them in the house of the high places. The LORD they were fearing, and their own gods they were serving, according to the custom of the nations from which they had carried them into exile.*

"And they were fearing the LORD." They appointed priests "from among all of them," anyone at all, the same thing Jeroboam had done (1 Kings 12:31). Then the writer sums it up: "The LORD they were fearing, and their own gods they were serving."

This is called syncretism, mixing the worship of the true God with other religions. It may look tolerant and open-minded. God calls it unfaithfulness. You cannot fear the LORD and serve other gods any more than a husband can be faithful to his wife and keep other women on the side. Jesus said, "No one is able to serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). It is a danger for us too, when we try to add Jesus to a life still run by money, pleasure or other spiritual ideas.

17:34-39 *To this day they are doing according to the former customs; they are not fearing the LORD, and they are not doing according to their statutes and according to their judgment and according to the law and according to the commandment which the LORD commanded the sons of Jacob, whose name He made Israel. And the LORD made a covenant with them and commanded them, saying, "You shall not fear other gods, and you shall not bow down to them, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not sacrifice to them; but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, and to Him you shall bow down, and to Him you shall sacrifice. And the statutes and the judgments and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to do all the days; and you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I made with you, you shall not forget; and you shall not fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear, and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."*

"To this day they are doing according to the former customs." The writer says it plainly: "they are not fearing the LORD." Their kind of fear did not count, because they did not do what God commanded "the sons of Jacob, whose name He made Israel."

Then he reminds us what the LORD's covenant actually said. "You shall not fear other gods, and you shall not bow down to them, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not sacrifice to them." Instead, "the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear." Three times in four verses we read "you shall not fear other gods." The covenant could not have been clearer. And with the command came a promise: "But the LORD your God you shall fear, and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

The LORD does not share His people with other gods. That is not because He is small or jealous like a man. It is because He alone is God, and anything else we worship will fail us.

17:40-41 *And they did not listen, but according to their former custom they **were** doing. And these nations were fearing the LORD, and their idols they were serving; also their sons and the sons of their sons, as their fathers did, they are doing to this day.*

"And they did not listen, but according to their former custom they were doing." These nations "were fearing the LORD, and their idols they were serving," and their children and grandchildren did the same "to this day."

This is the origin of the Samaritans of the New Testament. Over time, the mixed people of the land, descended from the settlers and from the Israelites who had been left behind, kept a form of worship of the LORD. By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, they opposed the Jews who returned to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah 4:1-2). Later they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim and accepted only the five books of Moses as Scripture. Jews and Samaritans despised each other. That is why the Samaritan woman was so surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink: "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4:9).

When she raised the old argument about where to worship, she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship"

(John 4:20). Jesus answered with the same truth this chapter teaches: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). Then He told her the hour was coming when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23).

And here is the grace of God. The people whose mixed worship began in 2 Kings 17 heard the gospel from Jesus Himself. Many in that Samaritan town believed and said, "we know that this is truly the Savior of the world, the Christ" (John 4:42). Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of one of His best-known parables (Luke 10:30-37). After His resurrection, He sent His apostles to Samaria (Acts 1:8), and Philip preached Christ there, and many believed (Acts 8:5-8). The God who judged Samaria's sin did not stop loving its people.

Chapter 17 Summary

Hoshea son of Elah reigned nine years over Israel. He did evil, though not as much as the kings before him. He became the servant of Shalmaneser king of Assyria, but he secretly sent to So king of Egypt and stopped paying tribute, so the king of Assyria imprisoned him. Assyria besieged Samaria three years and captured it in Hoshea's ninth year, about 722 B.C., and carried Israel into exile to Assyria and Media. The writer explains why: Israel sinned against the LORD who brought them out of Egypt. They feared other gods, built high places, pillars and Asherim, served idols, made the two calves, worshiped the host of heaven and Baal, sacrificed their children, and practiced divination. The LORD warned them by all the prophets to turn back, but they hardened their necks, did not believe, and followed the sins of Jeroboam until the LORD removed them from His face. Judah also did not keep His commandments. The king of Assyria resettled the cities of Samaria with peoples from Babylon, Cuth, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim. When the LORD sent lions among them, the king sent back an exiled priest to teach them to fear the LORD. They feared the LORD but also served their own gods, even burning their children, and their descendants did the same, though the LORD's covenant had commanded them to fear no other gods.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. What did Hoshea do that led the king of Assyria to imprison him and besiege Samaria? (17:3-5)

2. Where were the people of Israel carried away to, and what had Moses warned? (17:6; Deuteronomy 28:64)

3. According to the writer, what was the root reason Samaria fell? (17:7-8)

4. How did the LORD warn Israel, and what was His message? (17:13)

5. What does it mean that Israel "walked after vanity and became vain"? (17:15; Psalm 115:8)

6. What role did Jeroboam's choice play in Israel's fall? (17:21-23; 1 Kings 12:26-30)

7. What kind of worship did the new settlers in Samaria practice? (17:32-33, 41)

8. How does Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman connect to this chapter? (John 4:9, 20-24)

9. Israel's unbelief came before its disobedience (17:14). Where does unbelief show up in your life as disobedience?

10. The settlers feared the LORD and served their own gods. Is there anything you are trying to keep alongside Jesus, and what would it take to give Him your whole heart?

Chapter 18: Hezekiah and the Threat of Assyria

Scripture

18:1-12 And it was, in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah, and he crushed to pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel were burning incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan. In the LORD, the God of Israel, he trusted; and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, and ***among*** those who were before him. And he clung to the LORD; he did not turn aside from after Him, and he kept His commandments which the LORD had commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; in all where he went out, he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territories, from a tower of watchmen to a city of fortification. And it was, in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, that ***was*** the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. And they captured it at the end of three years; in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that ***was*** the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Israel, Samaria was captured. And the king of Assyria carried Israel into exile to Assyria, and he led them into Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and ***into*** the cities of Media, because they had not listened to the voice of the LORD their God, and they had transgressed His covenant, all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they did not listen, and they did not do ***it***.

18:13-25 And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. And Hezekiah the king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria, to Lachish, saying, "I have sinned; turn back from me. That which you put on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria imposed on Hezekiah the king of Judah approximately 22,500 pounds (three hundred talents) of silver and approximately 2,250 pounds (thirty talents) of gold. And Hezekiah gave all the silver that was found ***in*** the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king. At that time Hezekiah cut off the doors of the temple of the LORD and the doorposts which Hezekiah the king of Judah had overlaid, and he gave them to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan and the Rab-saris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a heavy army ***to*** Jerusalem. And they went up and came ***to*** Jerusalem; and they went up and came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which ***is*** on the highway of the field of the launderer. And they called to the king; and ***there*** went out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who ***was*** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder. And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say, please, to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What ***is*** this trust in which you trust? You have said, only a word of lips, "Counsel and strength ***are*** for the war." Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? Now look, you rely for yourself on the staff of this crushed reed, on Egypt, on which a man will lean, and it will go into his palm and pierce it. So ***is*** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to all who rely on him. And if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not He whose high places

and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and he has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, "Before this altar you shall bow down in Jerusalem"? And now, make a wager, please, with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them for yourself. And how will you turn back the face of one governor of the least of the servants of my master, and you rely for yourself on Egypt for chariotry and for horsemen? Now, have I come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up against this land and destroy it."'"

18:26-37 And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah and Shebna and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Speak, please, to your servants ***in*** Aramaic, for we understand; and do not speak with us ***in*** Judean in the ears of the people who ***are*** on the wall." And the Rabshakeh said to them, "To your master and to you has my master sent me to speak these words? ***Is it*** not to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their excrement and to drink the water of their feet with you?" And the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a great voice ***in*** Judean, and he spoke and said, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you from his hand. And do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will certainly deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: "Make a blessing with me and come out to me, and eat each man ***from*** his vine and each man ***from*** his fig tree, and drink each man the waters of his cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees of oil and honey; and live, and you will not die." And do not listen to Hezekiah, for he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Have the gods of the nations really delivered, each one his land, from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where ***are*** the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where ***are*** the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah, that they have delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands ***are those*** who have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'" And the people kept silent and did not answer him a word, for it ***was*** the command of the king, saying, "Do not answer him." And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who ***was*** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah ***with*** clothes torn, and they told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

Chapter 18 Preview

After the darkness of Ahaz comes the light of Hezekiah. He does right like David, tears down the high places, and even breaks the bronze serpent Moses made, because the people had turned it into an idol. The writer says no king of Judah before or after trusted the LORD like him. He rebels against Assyria and wins victories over the Philistines. Then the writer reminds us of the fall of Samaria, which happened early in Hezekiah's reign, and why it happened.

In Hezekiah's fourteenth year, 701 B.C., Sennacherib king of Assyria sweeps through Judah and takes its fortified cities. Hezekiah tries to buy him off, but Sennacherib sends three high officers with an army to Jerusalem. One of them, the Rabshakeh, stands outside the wall and mocks the LORD in the language of the people, trying to frighten them into surrender. The people keep silent, as their king commanded. Chapters 18 to 20 are told again almost word for word in Isaiah 36 to 39, and 2 Chronicles 29 to 32 adds more about Hezekiah's reforms.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-3 *And it was, in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, the king of Judah, became king. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother* ***was*** *Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.*

"In the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, the king of Judah, became king." He was twenty-five and reigned twenty-nine years. Following the dates used in this study, he reigned from about 715 to 686 B.C. His mother was Abi, the daughter of Zechariah.

The date in this verse is one of the hardest in Kings. If Hezekiah's fourteenth year was 701 B.C. (18:13), he began to reign alone about 715 B.C. But the third year of Hoshea was about 729 B.C. Bible scholars explain this in different ways. Many think Hezekiah began to share the throne with his father Ahaz about 729 B.C., and that some numbers are counted from that start and others from when he reigned alone. Scripture doesn't give us enough to be certain, and none of it changes what the text teaches.

"And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done." That is the highest praise a king of Judah can get. In Kings only a few kings of Judah are compared to David this fully: Asa (1 Kings 15:11), Hezekiah and Josiah (22:2). The son of the worst king became one of the best.

18:4 *He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah, and he crushed to pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel were burning incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan.*

"He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah." For the first time a king of Judah removed the high places. Kings before him had left them standing. Hezekiah tore them down, even the ones where people worshiped the LORD, so that all worship would go to the one place God chose, the temple in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5).

Then he did something surprising. "He crushed to pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made." This was the bronze snake on a pole that God told Moses to make in the wilderness. When poisonous snakes bit the people, anyone who looked at it lived (Numbers 21:8-9). It was more than seven hundred years old. "For until those days the sons of Israel were burning incense to it." They had turned God's means of healing into an idol. Hezekiah called it "Nehushtan," a word that sounds like the Hebrew for bronze and for serpent. In effect he said it was just a piece of bronze.

Jesus said the bronze serpent was a picture of Himself: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14). The serpent never had power to heal. God did, through faith. Even good things God has used, a church building, a tradition, a Bible on a shelf, can become idols if we worship them in place of the God they point to.

18:5-8 *In the LORD, the God of Israel, he trusted; and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, and **among** those who were before him. And he clung to the LORD; he did not turn aside from after Him, and he kept His commandments which the LORD had commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; in all where he went out, he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territories, from a tower of watchmen to a city of fortification.*

"In the LORD, the God of Israel, he trusted." Trust is the word that ties chapters 18 and 19 together. The Rabshakeh will ask, "What is this trust in which you trust?" (18:19). Here is the answer. "And after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, and among those who were before him." In trust, Hezekiah was unmatched. Josiah is later praised as unmatched in turning to the LORD with all his heart according to the law (23:25). Each was outstanding in his own way.

"And he clung to the LORD." Clung is the word used in Genesis 2:24 for a husband holding fast to his wife. "He did not turn aside from after Him, and he kept His commandments."

"And the LORD was with him; in all where he went out, he prospered." He "rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him." His father had made Judah Assyria's servant (16:7). Hezekiah broke that tie. He also struck the Philistines "as far as Gaza," on the southern coast.

Chronicles adds that in his first month as king he opened and repaired the temple doors his father shut, cleansed the temple, restored the priests and Levites, and held a great Passover, inviting even the people of the northern tribes (2 Chronicles 29:3; 30:1-27).

18:9-12 *And it was, in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, that **was** the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. And they captured it at the end of three years; in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that **was** the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Israel, Samaria was captured. And the king of Assyria carried Israel into exile to Assyria, and he led them into Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and **into** the cities of Media, because they had not listened to the voice of the LORD their God, and they had transgressed His covenant, all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they did not listen, and they did not do **it**.*

The writer now goes back to tell the fall of Samaria from Judah's side. In Hezekiah's fourth year, "Shalmaneser the king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it." In his sixth year, "Samaria was captured." The people were carried away to Halah, the Habor, and the cities of Media (17:6).

Why does the writer tell it again? To set the scene for what comes next. The same empire that swallowed Israel was next door, and Judah had just rebelled against it. Hezekiah had watched his northern neighbor fall. He knew exactly what Assyria could do.

The writer also repeats the reason: "because they had not listened to the voice of the LORD their God, and they had transgressed His covenant, all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded." Israel fell for not listening. The question now was whether Judah would listen and trust.

18:13-16 *And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. And Hezekiah the king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria, to Lachish, saying, "I have sinned; turn back from me. That which you put on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria imposed on Hezekiah the king of Judah approximately 22,500 pounds (three hundred talents) of silver and approximately 2,250 pounds (thirty talents) of gold. And Hezekiah gave all the silver that was found* ***in*** *the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the house of the king. At that time Hezekiah cut off the doors of the temple of the LORD and the doorposts which Hezekiah the king of Judah had overlaid, and he gave them to the king of Assyria.*

"And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them." That was 701 B.C. Sennacherib had become king of Assyria a few years earlier, and he came west to crush the rebels.

Sennacherib left his own account of this campaign. On a clay prism, a six-sided column of clay covered in writing, he boasted that he took many of Judah's walled towns and shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem, and that Hezekiah sent him heavy tribute. He never claims to have taken Jerusalem. He also had the siege of Lachish carved on the walls of his palace at Nineveh. These records fit the Bible's account closely. It is worth noticing what Sennacherib leaves out: he says nothing about how the campaign ended for his army (19:35).

Hezekiah sent word to Sennacherib at Lachish: "I have sinned; turn back from me. That which you put on me I will bear." It was a moment of fear. Sennacherib demanded three hundred talents of silver, about 22,500 pounds, and thirty talents of gold, about 2,250 pounds. To pay it, Hezekiah emptied the treasuries of the temple and palace, and even stripped the gold he himself had overlaid on the temple doors and doorposts.

Even a man of great faith can have a weak moment. The gold did not buy peace. Sennacherib took the money and sent his army anyway. Paying off the enemy rarely works, in war or in the spiritual life. Compromise with sin does not make it go away. It only makes it hungrier.

18:17-18 *And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan and the Rab-saris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a heavy army* ***to*** *Jerusalem. And they went up and came* ***to*** *Jerusalem; and they went up and came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which* ***is*** *on the highway of the field of the launderer. And they called to the king; and* ***there*** *went out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who* ***was*** *over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.*

"And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan and the Rab-saris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish." These are titles, not names. The Tartan was the commander in chief, the Rab-saris a chief officer of the court, and the Rabshakeh a high official, perhaps the chief cupbearer, who did the talking. They came "with a heavy army" to Jerusalem and stood "by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway of the field of the launderer."

That is the exact spot where Isaiah had met Ahaz about thirty years earlier and told him to trust the LORD instead of Assyria (Isaiah 7:3). Ahaz refused and called Assyria in. Now Assyria stood in

the same place, demanding the city. God sometimes brings us back to the place of our failures to give us a second chance to trust Him.

Three of Hezekiah's officials went out to meet them: Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was over the palace, Shebna the scribe, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

18:19-22 *And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say, please, to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What **is** this trust in which you trust? You have said, only a word of lips, "Counsel and strength **are** for the war." Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? Now look, you rely for yourself on the staff of this crushed reed, on Egypt, on which a man will lean, and it will go into his palm and pierce it. So **is** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to all who rely on him. And if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and he has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, "Before this altar you shall bow down in Jerusalem"?*

The Rabshakeh's speech is a master class in fear. "What is this trust in which you trust?" He attacked every place Judah might lean.

First, he mocked Hezekiah's plans. Talk about counsel and strength is just "a word of lips," empty talk. Then he mocked Egypt: "you rely for yourself on the staff of this crushed reed, on Egypt, on which a man will lean, and it will go into his palm and pierce it." A cracked reed used as a walking stick breaks and stabs the hand that leans on it. On this point he was right. Isaiah said the same (Isaiah 30:1-3; 31:1).

Then he turned to the LORD. "And if you say to me, We trust in the LORD our God," he said, is not this the God whose high places and altars Hezekiah has torn down, telling the people to worship only at the altar in Jerusalem? It was clever and twisted. He took Hezekiah's faithfulness and made it look like an insult to God. A pagan could not imagine a god who wanted fewer altars. Satan still does this. He takes our obedience and tries to make us doubt it.

18:23-25 *And now, make a wager, please, with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them for yourself. And how will you turn back the face of one governor of the least of the servants of my master, and you rely for yourself on Egypt for chariotry and for horsemen? Now, have I come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up against this land and destroy it."'"*

"And now, make a wager, please, with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them for yourself." It was pure mockery. Judah was so weak, he said, that it could not even find two thousand horsemen. How could it turn back even "one governor of the least of the servants of my master"?

Then came his boldest claim: "Now, have I come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it?" He said the LORD had sent him. There was a grain of truth in it. Isaiah had called Assyria "the rod of My anger" (Isaiah 10:5), sent to punish a godless nation. But the Rabshakeh was lying about Jerusalem, and Isaiah had also said God would punish Assyria's arrogance once

His work was done (Isaiah 10:12). The enemy loves to use half-truths. The best answer is the whole truth of God's Word.

18:26-27 *And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah and Shebna and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Speak, please, to your servants **in** Aramaic, for we understand; and do not speak with us **in** Judean in the ears of the people who **are** on the wall." And the Rabshakeh said to them, "To your master and to you has my master sent me to speak these words? **Is it** not to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their excrement and to drink the water of their feet with you?"*

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah asked, "Speak, please, to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand." Aramaic was the language of diplomacy in that day, the language educated officials knew. "And do not speak with us in Judean in the ears of the people who are on the wall." Judean is Hebrew, the language of the common people. The officials did not want the people frightened.

The Rabshakeh refused. His message was for the men on the wall, who would suffer the most if the siege went on. He described in coarse words how desperate a long siege would make them. His aim was to turn the people against their king.

18:28-32 *And the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a great voice **in** Judean, and he spoke and said, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you from his hand. And do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will certainly deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: "Make a blessing with me and come out to me, and eat each man **from** his vine and each man **from** his fig tree, and drink each man the waters of his cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees of oil and honey; and live, and you will not die." And do not listen to Hezekiah, for he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us."*

"And the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a great voice in Judean." He spoke straight to the crowd: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria." He used the form of a prophet's message, "Thus says the king," mocking the prophets' "Thus says the LORD."

His message was simple: do not let Hezekiah deceive you, do not let him make you trust in the LORD. Then he offered a deal. "Make a blessing with me and come out to me." Surrender, he said, and you can eat from your own vine and fig tree and drink from your own cistern, "until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards."

Notice what he admitted. Surrender meant exile. He made it sound pleasant, but it was still being torn from home. That is how temptation talks. It promises a good life, and it hides the chains. Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down (Matthew 4:8-9). The world's offers always come with a hidden price.

18:33-35 *Have the gods of the nations really delivered, each one his land, from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where **are** the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where **are** the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah, that they have delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands **are those** who have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'"*

"Have the gods of the nations really delivered, each one his land, from the hand of the king of Assyria?" The Rabshakeh named cities Assyria had crushed: Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, Ivvah. Then the one that would sting the most: "that they have delivered Samaria from my hand?" Israel's capital, just a few miles north, had already fallen.

"Who among all the gods of the lands are those who have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

That was his great mistake. He put the LORD on the same level as the idols of the nations. He was about to learn the difference between a god made of wood and stone and the living God who made heaven and earth. Samaria fell because the LORD had given it up for its sin (17:18), not because Assyria was stronger than God.

18:36-37 *And the people kept silent and did not answer him a word, for it **was** the command of the king, saying, "Do not answer him." And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who **was** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah **with** clothes torn, and they told him the words of the Rabshakeh.*

"And the people kept silent and did not answer him a word, for it was the command of the king, saying, Do not answer him." Hezekiah was wise. There is no point in arguing with someone who is trying to frighten you. Some battles are won by silence and prayer, not by a war of words.

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah came back to the king with their clothes torn, a sign of grief and distress, and told him everything the Rabshakeh had said. What would Hezekiah do? The next chapter tells us. He took it to the LORD.

Chapter 18 Summary

Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah at twenty-five and reigned twenty-nine years, doing right as David had. He removed the high places, broke the pillars, cut down the Asherah, and crushed the bronze serpent Moses had made, because the people burned incense to it, calling it Nehushtan. He trusted in the LORD like no other king of Judah, clung to Him, and kept His commandments, and the LORD was with him. He rebelled against Assyria and defeated the Philistines. In his fourth to sixth years Shalmaneser besieged and captured Samaria, because Israel had not listened to the LORD. In Hezekiah's fourteenth year Sennacherib took the fortified cities of Judah, and Hezekiah paid him silver and gold from the temple and palace and the gold from the temple doors. Sennacherib sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris and the Rabshakeh with an army to Jerusalem. At the conduit of the upper pool, the Rabshakeh mocked Hezekiah's trust in Egypt and in the LORD, refused to speak Aramaic, and called out in Hebrew to the people on the

wall, urging them to surrender and claiming that no god had saved any land from Assyria. The people kept silent as the king commanded, and his officials came to him with torn clothes.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. How does the writer describe Hezekiah's faithfulness, and how is it different from the kings before him? (18:3-6)

2. What did Hezekiah do with the bronze serpent, and why? (18:4; Numbers 21:8-9)

3. How did Jesus use the bronze serpent to explain His own death? (John 3:14-15)

4. Why does the writer retell the fall of Samaria in this chapter? (18:9-12)

5. How did Hezekiah first respond to Sennacherib's attack, and did it work? (18:13-17)

6. What places of trust did the Rabshakeh attack in his speech? (18:19-25)

7. What was the Rabshakeh's great mistake about the LORD? (18:33-35)

8. Why do you think Hezekiah told the people not to answer? (18:36)

9. The people of Israel turned a good gift from God into an idol. Is there anything good in your life, even something spiritual, that you have started to trust in place of God?

10. The Rabshakeh asked, "What is this trust in which you trust?" How would you answer that question about your own life?

Chapter 19: The LORD Delivers Jerusalem from Sennacherib

Scripture

19:1-13 And it was, when King Hezekiah heard, and he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and he went ***into*** the house of the LORD. And he sent Eliakim, who ***was*** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'A day of distress and rebuke and contempt ***is*** this day, for children have come to ***the*** birth opening, and ***there is*** no strength to give birth. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of ***the*** Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to taunt the living God, and will rebuke ***him*** for the words which the LORD your God has heard. And you shall lift up a prayer for the remnant that is found.'" And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master: 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, ***with*** which the young men of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Look, I ***am*** about to put a spirit in him, and he will hear a report and return to his land; and I will make him fall by the sword in his land."'" And ***the*** Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. And he heard concerning Tirhakah the king of Cush, saying, "Look, he has come out to fight with you." And he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah the king of Judah, saying, 'Do not let your God, in whom you ***are*** trusting, deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, devoting them to destruction; and will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations deliver them, whom my fathers destroyed: Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who ***were*** in Telassar? Where ***is*** the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?'"

19:14-28 And Hezekiah took the letters from the hand of the messengers and read them; and he went up ***to*** the house of the LORD, and Hezekiah spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who sits ***on*** the cherubim, You ***are*** He, the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You made the heavens and the earth. Incline, O LORD, Your ear and hear; open, O LORD, Your eyes and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, ***with*** which he has sent him to taunt the living God. Truly, O LORD, ***the*** kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their land, and they have put their gods into the fire, for they ***were*** not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone; and they have destroyed them. And now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, O LORD, ***are*** God, You alone." And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'What you have prayed to Me concerning Sennacherib the king of Assyria I have heard.' This ***is*** the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: 'She has despised you, she has mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion; behind you she has shaken ***her*** head, the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you taunted and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised a voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy ***One*** of Israel! By the hand of your messengers you have taunted the Lord, and you have

said, "With the abundance of my chariots I have gone up ***to*** the height of ***the*** mountains, ***to*** the remotest parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tallness of its cedars, the choice of its cypresses; and I will enter the lodging place of its farthest end, the forest of its fruitful land. I have dug and drunk foreign waters, and I will dry up with the sole of my feet all the streams of Egypt." Have you not heard? From long ago I did it, from days of antiquity I formed it; now I have brought it about, and you are to make fortified cities crash ***into*** ruined heaps. And their inhabitants ***were*** short of hand; they were dismayed and they were ashamed; they were the vegetation of the field and the greenery of grass, the grass of the roofs, and blight before standing grain. And your sitting down and your going out and your coming in I know, and your raging against Me. Because your raging against Me and your arrogance has come up into My ears, I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came.

19:29-37 And this ***will be*** the sign for you: eating this year aftergrowth, and in the second year self-seeded growth, and in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains will again ***take*** root downward and make fruit upward. For from Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and an escaped remnant from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He will not come into this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not come before it ***with*** a shield, and he will not pour out a siege mound against it. By the way by which he came, by it he will return, and into this city he will not come, declares the LORD. And I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant.'" And it was in that night, and the angel of the LORD went out and struck down in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and they rose early in the morning, and look, all of them ***were*** dead corpses. And Sennacherib the king of Assyria departed and went and returned, and he dwelt in Nineveh. And it was, he ***was*** bowing down ***in*** the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him down with the sword; and they escaped ***to*** the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 19 Preview

Hezekiah answers the Rabshakeh's threats the right way. He tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, goes into the house of the LORD, and sends to Isaiah the prophet for prayer. Isaiah sends back a word from the LORD: do not be afraid. Sennacherib sends a second message, a letter mocking the LORD again, and Hezekiah takes the letter into the temple, spreads it out before the LORD, and prays one of the great prayers of the Bible.

God answers through Isaiah with a long poem against the proud king of Assyria. Sennacherib thinks he has done it all himself, but God says He planned it long ago, and now He will put a hook in Sennacherib's nose and lead him home. That night the angel of the LORD strikes down 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib goes back to Nineveh, and years later his own sons kill him in the temple of his god. Isaiah 37 tells the same events.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-4 *And it was, when King Hezekiah heard, and he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and he went **into** the house of the LORD. And he sent Eliakim, who **was** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'A day of distress and rebuke and contempt **is** this day, for children have come to **the** birth opening, and **there is** no strength to give birth. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of **the** Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to taunt the living God, and will rebuke **him** for the words which the LORD your God has heard. And you shall lift up a prayer for the remnant that is found.'"*

"When King Hezekiah heard," he did three things. "He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth," rough cloth worn as a sign of grief and repentance. "And he went into the house of the LORD." He went straight to God. Then he sent Eliakim, Shebna and the elders of the priests, all in sackcloth, "to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz."

This is the first time Isaiah appears in Kings. He had been preaching in Jerusalem for nearly forty years, since the year King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6:1).

Hezekiah's message was honest. "A day of distress and rebuke and contempt is this day, for children have come to the birth opening, and there is no strength to give birth." It was a picture of a mother in labor too weak to deliver. Judah had come to the moment of crisis with no strength left to get through it.

"Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to taunt the living God." Hezekiah saw the real issue. This was not only an attack on Jerusalem. It was an insult to "the living God," and the LORD would answer for His own name. "And you shall lift up a prayer for the remnant that is found." A remnant is what is left after a disaster. With the rest of Judah taken, only Jerusalem remained.

Notice he said "your God" to Isaiah. Perhaps he felt his own failure keenly after paying the tribute. But he still went to God. When we feel weakest, the right thing is to go to God and ask others to pray.

19:5-7 *And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master: 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, **with** which the young men of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Look, I **am** about to put a spirit in him, and he will hear a report and return to his land; and I will make him fall by the sword in his land."'"*

Isaiah's answer was short. "Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard." The Rabshakeh's words were loud, but they were only words. God called the Assyrian officers "the young men of the king of Assyria," a word that can mean servants or boys. To God they were just errand boys.

"Look, I am about to put a spirit in him, and he will hear a report and return to his land; and I will make him fall by the sword in his land." God would change the king's mind, send him home, and bring him down there. All three things happened, just as He said (19:9, 36-37).

19:8-13 *And **the** Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. And he heard concerning Tirhakah the king of Cush, saying, "Look, he has come out to fight with you." And he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah the king of Judah, saying, 'Do not let your God, in whom you **are** trusting, deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, devoting them to destruction; and will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations deliver them, whom my fathers destroyed: Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who **were** in Telassar? Where **is** the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?'"*

The Rabshakeh went back and found Sennacherib fighting against Libnah, a town not far from Lachish. Lachish had fallen. Then Sennacherib "heard concerning Tirhakah the king of Cush." Cush was the land south of Egypt, and its kings ruled Egypt at this time. An Egyptian army was coming. It was the beginning of the "report" God had promised.

Sennacherib could not stay to besiege Jerusalem, so he sent a letter. Its message was a step beyond the Rabshakeh's: "Do not let your God, in whom you are trusting, deceive you." The Rabshakeh had said Hezekiah was deceiving the people. Now Sennacherib said God Himself was a liar.

He listed the nations Assyria had destroyed: Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, Eden, Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah. "Did the gods of the nations deliver them?" The argument was the same. No god had ever stopped Assyria, so why would the LORD?

19:14-19 *And Hezekiah took the letters from the hand of the messengers and read them; and he went up **to** the house of the LORD, and Hezekiah spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who sits **on** the cherubim, You **are** He, the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You made the heavens and the earth. Incline, O LORD, Your ear and hear; open, O LORD, Your eyes and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, **with** which he has sent him to taunt the living God. Truly, O LORD, **the** kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their land, and they have put their gods into the fire, for they **were** not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone; and they have destroyed them. And now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, O LORD, **are** God, You alone."*

"And Hezekiah took the letters from the hand of the messengers and read them; and he went up to the house of the LORD, and Hezekiah spread it out before the LORD." I love this picture. He did not argue with the letter or panic over it. He laid it open before God, as if to ask the LORD to read what they were saying about Him.

Then he prayed. Look at how he began: "O LORD, the God of Israel, who sits on the cherubim, You are He, the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You made the heavens and the earth." The cherubim were the golden angel figures on the lid of the ark of the covenant, the gold-covered

chest in the Most Holy Place where God's presence rested among His people (Exodus 25:22). Before Hezekiah asked for anything, he reminded himself who God is. Sennacherib was king of many nations. The LORD made the heavens.

"Incline, O LORD, Your ear and hear; open, O LORD, Your eyes and see." Hezekiah asked God to hear the words "with which he has sent him to taunt the living God."

He was honest about the facts. "Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their land." Sennacherib was not lying about what he had done. But Hezekiah saw why. "They have put their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone." Of course those gods could not save anyone. They were not real.

Then he asked: "And now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, O LORD, are God, You alone." Notice the reason. Hezekiah wanted to be saved, but above all he wanted God's name to be known. That is how Jesus taught us to pray: first, "let Your name be sanctified," then our needs (Matthew 6:9-11).

This prayer is a model for us. When trouble comes in writing, a diagnosis, a bill, a legal letter, we can spread it out before the LORD. We can remember who He is, tell Him the facts honestly, and ask Him to act for His glory.

19:20-24 *And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'What you have prayed to Me concerning Sennacherib the king of Assyria I have heard.' This* ***is*** *the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: 'She has despised you, she has mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion; behind you she has shaken* ***her*** *head, the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you taunted and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised a voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy* ***One*** *of Israel! By the hand of your messengers you have taunted the Lord, and you have said, "With the abundance of my chariots I have gone up* ***to*** *the height of* ***the*** *mountains,* ***to*** *the remotest parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tallness of its cedars, the choice of its cypresses; and I will enter the lodging place of its farthest end, the forest of its fruitful land. I have dug and drunk foreign waters, and I will dry up with the sole of my feet all the streams of Egypt."*

Isaiah sent a message from the LORD: "What you have prayed to Me concerning Sennacherib the king of Assyria I have heard." God heard. Then comes a poem, God's answer to Sennacherib's boasting.

"She has despised you, she has mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion." Zion is the hill of Jerusalem, and the daughter of Zion is the city and its people pictured as a young woman. Sennacherib thought she was helpless. God said she was shaking her head at him as he ran away.

"Whom have you taunted and blasphemed?" To blaspheme is to speak with contempt against God. Sennacherib had insulted "the Holy One of Israel," Isaiah's favorite name for God.

Then God quoted the king's own boasts back to him. With his chariots he had climbed the highest mountains, cut down Lebanon's tallest cedars, dug wells in foreign lands, and claimed he could

dry up the rivers of Egypt under his feet. It was the voice of a man who thought nothing could stop him.

19:25-28 *Have you not heard? From long ago I did it, from days of antiquity I formed it; now I have brought it about, and you are to make fortified cities crash* ***into*** *ruined heaps. And their inhabitants* ***were*** *short of hand; they were dismayed and they were ashamed; they were the vegetation of the field and the greenery of grass, the grass of the roofs, and blight before standing grain. And your sitting down and your going out and your coming in I know, and your raging against Me. Because your raging against Me and your arrogance has come up into My ears, I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came.*

"Have you not heard? From long ago I did it, from days of antiquity I formed it." This is the heart of God's answer. Sennacherib thought he had conquered by his own strength. God says He planned it. Assyria's victories were part of God's plan to judge the nations. The cities crashed into ruins because God allowed it, and their people were as weak as grass on a rooftop that dries up before it grows. Assyria was only the axe in God's hand (Isaiah 10:15).

"And your sitting down and your going out and your coming in I know, and your raging against Me." God knew every move Sennacherib made. Nothing about him was hidden.

"I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came." The Assyrians were known for leading captives with hooks or rings through their noses or lips. God says He will do the same to the king of Assyria and lead him home like an animal.

19:29-31 *And this* ***will be*** *the sign for you: eating this year aftergrowth, and in the second year self-seeded growth, and in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains will again* ***take*** *root downward and make fruit upward. For from Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and an escaped remnant from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.*

"And this will be the sign for you." God gave Hezekiah a sign for the future. The Assyrians had ruined the fields, so for two years the people would eat what grew on its own, "and in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit." Life would return to normal. The fields would be theirs again.

"And the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains will again take root downward and make fruit upward." Judah was like a tree cut down to a stump, but the roots were alive. The remnant would grow again. "For from Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and an escaped remnant from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this."

That last line is the same promise Isaiah gave about the coming Child who would sit on David's throne forever: "The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this" (Isaiah 9:7). The God who would save Jerusalem from Assyria is the same God who will establish the kingdom of His Son. His zeal, His burning love for His people and His name, guarantees it.

19:32-34 *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He will not come into this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not come before it **with** a shield, and he will not pour out a siege mound against it. By the way by which he came, by it he will return, and into this city he will not come, declares the LORD. And I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant.'"*

"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He will not come into this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not come before it with a shield, and he will not pour out a siege mound against it." A siege mound was a ramp of earth built up against a city wall so an army could attack the top. The Assyrians had built one at Lachish. At Jerusalem, God said, there would be no siege at all. Not even one arrow.

"By the way by which he came, by it he will return." And why? "For My own sake and for the sake of David My servant." God saved Jerusalem for His own name and to keep His promise to David (2 Samuel 7:16). Again and again in Kings, God's faithfulness to David keeps Judah alive.

19:35 *And it was in that night, and the angel of the LORD went out and struck down in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and they rose early in the morning, and look, all of them **were** dead corpses.*

"And it was in that night, and the angel of the LORD went out and struck down in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and they rose early in the morning, and look, all of them were dead corpses."

That is all Scripture says. It does not tell us how. Some have suggested a sudden plague, and God can use natural means. But the text says plainly that "the angel of the LORD" did it, in one night, as God had promised. I take it as written: a direct act of God. Some scholars read the Hebrew word for thousand as a military unit, which would make the number smaller. I take the number as it stands.

The angel of the LORD appears many times in the Old Testament. In some places he speaks as the LORD Himself (Genesis 22:11-12; Exodus 3:2-6), and many Bible teachers believe those appearances were the Son of God before He was born as a man. Here he acts as God's messenger of judgment, as an angel did in Egypt on the night of the Passover (Exodus 12:23) and at Jerusalem in David's day (2 Samuel 24:16).

The Rabshakeh had asked what the LORD could do. Now he had his answer. Not one arrow was shot at Jerusalem. Hezekiah did not fight. He prayed, and God fought for him. "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

As I mentioned in the last chapter, Sennacherib's own prism boasts of shutting Hezekiah up in Jerusalem and receiving his tribute. It does not say he took the city, and it says nothing about this night. Kings tells us why.

19:36-37 *And Sennacherib the king of Assyria departed and went and returned, and he dwelt in Nineveh. And it was, he **was** bowing down **in** the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him down with the sword; and they escaped **to** the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.*

"And Sennacherib the king of Assyria departed and went and returned, and he dwelt in Nineveh." Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. He went home "by the way by which he came," just as God said (19:33).

Years later, "he was bowing down in the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him down with the sword." Assyrian records also tell of Sennacherib's murder by his own sons. It happened about 681 B.C., some twenty years after he left Jerusalem. The writer tells it right after the night of the angel, because it was the end of the same story. God had said, "I will make him fall by the sword in his land" (19:7). It came true, in the house of the god who could not save him.

"And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place."

Here is the contrast of the two kings. Hezekiah went into the house of his God and was saved. Sennacherib went into the house of his god and was killed. The LORD is God, He alone.

Chapter 19 Summary

When Hezekiah heard the Rabshakeh's words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD, and he sent his officials to Isaiah to ask him to pray for the remnant. Isaiah answered that the LORD said not to be afraid, for He would put a spirit in the king of Assyria, send him home, and make him fall by the sword in his own land. Sennacherib, hearing that Tirhakah king of Cush was coming against him, sent a letter to Hezekiah saying that his God was deceiving him. Hezekiah spread the letter before the LORD in the temple and prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, asking Him to save them so that all kingdoms would know that He alone is God. Isaiah sent the LORD's answer: Sennacherib had taunted the Holy One of Israel, but the LORD had planned all that Assyria did long ago, and He would put His hook in Sennacherib's nose and turn him back. The LORD gave a sign of harvest in the third year and promised a remnant would take root again. Sennacherib would not come into Jerusalem or shoot an arrow there, because the LORD would defend it for His own sake and David's. That night the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, where his sons later killed him while he worshiped Nisroch his god, and Esarhaddon reigned in his place.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What did Hezekiah do first when he heard the Rabshakeh's words? (19:1-2)

2. What did the LORD promise through Isaiah would happen to the king of Assyria? (19:6-7)

3. What did Hezekiah do with Sennacherib's letter? (19:14)

4. How did Hezekiah begin his prayer, and why does that matter? (19:15)

5. What was the main reason Hezekiah gave for asking God to save them? (19:19)

6. What did God say about Sennacherib's victories in verse 25? (19:25-28)

7. Why did God say He would defend Jerusalem? (19:34)

8. How was God's word about Sennacherib's death fulfilled? (19:7, 37)

9. What "letter" in your life, a problem, a fear or a threat, do you need to spread out before the LORD this week?

10. Hezekiah's prayer was concerned first with God's name being known. How might that change the way you pray about your own troubles?

Chapter 20: Hezekiah's Illness and the Envoys from Babylon

Scripture

20:1-11 In those days Hezekiah became sick to ***the point of*** dying. And Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Command your house, for you ***are*** dying, and you will not live.'" And he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Please, O LORD, remember, please, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a complete heart, and I have done what ***is*** good in Your eyes." And Hezekiah wept ***with*** a great weeping. And it was, Isaiah had not ***yet*** gone out ***of*** the middle court, and the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return, and you shall say to Hezekiah the ruler of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I ***am*** healing you. On the third day you will go up ***to*** the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years, and from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant."'" And Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took ***it*** and put ***it*** on the boil, and he lived. And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What ***will be*** the sign that the LORD will heal me, and ***that*** I will go up on the third day ***to*** the house of the LORD?" And Isaiah said, "This ***will be*** the sign for you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: the shadow has gone ***forward*** ten steps; or shall it return ten steps?" And Hezekiah said, "It is easy for the shadow to stretch out ten steps; no, but let the shadow return backward ten steps." And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and He brought the shadow back on the steps by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz, backward ten steps.

20:12-21 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah listened to them, and he showed them all the house of his treasure, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil, and the house of his weapons, and all that was found in his storehouses. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them in his house and in all his dominion. And Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where do they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "From a distant land they have come, from Babylon." And he said, "What did they see in your house?" And Hezekiah said, "All that ***is*** in my house they saw; there was not a thing which I did not show them in my storehouses." And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 'Look, days ***are*** coming, and all that ***is*** in your house, and what your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon; not a thing will be left, says the LORD. And some of your sons who will come out from you, whom you will father, they will take away; and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "Good ***is*** the word of the LORD which you have spoken." And he said, "***Is it*** not ***so***, if peace and security will be in my days?" And the rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought the waters into the city, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Hezekiah lay down with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 20 Preview

This chapter tells two stories from Hezekiah's later years. In the first, Hezekiah becomes deathly sick, and Isaiah tells him to set his house in order, because he will die. Hezekiah turns his face to the wall, prays and weeps, and before Isaiah has even left the palace courtyard, God sends him back: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears." God adds fifteen years to his life, promises again to defend Jerusalem, and gives a sign by making the shadow on the steps of Ahaz go backward.

In the second story, envoys come from the king of Babylon with letters and a gift, and Hezekiah proudly shows them everything in his treasure houses. Isaiah comes with a hard word. The day will come when all of it will be carried off to Babylon, and some of Hezekiah's own descendants will serve in the palace of the king of Babylon. This is the first time in Kings that Babylon is named as the coming enemy. Isaiah 38 and 39 tell these same events, and Isaiah 38 adds the song Hezekiah wrote after he was healed.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-3 *In those days Hezekiah became sick to **the point of** dying. And Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Command your house, for you **are** dying, and you will not live.'" And he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Please, O LORD, remember, please, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a complete heart, and I have done what **is** good in Your eyes." And Hezekiah wept **with** a great weeping.*

"In those days Hezekiah became sick to the point of dying." The phrase "in those days" ties this to the time of the Assyrian crisis. God's promise in verse 6 to deliver the city from the king of Assyria suggests it happened before or during Sennacherib's attack, about 701 B.C. The writer tells it after chapter 19 to keep the story of Sennacherib together.

Isaiah came with a hard message from the LORD: "Command your house, for you are dying, and you will not live." To command your house means to give your final instructions and put your affairs in order.

"And he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD." He turned away from everyone in the room to be alone with God. "Please, O LORD, remember, please, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a complete heart, and I have done what is good in Your eyes." Hezekiah was not claiming to be sinless or trying to earn healing. He was asking God to remember a life lived in faithfulness. "And Hezekiah wept with a great weeping."

Why would a man of faith weep at death? He was only about thirty-nine. And in the Old Testament, before Christ rose from the dead, believers did not yet see the life to come as clearly as we do now (2 Timothy 1:10). Hezekiah also may have had no son yet to take the throne.

20:4-6 *And it was, Isaiah had not **yet** gone out **of** the middle court, and the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return, and you shall say to Hezekiah the ruler of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I **am** healing you. On the third day you will go up **to** the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years, and from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant."'"*

"And it was, Isaiah had not yet gone out of the middle court, and the word of the LORD came to him." God answered before the prophet even made it out of the palace grounds. Sometimes God's answers come slowly. Sometimes they come in minutes.

"Return, and you shall say to Hezekiah the ruler of My people." The message came from "the LORD, the God of David your father." Notice the name God used: the God of David. God was remembering His promise to David's house. "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I am healing you. On the third day you will go up to the house of the LORD."

What a tender word. God sees our tears. Not one of them is lost (Psalm 56:8).

"And I will add to your days fifteen years." God also promised to deliver Hezekiah and the city from the king of Assyria. "And I will defend this city for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant."

Does this mean prayer changed God's mind? God's first word through Isaiah was true: from a human point of view, the sickness was fatal. God's second word showed what He had planned to do in answer to prayer. Scripture shows us both that God is sovereign and that prayer truly matters (James 5:16). Good Bible teachers explain how these fit together in different ways, but every one of them would tell you to pray.

20:7 *And Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took **it** and put **it** on the boil, and he lived.*

"And Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs." A cake of pressed figs was used in that day as a poultice, something warm laid on a sore to draw out infection. "And they took it and put it on the boil, and he lived." A boil is an infected sore or swelling.

God healed Hezekiah, and He used a common remedy to do it. God is the healer whether He works by a miracle or by medicine. There is no conflict between praying for healing and going to the doctor. Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23), and Luke, who wrote two books of our New Testament, was a physician (Colossians 4:14).

20:8-11 *And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What **will be** the sign that the LORD will heal me, and **that** I will go up on the third day **to** the house of the LORD?" And Isaiah said, "This **will be** the sign for you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: the shadow has gone **forward** ten steps; or shall it return ten steps?" And Hezekiah said, "It is easy for the shadow to stretch out ten steps; no, but let the shadow return backward ten steps." And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and He brought the shadow back on the steps by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz, backward ten steps.*

Hezekiah asked, "What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I will go up on the third day to the house of the LORD?" This was not unbelief. God had offered signs before (19:29), and Hezekiah asked for one to strengthen his faith. Compare his father Ahaz, who refused a sign God offered (Isaiah 7:10-12).

Isaiah gave him a choice: should the shadow go forward ten steps, or back ten steps? The "steps of Ahaz" were likely a stairway built by Ahaz, perhaps used to tell the time of day by the shadow moving down the stairs, like a sundial.

"It is easy for the shadow to stretch out ten steps," Hezekiah said. A shadow going forward is what shadows always do. "No, but let the shadow return backward ten steps." He asked for the harder thing.

"And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and He brought the shadow back." Scripture doesn't tell us how God did this, and I won't guess. The God who made the sun and stood it still for Joshua (Joshua 10:12-14) is able to do what He pleases with a shadow. Chronicles mentions that the envoys from Babylon came to ask about "the sign that had happened in the land" (2 Chronicles 32:31).

20:12-13 *At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah listened to them, and he showed them all the house of his treasure, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil, and the house of his weapons, and all that was found in his storehouses. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them in his house and in all his dominion.*

"At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah." At this time Babylon was not yet the great empire it would become. It was under Assyria's thumb, and Merodach-baladan was a Babylonian leader who fought for years to break free of Assyria. He was looking for allies in the west, and a king who had just been healed by a miracle and was standing up to Assyria was a good friend to have. The get-well gift had a political purpose.

"And Hezekiah listened to them." He was flattered. He "showed them all the house of his treasure, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil, and the house of his weapons." There was nothing he did not show them.

Why was this wrong? Chronicles says that after his healing "his heart was haughty," and that in the matter of the envoys "God left him, to test him, to know all that was in his heart"

(2 Chronicles 32:25, 31). Hezekiah wanted to impress them. He showed off his own wealth and weapons instead of telling them about the God who had healed him and saved his city. And he was making an alliance with a foreign power, the very thing Isaiah warned against.

20:14-15 *And Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where do they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "From a distant land they have come, from Babylon." And he said, "What did they see in your house?" And Hezekiah said, "All that **is** in my house they saw; there was not a thing which I did not show them in my storehouses."*

"And Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah." The prophet asked two questions: "What did these men say? And from where do they come to you?"

Hezekiah answered the second: "From a distant land they have come, from Babylon." You can almost hear the pride in "a distant land." Word of him had reached so far.

"What did they see in your house?" Hezekiah answered honestly: "All that is in my house they saw; there was not a thing which I did not show them in my storehouses."

20:16-18 *And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 'Look, days **are** coming, and all that **is** in your house, and what your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon; not a thing will be left, says the LORD. And some of your sons who will come out from you, whom you will father, they will take away; and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"*

"Hear the word of the LORD." Isaiah's message was severe. "Look, days are coming, and all that is in your house, and what your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon; not a thing will be left, says the LORD." Everything Hezekiah showed off would one day belong to the very people he showed it to.

"And some of your sons who will come out from you, whom you will father, they will take away; and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Sons here means descendants. A eunuch was a man who served in a king's court. Many were made unable to have children, and the word also came to be used for court officials in general.

This came true about a hundred years later. Daniel and his friends, young men "of the offspring of the kingship" of Judah, were taken to Babylon to serve in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar under the chief of his officials (Daniel 1:3-7). In 597 and 586 B.C. the treasures of the temple and palace were carried off to Babylon (24:13; 25:13-17). When Isaiah spoke these words, Assyria was the great power and Babylon was its subject. Only God could have known that Babylon, not Assyria, would be the one to carry Judah away.

20:19 *And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "Good **is** the word of the LORD which you have spoken." And he said, "**Is it** not **so**, if peace and security will be in my days?"*

"And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which you have spoken." Then he added, "Is it not so, if peace and security will be in my days?"

How should we take this? Bible teachers read it two ways. Some hear relief that the judgment would not come in his own lifetime, and they see it as a sad, self-centered response. Others hear humble acceptance: Hezekiah submitted to God's word as good and was grateful for God's mercy in delaying it, as God did for Josiah (22:20). Chronicles says that Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the people of Jerusalem, so that the LORD's wrath did not come in his days (2 Chronicles 32:26). Perhaps both are true. Hezekiah accepted God's word, but he did not weep for the generations to come as he had wept for himself.

That is a question for us. Do we care about the generations after us, or only about peace in our own days?

20:20-21 *And the rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought the waters into the city, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Hezekiah lay down with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.*

"And the rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought the waters into the city." Chronicles tells us that Hezekiah stopped up the upper outlet of the Gihon spring, outside the city, and directed the water down to the west side of the city of David (2 Chronicles 32:30). He did this so that an attacking army would find no water and Jerusalem would have plenty.

That tunnel can still be walked today. It runs about a third of a mile through solid rock, under the city of David, from the Gihon spring to the pool of Siloam. An old inscription found inside it tells how two teams of workers cut from opposite ends and met in the middle. It is one of the best-known finds of Bible archaeology. It was also near the pool of Siloam, at the end of that tunnel, that Jesus later sent a man born blind to wash and receive his sight (John 9:7).

"And Hezekiah lay down with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place." He had trusted the LORD like no other king of Judah. His son would lead Judah into the worst evil it had ever known.

Chapter 20 Summary

Hezekiah became deathly sick, and Isaiah told him to put his house in order because he would die. Hezekiah turned to the wall, prayed that the LORD would remember his faithful walk, and wept bitterly. Before Isaiah left the middle court, the LORD sent him back to tell Hezekiah that He had heard his prayer and seen his tears, would heal him, add fifteen years to his life, and defend Jerusalem from Assyria for His own sake and David's. A cake of figs was put on the boil, and Hezekiah recovered. As a sign, the LORD brought the shadow back ten steps on the steps of Ahaz. When envoys came from Merodach-baladan king of Babylon with letters and a gift, Hezekiah showed them everything in his treasure house and armory. Isaiah told him that all of it would one day be carried to Babylon and some of his descendants would serve as eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace. Hezekiah called the word of the LORD good, glad that there would be peace and security in his own days. He made the pool and conduit that brought water into the city, and when he died, his son Manasseh reigned in his place.

I struggle daily with different things. Taking them to the feet of God is what I do. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and poured out his heart. That is still the best place to take what weighs on us.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What did Hezekiah do when Isaiah told him he would die? (20:1-3)

2. How quickly did God answer, and what did He say He had seen and heard? (20:4-6)

3. What means did God use to heal Hezekiah, and what does that teach us about medicine and prayer? (20:7)

4. Why did Hezekiah choose the shadow going backward as his sign? (20:9-11)

5. Why did the envoys from Babylon come, and what did Hezekiah show them? (20:12-13; 2 Chronicles 32:31)

6. What did Isaiah prophesy about Hezekiah's treasures and descendants, and how did it come true? (20:16-18; Daniel 1:3-7)

7. What are the two ways Bible teachers read Hezekiah's answer in verse 19? (20:19; 2 Chronicles 32:26)

8. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and poured out his heart to God. Is there something you need to bring to God that honestly?

9. Hezekiah showed off his treasures instead of telling the envoys about his God. When people see your life, what are you most eager to show them?

10. Do your choices today show that you care about the generations who will come after you?

Chapter 21: Manasseh and Amon

Scripture

21:1-9 Manasseh ***was*** a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Hephzibah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he raised up altars for the Baal and made an Asherah, just as Ahab the king of Israel had done, and he bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." And he built altars for all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he made his son pass through the fire, and he practiced soothsaying and practiced omens, and dealt with a medium and spiritists. He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke ***Him*** to anger. And he put the carved image of the Asherah that he had made in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. And I will not again make the foot of Israel wander from the ground which I gave to their fathers, only if they take care to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law which My servant Moses commanded them." And they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do the evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel.

21:10-18 And the LORD spoke by the hand of His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh the king of Judah has done these abominations, he has done evil more than all that the Amorites did who ***were*** before him, and he has also made Judah sin with his idols, therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Look, I ***am*** bringing calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, so that everyone who hears of it, his two ears will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the level of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes the bowl: he wipes ***it*** and turns ***it*** over on its face. And I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they will be for spoil and for plunder to all their enemies, because they have done the evil in My eyes and have been provoking Me to anger from the day that their fathers came out from Egypt and until this day.'" And also Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from end to end, apart from his sin with which he made Judah sin, to do the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And the rest of the matters of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin which he sinned, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh lay down with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his place.

21:19-26 Amon ***was*** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz from Jotbah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Manasseh his father had done. And he walked in all the way in which his father had walked, and he served the idols which his father had served and bowed down to them. And he forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and he did not walk in the way of the LORD. And the servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his house. And the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon, and the

people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place. And the rest of the matters of Amon which he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And someone buried him in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 21 Preview

Hezekiah's son Manasseh reigns longer than any other king of Judah, fifty-five years, and he is the worst of them all. He rebuilds the high places his father tore down, brings back Baal and the Asherah, worships the stars, builds pagan altars inside the temple courts, sacrifices his son, and turns to mediums and spiritists. He leads Judah to do more evil than the nations God drove out of Canaan, and he fills Jerusalem with innocent blood. God sends His prophets to announce that Jerusalem will be wiped like a dish and turned upside down.

Kings gives us only the darkness of Manasseh's reign. 2 Chronicles 33 tells us something Kings does not: late in life, taken captive to Babylon, Manasseh humbled himself, prayed, and God forgave him and brought him home. His son Amon follows his father's sins for two years and is murdered by his servants. The people put eight-year-old Josiah on the throne. This is a hard chapter. It shows how far a nation can fall, and, read with Chronicles, how far God's grace can reach.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *Manasseh **was** a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Hephzibah.*

"Manasseh was a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem." That is the longest reign of any king of either kingdom. It ran from about 697 to 642 B.C., counting about ten years when he reigned alongside his father. His mother was Hephzibah, a name that means my delight is in her.

He was the son of one of Judah's best kings. Godly parents cannot choose for their children. Each generation must choose the LORD for itself.

21:2-3 *And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he raised up altars for the Baal and made an Asherah, just as Ahab the king of Israel had done, and he bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them.*

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed from before the sons of Israel." An abomination is something God hates, something disgusting to Him. The writer compares Manasseh to the Canaanites, the very peoples God removed from the land for their sins.

He undid his father's reforms one by one. "He again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed." He set up altars for Baal and made an Asherah, "just as Ahab the king of Israel had done." Ahab was the byword for wickedness in the north. Now Judah had its own Ahab. "And he bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them." He worshiped the sun, moon and stars, a religion that was strong in Assyria and Babylon in his day.

21:4-6 *And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." And he built altars for all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he made his son pass through the fire, and he practiced soothsaying and practiced omens, and dealt with a medium and spiritists. He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke **Him** to anger.*

"And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, In Jerusalem I will put My name." He brought idolatry into God's own house. "And he built altars for all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of the LORD." The courts where Israel came to worship the LORD were filled with altars to the stars.

"And he made his son pass through the fire." This is child sacrifice, as with Ahaz (16:3). Chronicles says he did it in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and it says "sons" (2 Chronicles 33:6). This valley became so linked with burning and death that its name, Gehinnom, became the word Jesus used for hell, Gehenna (Mark 9:43).

"He practiced soothsaying and practiced omens, and dealt with a medium and spiritists." Soothsaying and omens are ways of trying to read the future through signs. A medium claims to speak with the dead, and a spiritist seeks knowledge from spirits. God forbade every one of these (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). They turn to dark powers for what only God can give. "He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger."

I want to say this plainly. These practices are not harmless games, then or now. God's Word warns us away from them because they open doors to spiritual darkness. If you have been involved in anything like this, the answer is the same as for any sin: confess it, turn from it, and trust Christ, who has power over every dark thing (Colossians 2:15).

21:7-9 *And he put the carved image of the Asherah that he had made in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. And I will not again make the foot of Israel wander from the ground which I gave to their fathers, only if they take care to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law which My servant Moses commanded them." And they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do the evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel.*

"And he put the carved image of the Asherah that he had made in the house." Not just in the courts, but in the temple itself, the house God had chosen. The writer quotes God's promise to David and Solomon: "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever."

God had made a further promise, with a condition: "I will not again make the foot of Israel wander from the ground which I gave to their fathers, only if they take care to do according to all that I have commanded them." Manasseh was trampling that condition underfoot.

"And they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do the evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel." This is a terrible verdict. God's own people became worse than the Canaanites. And notice "they did not listen." The people followed gladly. A wicked leader can lead a nation astray, but the people chose to go.

21:10-15 *And the LORD spoke by the hand of His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh the king of Judah has done these abominations, he has done evil more than all that the Amorites did who **were** before him, and he has also made Judah sin with his idols, therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Look, I **am** bringing calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, so that everyone who hears of it, his two ears will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the level of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes the bowl: he wipes **it** and turns **it** over on its face. And I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they will be for spoil and for plunder to all their enemies, because they have done the evil in My eyes and have been provoking Me to anger from the day that their fathers came out from Egypt and until this day.'"*

"And the LORD spoke by the hand of His servants the prophets." Scripture does not name these prophets. God did not stay silent even in the darkest years.

The charge: "Manasseh the king of Judah has done these abominations, he has done evil more than all that the Amorites did who were before him." The Amorites were one of the main peoples of Canaan, and God had told Abraham long ago that He would wait until their sin was complete before He judged them (Genesis 15:16). Now Judah's sin was complete.

The sentence: "Look, I am bringing calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, so that everyone who hears of it, his two ears will tingle." It would be news so shocking that people's ears would ring. God used the same words in the days of Eli before the ark was taken (1 Samuel 3:11).

"And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the level of the house of Ahab." A measuring line and a level, or plumb line, are builder's tools. God would measure Jerusalem by the same standard He used for Samaria and Ahab's house, and the result would be the same: destruction (Amos 7:7-9). God does not have a softer standard for His favorite city.

"And I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes the bowl: he wipes it and turns it over on its face." It is a picture from the kitchen. When a dish is finished, you wipe it clean and turn it upside down. Jerusalem would be emptied.

"And I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance." Judah was all that was left of Israel, God's inheritance, and they too would be given "into the hand of their enemies." Why? "Because they have done the evil in My eyes and have been provoking Me to anger from the day that their fathers came out from Egypt and until this day." Manasseh's sin was the last straw on a load that had been piling up for centuries.

21:16 *And also Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from end to end, apart from his sin with which he made Judah sin, to do the evil in the eyes of the LORD.*

"And also Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from end to end." Scripture doesn't tell us who all the victims were. They were likely those who stood against his idolatry, the faithful prophets and worshipers of the LORD, and also the poor and weak who had no one to defend them.

There is an old Jewish tradition that the prophet Isaiah was put to death under Manasseh, sawn in two, and many think Hebrews 11:37 ("they were sawed in two") has him in mind. Scripture itself doesn't tell us how Isaiah died, so I hold that tradition loosely.

This verse matters later. When Judah falls, the writer says it was "for the sins of Manasseh" and "also for the innocent blood that he had shed," and "the LORD was not willing to forgive" (24:3-4). Innocent blood cries out to God (Genesis 4:10).

21:17-18 *And the rest of the matters of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin which he sinned,* ***are*** *they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh lay down with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his place.*

"And the rest of the matters of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin which he sinned." Kings mentions "his sin" in the formula, which is unusual. It leaves out what Chronicles tells us.

2 Chronicles 33:10-17 tells the rest of the story. The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, and they would not listen. So the LORD brought the army of Assyria, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains, and took him to Babylon. Then: "And when he was in distress, he entreated the face of the LORD his God, and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers" (2 Chronicles 33:12). "And he prayed to Him, and He was entreated by him, and He heard his supplication, and He brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. And Manasseh knew that the LORD, He is God" (2 Chronicles 33:13).

Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh removed the foreign gods and the idol from the temple, threw the altars out of the city, restored the altar of the LORD, and told Judah to serve the LORD (2 Chronicles 33:15-16).

How can both books be true? Kings is telling us why Judah fell. Manasseh's long reign of evil set the nation on a course it never left, and even his late repentance did not turn the people back. Chronicles tells us that God's grace reached the worst king of all. Both are true. God forgave Manasseh the man. The damage Manasseh did to the nation remained, and the judgment on Judah still came (23:26).

That is how sin works. God's forgiveness is complete, and it is real. Paul called himself the foremost of sinners and said Christ saved him so that others would see His patience (1 Timothy 1:15-16). If God could forgive Manasseh, He can forgive anyone who turns to Him. But forgiveness does not always undo the harm our sin has done to others. Manasseh could not give

back the lives he took or unteach a generation the idolatry he taught them. That should make us both grateful for grace and careful about sin.

"And Manasseh lay down with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza." He was not buried in the tombs of the kings of David's line.

21:19-22 *Amon **was** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz from Jotbah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Manasseh his father had done. And he walked in all the way in which his father had walked, and he served the idols which his father had served and bowed down to them. And he forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and he did not walk in the way of the LORD.*

"Amon was a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem," about 642 to 640 B.C. His mother was Meshullemeth from Jotbah.

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Manasseh his father had done." He followed the first Manasseh, the idolater, not the repentant one. Chronicles says plainly that Amon did not humble himself as his father had, but multiplied guilt (2 Chronicles 33:23).

"And he forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and he did not walk in the way of the LORD." A father's late repentance does not always undo the example of his earlier years. Our children learn from how we live for decades, not only from how we end.

21:23-26 *And the servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his house. And the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place. And the rest of the matters of Amon which he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And someone buried him in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his place.*

"And the servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his house." Scripture doesn't tell us why. Then "the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon." The people of the land seem to have been the leading landowners and citizens of Judah, and they stood for keeping David's line on the throne. "And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place."

Amon was buried "in his tomb in the garden of Uzza," like his father. "And Josiah his son reigned in his place."

In the darkness that followed Manasseh, God was already preparing a light. Three hundred years earlier, a man of God had named Josiah as the king who would tear down Jeroboam's altar at Bethel (1 Kings 13:2). Now that boy, eight years old, sat on the throne.

Chapter 21 Summary

Manasseh became king at twelve and reigned fifty-five years, doing evil like the nations the LORD had driven out. He rebuilt the high places his father destroyed, set up altars to Baal, made an

Asherah as Ahab did, and worshiped the host of heaven. He built altars to the stars in the courts of the LORD's house and put the carved Asherah in the temple where the LORD had put His name. He made his son pass through the fire and practiced omens and consulted mediums and spiritists. He led Judah to do more evil than the nations, and the people did not listen. The LORD spoke by His prophets that He would bring such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah that ears would tingle, stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the level of Ahab's house, wipe Jerusalem like a dish, and give the remnant of His inheritance to their enemies. Manasseh also filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. He was buried in the garden of Uzza. His son Amon reigned two years, did evil as his father had, forsook the LORD, and was killed by his servants. The people of the land killed the conspirators and made Amon's son Josiah king.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What did Manasseh undo from his father Hezekiah's reign? (21:3)

2. What did Manasseh bring into the house of the LORD? (21:4-7)

3. What does the writer say about Judah compared to the nations God drove out? (21:9, 11)

4. What pictures did the LORD use for the judgment coming on Jerusalem? (21:12-13)

5. What else did Manasseh do in Jerusalem besides idolatry, and why does it matter later? (21:16; 24:3-4)

6. What does 2 Chronicles 33:10-17 tell us about the end of Manasseh's life?

7. How did Amon follow his father, and how was he different from Manasseh at the end? (21:20-22; 2 Chronicles 33:23)

8. If God forgave Manasseh, what does that say to someone who thinks they have gone too far to be forgiven? (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

9. Manasseh was forgiven, but the harm he did to others remained. How should that shape the way we think about sin before we commit it?

10. Amon learned from his father's early years, not his later ones. What are the people closest to you learning from the way you live?

Chapter 22: Josiah and the Book of the Law

Scripture

22:1-10 Josiah ***was*** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside ***to the*** right or left. And it was, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, ***to*** the house of the LORD, saying, "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may total the money that is brought ***into*** the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have gathered from the people. And let them put it into the hand of the doers of the work who are appointed ***over*** the house of the LORD; and let them give it to the doers of the work who ***are*** in the house of the LORD, to repair the breach of the house: to the craftsmen and to the builders and to the masons, and to buy timber and hewn stones to repair the house. Only, the money that is given into their hand shall not be accounted with them, for they ***are*** working in faithfulness." And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king, and he said, "Your servants have poured out the money that was found in the house, and they have put it into the hand of the doers of the work who are appointed ***over*** the house of the LORD." And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "A book Hilkiah the priest has given to me." And Shaphan read it before the king.

22:11-20 And it was, when the king heard the words of the book of the law, and he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great ***is*** the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." And Hilkiah the priest and Ahikam and Achbor and Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the garments; and she ***was*** dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second ***Quarter***; and they spoke to her. And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Say to the man who sent you to me, "Thus says the LORD: Look, I ***am*** bringing calamity to this place and on its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands; and My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched."' And to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "***As for*** the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a horror and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD. Therefore look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity which I ***am*** bringing on this place."'" And they brought back word to the king.

Chapter 22 Preview

After Manasseh and Amon, God gives Judah one last good king. Josiah becomes king at eight years old, and he walks in all the way of David, turning neither right nor left. In his eighteenth year he sends his scribe Shaphan to the temple to arrange its repair, the same way Joash did two centuries earlier. While the work goes on, Hilkiah the high priest finds something that changes everything: the book of the law, lost and forgotten in the house of the LORD.

When Shaphan reads it to the king, Josiah tears his clothes. He sees how far Judah has fallen from God's Word and how great God's wrath must be. He sends his officials to ask the LORD what to do, and they go to Huldah the prophetess. Her answer is hard and kind at once. The judgment written in the book will surely come on Jerusalem. But because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself, he will die in peace and not see it. This chapter shows us the power of God's Word when it is rediscovered and how God responds to a humble heart.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-2 *Josiah **was** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside **to the** right or left.*

"Josiah was a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem." That was about 640 to 609 B.C. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. An eight-year-old king needs advisers, and Scripture doesn't name them. Perhaps his mother or godly officials guided him. Someone taught that boy well.

"And he did the right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or left." Not turning to the right or left is the language of Moses, who told Israel and its kings to keep God's law without turning aside from it either way (Deuteronomy 5:32; 17:20). Josiah is one of only a few kings compared to David without any "only" attached.

Chronicles adds that in his eighth year as king, at sixteen, "he began to seek the God of David his father," and at twenty he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of the high places and idols (2 Chronicles 34:3). The prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah began to preach during his reign (Jeremiah 1:2; Zephaniah 1:1).

22:3-7 *And it was, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe,* ***to*** *the house of the LORD, saying, "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may total the money that is brought* ***into*** *the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have gathered from the people. And let them put it into the hand of the doers of the work who are appointed* ***over*** *the house of the LORD; and let them give it to the doers of the work who* ***are*** *in the house of the LORD, to repair the breach of the house: to the craftsmen and to the builders and to the masons, and to buy timber and hewn stones to repair the house. Only, the money that is given into their hand shall not be accounted with them, for they* ***are*** *working in faithfulness."*

"And it was, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah," about 622 B.C., when Josiah was twenty-six, "the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD." The scribe was the king's secretary, a high officer of state.

His orders were to go to Hilkiah the high priest and have him count the money "which the keepers of the threshold have gathered from the people." The keepers of the threshold were priests who guarded the temple doors and received the gifts. The money was to be given to the overseers and then to the workmen, "the craftsmen and to the builders and to the masons," to buy timber and cut stone "to repair the breach of the house." After Manasseh's long reign, the temple was badly run down.

"Only, the money that is given into their hand shall not be accounted with them, for they are working in faithfulness." These are almost the same words used of the workmen in Joash's day (12:15). Honest work done for God is noticed and trusted.

22:8-10 *And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king, and he said, "Your servants have poured out the money that was found in the house, and they have put it into the hand of the doers of the work who are appointed* ***over*** *the house of the LORD." And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "A book Hilkiah the priest has given to me." And Shaphan read it before the king.*

"And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

What was this book? Most Bible teachers believe it was the book of Deuteronomy, or the whole Law of Moses, which includes it. The things Josiah did next match Deuteronomy closely: worship in only one place, the end of the high places and mediums, the Passover kept in Jerusalem, and the curses for breaking the covenant. Moses had commanded that the book of the law be kept beside the ark of the covenant "for a witness against you" (Deuteronomy 31:26), and that each king write out his own copy and read it all his life (Deuteronomy 17:18-19).

How could it be lost? During Manasseh's fifty-five years of idolatry, the temple was filled with pagan altars, and the Word of God was pushed aside. It is possible the copy was hidden by faithful priests to protect it, or simply buried under years of neglect and rubble.

Many modern critical scholars believe that Deuteronomy was not written by Moses at all, but written around this time and "found" to support Josiah's reforms. I do not accept that. The text says the book was found, not written, and Josiah and everyone around him treated it as the old law of Moses that their fathers had failed to keep (22:13). Jesus quoted Deuteronomy as God's Word three times when Satan tempted Him (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Shaphan came back to report on the money, then said, almost as an afterthought, that Hilkiah had given him a book. "And Shaphan read it before the king." It is remarkable how often the most important news is mentioned last.

22:11-13 *And it was, when the king heard the words of the book of the law, and he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great **is** the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."*

"And it was, when the king heard the words of the book of the law, and he tore his clothes." Josiah was not just moved. He was broken. He heard God's covenant, the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience, and he knew that Judah had done everything God warned against.

He sent five officials: Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant. "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book."

Notice that Josiah included himself: "for me and for the people." He did not blame only his fathers. He knew he stood under the same judgment. That is what real conviction of sin looks like. God's Word does not just inform us. It reads us. "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

And notice what he did not do. He did not hide the book again or explain it away. He took it seriously and asked God what to do next.

22:14-17 *And Hilkiah the priest and Ahikam and Achbor and Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the garments; and she **was** dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second **Quarter**; and they spoke to her. And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Say to the man who sent you to me, "Thus says the LORD: Look, I **am** bringing calamity to this place and on its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands; and My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched."'*

The officials "went to Huldah the prophetess." A prophetess is a woman who speaks God's message. Huldah was the wife of Shallum, the keeper of the wardrobe, either the temple's priestly

garments or the king's, "and she was dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter," a newer part of the city. Jeremiah and Zephaniah were preaching at this time, but the king's men went to Huldah. She must have been known and respected as one through whom God spoke. God has used women to speak His word in many ages, such as Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Anna (Luke 2:36).

Her answer did not soften anything. "Say to the man who sent you to me." To God, the king was simply "the man." In matters of judgment, God speaks to kings and commoners alike.

"Look, I am bringing calamity to this place and on its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read." Everything written in the curses would happen. "Because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods." And then the hardest words: "My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched."

Josiah's reforms would be real and good, but they would not turn back the judgment. The nation's heart had been hardened too long, and as we will see, the people's repentance did not go deep (Jeremiah 3:10).

22:18-20 *And to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "**As for** the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a horror and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD. Therefore look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity which I **am** bringing on this place."'" And they brought back word to the king.*

Then came a word for the king himself. "Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a horror and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD."

A tender heart is soft before God, easily moved by His Word, quick to grieve over sin. The opposite is the hard neck we saw in Israel (17:14). God sees the difference. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

"Therefore look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity which I am bringing on this place."

You may ask how Josiah could die in peace, when he was killed in battle at Megiddo (23:29). In peace here means before the calamity came, not necessarily a gentle death. Josiah died before Jerusalem was besieged, before the temple burned, and before his sons were dragged away. He was spared from seeing it. Sometimes God's mercy to His faithful servants is to take them home before the storm.

"And they brought back word to the king." What would Josiah do with a judgment that could not be turned back? Many would have given up. The next chapter shows that Josiah obeyed God anyway.

Chapter 22 Summary

Josiah became king at eight and reigned thirty-one years, walking in all the way of David without turning to the right or left. In his eighteenth year he sent Shaphan the scribe to Hilkiah the high priest to have the money gathered at the temple paid to the honest workmen repairing the house of the LORD. Hilkiah told Shaphan he had found the book of the law in the temple, and Shaphan read it to the king. When Josiah heard its words, he tore his clothes and sent Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah to inquire of the LORD, for he saw that the LORD's wrath was great because their fathers had not obeyed the book. They went to Huldah the prophetess. She said that the LORD would bring on Jerusalem all the calamity written in the book, because the people had forsaken Him and served other gods, and His wrath would not be quenched. But because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself and wept before the LORD, he would be gathered to his grave in peace and would not see the calamity.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. How old was Josiah when he became king, and how does the writer describe his walk with God? (22:1-2)

2. What was Shaphan sent to the temple to do? (22:3-7)

3. What did Hilkiah find, and what do most Bible teachers believe it was? (22:8; Deuteronomy 31:26)

4. How did Josiah respond when he heard the words of the book? (22:11-13)

5. Whom did Josiah's officials go to, and what did she say would happen to Jerusalem? (22:14-17)

6. What did the LORD say about Josiah's heart, and what did He promise him? (22:18-20)

7. How could Josiah be "gathered to your graves in peace" when he died in battle? (22:20; 23:29)

8. The book of the law was lost inside the house of God. Is it possible for God's Word to be lost in a church, or in a Christian's life? What would that look like?

9. Josiah included himself when he confessed the nation's sin. Do you tend to see sin in others before you see it in yourself?

10. When God's Word convicts you, is your heart tender or hard? What helps keep a heart soft before God?

Chapter 23: Josiah's Reforms and the Last Kings Before the Exile

Scripture

23:1-14 And the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up ***to*** the house of the LORD, and every man of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, from small to great; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by the pillar and made the covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all ***the*** heart and with all ***the*** soul, to establish the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood in the covenant. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second rank and the keepers of the threshold to bring out from the temple of the LORD all the articles that were made for the Baal and for the Asherah and for all the host of the heavens; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and he carried their dust ***to*** Bethel. And he did away with the idol priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed, and ***who*** burned incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and the surroundings of Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to the Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations and to all the host of the heavens. And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the wadi Kidron, and he burned it at the wadi Kidron and crushed ***it*** to dust, and he threw its dust on the grave of the sons of the people. And he tore down the houses of the male cult prostitutes that ***were*** in the house of the LORD, where the women ***were*** weaving houses for the Asherah. And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and he defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he tore down the high places of the gates that ***were at*** the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which ***were*** on a man's left at the gate of the city. Only, the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread in the midst of their brothers. And he defiled Topheth, which ***is*** in the valley of the son of Hinnom, so that a man would not make his son and his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. And he did away with the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, from the entrance of the house of the LORD by the chamber of Nathan-melech the eunuch, which ***was*** in the precincts; and the chariots of the sun he burned with fire. And the altars that ***were*** on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king tore down; and he ran from there and threw their dust into the wadi Kidron. And the high places that ***were*** on the face of Jerusalem, which ***were*** on the south of the Mount of Destruction, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the detestable thing of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the detestable thing of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled. And he broke the pillars and cut down the Asherim, and he filled their place ***with*** bones of man.

23:15-28 And also the altar that ***was*** at Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, also that altar and the high place he tore down; and he burned the high place, he crushed ***it*** to dust, and he burned ***the*** Asherah. And Josiah turned and saw the

graves that ***were*** there on the mountain; and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned ***them*** on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things. And he said, "What ***is*** this monument that I ***am*** seeing?" And the men of the city said to him, "The grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." And he said, "Let him rest; let no man disturb his bones." And they spared his bones, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. And also all the houses of the high places that ***were*** in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke ***Him*** to anger, Josiah removed; and he did to them according to all the deeds that he had done at Bethel. And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who ***were*** there on the altars, and he burned bones of man on them; and he returned ***to*** Jerusalem. And the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep a Passover to the LORD your God, as ***it is*** written in this book of the covenant." For ***one*** had not been kept like this Passover since the days of the judges who judged Israel, and all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem. And also the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the detestable things that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, Josiah purged, so as to establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had found ***in*** the house of the LORD. And like him there was no king before him who turned back to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; and after him ***one*** like him did not arise. Only, the LORD did not turn back from the burning of His great anger, with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the LORD said, "Also Judah I will remove from My face, as I removed Israel; and I will reject this city which I chose, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'" And the rest of the matters of Josiah and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah?

23:29-37 In his days Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria, to the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went to meet him, and he killed him at Megiddo when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead ***in a chariot*** from Megiddo, and brought him ***to*** Jerusalem and buried him in his tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father. Jehoahaz ***was*** a son of twenty-three years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, from reigning in Jerusalem; and he put a fine on the land, approximately 7,500 pounds (one hundred talents) of silver and approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold. And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of Josiah his father, and he changed his name ***to*** Jehoiakim. And Jehoahaz he took, and he came ***to*** Egypt and died there. And the silver and the gold Jehoiakim gave to Pharaoh; only he assessed the land to give the silver at the command of Pharaoh. From each man according to his assessment he exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, to give to Pharaoh Neco. Jehoiakim ***was*** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah from Rumah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Chapter 23 Preview

Josiah has been told that judgment on Jerusalem cannot be turned back. He obeys God anyway. He gathers all the people to the temple, reads them the whole book of the covenant, and leads them in making a covenant with the LORD. Then he cleans house as no king before him had. He burns the idols and the Asherah, removes the idol priests, defiles the valley where children were sacrificed, tears down altars built by Ahaz, Manasseh and even Solomon, and goes north to Bethel to destroy Jeroboam's altar, just as a man of God had foretold three hundred years earlier. He keeps a Passover like none since the days of the judges. The writer says there was no king like him before or after.

Yet the LORD's anger does not turn back because of Manasseh's sins. Josiah dies in battle at Megiddo against Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. His son Jehoahaz reigns three months before Neco takes him away to Egypt, and Neco puts another son, Eliakim, on the throne and renames him Jehoiakim. Both do evil. Judah's last good king is gone, and the end is near.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-3 *And the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up **to** the house of the LORD, and every man of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, from small to great; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by the pillar and made the covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all **the** heart and with all **the** soul, to establish the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood in the covenant.*

"And the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem." Then Josiah went up to the temple with "every man of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, from small to great." Everyone was there, from the least to the greatest.

"And he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD." The king himself read it. Moses had commanded that the law be read to all the people, men, women, children and foreigners, so they could hear and learn to fear the LORD (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). Revival in the Bible almost always begins with God's Word read and heard again (Nehemiah 8:1-8).

"And the king stood by the pillar and made the covenant before the LORD." This was likely one of the two great bronze pillars at the entrance of the temple, where Joash had stood when he was crowned (11:14). Josiah promised "to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all the heart and with all the soul." That is the language of the greatest commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5), which Jesus also called the first and greatest (Matthew 22:37-38).

"And all the people stood in the covenant." They agreed to it. Whether their hearts truly changed is another matter. Jeremiah, preaching in those years, said Judah did not return to God "with all her heart, but rather with falsehood" (Jeremiah 3:10).

23:4-7 *And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second rank and the keepers of the threshold to bring out from the temple of the LORD all the articles that were made for the Baal and for the Asherah and for all the host of the heavens; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and he carried their dust* ***to*** *Bethel. And he did away with the idol priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed, and* ***who*** *burned incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and the surroundings of Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to the Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations and to all the host of the heavens. And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the wadi Kidron, and he burned it at the wadi Kidron and crushed* ***it*** *to dust, and he threw its dust on the grave of the sons of the people. And he tore down the houses of the male cult prostitutes that* ***were*** *in the house of the LORD, where the women* ***were*** *weaving houses for the Asherah.*

Josiah's reform began at the temple itself. He had Hilkiah and the priests bring out "all the articles that were made for the Baal and for the Asherah and for all the host of the heavens." He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, the valley east of the city, and carried their ashes to Bethel. Bethel was where Jeroboam's false worship began. Josiah sent the ashes of Judah's idols back to the place where Israel's idolatry started.

"And he did away with the idol priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed." These were priests of false gods who burned incense at the high places, and to Baal, "to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations and to all the host of the heavens."

He brought out the Asherah image from the house of the LORD, the one Manasseh had set up (21:7), burned it at the Kidron, "and crushed it to dust, and he threw its dust on the grave of the sons of the people." That was the common burial ground, an unclean place. The idol that had stood in God's house ended up as dust on the graves of common people.

"And he tore down the houses of the male cult prostitutes that were in the house of the LORD." Pagan worship often included sexual rituals, and men had served as prostitutes for these gods right inside the temple area. God had forbidden this in the Law (Deuteronomy 23:17). Women there also wove hangings for the Asherah. The worship of false gods always ends up degrading people, body and soul. Josiah tore it down.

23:8-9 *And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and he defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he tore down the high places of the gates that* ***were at*** *the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which* ***were*** *on a man's left at the gate of the city. Only, the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread in the midst of their brothers.*

"And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and he defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba." Geba was on the northern edge of Judah

and Beersheba on the southern edge, so this covered the whole kingdom. To defile a high place means to make it unclean and unfit for worship, so it could never be used again.

These priests seem to have been Levites who had offered sacrifices at the high places, perhaps even to the LORD, but in the wrong place. Josiah brought them to Jerusalem. "Only, the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread in the midst of their brothers." They could share in the priests' food, but they could no longer serve at the altar. It was both mercy and discipline.

He also tore down the high places at the city gates, including one at the Gate of Joshua, the governor of the city.

23:10-14 *And he defiled Topheth, which **is** in the valley of the son of Hinnom, so that a man would not make his son and his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. And he did away with the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, from the entrance of the house of the LORD by the chamber of Nathan-melech the eunuch, which **was** in the precincts; and the chariots of the sun he burned with fire. And the altars that **were** on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king tore down; and he ran from there and threw their dust into the wadi Kidron. And the high places that **were** on the face of Jerusalem, which **were** on the south of the Mount of Destruction, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the detestable thing of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the detestable thing of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled. And he broke the pillars and cut down the Asherim, and he filled their place **with** bones of man.*

"And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, so that a man would not make his son and his daughter pass through the fire to Molech." Topheth was the place in the valley of Hinnom where children were sacrificed. Molech was the god of the Ammonites to whom they were offered. Jeremiah preached against this very place (Jeremiah 7:31-32). Josiah made it unclean so no one could use it again.

"And he did away with the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun," and he burned "the chariots of the sun." Sun worship pictured the sun god riding across the sky in a chariot. These horses and chariots stood at the very entrance to the temple.

He tore down the altars on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz, where people worshiped the stars on the rooftops (Jeremiah 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5), and the altars Manasseh had built in the two temple courts, and threw their dust into the Kidron. Chronicles tells us Manasseh had removed these after his repentance (2 Chronicles 33:15). It seems they were rebuilt under Amon, or never fully destroyed.

He even defiled the high places east of Jerusalem that Solomon had built more than three hundred years earlier "for Ashtoreth the detestable thing of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the detestable thing of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon" (1 Kings 11:5-7). Ashtoreth was a goddess of fertility and war, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom another name for the Ammonite god. Solomon's sin had stood for three centuries on the

hill the writer calls "the Mount of Destruction," part of the Mount of Olives. It is a sobering thought. A sin we tolerate can outlive us by generations.

He broke the pillars, cut down the Asherim, "and he filled their place with bones of man." Human bones made a place unclean (Numbers 19:16). No one would worship there again.

23:15-18 *And also the altar that **was** at Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, also that altar and the high place he tore down; and he burned the high place, he crushed **it** to dust, and he burned **the** Asherah. And Josiah turned and saw the graves that **were** there on the mountain; and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned **them** on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things. And he said, "What **is** this monument that I **am** seeing?" And the men of the city said to him, "The grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." And he said, "Let him rest; let no man disturb his bones." And they spared his bones, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria.*

"And also the altar that was at Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made." Bethel had been part of the northern kingdom. With Assyria now weak, Josiah could reach into the old territory of Israel. He tore down Jeroboam's altar and high place, crushed it to dust, and burned the Asherah.

Then he saw graves on the mountain. He had the bones taken out and "burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things."

This takes us back to 1 Kings 13. About three hundred years earlier, on the very day Jeroboam stood at this altar, an unnamed man of God from Judah cried out against it. He named Josiah, a son to be born to the house of David, and said he would sacrifice on it the priests of the high places and burn human bones on it (1 Kings 13:2). Now it happened, exactly as spoken. God's Word does not fail, even across centuries.

"What is this monument that I am seeing?" Josiah asked. The men of the city told him: "The grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." Josiah said, "Let him rest; let no man disturb his bones." The bones of the old prophet from Samaria who was buried with him were also spared (1 Kings 13:31-32). The man who spoke God's word was honored by the king who fulfilled it.

23:19-20 *And also all the houses of the high places that **were** in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke **Him** to anger, Josiah removed; and he did to them according to all the deeds that he had done at Bethel. And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who **were** there on the altars, and he burned bones of man on them; and he returned **to** Jerusalem.*

Josiah went on through "all the houses of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria" and did to them as he had done at Bethel.

"And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who were there on the altars, and he burned bones of man on them." This is hard to read. Josiah put to death the priests of these northern shrines on their own altars. What are we to make of it?

First, these were not priests of the LORD in Jerusalem. Notice the difference from Judah's high place priests, whom Josiah spared and brought to Jerusalem (23:8-9). These northern priests served the false worship that had grown up in Samaria after the exile, mixing the LORD with other gods (17:29-33). Under the Law of Moses, anyone who led God's people to worship other gods was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:1-10; 17:2-7). Second, this was the very thing God had foretold through the man of God three centuries earlier (1 Kings 13:2). Josiah was carrying out God's announced judgment on the altar that began Israel's ruin. Third, defiling the altars with their own priests' bones made sure those shrines could never be used again.

This was an act of a king under the Mosaic covenant, when Israel was a nation under God's direct rule. It is not a pattern for God's people today. Jesus rebuked His disciples when they wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54-55). We fight false teaching with the truth of God's Word, prayer and love, not with the sword (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). But this passage does show how seriously God takes leading people into false worship. Jesus said it would be better for a man to have a millstone hung around his neck than to cause one of His little ones to stumble (Matthew 18:6).

"And he returned to Jerusalem."

23:21-23 *And the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep a Passover to the LORD your God, as **it is** written in this book of the covenant." For **one** had not been kept like this Passover since the days of the judges who judged Israel, and all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.*

"And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep a Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant." The Passover was Israel's great feast remembering the night God brought them out of Egypt, when the blood of a lamb on the doorposts turned away the destroyer (Exodus 12). Deuteronomy commanded that it be kept at the one place God chose (Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

"For one had not been kept like this Passover since the days of the judges who judged Israel." Hezekiah had kept a great Passover too (2 Chronicles 30), so what made this one different? Most likely it was kept so fully according to the book, by the whole nation in the one place, with nothing out of order. Chronicles describes it in detail and says the same (2 Chronicles 35:1-19).

"But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem." Kings tells the reform as it followed the finding of the book, in his eighteenth year; Chronicles shows it began six years earlier.

The Passover lamb pointed ahead to Jesus. "For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Josiah's great Passover looked back to the exodus. Ours looks back to the cross, where the true Lamb of God died so that judgment would pass over us.

23:24-25 *And also the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the detestable things that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, Josiah purged, so as to establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had found* ***in*** *the house of the LORD. And like him there was no king before him who turned back to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; and after him* ***one*** *like him did not arise.*

Josiah also removed "the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the detestable things." Teraphim were household idols, small images used for luck or fortune-telling (Genesis 31:19). He did it "so as to establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had found in the house of the LORD." The book drove everything he did.

Then comes the writer's verdict: "And like him there was no king before him who turned back to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; and after him one like him did not arise." All his heart, all his soul, all his might: Josiah kept Deuteronomy 6:5 more fully than any king. Hezekiah was praised as unmatched in trust (18:5). Josiah is praised as unmatched in turning to the LORD according to His law.

23:26-27 *Only, the LORD did not turn back from the burning of His great anger, with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the LORD said, "Also Judah I will remove from My face, as I removed Israel; and I will reject this city which I chose, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"*

"Only, the LORD did not turn back from the burning of His great anger, with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him."

This is a hard verse. Josiah did everything right, and it was not enough to save the nation. Why? Because Josiah's reform was the work of a king, and the hearts of the people had not truly changed. As soon as Josiah died, his sons went right back to evil (23:32, 37). The sins of Manasseh had soaked into the whole nation.

Does that mean Josiah's faithfulness was wasted? No. God spared Josiah, and his reform gave a whole generation the chance to hear God's Word. Jeremiah preached through those years, and Daniel, Ezekiel and others grew up in them. God's judgment on a nation does not cancel His grace to individuals who turn to Him.

"Also Judah I will remove from My face, as I removed Israel; and I will reject this city which I chose, Jerusalem." The house where God said His name would be was rejected too. The same judgment that fell on Samaria would fall on Jerusalem.

23:28-30 *And the rest of the matters of Josiah and all that he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? In his days Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria, to the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went to meet him, and he killed him at Megiddo when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead **in a chariot** from Megiddo, and brought him **to** Jerusalem and buried him in his tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father.*

"In his days Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria, to the river Euphrates." This was 609 B.C. Assyria was dying. Its capital, Nineveh, had fallen to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C., as the prophet Nahum foretold. Neco marched north to help what was left of the Assyrian army against Babylon. To get there, he had to pass through Judah's land.

"And King Josiah went to meet him, and he killed him at Megiddo when he saw him." Megiddo guarded the main pass through the hills on the road north. Chronicles tells us more. Neco sent word that he had no quarrel with Josiah and that God had told him to hurry. But Josiah disguised himself and fought anyway, and "he did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God" (2 Chronicles 35:21-22). Archers shot him, and he died.

Why would a godly king do this? Scripture doesn't tell us. Perhaps he did not want Egypt to save Assyria, the empire that destroyed Israel. Perhaps he did not believe God would speak through a pagan king. Whatever the reason, he did not ask the LORD first, and it cost him his life at thirty-nine.

"And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his tomb." All Judah mourned him, and Jeremiah wrote laments for him (2 Chronicles 35:24-25). Years later, the prophet Zechariah spoke of the great mourning "in the plain of Megiddo" as a picture of the day when Israel will mourn for Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10-11). That day is still ahead, when the Lord Jesus returns and Israel looks on Him and believes.

"And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father."

23:31-35 *Jehoahaz **was** a son of twenty-three years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, from reigning in Jerusalem; and he put a fine on the land, approximately 7,500 pounds (one hundred talents) of silver and approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold. And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of Josiah his father, and he changed his name **to** Jehoiakim. And Jehoahaz he took, and he came **to** Egypt and died there. And the silver and the gold Jehoiakim gave to Pharaoh; only he assessed the land to give the silver at the command of Pharaoh. From each man according to his assessment he exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, to give to Pharaoh Neco.*

"Jehoahaz was a son of twenty-three years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem." That was 609 B.C. Jeremiah calls him Shallum (Jeremiah 22:11). His mother was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah, not the prophet but another man of the same name.

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done." In three months he showed which way he would go. Josiah's reforms had not reached his own son's heart.

"And Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath." Riblah was in Syria, where Neco had set up his headquarters. Judah now belonged to Egypt. Neco laid a fine on the land of a hundred talents of silver, about 7,500 pounds, and a talent of gold, about 75 pounds.

He made another son of Josiah, Eliakim, king, "and he changed his name to Jehoiakim." Changing a man's name showed that Neco was his master. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt "and died there," just as Jeremiah said: "He will not return there again" (Jeremiah 22:11).

Jehoiakim paid the silver and gold to Pharaoh by taxing the people of the land, each according to what he had. The king who should have protected his people made them pay for his throne.

23:36-37 *Jehoiakim **was** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah from Rumah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.*

"Jehoiakim was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem." That was about 609 to 598 B.C. His mother was Zebudah from Rumah.

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done." Jeremiah tells us what kind of king he was. He built himself a fine palace with unpaid labor while the poor suffered. Jeremiah reminded him that his father Josiah did justice and righteousness and "judged the cause of the poor and needy," and God asked, "Is not that the knowledge of Me?" (Jeremiah 22:13-16). Jehoiakim later cut up Jeremiah's scroll with a knife and burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). His father tore his clothes when he heard God's Word. The son burned it.

Chapter 23 Summary

Josiah gathered the elders and all the people to the temple, read them the whole book of the covenant, and made a covenant before the LORD to keep His commandments with all his heart and soul, and the people joined in it. He removed and burned everything made for Baal, the Asherah and the host of heaven, did away with the idol priests, burned the Asherah from the temple, tore down the houses of the cult prostitutes, and defiled the high places from Geba to Beersheba. He defiled Topheth so no one could sacrifice children to Molech, removed the horses and chariots of the sun, tore down the altars of Ahaz and Manasseh, and defiled the high places Solomon built for foreign gods. At Bethel he tore down Jeroboam's altar and burned bones on it, as the man of God from Judah had foretold, but spared that prophet's grave. He removed the high places in Samaria and put their priests to death on their altars. He kept a Passover like none since the days of the judges and removed the mediums, spiritists and idols. No king before or after turned to the LORD as he did, yet the LORD did not turn from His anger over Manasseh's provocations and said He would remove Judah as He had removed Israel. Josiah was killed at Megiddo by Pharaoh Neco. His son Jehoahaz reigned three months and did evil, until Neco imprisoned him at Riblah, fined the land, and made Eliakim king, renaming him Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz died in Egypt. Jehoiakim taxed the people to pay Pharaoh and reigned eleven years, doing evil.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What did Josiah do first after hearing Huldah's answer? (23:1-3)

2. List some of the things Josiah removed from the temple and from Jerusalem. (23:4-14)

3. What did Josiah do at Bethel, and how did it fulfill a prophecy? (23:15-18; 1 Kings 13:2)

4. Why did Josiah treat the priests of the high places in Judah and in Samaria so differently? (23:8-9, 19-20)

5. What made Josiah's Passover different from those before it? (23:21-23)

6. How does the writer describe Josiah's turning to the LORD? (23:25; Deuteronomy 6:5)

7. Why did the LORD's anger not turn back, even after Josiah's reforms? (23:26-27)

8. Solomon's high places stood for over three hundred years. Is there a sin you have tolerated that could affect those who come after you?

9. Josiah's reform reached the nation's practice but not, it seems, its heart, or even his sons' hearts. What is the difference between outward change and a changed heart?

10. Josiah died because he did not stop to seek the LORD before he went to battle. Where do you need to stop and ask God before you act?

Chapter 24: Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and the First Exile

Scripture

24:1-9 In his days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became a servant to him three years; and he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him the raiding bands of ***the*** Chaldeans and the raiding bands of Syria and the raiding bands of Moab and the raiding bands of the sons of Ammon; and He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by the hand of His servants the prophets. Surely at the command of the LORD it came about in Judah, to remove ***them*** from His face, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also ***for*** the innocent blood that he had shed; and he filled Jerusalem ***with*** innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive. And the rest of the matters of Jehoiakim and all that he did, ***are*** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Jehoiakim lay down with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not again come out from his land any more, for the king of Babylon had taken, from the wadi of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that had belonged to the king of Egypt. Jehoiachin ***was*** a son of eighteen years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

24:10-20 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon went up ***to*** Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants ***were*** besieging it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his officials and his eunuchs; and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. And he brought out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon the king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had spoken. And he carried into exile all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand exiles, and every craftsman and smith; none was left except the poor of the people of the land. And he carried Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon; and the mother of the king and the wives of the king and his eunuchs and the leaders of the land he led ***as*** exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all ***were*** mighty men, makers of war, the king of Babylon brought them ***as*** exiles to Babylon. And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his uncle king in his place, and he changed his name ***to*** Zedekiah. Zedekiah ***was*** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the LORD it came about in Jerusalem and in Judah, until He threw them out from His face. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Chapter 24 Preview

A new power now rules the world. Babylon has crushed Assyria and driven Egypt back, and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon comes to Judah. Jehoiakim submits to him for three years, then

rebels. The LORD sends raiders from Babylon, Syria, Moab and Ammon against Judah, and the writer tells us plainly why: the sins of Manasseh and the innocent blood he shed, which the LORD was not willing to forgive.

Jehoiakim dies, and his eighteen-year-old son Jehoiachin reigns only three months before Nebuchadnezzar's army surrounds Jerusalem. Jehoiachin surrenders. Nebuchadnezzar carries him to Babylon along with his mother, his wives, his officials, the treasures of the temple, the best soldiers and all the craftsmen, ten thousand people in all, leaving only the poorest of the land. The prophet Ezekiel was among them. Nebuchadnezzar puts Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah on the throne and renames him Zedekiah. Zedekiah does evil too, and then he rebels against Babylon. The final chapter is about to begin.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-4 *In his days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became a servant to him three years; and he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him the raiding bands of **the** Chaldeans and the raiding bands of Syria and the raiding bands of Moab and the raiding bands of the sons of Ammon; and He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by the hand of His servants the prophets. Surely at the command of the LORD it came about in Judah, to remove **them** from His face, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also **for** the innocent blood that he had shed; and he filled Jerusalem **with** innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive.*

"In his days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up." This was about 605 B.C. That year Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish on the Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:2), and he became master of the lands west of the river. Daniel tells us that in this campaign some of the temple vessels and some young men of the royal family, Daniel among them, were taken to Babylon (Daniel 1:1-6). That was the first deportation.

"And Jehoiakim became a servant to him three years; and he turned and rebelled against him." Jehoiakim had been Egypt's man. Now he paid tribute to Babylon, until he thought he could break free. Jeremiah had warned him over and over to submit to Babylon, because God had given the nations into Nebuchadnezzar's hand for a time (Jeremiah 25:8-11; 27:6-8). Jehoiakim would not listen.

"And the LORD sent against him the raiding bands of the Chaldeans and the raiding bands of Syria and the raiding bands of Moab and the raiding bands of the sons of Ammon." The Chaldeans were the people of southern Babylonia, and the name came to mean the Babylonians in general. Judah's old neighbors joined in to pick at her. But notice who sent them: "the LORD sent." Babylon's army was carrying out God's judgment "according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by the hand of His servants the prophets."

"Surely at the command of the LORD it came about in Judah, to remove them from His face, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed." And then the hardest words in the chapter: "and he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive."

What does this mean? We know from Chronicles that God forgave Manasseh himself when he repented (2 Chronicles 33:12-13). This verse speaks of the nation. The sin Manasseh led Judah into, especially the shedding of innocent blood, was never repented of by the people. They went on in it (Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3, 17). So the national judgment God had announced (21:10-15) would not be called off. It does not mean God refuses to forgive anyone who turns to Him. Even in these same years, God promised through Jeremiah that He would forgive and restore all who sought Him with all their heart (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

Judgment delayed is not judgment cancelled. God had waited through Hezekiah's faith and Josiah's reform. Now His patience had reached its end. The same is true for every person who refuses God's mercy to the end. But today is still the day of salvation for anyone who turns to Christ (2 Corinthians 6:2).

24:5-7 *And the rest of the matters of Jehoiakim and all that he did, **are** they not written in the book of the matters of the days of the kings of Judah? And Jehoiakim lay down with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not again come out from his land any more, for the king of Babylon had taken, from the wadi of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that had belonged to the king of Egypt.*

"And Jehoiakim lay down with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place." This was about 598 B.C. The phrase "lay down with his fathers" simply means he died. Kings says nothing more about how. Jeremiah had prophesied that no one would mourn him and that he would be buried "With the burial of a donkey," dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:18-19). Chronicles says Nebuchadnezzar bound him in bronze fetters to take him to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6). Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how these fit together. He may have been bound and then released, or he may have died in the fighting and his body been left unburied for a time. What is clear is that the king who burned God's Word came to a shameful end.

"And the king of Egypt did not again come out from his land any more, for the king of Babylon had taken, from the wadi of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that had belonged to the king of Egypt." The wadi of Egypt was a dry riverbed on Judah's southwest border. Egypt, the power Judah kept looking to for help, could no longer help anyone. This verse explains why no rescue would come.

24:8-9 *Jehoiachin **was** a son of eighteen years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.*

"Jehoiachin was a son of eighteen years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem." That was about 598 to 597 B.C. Jeremiah calls him Coniah and Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:24; 24:1). His mother was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan. Elnathan was likely the same official who was sent to bring back the prophet Uriah to be killed and who later begged Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (Jeremiah 26:22; 36:12, 25).

2 Chronicles 36:9 says Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king. Most explain this as an error made in copying the numbers over the centuries, since Jehoiachin had wives when he went to Babylon (24:15). Eighteen fits the rest of the story.

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father had done." In three months, he showed which way his heart went.

24:10-12 *At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon went up **to** Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants **were** besieging it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his officials and his eunuchs; and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.*

"At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege." Then Nebuchadnezzar came himself.

"And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his officials and his eunuchs." He surrendered. It may have been the wisest thing he ever did, because it spared the city and the temple for another eleven years. Jeremiah had told the kings that surrender to Babylon was God's way of mercy (Jeremiah 38:17).

"And the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign." That was 597 B.C. Babylonian records also tell of Nebuchadnezzar taking Jerusalem in that year and appointing a new king.

24:13-16 *And he brought out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon the king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had spoken. And he carried into exile all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand exiles, and every craftsman and smith; none was left except the poor of the people of the land. And he carried Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon; and the mother of the king and the wives of the king and his eunuchs and the leaders of the land he led **as** exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all **were** mighty men, makers of war, the king of Babylon brought them **as** exiles to Babylon.*

"And he brought out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king." He cut in pieces "all the articles of gold which Solomon the king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had spoken." This was the word Isaiah gave to Hezekiah a hundred years earlier, when he showed off his treasures to the envoys from Babylon (20:17). Some of these vessels later appear in Babylon at Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5:2-3), and Cyrus gave them back when the exiles returned (Ezra 1:7-11).

"And he carried into exile all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand exiles, and every craftsman and smith." Smiths were metalworkers who could make weapons. Babylon took the leaders, the soldiers and the skilled workers, everyone who could lead a revolt or arm one. "None was left except the poor of the people of the land."

Jehoiachin went into exile with his mother, his wives, his officials "and the leaders of the land." Verse 16 adds seven thousand men of valor and a thousand craftsmen and smiths. These numbers seem to overlap with the ten thousand of verse 14, which may be a round total of all the groups. Jeremiah 52:28 gives a smaller number, 3,023, for the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, which may count only certain men or a different group. The writers counted in different ways.

Among the exiles was a young priest named Ezekiel. He dated his prophecies by "the exile of King Jehoiachin" (Ezekiel 1:2). God sent a prophet into exile with His people. He did not abandon them there.

God also said something surprising through Jeremiah about these exiles. He compared them to a basket of good figs and said He would watch over them for good, bring them back, and "give them a heart to know Me" (Jeremiah 24:5-7). The people left in Jerusalem thought the exiles were the ones God had rejected. God said the opposite. Sometimes what looks like the worst thing that could happen to us is the very place where God begins to make us new.

24:17-20 *And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his uncle king in his place, and he changed his name **to** Zedekiah. Zedekiah **was** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the LORD it came about in Jerusalem and in Judah, until He threw them out from His face. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*

"And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his uncle king in his place, and he changed his name to Zedekiah." Mattaniah was another son of Josiah, Jehoiachin's uncle. Chronicles calls him Jehoiachin's brother (2 Chronicles 36:10), which may mean relative. Nebuchadnezzar renamed him, as Neco had renamed Jehoiakim, to show who was master. Zedekiah means the LORD is righteous. It was a name he would not live up to. Ezekiel tells us Nebuchadnezzar made a covenant with him and put him under oath (Ezekiel 17:13).

"Zedekiah was a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem." That was about 597 to 586 B.C. His mother was Hamutal, so he was the full brother of Jehoahaz (23:31).

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done." Chronicles says "he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 36:12). Jeremiah's book shows him as a weak man who often asked Jeremiah for a word from God but was too afraid of his own officials to obey it (Jeremiah 37:17; 38:5, 14-28).

"For because of the anger of the LORD it came about in Jerusalem and in Judah, until He threw them out from His face." The writer looks ahead to the end. "And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon." He broke his oath, sent to Egypt for help (Ezekiel 17:15), and brought Nebuchadnezzar back to Jerusalem for the last time.

Chapter 24 Summary

In Jehoiakim's days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim served him three years and then rebelled. The LORD sent raiding bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites against Judah to destroy it, as He had spoken by the prophets, to remove Judah from His face for the sins of Manasseh and the innocent blood he shed, which the LORD would not forgive. Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin reigned. The king of Egypt did not come out of his land again, because Babylon had taken all his territory. Jehoiachin was eighteen and reigned three months, doing evil. Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin surrendered with his mother, servants, officials and eunuchs. In the eighth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon, carried off the treasures of the temple and palace, cut up Solomon's gold vessels as the LORD had said, and exiled the officials, warriors, craftsmen and smiths, leaving only the poorest people. He made Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah king, renaming him Zedekiah. Zedekiah reigned eleven years and did evil like Jehoiakim, and because of the LORD's anger, he rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Who came against Jehoiakim, and how did Jehoiakim respond? (24:1)

2. According to verses 2 to 4, who really sent the raiders against Judah, and why?

3. How do we understand "the LORD was not willing to forgive" alongside God's forgiveness of Manasseh himself? (24:4; 2 Chronicles 33:12-13)

4. Why did no help come from Egypt? (24:7)

5. What did Nebuchadnezzar take from Jerusalem in Jehoiachin's time, and what earlier prophecy did that fulfill? (24:13-16; 20:17)

6. What did God say about the exiles in Jeremiah 24:5-7?

7. Who was Zedekiah, and what kind of king was he? (24:17-20; 2 Chronicles 36:12)

8. Judah ran out of time after years of warnings. Is there anything God has been warning you about that you keep putting off?

9. God sent Ezekiel into exile with His people. How have you seen God with you in a hard place you never wanted to be?

10. Zedekiah often asked for God's word but was too afraid of people to obey it. Where are you tempted to fear people more than God?

Chapter 25: The Fall of Jerusalem

Scripture

25:1-12 And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and he encamped against it, and they built a siege wall against it all around. And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth of the month, and the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken into, and all the men of war ***fled*** by night ***by*** the way of the gate between the two walls, which ***was*** by the garden of the king, and the Chaldeans ***were*** against the city all around; and he went ***by*** the way of the Arabah. And the army of ***the*** Chaldeans pursued after the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. And they seized the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon ***at*** Riblah, and they spoke judgment with him. And the sons of Zedekiah they slaughtered before his eyes, and the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded; and he bound him with bronze fetters and brought him ***to*** Babylon. And in the fifth month, on the seventh of the month, that ***was*** the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, the servant of the king of Babylon, came ***to*** Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and every house of a great ***one*** he burned with fire. And the walls of Jerusalem all around, all the army of ***the*** Chaldeans who ***were with*** the chief of the bodyguards broke down. And the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile. And some of the poor of the land the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen.

25:13-21 And the pillars of bronze that ***were in*** the house of the LORD, and the stands, and the sea of bronze that ***was*** in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and they carried their bronze ***to*** Babylon. And the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes and all the articles of bronze with which they ministered, they took. And the firepans and the bowls, what ***was*** gold, gold, and what ***was*** silver, silver, the chief of the bodyguards took. The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, there was no weight for the bronze of all these articles. Approximately 27 feet (eighteen cubits) ***was*** the height of the one pillar, and a capital of bronze ***was*** on it; and the height of the capital ***was*** approximately 4.5 feet (three cubits), and a network and pomegranates ***were*** on the capital all around, all of bronze; and like these ***were*** to the second pillar, with the network. And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah ***the*** second priest and the three keepers of the threshold. And from the city he took one eunuch who ***was*** overseer over the men of war, and five men of those who saw the face of the king who were found in the city, and the scribe, the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took them and brought them to the king of Babylon ***at*** Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. And Judah went into exile from its ground.

25:22-30 And ***as for*** the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had left, he appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.

And all the commanders of the armies heard, they and the men, that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, and they came to Gedaliah ***at*** Mizpah: Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah swore to them and to their men, and he said to them, "Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you." And it was in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship, came, and ten men with him, and they struck down Gedaliah, and he died, and the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. And all the people arose, from small to great, and the commanders of the armies, and they went ***to*** Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans. And it was in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year he became king, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah from the house of prison. And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who ***were*** with him in Babylon. And he changed the clothes of his prison, and he ate bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance, a continual allowance, was given to him from the king, the portion of a day in its day, all the days of his life.

Chapter 25 Preview

This is the chapter the whole book has been moving toward. Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem with all his army and builds siege walls around it. For a year and a half the city holds out, until famine leaves no bread. Then the wall is broken. Zedekiah flees by night and is caught near Jericho. At Riblah, his sons are killed in front of him, his eyes are put out, and he is taken to Babylon in chains. A month later Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, burns the temple, the palace and every great house in Jerusalem, tears down the walls, and carries the people into exile. The bronze pillars and the great sea Solomon made are broken up and hauled away. The chief priests and leaders are executed. "And Judah went into exile from its ground."

Even then, the sorrow is not over. Gedaliah, the governor left over the poor of the land, is murdered, and the remaining people flee to Egypt. But the book does not end in darkness. In the last four verses, after thirty-seven years in prison, King Jehoiachin is lifted up, given new clothes, and seated at the king of Babylon's table for the rest of his life. David's line is still alive. God has not forgotten His promise. Jeremiah 39 and 52 tell these same events, and the book of Lamentations is Jeremiah's grief over them.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-3 *And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and he encamped against it, and they built a siege wall against it all around. And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth of the month, and the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.*

"And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem." That was in the winter of 588 B.C. The writer gives the exact day. It was remembered for generations. Ezekiel, far away in Babylon, was told by God to write down the name of that very day (Ezekiel 24:1-2), and after the exile the Jews kept fasts on the anniversaries of these dark days (Zechariah 8:19).

"And they built a siege wall against it all around." A siege wall was a ring of earthworks and towers that sealed the city in. No one could get in or out. "And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah." That was about a year and a half.

"On the ninth of the month," the fourth month according to Jeremiah 52:6, in the summer of 586 B.C., "the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land." Lamentations describes those days with great sorrow: children begging for bread, and no one giving it to them (Lamentations 4:4). It was everything Moses had warned would happen if Israel broke the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:52-53). I will not dwell on the details. It is enough to say that the suffering was terrible, and God grieved over it, even as He allowed it.

25:4-7 *And the city was broken into, and all the men of war **fled** by night **by** the way of the gate between the two walls, which **was** by the garden of the king, and the Chaldeans **were** against the city all around; and he went **by** the way of the Arabah. And the army of **the** Chaldeans pursued after the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. And they seized the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon **at** Riblah, and they spoke judgment with him. And the sons of Zedekiah they slaughtered before his eyes, and the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded; and he bound him with bronze fetters and brought him **to** Babylon.*

"And the city was broken into." The Babylonians breached the wall. That night Zedekiah and "all the men of war" fled "by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the garden of the king," likely a gate near the southeast corner of the city. They slipped out while "the Chaldeans were against the city all around," and he went toward the Arabah, the Jordan valley.

"And the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho." He got about fifteen miles. "And all his army was scattered from him." The men who fled with him left him. They seized the king and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, in Syria, where the king of Babylon had his headquarters. "And they spoke judgment with him." He was put on trial for breaking his oath.

"And the sons of Zedekiah they slaughtered before his eyes, and the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded; and he bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon." This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. The last thing Zedekiah ever saw was the death of his sons. I will not add to it.

Both prophets had foretold this. Jeremiah told Zedekiah that if he surrendered, his life would be spared and the city would not be burned, and if not, he would not escape (Jeremiah 38:17-18). Ezekiel said of him, "I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it, and he shall die there" (Ezekiel 12:13). How could he be brought to Babylon and not see it? Now we know. He arrived there blind.

Zedekiah had asked for God's word many times. He just never obeyed it. Knowing what God says is not enough. We have to do it (James 1:22).

25:8-10 *And in the fifth month, on the seventh of the month, that **was** the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, the servant of the king of Babylon, came **to** Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and every house of a great **one** he burned with fire. And the walls of Jerusalem all around, all the army of **the** Chaldeans who **were with** the chief of the bodyguards broke down.*

"And in the fifth month, on the seventh of the month, that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, the servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem." That was in August of 586 B.C., about a month after the wall was broken. Jeremiah 52:12 gives the tenth of the month. He may have arrived on the seventh and set the fire on the tenth, or one of the numbers may have been changed in copying.

"And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and every house of a great one he burned with fire." The temple Solomon had built, where God had put His name, stood for nearly four hundred years. Now it was gone. The writer does not stop to describe the flames. He simply says it.

"And the walls of Jerusalem all around, all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the chief of the bodyguards broke down." A city without walls was helpless and open to anyone. The walls would lie in ruins until Nehemiah rebuilt them about 445 B.C.

Why did God let His own house burn? Because the people had turned it into a den of idols and trusted the building instead of the God who lived there. Jeremiah had stood at the temple gate and warned them not to trust in lying words, saying "The temple of the LORD" over and over, while they lived in sin (Jeremiah 7:4, 9-14). God would rather have no temple than one that hid His people's sin. Jesus spoke the same kind of warning about the temple of His own day (Matthew 24:1-2), and it was destroyed again in A.D. 70.

25:11-12 *And the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile. And some of the poor of the land the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen.*

Nebuzaradan carried into exile "the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude." Even those who had gone over to Babylon were taken.

"And some of the poor of the land the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen." Babylon left the poorest to work the fields and vineyards. The rich who had oppressed the poor were taken away, and the poor were given the land. Jeremiah 39:10 says Nebuzaradan gave them vineyards and fields that day. There is a quiet justice in that. God sees the poor (Psalm 9:18).

25:13-17 *And the pillars of bronze that **were in** the house of the LORD, and the stands, and the sea of bronze that **was** in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and they carried their bronze **to** Babylon. And the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes and all the articles of bronze with which they ministered, they took. And the firepans and the bowls, what **was** gold, gold, and what **was** silver, silver, the chief of the bodyguards took. The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, there was no weight for the bronze of all these articles. Approximately 27 feet (eighteen cubits) **was** the height of the one pillar, and a capital of bronze **was** on it; and the height of the capital **was** approximately 4.5 feet (three cubits), and a network and pomegranates **were** on the capital all around, all of bronze; and like these **were** to the second pillar, with the network.*

The writer lists what was taken from the temple. "The pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands, and the sea of bronze," the Chaldeans "broke in pieces, and they carried their bronze to Babylon." They took the pots, shovels, snuffers, dishes, firepans and bowls, all the bronze, gold and silver articles used in the worship.

"The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, there was no weight for the bronze of all these articles." There was so much bronze that no one could weigh it. The writer describes the pillars one last time: about 27 feet high, with bronze tops about 4.5 feet high, decorated with network and pomegranates (1 Kings 7:15-22). 1 Kings 7:16 gives five cubits for the whole capital.

Why such a careful list? It is like reading the inventory of a burned house. Each item carried a memory. Solomon had named these pillars Jachin and Boaz, names that speak of God establishing and of strength (1 Kings 7:21). Now the symbols of God's strength and stability were broken and carried off by a pagan king. Hezekiah had stripped the temple doors to pay Assyria (18:16), and Ahaz had cut up the stands (16:17). What the kings of Judah began to strip away, Babylon finished.

25:18-21 *And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah **the** second priest and the three keepers of the threshold. And from the city he took one eunuch who **was** overseer over the men of war, and five men of those who saw the face of the king who were found in the city, and the scribe, the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took them and brought them to the king of Babylon **at** Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. And Judah went into exile from its ground.*

"And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold." Seraiah was the high priest. He was the grandson of Hilkiah, who found the book of the law, and the ancestor of Ezra (1 Chronicles 6:13-15; Ezra 7:1).

He also took a military officer, five of the king's advisers, "the scribe, the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land," and sixty men of the people. These were the leaders who had urged Zedekiah to rebel. He brought them to Riblah, "And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath."

Then comes the sentence the whole book has been building toward: "And Judah went into exile from its ground." Just like Israel (17:23). The covenant curse had come true: "you will be torn away from off the ground" (Deuteronomy 28:63). The exile had begun, and Jeremiah had said it would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).

25:22-24 *And **as for** the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had left, he appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. And all the commanders of the armies heard, they and the men, that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, and they came to Gedaliah **at** Mizpah: Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah swore to them and to their men, and he said to them, "Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you."*

For the poor who were left, Nebuchadnezzar "appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan." This was a godly family. His grandfather Shaphan was the scribe who read the book of the law to Josiah (22:10), and his father Ahikam had protected Jeremiah from being killed (Jeremiah 26:24). Gedaliah set up his government at Mizpah, a few miles north of the ruined city.

The army commanders who had escaped came to him with their men: Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth and Jaazaniah. Gedaliah swore to them, "Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you." It was the same counsel Jeremiah had given (Jeremiah 27:12; 40:9). Jeremiah himself chose to stay with Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40:6). For a short time, it looked as though the poor of Judah might live in peace.

25:25-26 *And it was in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship, came, and ten men with him, and they struck down Gedaliah, and he died, and the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. And all the people arose, from small to great, and the commanders of the armies, and they went* ***to*** *Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.*

"And it was in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship, came, and ten men with him, and they struck down Gedaliah, and he died." Ishmael was of the royal family. He may have resented a man not of David's line ruling, or he may have been sent by the king of the Ammonites, as Jeremiah tells us (Jeremiah 40:14). Gedaliah had been warned and would not believe it (Jeremiah 40:13-16). Ishmael also killed the Jews and Chaldeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah.

"And all the people arose, from small to great, and the commanders of the armies, and they went to Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans." They feared Babylon's revenge. Jeremiah told them God's word: stay in the land and God would protect them, go to Egypt and they would die there (Jeremiah 42:9-17). They went anyway, and they took Jeremiah with them (Jeremiah 43:4-7).

Think of how far they had come. God had brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Now, after all those centuries, the last of them went back to Egypt on their own, against His word. Moses had warned of exactly this (Deuteronomy 28:68). The Jews later kept a fast in the seventh month to mourn Gedaliah's death (Zechariah 8:19).

25:27-30 *And it was in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year he became king, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah from the house of prison. And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who* ***were*** *with him in Babylon. And he changed the clothes of his prison, and he ate bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance, a continual allowance, was given to him from the king, the portion of a day in its day, all the days of his life.*

After all that darkness, the book ends with a light.

"And it was in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year he became king, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah from the house of prison." That was about 560 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had died, and his son Evil-merodach released Jehoiachin, perhaps as an act of goodwill at the start of his reign. Jeremiah 52:31 gives the twenty-fifth day. The order may have been given on one day and carried out on another. To lift up someone's head means to raise him to honor, the same phrase used of Joseph's fellow prisoner restored by Pharaoh (Genesis 40:13, 20-21).

"And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon." He was honored above other captive kings. "And he changed the clothes of his prison, and he ate bread continually before him all the days of his life." The prisoner's clothes

came off, and he ate at the king's table every day. "And his allowance, a continual allowance, was given to him from the king, the portion of a day in its day, all the days of his life."

Why does the writer end here? He could have stopped with the burning of the temple, or with the people fleeing to Egypt. Instead he ends with a son of David alive, out of prison and honored. It is a small thing, but it is a sign. God had promised David, "your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Jerusalem was in ruins, the temple was ashes, and David's heir was a captive in a foreign land. But the line was not cut off. God had kept David's lamp burning (1 Kings 11:36), even in Babylon.

There is something more. Jeremiah had said that no descendant of Jehoiachin would prosper "sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah" (Jeremiah 22:30). How could God keep both words? Matthew lists Jehoiachin, called Jeconiah, in the family line of Jesus through Joseph (Matthew 1:11-12). His grandson Zerubbabel led the first exiles home and was called God's signet ring (Haggai 2:23). Jesus was the legal heir of David's throne through Joseph, His adoptive father. But Jesus was not Joseph's physical son. He was born of the virgin Mary, whose line Luke traces back to David through another of David's sons, Nathan (Luke 3:31). Many Bible teachers see this as how God kept His word to Jeconiah and His promise to David at the same time. The throne of David will belong forever to Jesus, "and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). When He returns, He will sit on that throne and reign from Jerusalem (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4-6).

Jehoiachin eating at the king's table is a small picture of what God does for us. We were prisoners of sin. In Christ, God lifts up our heads, takes away our prison clothes, clothes us in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), and seats us at His table, not for a few years, but forever.

Chapter 25 Summary

In the ninth year of Zedekiah, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar came with all his army against Jerusalem and built siege walls around it. The siege lasted until Zedekiah's eleventh year, when famine left no bread. The wall was broken, and Zedekiah and his soldiers fled by night toward the Arabah, but the Chaldeans caught him in the plains of Jericho. At Riblah his sons were killed before his eyes, his eyes were put out, and he was taken in bronze fetters to Babylon. In the fifth month Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, burned the house of the LORD, the king's palace and all the houses of Jerusalem, broke down the walls, and carried the people into exile, leaving some of the poorest to work the land. The Chaldeans broke up the bronze pillars, the stands and the sea, and took all the temple articles to Babylon. Nebuzaradan brought the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest and other leaders to Riblah, where the king of Babylon put them to death, and Judah went into exile from its land. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah governor at Mizpah, and he urged the commanders to serve the king of Babylon, but Ishmael of the royal family murdered him, and all the people fled to Egypt out of fear. In the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's exile, Evil-merodach king of Babylon released him from prison, spoke kindly to him, set his seat above the other kings, changed his prison clothes, and gave him a place at his table and a daily allowance for the rest of his life.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. When did Nebuchadnezzar begin the siege of Jerusalem, and how did it end? (25:1-4)

2. What happened to Zedekiah, and how did it fulfill Ezekiel 12:13? (25:5-7)

3. What did Nebuzaradan do to the temple, the palace and the walls? (25:8-10)

4. Why did God allow His own house to be burned? (Jeremiah 7:4, 9-14)

5. Who was Gedaliah, and what happened to him and the people who were left? (25:22-26)

6. What happened to Jehoiachin in the thirty-seventh year of his exile? (25:27-30)

7. Why do you think the writer ends the book with Jehoiachin's release? (2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:32-33)

8. Zedekiah heard God's word many times but never obeyed it. Is there something God has told you that you have heard but not yet done? (James 1:22)

9. The people of Judah trusted the temple instead of the God of the temple. What religious things are you tempted to trust instead of trusting God Himself?

10. Jehoiachin was lifted up from prison and given a seat at the king's table. How does that picture what God has done for you in Christ?

Conclusion

2 Kings begins with a prophet carried up to heaven in a whirlwind, and it ends with a king of David's line sitting at a foreign king's table in Babylon. In between, we watched two kingdoms lose everything God had given them. Israel in the north never let go of Jeroboam's calves, and in 722 B.C. Assyria carried it away. Judah in the south had its Hezekiah and its Josiah, but it also had its Ahaz and its Manasseh, and in 586 B.C. Babylon burned the temple and took the people into exile. Along the way we saw God's mercy again and again: the widow's oil, the Shunammite's son, Naaman washed clean, the hills full of chariots of fire, a dead man raised at Elisha's grave, and an army of 185,000 struck down in one night while Hezekiah prayed.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, 2 Kings answers the question every exile in Babylon was asking: why did this happen? The writer's answer is clear. It was not because the LORD was weak or His promises failed. It was because His people would not listen. "And the LORD warned Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets and every seer, saying, Turn back from your evil ways, and keep My commandments" (17:13). God was patient for centuries. He sent Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Isaiah, Huldah, Jeremiah and many others. But patience is not the same as approval, and in the end He did what He said He would do.

2 Kings also shows us a God who keeps His promises when His people do not. Again and again He spared Judah "for the sake of David His servant" (8:19). When Athaliah tried to wipe out the royal line, one baby was hidden in the temple. When Jerusalem fell, Jehoiachin lived, and in the last verses of the book he is lifted up from prison. God had promised David a throne that would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16), and He did not let that promise die in Babylon. Seventy years later the exiles came home, as Jeremiah said (Jeremiah 29:10), and centuries after that, the Son of David was born in Bethlehem. Jesus is the King every king in this book failed to be. He did right in the eyes of the LORD in every way, "and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). God has not forgotten Israel either. The same God who scattered His people has promised to gather them and to keep His covenants with Abraham and David (Romans 11:25-29).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and help you take His warnings and His promises seriously. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). The kings of Israel and Judah show us what happens when we trust in Egypt, in gold, in alliances, or in a building, instead of in the living God. Hezekiah and Josiah show us what a tender heart that trusts the LORD looks like. And Manasseh shows us that no one has gone too far for God to forgive.

The message of 2 Kings is the same for us as it was for the exiles. Turn back. The judgment on sin is real, but Jesus took that judgment for us on the cross and rose again. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and, like Josiah, keep a heart that is tender toward it (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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