

The History, Book 7

II Kings

The Book of II Kings opens during the last part of the life and ministry of the great prophet, Elijah, and the beginning of the ministry of his successor, Elisha. As II Kings opens, Ahaziah, Ahab's son, is King of Israel; and Jehoram (Joram), son of Jehoshaphat, is King of Judah. The first chapter repeats the story of the death of Ahaziah, King of the Northern Kingdom after only two years, but with added facts about his death and the role of Elijah.

The rest of the book continues, recording the reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah, from the death of Ahaziah, until the carrying off of the Northern Kingdom into captivity by the Assyrians, and the subsequent carrying off of the Southern Kingdom into Babylonian captivity. This period, of about 275 years, is essentially a dismal story of wicked kings and their leading of the people into apostasy and idolatry; this depressing pattern is relieved occasionally by the refreshing reigns of a few godly Kings of Judah.

A. Author. Like I Kings, Jeremiah is believed to have been the human author of II Kings, having compiled the various records which had previously been kept, up to the captivity of Judah.

B. Place and Date. Like I Kings, the place of the compiling was probably Jerusalem, about 600 BC.

C. Occasion. As is the case with I Kings, the occasion was to make the final compilation of the histories of the kings of Israel and Judah, from the death of Ahaziah in the Northern Kingdom, until the ignominious end of both Kingdoms.

D. Theme. Like I Kings, the theme of II Kings is the blessed state that comes with obedience to the laws of God, and the awful consequences of rebellion against Him. In II Kings, however, we see an additional, sobering, fact: that there is a limit to God's patience with us, and beyond that limit lies destruction--and that without remedy¹.

E. Highlights. Highlights of II Kings include the following:

1. More Heaven Fire, and Ahaziah's Death. (Chapter 1)

King Ahaziah, Ahab's son, takes a bad fall from his upper chamber, "through a lattice" (probably a balustrade on the upper level, built to prevent such a fall). He is badly injured, and sends messengers to Ekron, a Philistine capitol, to ask

¹ Proverbs 29:1.

Baalzebul (Beelzebul), their pagan god, if he will recover from his injuries². On the way Elijah meets them, rebukes them, and sends them back to the palace to tell Ahaziah that he will die. They return to Ahaziah with the bad news, describe the man who met them, and Ahaziah knows that they have met Elijah³. Twice Ahaziah sends out bands of 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah; and twice Elijah calls down fire from Heaven, which consumes all the soldiers. The third band of 50 approaches respectfully (they have apparently heard what happened to the first two groups), and its captain pleads with Elijah to come with them. Elijah returns with them to the palace, and gives Ahaziah the same bad news as before (the same message, word for word).

Ahaziah dies after being King of Israel less than two years; having no son, he is succeeded by his brother, Jehoram (Joram). Thus it appears that, for a time, the kings of both Israel and Judah are named Jehoram (Joram).

2. Parting the River Jordan. (2:1-8)

When it is time for Elijah to be caught up to Heaven he, accompanied by Elisha who refuses to leave his side, journeys from Gilgal to Bethel, thence to Jericho and, finally, to the River Jordan. At each place, there are "sons of the prophets," and at the first two places these prophets tell Elisha that Elijah will be taken from him that day⁴. Elisha tells them, in each place, that he already knows that. When they reach the west bank of the Jordan, 50 men of the school of the prophets do not speak, but watch from afar; they seem to know what is about to happen, but are afraid to go near. Elijah strikes the water with his mantle, the waters part, and he and Elisha cross over on dry ground, to the east bank⁵. It is Elijah's last recorded miracle, unless we count his imparting of a double portion of his anointing to Elisha, but that was probably an act of the LORD--not Elijah.

3. Elijah's Spectacular Exit; the Mantle is Passed. (2:9-11)

Knowing that his departure is near, Elijah asks Elisha if he has a last request, and Elisha has one: he wants a double portion of the anointing that is on Elijah. As they walk on, a fiery chariot with horses of fire separates them, and a whirlwind

² Baalzebul, a pagan god of the Philistines, appears only here in II Kings 1, and in the New Testament, where the spelling is Beelzebul. The exact meaning is disputed, but most define it as "Lord of the Flies" or, "Lord of the Dunghill." In the New Testament it is a synonym for Satan.

³ In v8 Elijah is described as a hairy man with a girdle of leather around his waist and hips. John the Baptist, the Elijah of the New Testament, was of the same appearance and also wore a leather girdle.

⁴ It is interesting to note that in that thoroughly wicked kingdom there were still communities (schools) of faithful prophets, apparently operating openly (those who survived Jezebel's pogroms), and that God was speaking to them--not just to the "first string" prophets such as Elijah. How kind of the Lord to give Elisha two warnings to prepare him (and allow him to prepare himself) for his soon-coming loss of his mentor, although Elisha knew it already.

⁵ This is the second recorded parting of the waters of the Jordan to allow crossing on dry ground. The first was the prolonged parting so that Joshua and 2-3 million people could cross on dry ground; this time only Elijah and Elisha cross. It will happen one more time, very soon; and in that parting only Elisha will cross.

catches Elijah up into Heaven as Elisha watches. Elisha cries out in grief, as Elijah's mantle falls to the ground beside him⁶. The grieving Elisha tears his own garment into two pieces, takes up Elijah's mantle, and walks back to the river. Elijah's ministry is passed to Elisha, and his final request is granted⁷.

NOTE: The traditional image in paintings and illustrations of Elijah's departure is that he ascended into Heaven riding in the fiery chariot. In some Bible versions, superscriptions and notes for this passage have him ascending in the chariot. But did he? Or was he caught up by the whirlwind, escorted to Heaven by the fiery chariot? Perhaps we can't be certain, for there is no parallel passage in I or II Chronicles to shed additional light on the event, and two verses in this chapter (verses 1 and 11) are the only descriptions that we have. Taking the wording literally, in verses 1 and 11, it appears that the whirlwind took him up, escorted by the chariot. Perhaps the chariot was driven by angels, for in v 12 Elisha cries out, "...the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof"; but the fact is that we simply don't know. I am inclined to believe that Elijah was taken up by the whirlwind, escorted by a fiery chariot which was driven by two or more angels, because I take the wording to mean just what it says. And, if so, it would make Elijah a perfect type of the Christians, who will be caught up into the air to meet the Lord (without benefit of transportation or escorts in fiery chariots) at the second coming of Christ.

4. Elisha's First Miracles. (2:12-25)

Standing on the river bank, Elisha attempts to part the water as Elijah had done, crying, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" When he strikes the water with Elijah's mantle, the waters part (perhaps on the second attempt), and he crosses over to the west bank⁸. The sons of the prophets, who had observed the series of miraculous events, declare that the anointing of Elijah now rests on Elisha, and they give him honor. They ask Elisha's permission to search the surrounding country for Elijah; Elisha disagrees, but they persist and he agrees to it. He waits at Jericho for 3 days while the search goes on, and Elijah is not found. As a result, there are well over 50 witnesses who can attest that Elijah was indeed taken up to Heaven (perhaps this was the purpose of the search). Then the men of Jericho complain that their water supply is contaminated and the ground un-productive,

⁶ Interestingly, Elisha's cry of grief, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" will be repeated, verbatim, by King Joash at the death of Elisha (13:14).

⁷ A careful study indicates that there were exactly twice the number of recorded miracles in the ministry of Elisha than in that of Elijah; and the final miracle of Elisha occurred after his death (13:21).

⁸ It appears from the wording here that, perhaps, the first time Elisha struck the water, nothing happened, and that his cry, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" was something between a complaint and a plea to the LORD to perform the miracle. As was the case with the catching up of Elijah into the air, there is no parallel passage in I or II Chronicles to shed light here, so we can't be certain.

and they ask Elisha to heal the water and the soil⁹. Calling for a new cruse with salt in it, he throws the salt into the spring and pronounces the water purified and the land fertile. From Jericho, retracing his last journey with Elijah, Elisha goes to Bethel where a crowd (mob) of mocking "little children" (actually accountable young men) comes out to jeer and mock him, shouting, "Go up, thou bald head." From this we know that Elisha was bald, that the crowd was deliberately insulting him, and that they were mocking and challenging him to rise up into the air like Elijah. Elisha pauses to curse the hostile crowd, two she-bears come out of the forest and rip up 42 of them; presumably, the rest of the mob gets the message and flees. Elisha then travels to Mt. Carmel, thence to the city of Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom.

NOTES:

*a. **Insults and Punishment.** This episode calls for some explanation. The Hebrew word translated "little children" ("naar") in v 23 can mean anything from an infant to an adolescent; it is even used in speaking of Isaac, Joseph, and Rehoboam, when they were grown men. In the AV (KJV) it is translated "young man" or "young men" at least 70 times. Here, the hostile crowd was probably made up of adolescents (infants would not have been gathered in a hostile crowd, with knowledge and ability to hurl these insults). They were natives of the center of paganism (Bethel), who hated the Lord and His prophets. "Bald head" meant much more than lack of hair; it was a generalized term of contempt, an expression of their hatred of God. "Go up" was probably a jeering challenge to Elisha to ascend up into Heaven as Elijah had done (assuming that the story had already reached Bethel), which expressed their contempt both for Elisha and the miracle of Elijah's translation into Heaven and, thus, a blasphemous insult to the LORD. In commenting on this extreme punishment, Matthew Henry observed that it was not for insulting Elisha, but to punish "the dishonor done to God...He [Elisha] knew what a generation of vipers those were, and what mischievous enemies they would be to God's prophets if they should live to be men...."*

*b. **Baldness.** Baldness is genetically hereditary, and the tendency is inherited by both men and women. It occurs normally only in men, because it is what is called a sex-influenced (or gender-influenced) trait. In simplest terms, baldness is common in men, but rare in women, because, although both males and females inherit the genetic combination for it, its manifestation requires high levels of testosterone in the blood, and this is normally only true of males. Somehow, since*

⁹ We should remember that Jericho was cursed by Joshua (Joshua 6:26); small wonder that, when rebuilt during the reign of wicked Ahab (I Kings 16:34), its water should be contaminated and its soil infertile. It appears that this curse was lifted as a gracious gift of God to His faithful remnant there. The water and land were still good at the time of the writing of II Kings ("unto this day"), about 600 BC.

ancient times (at least as long ago as the time of Elisha), baldness has been looked upon as somehow less masculine than thick, bushy hair; bald men have felt cursed with their condition, and men with thick hair have been proud of it. Actually, baldness is absolute evidence of masculinity; bald men should be encouraged and confirmed in their masculinity. So, be of good cheer, you men with baldness, for there are no bald eunuchs¹⁰.

But what about women? As stated above, women inherit the tendency also, but they normally do not become bald because they do not have the high testosterone levels in their blood that men have. Elderly women who have inherited the genetic combinations for baldness do experience noticeable thinning of the hair. They do not, however, become bald because, although women do have some blood testosterone, and their estrogen levels drop in old age, their testosterone levels are still not high enough to produce baldness.

And so, although the genetics of balding has been understood for a long time, through ignorance, baldness in men is still seen today as a negative, something to be dreaded. Yet it should actually be encouraging, for it is absolute evidence of masculinity.

c. The Chronology Problem. From this point onward there are chronology problems in the succession of the kings that are not explained in the texts. For example, it appears that in Jehoshaphat's closing years as King of Judah, his son and successor, Jehoram (Joram), reigned with him as co-regent. Experts have wrestled with these problems of chronology for centuries without resolution and, beyond this matter of Jehoshaphat/Jehoram, I will make no attempt at resolving them here.

Author's Note. Although explanatory **NOTES** are not normally given titles, I have done it in the ones above because of their importance in making sense of certain events in the passage.

5. Elisha, Three Kings, and the War with Moab. (Chapter 3)

Mesha, the King of Moab, a tributary to Israel, rebels and refuses to pay tribute. King Jehoram (Joram), has cleansed the Northern Kingdom of the Baal worship of his parents, but has replaced it with Jeroboam's worship of the bull calf. He asks Jehoshaphat and the King of Edom to join him in a war to regain control over Moab¹¹. They agree, and in the seven days journey to Moab they run out of water.

¹⁰ Actually, it is possible for a eunuch to be bald; but this can happen only if the eunuch is castrated after reaching full manhood, and this almost never happens. Since ancient times, eunuchs have been rendered eunuchs before reaching puberty, to render them impotent.

¹¹ Here is an example of the chronology problem referenced in **NOTE c** above. In I Kings 22:50 it is recorded that Jehoshaphat died and was succeeded by his son, Jehoram; yet here in II Kings 3 it is Jehoshaphat who is cooperating with Israel's king Jehoram in his conflict with Moab.

The water shortage is so serious that the three kings call on Elisha and ask him to consult the Lord. Elisha tells them that it were not for his respect for Jehoshaphat he would not help them; but he calls for a minstrel to play for him; and the power of the LORD comes upon Elisha. Elisha tells them to dig many ditches in the valley to hold water, and tells them further that they will be victorious. He also tells them that after the Moabites are beaten, they are to lay waste to Moab. In the morning, water flows miraculously out of Edom, floods the valley and fills the ditches. The rising Sun reflects red on the water causing Mesha to think it is blood. He sallies forth in confidence, expecting to find mass suicide; instead, he is surprised and defeated. Retreating to his walled city, he sacrifices his eldest son on the wall, in plain sight of the forces of the three kings. There is great anger against Israel¹². In some way that is not explained, the three kings decide to withdraw at this point, and they return home.

NOTE: Mesha the King of Moab left his own record of his rebellion, carved on a stone monument, found in Moab by a German missionary in 1868. Called the "Moabite Stone," it reads (in part), "I, Mesha, king of Moab, made this monument to Chemosh [god of Moab], to commemorate deliverance from Israel. My father reigned over Moab 30 years, and I reigned after my father. Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab many days, and his son [Ahab] after him. But I warred after the king of Israel, and drove him out, and took his cities, Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo, and Jahaz, which he built while he waged war against me. I destroyed his cities, and devoted the spoil to Chemosh, and the women and girls to Ashtar [pagan fertility goddess]. I built Qorhah with prisoners from Israel¹³."

After the discovery of the stone, while negotiations were being made to buy it, Arabs built a fire around it, and poured cold water over it to break it into pieces for magic charms. The pieces were recovered and reassembled, saving the inscription. The Moabite Stone is now in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

6. Elisha and the Miraculous Oil. (4:1-7)

A prophet has died and left his widow and 2 sons with a debt the widow can't pay; as a result the creditor is going to sell the 2 sons into slavery to recover the debt. When she cries to Elisha for help, he asks what she possesses, and she has only a pot of olive oil. He directs her to borrow as many pots from her neighbors as she can, and to fill them from the pot she already has. Like the miracle of Elijah and the widow's cruse, the oil in her pot is replaced as she pours, and all the

¹² The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain here. It probably means just that the King of Moab, and what was left of his previously lush and prosperous kingdom, hated Israel and its king even more than they did before.

¹³ It is obvious that Mesha had this monument made after his rebellion, when things were looking good and he was feeling good about it all, and before the arrival of Elisha and the three kings.

pots are filled, providing a valuable supply of olive oil¹⁴. She now has enough to pay the debt and provide a surplus to support her and her sons.

7. The Shunammite Woman's Miracle Son. (4:8-17)

A wealthy woman of Shunem, who appreciates the ministry of Elisha, creates a small apartment for him, and feeds him when he is in that area¹⁵. In gratitude, Elisha asks what he can do to bless her, and she replies that her husband is old and she is childless; she longs to have a child. He promises her a miracle baby, and she conceives and bears a son. But the story doesn't end here.

8. Elisha Raises the Miracle Child from Death. (4:18-37)

When the boy is about four or five years old, he goes with his father to watch the grain harvest, is apparently struck down with heat prostration, and he dies in his mother's lap. She goes to Elisha for help and he sends his servant, Gehazi; he rushes to lay his staff on the boy, but the child isn't raised. Elisha and the mother then arrive to learn that the child is still dead. Elisha then shuts himself in with the dead boy, he prays, and "stretches himself" on the body, and does it again. First the child begins to warm, and then he sneezes "seven times" and opens his eyes. The happy mother picks up her son who has been restored to her.

***NOTE:** Concerning the age of the boy, the Hebrew is not much help. In v 18 the Hebrew word rendered "grown" can mean "large," "a growing child" or "grown up." However, from the context we can determine that he was old enough to go with his father to the fields, but too young to work. And he was still small enough to be picked up by "a lad," carried to his mother and placed in her lap, where he died. And, when he is alive again, he is small enough that his mother can pick him up and hold him. A reasonable guess is that he was four or five years old.*

9. Elisha Purifies Food for His Students.

During a "dearth" (drought/famine) in the land, Elisha is teaching in a school of the prophets at Gilgal, and his many students need to be fed. He orders his servant to boil lentils and whatever else is available, to feed the crowd. One of the student prophets unknowingly picks fruit from a plant that is poisonous and adds them to the stew. Alerted by one of the student prophets to the danger to those eating, Elisha casts meal into the pot and declares it to be safe. As he had previously healed contaminated water with salt at Jericho, he heals poisonous stew at Gilgal with meal. (4:38-41)

***NOTE:** Critical, humanistic scholars, who seek to deny and explain away all miraculous occurrences in the Bible, say here that Elisha merely knew his herbal*

¹⁴ I Kings 17:8-16.

¹⁵ Shunem was a short distance north of Jezreel, in that fertile, prosperous valley. It was the home town of Abishag, the fair maiden chosen to warm and comfort King David as he was dying. Today the place is called Solem.

chemistry, and that he chose the right substance with which to neutralize the poison. But is not the wisdom of man foolishness to God? And should we not give Him the benefit of any doubt, giving Him the credit for such outcomes? I am convinced that it is always the wise and right thing to do.

10. Elisha Multiplies Food. (4:42-44)

On another occasion, when Elisha is teaching at a school of the prophets, a man brings bread and grain to him as a first-fruits offering. Elisha orders his servant to use it to feed the students, but the servant complains that it is not nearly enough to feed 100 men. Elisha tells him that there will be enough, and with food left over. The servant obeys, the food is multiplied, and there is more than the crowd can eat¹⁶.

NOTES:

a. Those who wish to explain away the miracles point out that the 20 loaves were probably very large loaves, and that there may have been a large amount of grain, enough to feed the crowd. But the wording makes clear the fact that the servant couldn't feed them with what was provided. Again, should we not give God the benefit of any doubt?

b. It appears that since the people of the northern kingdom could not take first-fruits offerings to the Temple, they took them to the prophets. Even in that thoroughly pagan kingdom, with pagan kings, there were still those who loved the Lord and did their best to obey his law. The Lord always has a faithful remnant that has not bent the knee to Baal.

11. The Cleansing of Naaman the Leper. (5:1-19)

Naaman, Captain of the Host of Syria's king, has great favor with his king because the Lord has worked through Naaman to bring victory over Syria's enemies¹⁷. He is rich and powerful, but is a leper. A girl, captured in Israel and kept as a handmaiden to Naaman's wife, recommends going to Elisha in Samaria to be healed. With a letter from the Syrian king, and valuable gifts, Naaman arrives in Samaria. When Elisha declines to see him personally, and sends him instructions, to go to the Jordan and wash himself seven times, Naaman is angry, insulted by Elisha, and thinking that he is to be denied a miraculous healing. His servants reason with him, he follows Elisha's instructions, and is healed. He wants to reward Elisha, but Elisha refuses, and Naaman, now thoroughly converted to worship of the Hebrew God, asks to take back to Damascus some Israelite earth to

¹⁶ As we shall see in the gospels, Jesus will perform this miracle at least twice during his three years of earthly ministry.

¹⁷ It appears from v 1 that Naaman was a chosen instrument of the LORD (YAHWEH) before he met Elisha. It is easy to believe that the leprosy was a means of bringing him in contact with Elisha, where he seems to have been sealed in his faith in the LORD.

build an altar to worship YHWH. He now worries, because he knows that, as a believer and follower of the Hebrew GOD, he should not enter a pagan temple; yet his duties to assist his pagan king will require him to do that. Enquiring about his problem, he also receives Elisha's blessing to continue to accompany his king into the pagan temple ("Bow...in the house of Rimmon"), and Naaman departs.

12. Gehazi Submits to Temptation. (5:20-27)

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, catches up with Naaman and lies to him. Thinking to enrich himself; he tells Naaman that Elisha wants a reward after all, some silver and garments for two young prophets. Naaman gladly gives Gehazi more than he asks for, and goes on his way, pleased about the whole thing. It seems like a happy ending for everyone; but Gehazi should have known better. After lying to Naaman to enrich himself, he lies to Elisha about what he has done; but God has already told Elisha all about it. Confronting Gehazi, Elisha gives him a chance to tell the truth, but Gehazi lies again. Because of his lying and stealing, the leprosy that had afflicted Naaman will now afflict Gehazi and his offspring "forever"; and it does, starting right then.

13. An Axe Head Floats. (6:1-7)

Student prophets ask and receive permission from Elisha to go to the Jordan Valley and cut timber, to bring back and use in building a house large enough for themselves and Elisha. He agrees, and also agrees to accompany them. In the cutting of the trees, one of the men has his axe head fly off and fall into a body of water. This is a problem, because the axe was borrowed (and the water must have been both deep, and muddy, for it seemed that there was no way to recover it). Told of the problem, Elisha cuts a branch, throws it in the water, and the axe head floats to the surface to be recovered. Problem solved!

14. Elisha and the Blinded Syrians: Killing with Kindness. (6:8-23)

The King of Syria has mounted repeated expeditions to ambush the King of Israel, but has been foiled every time because Elisha knows in advance what is going to happen and warns his king. The Syrian king becomes fed up with this and sends a large force of soldiers with chariots to Dothan, to capture Elisha and bring him to Syria¹⁸. The Syrian army arrives in the night, Elisha's servant wakes to see the town surrounded, and is terrified. Elisha, unimpressed with the Syrians, asks the Lord to open the servant's eyes to the even-larger heavenly army surrounding the Syrians, but invisible to them. The Syrians begin the attack, Elisha asks the Lord to blind the Syrians, and they are all blinded. He then leads the blind Syrian multitude to the capital city of Samaria, like a biblical Sergeant

¹⁸ It was at Dothan that Joseph's brothers staged his simulated death and sold him into slavery.

York¹⁹. The eyes of the Syrians are opened and they find that they are prisoners at the mercy of the Israelites. The King of Israel wants to kill all the Syrians, but Elisha says "no." He tells his king, instead, to feed the Syrians, give them abundant supplies, and send them home. He has, in a sense, killed the Syrians with kindness; and they come no more in small bands to attack Israel.

15. The Siege of Samaria: Desperation and a Remarkable Prophecy. (6:24-7:2) Benhadad, King of Syria, decides to deal with Israel once and for all; he mobilizes his entire army and lays siege to Samaria. The prolonged siege produces a famine so severe that King Jehoram, walking on the wall, is asked to settle a dispute between 2 mothers who have been reduced to eating their babies. Somehow the king blames his misfortune on Elisha (not on his own sin) and orders his execution. Elisha knows this supernaturally, detains the king's messenger, and prophesies that in 24 hours there will be an abundance of food. Then an important man ("a lord on whose hand the king leaned"), probably the king's cup-bearer, arrives on a horse, hears of the prophecy and scorns it. Elisha tells the haughty man that, although he will see the abundance of food, he will not eat any of it.

NOTE: Elisha, in 6:32, refers negatively to the King of Israel as "this son of a murderer." Actually the king was the son of two murderers: Ahab and Jezebel.

16. The Lord Intervenes, and Lepers Save Samaria. (7:3-20)

In the night four lepers, huddling outside the gate, decide in desperation to go to the Syrian camp and throw themselves on the mercy of the invaders; they are starving anyway, so they have nothing to lose. During the night the Lord has supernaturally created the sound of approaching chariots, a great host of them, **heard only by the Syrians.** The Syrians are so terrified that they flee on foot, leaving everything behind, even their horses, chariots, and donkeys; the camp is empty, and filled with food, drink and plunder. The amazed lepers find the camp empty, and they eat, drink, and carry out valuable things and hide them. Remembering those starving in the city, they return to the gate of Samaria and shout the good news. Thinking at first that it is a Syrian trap, Jehoram sends one chariot to check it out and, when the people learn of the situation (the word always gets out), they stampede for the Syrian camp. The sudden abundance causes the price of food to drop as Elisha had prophesied; and the king's man, sent to control the mob, is trampled to death. Thus the second part of the prophecy is fulfilled: "thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

17. Jehoshaphat Restores the Widow's Possessions, and More. (8:1-6)

¹⁹ Sergeant Alvin York, a Tennessee farmer, received the Medal of Honor, and great fame, in World War I for, among other feats, capturing single-handedly, 132 German soldiers and bringing them back into the American front line.

Elisha warns the woman, whose son he had restored to life, that a famine is coming to Israel and that it will last seven years. He advises her to move until the famine is over, and she finds shelter among the Philistines. At the end of the seven years the famine in Israel ends, and she returns. The king consults with Gehazi, Elisha's servant, asking him to tell the king all of the miraculous things that Elisha has done, and Gehazi complies. As he is telling the king about Elisha's raising the woman's son from the dead, she appears before the king and beseeches the king to have her home and land restored to her. Gehazi tells the king that this is the woman whose son was raised from the dead, and the king commands that her home and land be restored to her; he also orders that all of the profit from the land for the past seven years be given to her.

NOTE: Here we seem to have one of those chronology problems in II Kings, spoken of before. Gehazi, for lying to Naaman of Syria in order to enrich himself, has been struck with leprosy, along with all of his family; and yet here we find him in conversation with the king. As a leper, he would not have been allowed inside the city walls, let alone in the presence of the king. Either this account is out of sequence, or Elijah has forgiven and healed him. There is no record in Scripture of such forgiveness and healing; in fact, after this passage there is no further mention of Gehazi at all in the Bible. The passage seems to be out of sequence.

18. New Kings for Syria and Judah. (8:7-19)

King Benhadad of Syria falls ill and sends his chief man, Hazael, to ask Elisha if he will live or die. Elisha says that Benhadad will die, that Hazael will become king and will do terrible things to the people of Israel. Hazael returns to Damascus and lies to Benhadad, reporting that Elisha said that he will recover. He then, at his first opportunity, smothers Benhadad in his bed and becomes king himself, fulfilling the first part of the prophecy. Meanwhile, Jehoram (Joram) becomes King of Judah, succeeding his father Jehoshaphat²⁰. Jehoram, the son of one of Judah's best kings, becomes one of its worst. He marries wicked Athaliah, one of the most evil women in human history; but, then, what else could she be, for she is the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. We shall hear more of her. He follows the wretched example of his father-in-law, Ahab, rather than the good example of his father Jehoshaphat.

NOTE: Wicked Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab. It is fairly certain that her mother was Jezebel, for there is no record that Ahab had any other wife (and it seems unlikely that Jezebel would have tolerated other wives). What could the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel be but a paragon of wickedness?

²⁰ There is an apparent chronology problem here, for it appears that Jehoram became king of Judah while his father yet lived. It is probable that, in Jehoshaphat's declining years, his son, Jehoram, reigned with him as co-regent.

Although v 26 in this Chapt, and the parallel passage in II Chronicles 22:2, say that she was the "daughter of Omri, King of Israel," she was so only in the generic Hebrew sense. She was Ahab's daughter (v 18), and Omri's granddaughter.

19. Jehoram's Son Doesn't Last Long. (8:24-29)

Jehoram is King of Judah for only 8 years. He dies, is buried in Jerusalem, and is succeeded by his son, Ahaziah, who lasts only one year. During his brief reign, Ahaziah continues the alliance with Israel, and he joins his uncle Jehoram, King of Israel, in war against Syria²¹. Jehoram, King of Israel, is wounded by the Syrians and returns to his palace in Jezreel to recover; Ahaziah, in sympathy for his wounded uncle, goes "down" to Jezreel to visit him.

20. The Strange Anointing of Jehu. (9:1-10)

Elisha sends one of his student prophets to the battle front at Ramoth-giliad with precise instructions for anointing Jehu, a general (captain of the host) of the army of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The lad obeys, finds Jehu in a group of generals, takes him into a private room, pours oil over his head, and tells him that the Lord has chosen him to be King of Israel. The young prophet also prophesies to Jehu that he is to "smite the house of Ahab" (kill all in Ahab's family) to avenge the blood of the prophets and other men of God, murdered by Jezebel. And, as an interesting postscript, he prophesies that Jezebel will be eaten by dogs--not given a decent burial. With this, in obedience to his instructions, he flees without explanation and returns to Elisha²².

21. The Death of Two Kings: Jehu Wastes No Time. (9:11-29)

When the other generals learn what the young prophet ("this mad fellow") had said, they throw their cloaks on the floor for Jehu to walk upon and proclaim him king. Jehu, a man of action, catches the vision and immediately takes over. He cuts all communication with the palace and, with an escort, he rushes in his chariot toward Jezreel. A watchman on Jezreel's wall sees the approaching chariots and recognizes Jehu, "for he driveth furiously"²³. Two messengers are sent out to intercept Jehu, but they join him. When Jehoram sees this he takes his chariot out to meet Jehu; and King Ahaziah, who is visiting Jehoram, goes out with him. The two kings meet Jehu in the field that was Naboth's vineyard. Seeing what Jehu intends, Jehoram turns to flee, but Jehu kills him with an arrow through his back. Ahaziah also flees, is wounded, and dies at Megiddo; his servants take him to

²¹ This can become confusing. King Jehoram of Israel is the uncle of King Ahaziah of Judah because Ahaziah's mother, wicked Queen Athaliah of Judah, and King Jehoram of Israel, were brother and sister, both children of Ahab and Jezebel.

²² Jonah and Amos were boys here at the time and could have been student-prophets in Elisha's school. It is interesting to think that this un-named boy prophet may have been Jonah or Amos.

²³ Jehu must have had a reputation for driving his chariot at high speeds.

Jerusalem for burial. His death was not part of Jehu's mission, but Ahaziah was in the wrong place at the wrong time, a victim of the company he kept²⁴. And Jehu isn't finished yet.

22. The Ignominious End of Jezebel. (9:30-37)

When Jehu reaches the palace at Jezreel, a sordid, pathetic scene occurs. Jezebel, understanding perfectly what has taken place, puts on her makeup, has her hair adorned, and leans out of an upper window in the palace to speak to Jehu. It appears that this evil woman hoped to convince Jehu that she is too beautiful to kill, hoping to become his wife. It is a scene of cheap, painted-on, superficial beauty that is unable to conceal the revolting ugliness within. It doesn't work, and she has come to her ignominious end. He calls to two or three eunuchs, who are with her, to throw her out; they, seeing which way the shifting winds of power are blowing, and where their futures lie, toss her out the window and she is smashed on the pavement near Jehu's chariot, by the wall of Jezreel. Trampling the broken body, Jehu drives his chariot over Jezebel and enters the city as king. Settling into his new role as King of Israel Jehu, remembering that Jezebel is both the daughter and the wife of kings, decides that she should have a decent burial, and he sends servants to bury her. When they reach the scene they find that dogs have already eaten her, and Jehu remembers Elijah's prophecy (I Kings 21:21-29) and that of Elisha's young student prophet (9:10), which are now perfectly fulfilled.

NOTES:

a. Jehoram's death at Naboth's vineyard is partial fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy in I Kings 22:38, about recompense for the murder of Naboth; and it is interesting to note that Jehu is well aware of the events concerning Naboth's vineyard and Elijah's prophecy. One positive thing we can say about Jehu is that he took the Lord's prophets at their word, and acted on their prophecies (except for the fact that he intended to bury Jezebel--but the dogs had already eaten her).

b. "Jezebel... painted her face" (9:30). A joint expedition by Harvard, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and others (1908-1910), found in the ruins of what was believed to be Ahab's "ivory house" palace (I Kings 22:39) small stone boxes in which Jezebel mixed her makeup. The boxes had small holes to contain the various colors; when discovered, they still had traces of red. Could this have been left from that last, hasty attempt by Jezebel to save her life? It could be so²⁵.

23. Jehu Renders the House of Ahab Extinct. (10:1-17)

²⁴ Ahaziah was also the grandson of Ahab and Jezebel (son of their daughter wicked Athaliah), which may have contributed to Jehu's decision that he should die.

²⁵ Subsequent expeditions claim that the ruins discovered by Harvard, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, et al between 1908 and 1910 were not those of Ahab's palace; but there are always those seeking to make reputations for themselves, who come along later and attempt to discredit the work of others.

Jehu sets about to locate and kill all of the family of Ahab and Jezebel. He has 70 surviving sons of Ahab killed, and then has their heads delivered to the gate of Jezreel to make a statement. He kills those of Ahab's family in the palace of Jezreel, and then does the same thing in the capital, Samaria, killing even Ahab's pagan priests. He does this, by deception and subterfuge, until not one is left; thus Elijah's prophecy (I Kings 21:21,22) is completely fulfilled. He then comes upon 42 men of the house of Ahaziah and slaughters them, for they were friendly with Jehoram and Jezebel (and, in fact, were Ahab and Jezebel's descendants through Athaliah).

NOTE: This reference to Ahab's 70 sons takes us back to the question of whether Ahab had wives other than Jezebel. He obviously had many concubines, and these 70 sons represented something of a gene pool, reared in luxury and protected, to make possible the continuation of Ahab's royal line. But they are nameless, as are their mothers, so it still appears that Jezebel was Ahab's only wife, and their three recorded children were Ahaziah, Jehoram and wicked Athaliah.

24. Jehu Purges the Kingdom of Baal Worship. (10:18-36)

Having cleansed the kingdom of Ahab's descendants and courtiers, Jehu turns next to the problem of Baal worship and heads for Samaria. Near Samaria, he meets Jehonadab and takes him along in his chariot²⁶. Again using deception and subterfuge, Jehu arranges for the killing of all Baal priests and Baal worshippers in the kingdom. He also destroys all idols and altars of Baal and converts the temple of Baal into a dunghill (or a city sewage repository). Jehu did a thorough job of dealing with Baal worship, but he failed to remove Jeroboam's golden calves in Bethel and Dan; thus, he has a mixed record in terms of dealing with paganism. After reigning for 28 years, during which he loses much of the kingdom east of the Jordan to Hazael, the Syrian king, Jehu dies and is replaced by his son, Jehoahaz.

25. The Reign of Wicked Athaliah.

Upon the death of Ahaziah in the opening days of Jehu's coup d'etat, Athaliah, Ahaziah's wicked mother, had decided to usurp the throne of Judah. In a program of cold, calculated, cruelty, one perhaps unique in human history, she orders the murder of all of her grandchildren, and declares herself Queen of Judah. Her mother, Jezebel, would have been proud of her. Unknown to Athaliah, however, one of her grandsons, Jehoash (Joash), a baby, escapes the slaughter. He is rescued by Jehoshaba, his aunt (King Ahaziah's sister), wife of Jehoiadah, the high priest, and is hidden in the Temple. For seven years, while Athaliah reigns as

²⁶ Jehonadab was of the Rechabites, an ascetic, pious tribe, descendants of one Rechab, whose example they followed. The Rechabites never abandoned the nomadic life and they drank no wine. Perhaps Jehu took Jehonadab with him to show him his zeal for eliminating Baal worship. This is the only mention of Jehonadab in the Bible. For more on the Rechabites see Unger, Merrill: Unger's Bible Dictionary, "Rechabites," pp 913-914.

queen, unknown to her, little Jehoash lives and grows secretly, protected by his uncle, the high priest, and cared for by his aunt Jehoshaba, the high priest's wife.

In an ironic paradox, while the usurper Jehu is **eradicating** Baal worship in pagan **Israel**, the usurper, wicked Athaliah, is **promoting** it in what is supposed to be righteous **Judah**! She has already furnished the temple of Baal with some of the holy objects pillaged from Solomon's Temple²⁷. It is a spiritually dark time in Judah. This sordid story is told here in only three verses. (11:1-3)

Note: Wicked Athaliah was the only woman ever to reign as sovereign over either the Kingdom of Judah, or the Kingdom of Israel.

26. Wicked Athaliah's Unpleasant Surprise. (11:4-21)

Meanwhile, unknown to Athaliah, little Jehoash grows up in secret in the Temple (it is probably the one place in Jerusalem where Athaliah never goes). After the child has been hidden and nurtured by his uncle Jehoiadah and Aunt Jehoshaba for seven years, Jehoiadah decides that it is time to proclaim little Jehoash king. He summons the priests and Levites, and the commanders of the palace guard, brings out the little king and gives instruction for his protection. Placing little Jehoash "by a certain pillar," a place in the Temple reserved for the kings (see verses 14 and 23:3), the high priest places the crown on his head and a copy of the law in his hands and proclaims Jehoash king. The assembled leaders clap their hands, blow trumpets, shout "God save the king," and Athaliah hears them. When she comes to the temple and sees what has happened, she rends her garments, shouts "Treason, treason," and runs for her life from the Temple. She is overtaken and captured where horses were kept by the palace, and put to the sword. According to Josephus she was taken to the Brook Kidron, where unclean things were disposed of, and executed there; it may be that she was killed by the palace, and her body then discarded by the Brook Kidron²⁸. At any rate, wicked Athaliah is now dead, and Jehoiadah calls the people to repentance. They destroy the Temple of Baal and execute its priest, and Jehoash is placed on the throne of Judah. He is the youngest King to reign in either Judah or Israel, and he will reign for 40 years. He is also one of three kings omitted from the genealogy of Jesus²⁹.

NOTE: it appears that little Jehoash was the only surviving descendant of Solomon; thus, by his surviving the slaughter of his brothers, the messianic line of descent, from David to Jesus, is preserved.

27. The Godly Reign of Jehoash--at First. (Chapter 12)

²⁷ II Chronicles 24:7.

²⁸ Josephus, Antiquities, 9.7.3.

²⁹ Matthew 1:8.

Jehoash (Joash) grows up on the throne of Judah, advised by his Uncle, Jehoiadah, the high priest. During this time the Temple is repaired and Temple worship is restored. Except that he fails to remove the pagan high places, Jehoash is a good and godly king as long as Jehoiadah lives³⁰. After Jehoiadah dies, however, Jehoash turns from the Lord and Judah is weakened. When King Hazael of Syria lays siege to Jerusalem, Jehoash buys him off by giving him all the gold and silver treasures in the Temple and the palace. Finally, his servants conspire against him and murder him "in the house of Millo" (probably the old Jebusite fortress of Jerusalem, the one finally conquered by David)³¹. His son, Amaziah, succeeds him as King of Judah.

***NOTE:** Jehoash is interesting. Here is a guy who was almost "born into the faith," literally reared in the Temple by the high priest and his godly wife, and mentored as a growing king by the same couple. Yet upon the death of the high priest, his surrogate father, he slipped into darkest evil. Perhaps there was some demonic heredity in him, from Ahab and Jezebel, his great grandparents, and his grandmother, wicked Athaliah. The full story of the wickedness to which Jehoash descended, including the outrageous stoning of High Priest Zechariah (his cousin, and the son of his rescuers and mentors) in the Court of the Temple, is told in II Chronicles 24. Jesus, in rebuking sinners at the end of His earthly ministry, apparently referred to this outrageous murder³². He is one of three kings of Judah omitted from the genealogy of Jesus.*

28. Elisha's Final Days (Recorded in a Strange Place). (13:1-19)

Chapter 13 records a succession of kings in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, beginning with Jehoahaz, son of the impulsive and interesting Jehu. He has a mixed record, almost entirely bad, and is succeeded by his son, Joash (Jehoash), whose 16-year reign is entirely bad. He dies, and is succeeded by his son, Jeroboam II.

***AUTHOR'S NOTE:** The following account of Elisha's terminal illness and his rebuke of King Joash of Israel, is out of sequence. For reasons unknown, the keeper of the historical record interrupted the chronology to turn back the time line and tell this last story of Elisha and the late Joash, as follows:*

Verses 14-19 tell us of the terminal illness of Elisha, during the reign of Joash, father of Jeroboam II. Elisha had fallen ill "of the sickness whereof he died." As

³⁰ Jehoiadah lived to be 130 and was so well respected that he was buried with the kings of Judah, an honor denied King Jehoash, whose life he had saved, whom he had reared in the Temple, and whom he had placed on the throne of Judah (II Chron 24:16,25).

³¹ Jehoash is one of three kings of Judah in the messianic line whose names are conspicuously omitted in the genealogy of Christ (Matt 1:8); the other two are Amaziah and Uzziah. The significance of this is unclear.

³² Matthew 23:35.

the scene opens, the wicked king is greatly distressed at the thought of losing Elisha; he visits him and cries, "Oh my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof"³³! Elisha has him shoot an arrow out the window, eastward (toward Syria), and tells him that he will smite the Syrians at Aphek. Elisha then tells the king to "smite the ground" with the rest of his arrows, and he does it, three times³⁴. Elisha (here, I think, a little less than clear in his instructions) rebukes the king for not striking the ground more than three times. He will have three victories over Syria, Elisha says, but he could have had five or six victories if he had kept on "smiting the ground."

NOTE: *During the rest of the reign of Joash he was in ongoing conflict with Syria; during that time he had three victories over Syria, just as Elisha had prophesied (13:25).*

29. Elisha's Death and His Final Miracle. (13:20-21)

Elisha dies, and is buried. In the following years bands of Moabites are raiding into Israel. Some local people have a dead man to bury and, seeing a band of men believed to be Moabite raiders (or in some other way a threat to them), they hasten to bury him in the nearest grave. The grave is that of Elisha and, when the corpse touches Elisha's bones, the dead man is restored to life³⁵. Remember that when Elijah ascended to Heaven, Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's anointing. This is the final recorded miracle in the life of Elisha (and post mortem), making the total number of his recorded miracles exactly twice those recorded of Elijah.

NOTES:

1. The first 20 verses of Chapt 14 tells the story of Amaziah, son of Joash, King of Judah, Amaziah ruled for 29 years, and his record was mixed, but mostly bad. He was weak and foolish and, like his father, his own people conspired and murdered him. During his reign there are two kings of the Northern Kingdom: Joash and his son, Jeroboam II. His story is fully told in II Chronicles 25.

2. There follows a succession of kings of Israel, all of them wicked, and two of them murderers/usurpers. The first of them, Jeroboam II, Jehu's son, is noteworthy in that during his long reign of 41 years he had the benefit of the ministry of the prophet Jonah; this brought him blessings including military success, prophesied by Jonah, in which he recaptured land previously lost to

³³ Joash's cry over the loss of Elisha is in the very same words Elisha had cried out over the loss of Elijah (2:12). Joash's anguish was probably because Elisha's spiritual power had been a defense against the king's enemies.

³⁴ It may be that by "smite the ground" here, Elisha meant that Joash was to shoot the arrows out the window, thus "smiting" the ground. At any rate, this is how Josephus recorded the incident (Josephus, Antiquities, 9.8.6).

³⁵ The passage does not make it clear who was burying the corpse, or the nature of the band of men approaching. Josephus says that the burial party was a group of robbers, that the corpse was a victim they had robbed and murdered, and that they buried him in haste in order not to be apprehended (Josephus, Antiquities, 9.8.6).

invaders³⁶. His military success was probably the result of the amazing repentance in Ninevah following Jonah's preaching; with aggressive Assyria peaceful for about one generation, Jeroboam II was free of her attacks. This period brought Israel unprecedented blessings, but not to repentance. The rest of these kings are Zechariah (6 months), Shallum (1 month), and Menahem (10 years). During this time Syria declines, and the Assyrians rise as the dominant force in the region.

30. A Wicked King in Judah and the End of Syria. (16:1-9)

During the depressing succession of evil kings in the Northern Kingdom, the Southern Kingdom has two godly kings in a row: Uzziah (here he is called Azariah, a synonym) and his son, Jotham. But Ahaz, Jotham's son who succeeds him, becomes one of the most evil kings of all! He plunges with zeal into the cruel paganism of the Northern Kingdom, even sacrificing his own son; and he travels to all the high places and other centers of pagan worship in Judah ("every green tree"). Meanwhile, Assyria, a Chaldean nation in northern Mesopotamia, with its capital at Nineveh, is becoming an increasingly dominant power. When Israel and Syria join forces and attack Judah, Ahaz takes the silver and gold from the Temple and palace, humbles himself before Tiglathpileser, the King of Assyria ("I am thy servant and thy son"), and pays him for help³⁷. Tiglathpileser captures Damascus, executes Rezin, the Syrian king, and carries off the Syrian population of Damascus as slaves. The era of Syrian dominance has come to its end, and Assyria is now the dominant power in the region. Although now subservient to Assyria, Judah is temporarily saved. Meanwhile Babylon, Assyria's neighbor to the south, is growing stronger³⁸.

NOTE: *thinking about Assyria and Babylon can be a bit confusing; some salient facts will be helpful. Assyria and Babylon were the dominant cultures and key players in World history, at the time of the end of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Assyria arose first as the dominant regional power, replacing Syria; later, as Assyria was weakened, Babylon arose to become the dominant power in the region. Both Assyria and Babylon were in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley; Assyria occupied the northern portion (roughly, present day Syria and Lebanon), and*

³⁶ The reference to Jonah in 14:25 is the only mention of him in the Old Testament outside his own prophetic Book of Jonah.

³⁷ The great commentator, Matthew Henry (1662-1714), wisely observed that, had Ahaz humbled himself before God rather than bowing before Tiglathpileser, "he might have saved his money, and needed only to have parted with his sins".

³⁸ This coup de grace that brought an end to Syria as a World power was precisely predicted by the prophet Amos, even to the destination (Kir) of the enslaved populace of Damascus. See Amos 1:3-5.

Babylon occupied the southern portion (roughly, present day Iraq). Each, in its time of dominance, occupied much of the other's territory.

The capitol city of Assyria was Nineveh (founded by Nimrod, soon after the Flood); it was to Nineveh that Jonah went, so reluctantly, to preach repentance. 'Babylon's capitol was the city of Babylon, with its beautiful hanging gardens. The capitol cities, Nineveh and Babylon, were about 300 miles apart.

*The Assyrians and Babylonians were both Semitic peoples, and closely related; their languages were very similar, Chaldean, tongues. Although Assyria and Babylon were closely related by heredity, geographically close, and both were pagan, the Assyrians were more barbaric. They were **much** more cruel than the Babylonians--almost beyond belief.*

31. Wicked Ahaz Paganizes the Temple of GOD. (16:10-20)

Ahaz travels to Damascus to visit Tiglathpileser, and thinks a pagan altar that he sees there is wonderful. He returns to Jerusalem, has the altar that was designed by the Lord removed from its ordained place in the Temple, and replaces it with a replica of the pagan altar, built by a priest named Urijah. Ahaz also removes the brass laver, takes the brass sea off its base of ornate brass oxen and places it on a pavement of stones, on the north side of his pagan altar, "for me to enquire by"; Ahaz seems to be assuming the role of a pagan priest³⁹! It appears that he has gone mad in paganizing the Temple and himself. After moving the brazen sea from its place designated by God and placing it on the north side of the pagan replacement of the altar of God, he seems to have sent the ornate brass bases which the great brass bowl had rested upon, and its ornate borders to the king of Assyria as a gift. He also removes some of the ceremonial rooms and entrances. With this, Ahaz dedicates the Temple of YHWH, the holy, consecrated work of Moses, David, and Solomon, to satanic pagan worship. After 16 dark and sinful years as king, Ahaz dies at age 36, and is succeeded by his son, Hezekiah.

32. The Dismal End of the Northern Kingdom. (17:1-23)

Shalmaneser succeeds Tiglathpileser as King of Assyria, and Hoshea becomes the final King of Israel by murdering his predecessor, Pekah (15:30). Hoshea declares himself a servant and tributary of Shalmaneser, but secretly attempts to make an alliance with the King of Egypt. When Shalmaneser discovers the treachery, he places Hoshea in prison and besieges Samaria. After two years, Sargon becomes King of Assyria and, one year later, Samaria is taken, and its people follow the rest of the 10 tribes of Israel into captivity in Assyria. Sargon

³⁹ For him to "enquire" probably means to practice divination, a terrible sin. His intention could not have been intended to be enquiring of the LORD, for He would never have honored a request for guidance from Ahaz, especially after he had paganized the Holy Temple and declared himself assumed the role of a pagan priest.

re-populates their cities with his own people, and it's all over for the Northern Kingdom. The Lord has sent prophet after prophet, and judgment after judgment, to bring the rebellious people to repentance; but the kings and the people have relentlessly persisted in their self-destructive sin. After about 200 years the Lord ceases to strive with them, and the Northern Kingdom comes to its dismal end. All of its 19 kings have been wicked.

NOTE: the end of Israel is described perfectly in an inscription of Sargon: "In my first year I captured Samaria. I took captive 27, 290 people. People of other lands, who never paid tribute, I settled in Samaria."

Sargon is not mentioned in this inscription by name. In fact, his name appears in the Bible only once: in Isaiah 20:1. Until 1842 the name of Sargon had appeared nowhere else in ancient literature, and this was used by Bible critics to "disprove" the validity of the Bible. Then, in 1842, French archaeologist Paul Emile Botta discovered the remains of Sargon's palace on the north edge of Nineveh, complete with treasures and inscriptions showing him to have been one of Assyria's greatest kings. Once again, honest science confirms the Bible record.

33. Hezekiah: a Godly King for Judah. (18:1-8)

After 16 years of the reign of Ahaz, one of the most wicked kings of Judah, his son, Hezekiah succeeds him as king and is his godly opposite⁴⁰. He even destroys the high places, something that even his godly predecessors have consistently failed to do, and destroys the groves of phallic idols. He even destroys the brass serpent, which Moses had made in the wilderness, calling it "Nehushtan [just a piece of brass]," because the people have made of it an idol and worshipped it. He also rebels against the King of Assyria, refusing to pay the tribute his father has paid, and he conquers the Philistines. He does an excellent job of cleaning house and re-establishing the Kingdom of Judah under the headship of the Lord, and with the counsel of Isaiah.

34. The Return of the Assyrians.

Hezekiah watches the fall of Samaria and the final end of the Northern Kingdom, in the 6th year of his reign; but still he refuses to pay tribute to Assyria. Eight years later Sennacherib, King of Assyria, decides to bring Judah back in line. He goes on the offensive, captures some of the fortress cities of Judah, and Hezekiah loses his resolve. He strips the Temple and palace of silver and gold (what a dismal, repetitious story this is) to buy peace with Sennacherib. It doesn't work,

⁴⁰ The righteous reign of Hezekiah, following the extremely wicked reign of his father, Ahaz, may be explained in part by the ministry in Judah of Isaiah, perhaps God's greatest prophet, who functioned as Hezekiah's advisor. Isaiah was also of the royal line, probably Hezekiah's cousin, a member of the royal court, and would have been in frequent contact with the king.

and Sennacherib sends an army against Jerusalem⁴¹. His arrogant spokesman, Rabshakeh, calls for Hezekiah, who sends his own spokesmen to the wall to speak to the Assyrian. The Assyrian engages in tough talk, in Hebrew, and Hezekiah's frightened spokesmen ask him to please speak in Assyrian, so as not to frighten the people of Jerusalem (many of whom can hear him from the wall). That doesn't work either; while Hezekiah's men tremble on the wall, the Assyrian shouts to the people of Jerusalem in Hebrew, that their situation is hopeless. And, in a human sense, it is. (18:13-30)

NOTES:

*a. In this passage (vv 22-25) there is a fascinating revelation! The Assyrians are so accustomed to seeing the back-slid Israelites worshipping pagan gods in their groves and high places, that they believed that what they were seeing was righteous worship of YHWH! They completely misunderstood the spiritual housecleaning that Hezekiah had performed when he became king. Not only that, but the Assyrians were so confused as to whom those sinful Jews had been worshipping in the groves and high places that they believed that YHWH was with **them** (the Assyrians), and had told them to besiege Jerusalem, when they were surely being directed by evil spirits (v25). Is there not a powerful lesson here for us, when the un-redeemed watch the way we live, and fail to see a valid Christian example? In this regard, see II Chron 32:12.*

b. It still frustrates me that pagan barbarians like these Assyrians knew the true name of YHWH, our GOD, and they knew how to pronounce it; yet we, his children and servants, can't be certain about its correct pronunciation.

35. Hezekiah Finally Gets It Right. (19:1-13)

At this point Hezekiah's head seems to clear; he humbles himself before the Lord, commands his staff to do the same, goes to the Temple, and sends for Isaiah. Isaiah sends word to Hezekiah that the Assyrians will hear a rumor that will send them back to Ninevah, and there they will be destroyed. The Assyrian army leaves Jerusalem to deal with a supposed problem there, but the king sends a threatening letter to Hezekiah, telling him they will be back, and that Jerusalem will fall. The Assyrians return, with King Sennacherib personally leading, and surround Jerusalem.

36. Miraculous Deliverance for Hezekiah, and Death for Sennacherib. (19:14-37)

Hezekiah, although not walking in triumphant faith, is still making right responses. He takes Sennacherib's threatening letter to the Temple, and "spreads it before the Lord" saying, in effect, "LORD, look at this thing! What he writes is

⁴¹ Trying to buy peace, from a position of weakness, never works. If you give a bully half your lunch money, he will just take the rest, and he still won't be your friend.

true--he really has done all these terrible things to other kingdoms--please help us!" Isaiah comes to Hezekiah with a reassuring message from the Lord: He will defend Jerusalem, for His sake and for David's sake. That night the angel of the LORD goes forth and kills 185,000 Assyrians, and when Sennacherib wakes in the morning and looks around he sees that his entire army is nothing but dead bodies. He flees to Nineveh (what else could he do?), where he is later murdered by two of his own sons as he worships in the temple of Nisroch, his evil god. Isaiah's account of these events is found in Isaiah 36 and 37.

NOTE: Sennacherib's own account of these events has been found, written on an intact clay prism, which is now in the Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago. It agrees in every detail with the scriptural account, except that he omitted the part about losing 185,000 men in one night and retreating to Nineveh. This is to be expected; kings, in writing of their triumphs, never included accounts of their defeats.

37. Hezekiah Is Given 15 More Years, and Time Rolls Back. (20:1-11)

Hezekiah, sick unto death, asks the Lord for healing. The Lord grants Hezekiah's prayer for healing and tells him that in three days he will be able to return to the Temple⁴². Through Isaiah, the Lord grants the king 15 more years, and promises to protect Jerusalem from the Assyrians, "for mine own sake and for my servant David's sake." As a reassuring sign, the Lord gives Hezekiah a choice of having the shadow advance, or return, 10 degrees on the royal sundial. The king, not fully understanding, thought advancing the shadow would be easy (after all, it always advanced--but not in 10 degree leaps). He chooses returning the shadow, Isaiah cries out to the Lord, and the shadow of the sundial is reversed 10 degrees⁴³.

38. Hezekiah Disappoints Us. (20:12-21)

The King of Babylon, a kingdom rising to become a challenge to Assyria for regional dominance, sends an ambassador to express his sympathy in Hezekiah's sickness. Hezekiah, apparently from pride, naively shows the Babylonian group all his treasures, in the Temple and in his palace. When Isaiah learns of it, he rebukes Hezekiah, and prophesies that Babylon will not rest until Jerusalem has been conquered and all the treasures plundered. He further prophesies that the

⁴² Because Isaiah prescribed a fig poultice, a common (and effective) remedy of the day for boils, skeptical scholars insist that there was no miracle in Hezekiah's healing. But if God could turn the Sun back 10 degrees, simply to reassure Hezekiah, would healing a boil supernaturally be a challenge to Him?

⁴³ This causing the Sun to reverse itself, and the only other such disruption of astronomical order, the standing still of the Sun and Moon for Joshua for "about a whole day" at Gibeon (Josh 10:12-14), have both been demonstrated in modern astronomical calculations.

Babylonians will carry off Hezekiah's royal descendants as eunuchs to Babylon⁴⁴. Incredibly, Hezekiah replies that it's not such a bad thing as long as it will happen after he is dead. One would hope for a better response from this sometimes weak, but godly king. Hezekiah's remaining years are peaceful, and in them he does some good things, including building his amazing tunnel to bring water into Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in less than 100 years after Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah, it will be fulfilled, and Jerusalem will completely fall to Babylon.

39. Enter Evil King Manasseh.

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, succeeds him on the throne of Judah at age 16, and reigns for 55 horrible years⁴⁵. He methodically reverses the righteous reign of his father, deliberately leading the kingdom into darkest paganism. He rebuilds the high places and groves his father had destroyed, practices astrology, builds pagan altars in the Temple, sets up a phallic idol in the Temple⁴⁶, and even sacrifices his own son to Moloch. According to a credible Jewish tradition, he has the prophet Isaiah sawn in half. This man is completely, deliberately, 100% pure evil; in fact, for most of his life he practically redefines the word "evil." After 55 years as king, he dies in bed; he is buried in the garden of his palace, not in the sepulcher of the kings. (21:1-18)

NOTES:

a. Although it is not mentioned in this passage, the parallel passage in II Chronicles 33 reveals that in his latter years the Assyrians captured Manasseh and took him to Babylon (which, at that time, the Assyrians controlled). In a spectacular example of the grace of God, Manasseh finally repented, was forgiven, and returned to Jerusalem where he lived out his latter years as a reformer! Verily, with God all things are possible!

b. Although it is not included in the inspired canon of the Bible, there is in the Apocrypha a brief book called "The Prayer of Manasses, King of Judah, When He Was Holden Captive in Babylon." It is presented as Manasseh's prayer of brokenness and repentance. Its historical validity is unknown; but its message is valid and it makes interesting reading.

40. The Brief Reign of Manasseh's Evil Son. (21:19-26)

⁴⁴ This prophecy will be literally fulfilled when Daniel and other members of the royal family are taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and castrated. The prophecy is also found in Is 39:5-7. See also Josephus, Antiquities, 10.10.1.

⁴⁵ This most-wicked king's reign was the longest of any king of either kingdom; and I find that fascinating, but not at all enlightening. Perhaps the length of his reign, and his life, is a lesson to all of us that even the most perversely wicked, and who persist in their wickedness the longest, can still be forgiven if they truly repent of their wicked sins.

⁴⁶ There may have been more than 1 such phallic idol; 23:6 speaks of a "grove" removed and burned by Josiah, his grandson.

Manasseh's son, Amon, succeeds his father as King of Judah. Having apparently learned nothing from his father's experience, Amon, plunges the nation back into all the wickedness of Manasseh, in every way. But he reigns for only two years; for reasons unexplained, Amon's servants (those who undoubtedly know him best) conspire and murder him in the palace. In a general uprising that follows, those who murdered Amon are themselves put to death. Amon is buried in the palace grounds beside his evil father, and Amon's young son, Josiah, is made king. The stage is now set for the last revival of the children of Israel, and the reign of one who will arguably be the most godly king of all in Jerusalem, with David not excluded, until the triumphant return of Christ as King at the Second Advent.

41. Enter Josiah, the Young King of the Great Reformation.

Josiah, eight-year-old son of a wicked king, and grandson of the most wicked king in Judah's history, becomes King of Judah. This innocent child, who apparently has a good mother and moral mentors, grows up with at least some knowledge of his good and bad ancestors. By the time he is 16 he has a desire to know the Lord, and at age 20 he begins a spiritual cleansing of the land that goes on for six years⁴⁷. By this time the Temple is a shambles, and the Law of Moses (Torah/Pentateuch) is not only lost, but completely forgotten! Not only does no one know **where** it is, no one seems even to know **what** it is, or to remember that it ever existed⁴⁸! When Josiah is 26, he becomes concerned that the Temple is in such a state of neglect and disrepair, and he directs that funds be given to workmen and that the Temple be repaired. In the rubble that is being cleared away, the High Priest finds the lost-and-forgotten scrolls of the Law of Moses. He gives them to Shaphan the scribe, who reads them. Shaphan, appearing still to be uncertain about what he has found ("a book"), takes them to the king. When Shaphan reads the Scriptures to Josiah, who has no knowledge of them or their contents, the supernatural anointing on the Word of God convicts Josiah, and he weeps and tears his robes in repentance. He sees clearly that the kingdom is in terrible trouble for abandoning the Law, and he sends the high priest, scribe and others to "go inquire of the LORD" about the matter. The delegation goes to Hulda, a prophetess, and she declares judgment on the nation for the abandonment of the Law; but she promises that, because of Josiah's repentance, the terrible judgment will not come in his lifetime⁴⁹. (Chapter 22)

⁴⁷ These facts about Josiah are not included here, but are made clear in the parallel passage (II Chron 34).

⁴⁸ Things don't get much worse than this in the Kingdom of God! There was still a recognized High Priest, for the Jews were diligent about their genealogical records; but one must wonder what he did to stay busy. Without the Law to prescribe his functions, he must have been the most confused man in all of Judah about what he was supposed to do.

⁴⁹ This (with the parallel passage in II Chron 34) is the only place in Scripture where Hulda appears.

NOTE: *These people have had a genuine prophetess in their midst, but obviously have paid little or no attention to her. Also interesting is the fact that Jeremiah had entered into his ministry as a prophet, yet the priestly delegation went to Hulda for guidance. This may have been due to the fact that she was older, and Jeremiah was in the very early years of his prophetic ministry; it is also probable that he was still living in Anathoth, his home town, and had not yet moved to Jerusalem⁵⁰. By the time of Josiah's untimely death, however, Jeremiah led the lamentations⁵¹. It is also interesting to ponder the meaning of v20, for righteous Josiah lived only to be 39. Did the Lord simply know that the evil tidings would be fulfilled after his death? Or did the Lord shorten Josiah's life to avoid events already determined by Him⁵²? We can only wonder, for his early death is not explained, and the hidden things belong to God (Deut 29:29).*

42. Josiah Personally Leads the Nation to Repentance. (23:1-14)

Josiah gathers the priests, prophets, elders and the people ("both great and small") to the Temple. He stands "by a pillar" (a spot in the Temple reserved for the king--in a modern sense, his royal pew), and personally reads the Law to them⁵³. He then makes a covenant with the Lord to live by the Scriptures, and the people all "stand to the covenant" (agree to it). Then the house-cleaning begins and he leads it personally. He has all idols and associated articles brought out of the Temple and destroyed⁵⁴. The inevitable sodomites had been reinstated at the Temple entrance; he gets rid of them, and destroys "the houses of the sodomites which were by the House of the Lord."

Righteous Josiah burns the phallic idols, stamps upon their ashes and scatters the ashes on the graves of those who had worshipped there. He has every high place and every grove destroyed and their priests brought down. One high place, called "the mount of corruption," has been there since being built by Solomon for his pagan wives⁵⁵! In every place where there has been a pagan structure or altar, he defiles it with human remains from the tombs.

NOTES:

⁵⁰ Unger, Merrill: "Unger's Bible Dictionary," p 569.

⁵¹ II Chronicles 35:25.

⁵² Isaiah 57:1-2.

⁵³ Since there were no public address systems then, he undoubtedly had speakers at intervals in the crowd, relaying what he read to those around them.

⁵⁴ The parallel passage in II Chron 35 tells us that Josiah also had the Ark of the Covenant returned to the Holy of Holies. We are not told when or why it had been removed from its God-ordained place, but it was probably removed by Manasseh to make room for his phallic idol (or idols).

⁵⁵ Solomon had built, among other abominations, an altar to Chemosh, the national god of Moab and one to Milcom, the equivalent god of Ammon. The worship of Chemosh and Ammon was horribly cruel, comparable to that of Molech, in which children were sacrificed in a fire. These abominations had stood for about 300 years in Jerusalem until destroyed by Josiah.

a. The sin of sodomy is never far away in any culture, and its open practice is always a sign of the last stages of descent into moral and spiritual depravity and cultural ruin.

b. Paganism is always ultimately sexual, leading to phallic worship. It was being practiced in Japan as recently as the early-mid 1950s when I was there, it probably still is, and it appears openly in Mardi Gras parades today in New Orleans. There is a growing, annual gathering of pagans in the Nevada desert today, with everybody naked, known for its "Burning Man" climax.

43. Josiah Fulfills a Prophecy after 300 Years. (23:15-20)

Josiah then expands his reformation beyond the borders of Judah. He goes to Bethel, outside his kingdom, to the altar and high place which Jeroboam had built when the kingdom was first divided. Slaying the pagan priests, he burns them on Jeroboam's altar, destroys the altar and the high place, and stamps on the ashes. In the process, he fulfills the prophecy of the nameless young prophet who had so boldly confronted Jeroboam, 300 years earlier (I Kings 13). Josiah's attendants are familiar with the story, they tell him of it, and show him the tomb of the young prophet whose prophecy he has just fulfilled. Buried beside the young prophet is the corrupt old prophet who caused him to sin. Josiah decrees that the tomb be preserved, undisturbed, and goes on to continue his spiritual housecleaning throughout Samaria.

44. Reinstating the Passover. (23:21-28)

When Josiah is 24, as part of his reformation, he reinstates the Passover, commanding that it be observed, just "as it is written in the book of this covenant." He is determined to run the kingdom (and the leaderless regions of the former Northern Kingdom around his kingdom) in the manner that today we would call, "by the book." He also continues to cleanse the land of those with familiar spirits (spiritualist mediums), magicians, idols and all related things. Diligently following the newly discovered Law, Josiah makes a clean sweep of everything offensive to God.

NOTES:

a. Verse 26 makes clear an interesting point, and perhaps reveals a basic principle in God's dealings with man. In spite of the marvelous revival under Josiah, and the reigns of godly kings before him, such as Jehu and Hezekiah, the previous utter wickedness of Manasseh causes God to surrender Judah to its self-destruction. Apparently His patience with nations has its limits. In the same way that He continued to endure the wickedness of His people because of David's unflinching faithfulness, He eventually withdrew it because of Manasseh's unflinching

unfaithfulness (see also 24:3 and Jeremiah 15:4). Here is a principle worthy of thought.

b. During this period, Assyria's power is on the wane, weakened from invasions by the Scythians, a savage, nomadic race originating in the far northeast. Meanwhile, to the south of Assyria, Babylon is growing in power. During this time Egypt continues strong, although nearing the end of her time as a World power. At this pivotal time of shifting power in World history, Josiah considers Assyria to be an ally; and this will lead to his death.

45. The Death of Righteous Josiah.

Egypt's Pharaoh Necho, aware of the decline of Assyria, moves against her and conquers all the way to the Euphrates. Josiah, allied in some way with Assyria, feeling obliged to help his ally, leads his army into the field against the Egyptians at Megiddo, where he is mortally wounded by an Egyptian arrow⁵⁶. His body is taken back to Jerusalem where he and is buried, attended by great grieving. The parallel passage, II Chronicles 35, reveals that this lamentation was led by the prophet Jeremiah. Josiah's 23-year-old son, Jehoahaz, succeeds him as king, and Jeremiah will soon have much more about which to weep. (23:29-30)

***NOTE:** At about the time of Josiah's death, the great fortress city, Nineveh, was finally conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonians. The destruction of the vast city (as prophesied by Nahum and Zephaniah), one which had dominated the known World, was so thorough that Nineveh completely faded from memory--into the forgotten past. In fact, by the 19th Century it was considered to have been mythological; the Bible was its only known record. The ancient city was discovered and identified, however, by Sir Austen Layard and others, in excavations beginning in 1820. Although much of it has been uncovered, it will probably never be completely excavated, due to its vastness and to the fact that modern villages and cemeteries cover some of the sites.*

46. A Rapid Succession of Wicked Kings.

Jehoahaz, son of the righteous Josiah, is 23 when he becomes king, but he lasts only 3 months. He is definitely not his father's son, in that he is wicked, and does that which is evil⁵⁷. Pharaoh removes him from the throne and sends him in chains off to Egypt, where he dies in prison. Pharaoh then places Eliakim, another son of Josiah, on the throne, and changes his name to Jehoiakim. He is 25 when

⁵⁶ In the parallel passage, II Chron 35:23-24, the wording is a little vague, and could be interpreted to mean that Josiah lived to get back to Jerusalem, where he died; but the wording here makes it clear that he died in the chariot, on the battlefield, and his dead body was returned to Jerusalem.

⁵⁷ We must wonder how such a godly king as Josiah could have such evil children; perhaps he was so busy leading the kingdom in righteousness that he paid no attention to the spiritual health of his sons, a failing of David, and of many men of God today.

Pharaoh makes him a puppet king, and he reigns in Jerusalem for 11 years. At this time Egypt is in decline, and Babylon is growing stronger; as a result, Jehoiakim practices a difficult balancing act, playing one against the other. In the 3rd year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem and takes some of the sacred vessels of the Temple to Babylon, along with certain of the royal family and others, including Daniel and his three famous friends (see Dan 1:1-7). This is stage 1 of the Babylonian Captivity, which will be incremental (not immediate and total, as had been the case when Assyria took the Northern Kingdom). At age 36 he dies, and his son Jehoiachin ascends to the throne at age 18⁵⁸. By this time the Egyptians are beginning to retreat toward the Nile Valley, and Babylon is advancing into the Promised Land, to fill the political vacuum. (23:31- 24:7)

47. Sunset on the Kingdom of Judah. (24:8-17)

Jehoiachin also practices evil, and the stage is set for the final exit of the kingdom of Saul and David. Jehoiachin lasts only 3 months before being carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, about 600 BC, along with his family, some of the leading citizens of Jerusalem (including Ezekiel), and most of the treasures in the Temple and palace. Now, Nebuchadnezzar places Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, on the throne of Judah as a puppet, and changes his name to Zedekiah.

NOTES:

a. Nebuchadnezzar accomplished the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people of the Southern Kingdom in 4 stages, over a period of about 20 years. Whereas it was the custom of the Assyrian kings to deport the people of a conquered nation immediately and replace them with their own people (thus, the Northern Kingdom was carried away at once), Nebuchadnezzar preferred to leave behind a prosperous vassal nation, paying tribute (thus, he initially took only some of the Temple treasures, the royal family, and selected people to Babylon). It was only the continued rebellion by the Southern Kingdom that caused Nebuchadnezzar finally to lose patience with the rebellious Jews, complete the destruction of Jerusalem and deport the rest of the people.

b. Nebuchadnezzar had the sacred gold implements that remained in the Temple cut up and taken to Babylon. At this point in history, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared, and only God knows where it is today. According to a Jewish tradition it was hidden by Jeremiah in a cavern, somewhere under the Temple Mount, to save it from the Babylonians. According to II Maccabees 2:4-8, Jeremiah hid it, with the remains of the Tabernacle, in a cavern in Mount Nebo

⁵⁸ We are not told here, nor in the parallel passage (II Chron 36:8), how Jehoiakim died; but Josephus wrote that Nebuchadnezzar had him killed, and his body left unburied (Antiquities 10.6.3), in fulfillment of Jeremiah's terrible prophecy (Jer 22:18-19).

("the mountain where Moses climbed up and saw the heritage of God"), and sealed the entrance so that it could not be found, to remain hidden until the Lord returns and restores the land to his people.

48. The Ignominious End of Judah. (24:18-25:7)

It appears that Nebuchadnezzar doesn't desire the total destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, but Zedekiah rebels, as have his predecessors in Judah and Israel, although it makes no sense. It is comparable to Rhode Island's declaring war on the rest of the United States. And here we must wonder if rebellion is not simply, irretrievably, woven into their sinful, idolatrous natures, since "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (I Samuel 15:23), and witchcraft has been their prevailing way of life. At any rate, Nebuchadnezzar, who must be wondering what it takes for these stubborn Jews to understand what is good for them, returns to Jerusalem and lays siege to it for 18 months. Starvation (as always) ends the siege, and the king, his family, and the soldiers flee. The king and his family are captured between Jerusalem and Jericho and taken to Nebuchadnezzar's camp at Riblah. At Riblah Nebuchadnezzar passes final judgment on Zedekiah: his sons are killed before him and then his eyes are put out. The rebellious, wicked king is taken to Babylon, blind, in agony, and bound in fetters of brass⁵⁹.

49. The End of the Temple of David and Solomon. (25:8-21)

About a month later, Nebuzaridan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard (and his trusted servant), is sent back to Jerusalem to finish the job there, once and for all. He takes what is left of the silver and gold of the Temple, and all the things of brass.⁶⁰ The pillars of brass (Jachin and Boaz) and the brazen sea are so large that he has them broken up for moving, and sends them, all the brass implements, and the last of the silver and gold, to Babylon⁶¹. He takes the High Priest and all his assistants, other officials and even 60 ordinary men, to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where they are put to death. He burns the Temple, the palace, and all the homes of the wealthy, and breaks down the walls. The Jerusalem of Melchizedech, David, Solomon and Josiah, is a disgraced, defeated, ravaged, demolished ruin, anointed for burial with the tears of Jeremiah.

⁵⁹ Since brass symbolizes judgment, it appears that the brass fetters on the now-blind and impotent king represent God's final judgment on His rebellious people. Righteous Josiah, and his great reformation, had postponed God's inevitable judgment, but could not prevent it.

⁶⁰ In v 15, the phrases, "gold in gold" and "silver in silver" seem puzzling. They probably mean that he took the gold and silver implements, not as sacred objects, but simply as silver and gold for the value of the precious metals, keeping the gold and silver separated.

⁶¹ None of the precious items taken from the Temple has ever been found, although some will appear in the Scriptural account about 70 years later, used in a drunken banquet at Babylon by Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. This was his last party, the one in which God supernaturally wrote his pronouncement of doom on the wall; Babylon fell that night and the king was killed. (Dan 5)

50. One Final Flicker of Rebellion, and the Curtain Falls. (25:22-26)

The poor of the land are left behind to take care of the crops and livestock, and Nebuzaradan installs Gedaliah as governor over them. He is faithful to Nebuchadnezzar, and makes his headquarters at Mizpah, with some Babylonian overseers. For two months it looks like there may at last be peace in the land, but it is not to be. One Ishmael, an overlooked survivor of the royal family, apparently has the insane idea that he can rebel and be king. He gathers a small army of like-minded fools, seizes Mizpah and kills Gedaliah, his subordinates, and the Babylonian overseers. But it doesn't take long for these misguided rebels to realize that they can't succeed; they flee to Egypt for protection, and it is all over for Judah.

Thus ends David's earthly kingdom; it has lasted nearly 400 years. His spiritual Kingdom continues, and will be climaxed with the return of Jesus, David's Greater Son, to reign over the Earth and the Heavenly Kingdom that will follow.

Epilogue. In an interesting postscript, about 35 years later, Jehoiachin, who had lasted only three months as king of Judah, is 55 and still a prisoner in Babylon. Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the new king, Evilmerodach, does an interesting thing. In an act reminiscent of David and Mephibosheth, he takes Jehoiachin from prison, gives him fine clothing, regal honors, an allowance, and a permanent place at the king's table for life. This is not explained. (25:27-30)