

2Kings

“The Waves Are Coming In... But The Tide Is Going Out.”

Lectures in the Book of Second Kings for New Creation Teaching Ministry,
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Outline of studies:

August 1st	Introduction
August 8th	Elisha
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1. Introduction

1. Background

The Books of the Kings are about the past. It is history, a word which to us is almost synonymous with irrelevant. Henry Ford said, History is bunk. Carl Sandburg said, History is a bucket of ashes. (Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation*) Why study long forgotten and obscure kings and battles? How does this make any difference to our Christian lives? How do we read a book like this in Scriptures which we take to be authoritative?

P. T. Forsyth pointed out that there are at least three ways of reading Scripture. We must (1) read them in their historical setting to understand what was being said to the original hearers and readers of the text; (2) read them in the light of the whole Scriptures and the salvation history plan of God as revealed finally in Christ; (3) read them in the light of the Holy Spirit as He applies them to us in our particular setting. Each is valid, but (2) is central, and (3) must never contradict what we can know by ways (1) and (2). To focus on (3) alone often results in reading snatches of Scripture that give us a message or thought for the day, which ends up being subjective and utilitarian.

2. Setting

2Kings has its immediate setting in the collection of two books called Kings. These trace the history of the people of God from the last days of the reign of King David through the split of the Kingdom into North and South to the invasion of the North by Assyria and finally to the Babylonian exile of the South. David's Kingship is frequently referred to in these books, as is the Book of the Law, and the Temple worship. Each of these referents has to do with covenants, and so the Covenant of God, as well as the particular covenants God made with His people in history, needs to be understood to get to the heart of this book. We will come back to this later on.

These two books are placed in the history section of the English Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures they belong together in what is called the (Former) Prophets. This tells us that what we have is not modern, scientific, uninvolved history. We have here history which preaches, history with a point, prophetic history. These books are written to change the orientation of hearers to God. Because this is part of the former prophets, it tells us that what happens in these chapters is shaped and brought into being and effected by the Word of God. (Is this how we normally see history? Or do we prefer to see it as the random outcome of various forces and trends within society? Or even as the result of our own social engineering?) Prophecy is the living and active Word of God, or rather the living and active God working in His Word. It is a history creating event to prophecy. Throughout the book of Kings we see the Word of God doing what it says!

Scholars today refer to the Books of the Kings as part of the Deuteronomic history. This is the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. There is much debate about the authorship of this history and the nature of its transmission to us. The view held by many is that at least two writers have had a go at rewriting (redacting) an original account of this period, and so the books contain conflicting theologies. However there seems to be considerable evidence to show that the book, and in fact the whole Deuteronomic history, had

one author and only one edition. Quite likely this writer drew on historical sources, some of which we have mentioned in the books (e.g. the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah.)

2Kings, with the rest of the Deuteronomistic history, was probably written in Babylon shortly after the release of Jehoiachin from prison in 560 BC. This much seems evident from 2Kings 25:27-30. Comparing this with Jeremiah 52:31-34, it would seem that when the Deuteronomist wrote, the king was still alive. It is written down for people in exile. It is written so that they may understand how they got there, and what the Lord is doing with them in all the disaster they see around.

3. Historical Content

2Kings begins with the last days of the prophet Elijah, which is about the time that King Ahab, from the Northern Kingdom, has died and his son Ahaziah has become sick. Jehoshaphat is king of the South - this places us about 853 BC. It ends with the exile into Babylon in 587 BC. A number of prophets have their ministry during this time, including Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel and the other Minor Prophets.

The division between 1 and 2 Kings seems fairly arbitrary, and is likely to have been determined by how much fitted on a scroll! However 2Kings does begin with the end of Elijah's ministry in the North, and this seems like a good place to make a break.

The arrangement of the book is to trace through parallel histories of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The account of a long reign in one kingdom may immediately be followed by the overlapping or coincidental reigns in the other kingdom. This requires careful attention, and a table of the reigns of the kings may be useful as you read through the book. Not all the events in the book are given in a strictly chronological order.

4. 2Kings and The Covenant of God.

(Much very valuable material on this matter can be found in close attention to the studies from the recent New Creation Pastors School, God's Covenant and Christ's Church.)

The word covenant does not appear very often in the book of Second Kings (11 times in total, not all of which refer to the covenant of God), and yet the understanding of covenant underlies the whole book. The book is the covenant working out: it is a record of God dealing in covenant faithfulness with the people of Israel. Particularly, it is a working out of the covenant blessings and curses set out in Deuteronomy 28.

In creation, God established a covenant with the whole of creation, and particularly with Adam whom He placed as steward over the creation. This is the everlasting covenant. See Jeremiah 33:19-26, Isaiah 24:1ff (esp. v5), Hosea 6:7, etc. At creation God entered into a life-and-death bond with the whole creation. This bond or covenant flows from the nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit in Trinity.

Herman Hoeksema says "The relation of the Three Persons in the divine essence is a covenant relation....Now the Scriptures teach very clearly that God in Himself is a covenant God...And as the Triune God, He is the living God, Who lives the infinitely perfect covenant life within Himself." (from Pastors School Notes).

The covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David within the life of the people of God are the outworking of the covenant of creation, as God in His covenant faithfulness seeks the wayward race.

The Abrahamic (13:23; 17:15?), Mosaic (17:35, 38; 18:12, 23:2, 21) and Davidic (by constant appraisal of the kings by the measure of David) covenants feature particularly in 2Kings. The overall story is of a faithless and sinful people pursued by their covenant -partner Lord to bring them back into covenant blessing.

This reviving work of God flows from His covenant faithfulness to his people. But also, the low tide, the terrible situation into which both North and South Kingdom descend, comes from the covenant faithfulness of God. He blesses and he curses; unless we receive the curses when they are due, we cannot know the blessings. The events of 2Kings are the outworking of Gods covenant faithfulness to his people primarily in cursing. Reading the book is a little like standing on the beach watching a tide going out. The water is receding, but the waves still come in. There are times of renewing in the events of 2Kings, but the general flow is away. I think that this describes where we are as a church as a whole today. There are movements of blessing here and there, but the general trend is to dullness and weakness. 2Kings is written to people in exile, at the end of the tides outward run - things are as low as they can get! It is written to illuminate how things got there, and to show the way ahead in God s providence. In all this, there is the hope of the resurrection grounded in covenant faithfulness. The book looks to the coming work of God in Messiah. God is bringing Judah to its lowest ebb, so that they may learn the principle set out in Solomons prayer in 1Kings 8:22-53, esp. 46-51. This is also set out in Isaiah 62:9-12 :

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have laboured; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."

Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." And they shall be called The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.

2. Elisha, The Man of God

1. The Call of Elisha: 1Kings 19:15-21

Elijah was called to anoint Elisha as his successor in the context of his meeting God on the mountain following the destruction of the prophets of Baal. Elijah had become despondent about the future of the people of Israel, thinking himself to be the only one left of the faithful in Israel (19:10,14). He had forgotten the covenant faithfulness of God, thinking that his zeal and sorrow was the only zeal and sorrow, and it is to a remembrance of this covenant faithfulness that the presence of the Lord called him. The Lord is the One who is zealous for His own holiness, and who is jealous for His own people (see Exod. 20:5, 34:14, Num. 25:11, Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:13-15, 29:19-21, 32:16,21, Josh. 24:19, 1Kings 14:22, Pss 78:58, 79:5, Isa. 9:7, 26:11, 37:32, 42:13, 59:17, 63:15, many references in Ezekiel, Jas 4:5. See also 2Cor 11:2, and Num. 5:14, 15, Song of Songs 8:6 for the marriage setting of true jealousy.) This zeal and jealousy is the action of covenant faithfulness. In line with that covenant faithfulness the Lord showed Elijah His ongoing action in the world and called him to participate in it through the anointing of Hazael, Jehu and Elisha.

Elisha ('God is salvation') had his hand on the plough when he was called by Elijah. The twelve pairs of oxen indicate a wealthy family background. Elijah threw his mantle/cloak around him (cf. Isa. 59:17) showing that he was to succeed him, and so showing the continuing faithfulness of the Lord - things wouldn't die out with Elijah. Elisha initially wanted to return to farewell his parents, and Elijah's words 'Go back. What have I to do with you?' could indicate a rebuke at the delay in following (cf. Matt. 8:21, Luk. 5:11, 27-28). Elisha did return but only to make the final break with his past; he then set out to catch up with Elijah and remained his attendant from then on.

2Kings 2:1-18 sets out for us the actual transfer of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. The mantle or cloak which had originally been symbolically passed on at the first call was now given permanently as a sign of the enduing of the Spirit (v9). There is no magic attached to the cloak - Elisha's question in verse 14 indicates that the cloak is a sign of the presence and power of the Lord. Elisha, the prophet, the man of God now has responsibility and authority to bring the Word of the Lord to the people, and to issue the covenant call to the Lord's wayward partner-people.

2. The Signs of Elijah

Many commentators believe that the inclusion of the many miracle stories involving Elisha is done to validate his authority as a mighty and powerful prophet. I think they miss the point. The signs/miracles, as with all signs and miracles, are pointers to the reality of God's covenant action. They are never used to establish authority, but they do reveal it. Primarily, signs and miracles are given as prophecy, as the Word of God encountering and meeting a person or people in particular situations. The signs attached with Elisha are prophetic; they preach to us and to those who received them.

Miracles of restoration and resurrection are frequent in Elisha's ministry. There is the healing of the water (2:19-22), the provision of water and the defeat of Moab (3:1-27), the widow's overflowing oil (4:1-7), the resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son (4:8-37), the

healing of the stew (4:38-41), the feeding of the 100 (4:42-44), the cleansing of Naaman (5:1-19), the retrieval of the axehead (6:1-7), and the breaking of the Aramean siege (6:24-7:20). Alongside them are signs of judgment and curse: see the curse on the jeering lads (2:23-25), the wounding of Gehazi with leprosy (5:19a-27), the blinding of the Arameans (6:8-23) [this sign is a mix of curse and blessing], the death of the king's officer (7:1-2, 17-20), and the anointing of Hazael (8:7-15). So the miracles done through Elisha are covenant signs. They reveal the ongoing covenant relationship the Lord has with His people. In the middle of sin and God's judgment on sin, where there is faith and obedience to the Word of God, the blessing still comes. Those who reject that word find themselves outside blessing and in the curse of covenant.

The miracles of restoration are miracles of grace; they point the reader to learn of the grace of God which is at the heart of His covenant. Elisha is called throughout the book (nearly 30 times), 'a man of God'. This could mean:

(i) he is a prophet, as it is a common term for the prophets (e.g. Elijah in 2Kings 1).

(ii) he is a powerful and mighty man

(iii) he is a holy man

(iv) that in Elisha a person encounters God and the grace or judgment that comes from that encounter.

This latter seems to be the best understanding. Elisha is not simply talking about God; God is at work in him, and Elisha represents God to those whom he meets. This is best seen in 2Kings 4:8-37, the story of the Shunammite woman and her son. When Elisha started to visit and stay at her home, the woman soon recognised that he was a holy man of God (vv8-9). Elisha promised her that she would receive a son within a year, and she did not initially believe the Word (vv10-16). The son was born and grew, but then became sick and died (vv17-21). The woman's immediate response was to seek the man of God (vv22-26). Meeting Elisha, she fell at his feet (v27). Elisha's servant sought to push her away, but the man of God spoke the Word of grace and answered her request. Gehazi was sent ahead but was not able to raise the son, and when Elisha came, he went, interceded to the Lord, and pressed himself against the boy. This act was a sign of identification and of transfer. The boy's death made him unclean, but Elisha took that uncleanness on himself, and the boy received the warmth of life from Elisha. This is a sign of grace, of the way in which the Lord will bring life to dead Israel, Israel who has become dead through idolatry and unfaithfulness. Each of the signs of restoration in Elisha's ministry serve this purpose.

The signs of judgment show clearly that the Word of God must be received with faith and obedience. It is not a trifling Word; God is not a God who speaks rashly or foolishly. The youths who taunted Elisha (2:23-25) were really despising the Word of God. So also the officer of the Israelite king who scoffs at the prophecy of immediate relief from the famine. He was a practical man, and not a man of faith (7:1-2). Naaman himself is one who initially scoffs that the Word of God is powerful, but through the wise counsel of his servants he comes to faith (5:11-15). Gehazi is also a man who comes under the curse of rejecting the Word of God. he sins doubly by making the Word of God, the Word of grace into a means of benefit for himself.

These acts of Elisha at the start of this second book of Kings set out clearly the covenant faithfulness of God in dealing with His people. But they also show that the covenant of God is not simply with His elect people the Israelites, but with all the earth. So foreign kings and powers are dealt with by Elisha. Naaman is a commander from the army of Aram, the

enemies of Israel at the time. Yet grace comes to him. The soldiers from Aram who are blinded when they have come to arrest Elisha are shown favour, and in fact enjoy a great feast, an almost Messianic banquet with Elisha in Samaria, the capital of Israel

3. Jehu, Man of Blood

1. The Anointing of Jehu

The events of 2Kings 9:1-13 are introduced first of all in the prophetic word of God which comes to Elijah in 1Kings 19:15-18. This action is part of the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant, part of His zeal and jealousy for His people. Whilst it is Elijah who is given this command, it is Elisha, through an intermediary, who fulfils it. There is only one ministry of the Word, which comes through its various ministers - Elijah, Elisha and the whole of the prophetic community stand in one continuum of the Word of God. None of the ministry is dependent upon a particular person, and so is not magical in its nature. It is not any power which resides in Elisha which makes kings. Elisha's one task is to transmit the Word of God.

The prophet sent by Elisha to do the anointing is told to tuck his cloak into his belt and to be urgent in the ministry he is given. The message he is to deliver is given in the tersest form. He is to run off as soon as the task is done. Partly this is due to the danger inherent in making a new king. But more there is the danger of Jehu himself. As we will see, all that is happening is the plan of God, and yet God is using a man who is very much in the image of Satan. The prophetic dealings are to be consistent with this, something akin to Jude 23 where we avoid 'even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.'

In anointing Jehu, the prophet expands on the terse message given by Elisha, by referring back to the prophecies of Elijah concerning the house of Ahab following the violent shedding of Naboth's blood in order to gain his vineyard. (See 1Kings 21 for this event. Note also that Ahab is the son of Omri, and both have involved Israel in the devastation of idolatry and Baalism.) This expansion of the prophetic word of Elisha is not uncommon and is not necessarily wrong, but part of the prophetic and living Word itself. The message delivered, the prophet takes off, and his whole demeanour indicates madness to those who see him. But the Word is received and the fellow officers gladly announce that Jehu is king.

2. Jehu's Claiming of the Kingdom

The action of Jehu in claiming the kingdom has seven violent acts. These acts begin with key individuals, and move on to whole groups of people. There is an impression of snowballing violence in the actions of Jehu, a kind of blood-lust.

In the first act, 2Kings 9:14-26, he assassinates the king of Israel, J(eh)oram. It is an act which comes through stealth - no news of his moves towards kingship has come to the king who lies ill at Jezreel (v15). Jehu drives zealously to Jezreel to confront the king. The king sees the troops coming and sends messengers twice - 'Do you come in peace?' Joram wants peace where there can be no peace through his and his fathers' unbending idolatry (Jer. 6:14). The answer of Jehu indicates this - 'What do you have to do with peace?' Peace is known only in true worship of, and relationship with, the Lord. The peace of God here will only come through terrible judgment, through the action of the sword of God's holiness. When Joram is killed, Jehu recounts the words of the prophets, speaking of the Lord 'making pay' or

‘requiting’ (v26). This word has the same origin as the word for peace, shalom. The wounds of sin can not be healed lightly but must be healed only through holy judgment.

Jehu is keen for the prophecy of Elijah to be fulfilled in strict terms and arranges for the body of Joram to be thrown into the field of Naboth (9:25). This indicates something of the sin that is in Jehu. Whilst all he is doing is the will of God, he is actually now acting as though God were not the living God, and as though the prophecy were now in his hands to do as he wished. he seizes control of the prophecy and uses it for his own purposes, which are not in the end for worship but political. Ellul makes a cutting comment here:

‘Wanting to put into effect God’s decision, he pays no attention to the great statement that it is not of that wills nor of him that runs. Jehu is one of those in the Bible who wants to fulfil and accomplish of themselves what God has said. Thus Abraham wants to fulfil the promise of posterity by his own decision and at his own time, i.e., by means of Hagar. This is the whole problem. Will the Word of God seize us? Will we subject our own will to God’s....This is where Jehu goes astray. He does not let himself be seized by God’s Word; he seizes it.’ (*The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*, Eerdmans 1972, pages 113-115)

Jesus faced the same temptation to seize the Word of God in the wilderness temptations. The living word of his Father had come to him at his baptism - ‘You are My Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased’ - and the temptation was to seize that and to establish it independently - ‘If you are the Son of God...’ (See Luke 3:21,22, 4:1-13.) So we see here that Jehu whilst doing the will of God, as verified by the fulfilment of prophecy, is at the same time the child of Satan, in his image, listening to his voice and living outside the living Word of God. Jehu is faithless even in his scrupulous faithfulness.

We see this seizing of God’s Word repeated in the slaughter of Joram’s (and Ahab’s) family in 2Kings 10:1-11. Here also we have the added element of deception in Jehu’s actions. His ‘first letter is straightforward and calls the descendants of Ahab to choose a king and to fight. The bureaucrats realise they don’t have a chance and so surrender to Jehu. Jehu writes back and asks them to ‘take the heads of your master’s sons’ (10:6). This request is ambiguous - it could mean to take a census, i.e. to count them; the leading men of the city take it in a more political way, and behead the seventy children of Ahab. they then take the heads to Jehu in Jezreel. Jehu claims innocence at the slaughter (10:9) and uses the occasion to also rid himself of the officials at Samaria. He kills everyone attached to Ahab who is still alive at Jezreel.

In the events of 2Kings 10:18-28 we see again the image of Satan in Jehu. Not only is he destroyer, murderer, deceiver, and one who sets himself in the place of God, but he is also liar. This lying is used to destroy the lie of Baal, but is a lie all the same. He is a cunning man (v19), like the serpent in the garden. We are reminded that we bear only one of two images - either the image of God our Father by creation and adoption, or the contradictory image of Satan our Father by the Fall (John 8:42-47).

In these actions of Jehu, we see an evil man with evil purposes accomplishing the purposes of God. 2Kings 10:30 makes clear this undeniable fact. This however does not validate or sanctify the action or the person. We see in the events of Jehu’s reign the sovereign hand of God. Even though Jehu seeks to seize control, the Lord never relinquishes his control. At the end of history we shall that all the machinations of evil, all the proud accomplishments of humanity in rebellion will have achieved nothing but the end of God. We know this because of the action of God in the terrible events of the cross, where by God’s set purpose and

foreknowledge Christ was handed over to wicked men who put him to death (Acts 2:23). God never abandons His covenant faithfulness even at the darkest point in all history.

4. Athaliah and Joash

There are many similarities between the account of Jehu's ascension to the throne in Israel and Joash's ascension to the throne in Judah. Both replaced descendants of the wicked king Ahab, who had come under the condemnation of the Lord for his idolatry (9:1-10:17, cf. 11:1-17, 19-21). The ascension of the two kings was followed by a time of religious reform. Both resulted in the destruction of a Baal temple, and the killing of the Baal priest (10:18-28, cf. 11:18, 12:4-16). Both reigns stood under the cloud of the threat of Hazael, king of Aram (10:32-33, cf. 12:17-18).

Yet there are also very significant differences which contrast the fruitless revolution in the north and the fruit of reform in the south. Jehu's revolt was marked by widespread violence; the revolution that brought Joash to power resulted in the necessary deaths of only two people. Jehu was a usurper; Joash had covenantal right to the throne. Jehu's reign was begun in political secrecy; Joash's reign began with open proclamation. Jehu's reform involved craftiness and guile; Joash's reform came with openness, integrity to the covenant and administrative wisdom.

1. The Overthrow of Athaliah (2Kings 11:1-21)

Athaliah was the mother of Ahaziah (S), the king of Judah who was killed by Jehu in his overthrow of the northern dynasty which had begun with Omri. The line of ascension had been Omri - Ahab - Ahaziah (N) - J(eh)oram (N). Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, was a northerner married into the southern line, as queen to J(eh)oram of the south (2Kings 8:18-19). This marriage alliance had polluted the southern kingdom, and introduced the idolatry of the north into the Davidic house. Yet the Lord had remained faithful to his covenant with David, bringing judgment but not destruction to Judah.

On the death of her son, Ahaziah, Athaliah was the strongest remaining connection with the dynasty of Omri. She sought to strengthen her position by the slaughter of the descendants of Ahaziah, many of whom would have been through marriage into other families (11:1). She was undone in this purpose by her own daughter, Jehosheba, who took the one year old son of Ahaziah, Joash and hid him in the Temple precinct, quite possibly in the house of Jehoiada, the high priest. He remained there for six years, hidden and protected.

The whole story is riddled with political intrigue, but this event of Joash's protection reminds us again of God's covenant faithfulness. Time and again in the history of God's people, the promise of the Lord has hung by the thread of a single boy, a sign of His elective and sovereign purpose in salvation (Moses, Isaac, David, a new shoot from a chopped off stump, Christ Himself).

It was Jehoiada who led the revolution against Athaliah, who after six years was well ensconced in power. Those who were loyal to the line of David had kept their powder dry all that time. The commanders and guards and Corites (a special palace guard corps) were, until this time, Athaliah's men. The covenant that Jehoiada made with them (v4) is really over them; he acted with only one authority, that of the true worshipper. The soldiers were placed strategically to block off the palace from interfering with the enthronement of the boy king.

At his enthronement, Joash was presented with the crown and the testimony, most likely a copy of part (or all) of the Deuteronomic version of the covenant. The king was to have a copy of the law and to meditate upon it day and night (Deut. 17:18-20). It does not seem to be the whole of Deuteronomy, for this was rediscovered only in the time of Josiah, later in Judah

s history. The people are mentioned in verse 12 for the first time, indicating that there was a popular groundswell against Athaliah back to the Davidic line.

Athaliah was one who was caught in the deceit of sin. When she saw the newly crowned king sat the proper place in the Temple (by the pillar, possibly the pillars at the entrance to the Temple), she tore her clothes and cried out Treason! This in fact was her crime in her annihilation of the royal family. She may have been trying to restore some of her followers to herself, but this was to no avail. She was executed, and in a way that preserved the sanctity of the Temple, not in a hasty or blood-thirsty manner.

The covenant with the Lord was reaffirmed between the Lord the people, and the king. In the light of the covenant the presence of idolatry could no longer be tolerated, and the Baal temple present somewhere in Jerusalem was torn down and Mattan the Baal priest was executed. The posting of the guards at the Temple indicates that there was not complete acceptance of the renewed order, and so care was still to be taken.

2. The Reign of Joash (2Kings 12:1-21)

Joash reigned from boyhood through to adulthood. The narrators prophetic assessment of Joash is ambiguous. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years that Jehoiada instructed him (12:2), although he still tolerated the high places where people offered worship to the Lord, against what was prescribed. Joash seems to have not been able to develop an independent standing in the Word of God. He remained dependent on Jehoiada, and declined after Jehoiada's death, as we will see.

It was Joash who instituted the repairing of the Temple, which had fallen into disrepair under Athaliah's rule. He gave this task of overseeing the repairs to the priests. They were to use monies which had been brought to the Temple as sacred offerings. The priests were glad to receive the money but did nothing to repair the Temple. They had no passion or zeal for the house of the Lord. Their orthodoxy was formal and not fiery. Joash devised a new protocol for repairing the Temple (vv. 6-16), which was still done properly and in good order, and according to the Law of God. (Hence the priests still received those offerings which were theirs.)

The workers to whom the repair work was entrusted were themselves trusted and acted with integrity. No accounting of money spent was needed.

The repair of the Temple is limited - simply a patch-up job - and does not see the Temple further furnished or enriched. There is a lack of grandeur in what is happening here when compared with the building of the Temple by Solomon. This must have been related to the deep-seated idolatry and apathy toward to the Lord that was present amongst the people and priests, and by the limited nature of Joash's wisdom, wisdom which was derived from Jehoiada's instruction, and not from immediate intimacy with the Lord Himself.

The events of 12:17-21 we know to be after the death of Jehoiada from 2Chronicles 24:15ff.

Without Jehoiada's instruction and exhortation, Joash succumbed to fear and faithlessness in the face of the threat of Hazael of Aram. He plundered the Temple and took sacred objects - bowls, wick trimmers, etc. - and gave them as a bribe/tribute to Hazael to ensure that Judah was not attacked. This act was a refusal to trust in the Lord, and in fact stole from Him in order to appease another lord. This act was then followed by the weakening of Joash's authority. He was assassinated, but was succeeded by his son, again a sign of the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant with David.

6. The Fall of the North

2Kings 17 has three sections which deals with the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Verses 1-6 recall the events that marked the end of the kingdom; verses 7-23 give the prophetic rationale for these events (and the whole history of Israel); and then verses 24-41 spell out what happened following the fall of the North, and explains what was happening in the North at the time the first readers of this book would have been reading.

The Fall To Assyria (vv. 1-6).

Hoshea, the last king of the North, had come to power by assassinating Pekah (15:30). He was not a trustworthy man! The verdict of the writer was that he also 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him' (v2.) It seems that he did not inaugurate or continue any of the blatantly idolatrous practices for which many of the other kings are condemned; possibly he did not even follow in the steps of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, in the alternative worship at the bulls of Bethel and Dan. It is of note that it is during his reign that the kingdom ends. His moderating of the evil in Israel does not protect him or enable him to be bypassed in God's covenant action.

As king, Hoshea had been obliged to pay tribute to Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, successor to Tiglath-Pileser. Hoshea rebelled against this rule and sort an alliance with So of Egypt, and no longer paid tribute to Assyria. It was this that was the trigger for the final invasion of the North and the ending of the kingship there. It was during this time that Hosea prophesied. In the collection of his prophecies both Assyria and Egypt figure greatly. He has a constant refrain that runs through his prophecy - that the Lord is the one who called Israel out of Egypt (Hosea 2:15, 11:1, 12:9,13, 13:4). This was the action of his deep, gracious and constant covenant-love for His people. Yet it was clear that the people were flirting with going back to Egypt - as well as flirting with alliance with Assyria (5:13, 7:11, 8:9, 12:1) - this describes Hoshea's action to a tee! (In fact, through their idolatry they had done so in spirit already.) The Lord's judgment on Israel was to hand them over to Egypt and Assyria (7:16, 8:13, 9:3,6, 10:6, 11:5). These two, which Israel saw as alternatives, are in Hosea's prophecy really just the two faces of one reality. They seem almost interchangeable - especially in 9:3 and 11:5. Yet there is in all this work of judgment through the powers of Egypt and Assyria, the constancy of God's covenant-love. All this is to purify and restore Israel, to drive them to call out to the Lord, their faithful covenant-Husband - see 11:11 and 14:1-9.

The actual end of the kingdom is described very tersely (verses 4-6) and in a very matter of fact way. There is the strong and holy of action of the Lord signified in this, in which He is not both 'yes' and 'no', but rather constantly 'yes' to the word of His covenant. As we will see, this decisiveness is not hasty, but rather full of strong, strong love. The terseness also shows the futility of the political aligning and scheming that Hoshea had undertaken - it fell like a house of cards.

Removed From The Presence Of The Lord (vv. 7-23).

Verse 7 explains what this section of the chapter is about - it is to provide the theological and prophetic understanding of these events. It makes clear that what has happened to Israel is the action of God's holy, and considered, and thorough, judgment which comes because of His

faithfulness to the covenant, even in the face of Israel's unfaithfulness. He remains their God in the action of the judgment. Judgment begins with the household of God.

Their unfaithfulness was spiritual adultery: false worship and the adoption of a false law with that worship, and the abandoning of true worship and the true law (vv. 7b-12). In verse 9 we are told that this was done secretly. Probably what is meant here is that there was the attempt to syncretise, to call the worship of Baal, the worship of the Lord. The reference to watch towers and fortified places points out that this idolatry was spread from the smallest settlements to the largest cities in Israel.

The prophets come in the action of the love of God to warn and to call the people back to their husband-Lord (vv. 13-17). Note that the prophets are not revolutionary - they do not come to create a new order, but to call back to the reality that the Lord has established. The people follow in the Exodus tradition of being stiff-necked - that is proud and unyielding, stubborn and resentful towards the Lord and His discipline. See Exodus 32:9, 33:3,5, 34:9, Deuteronomy 9:6,13, 10:16 (note the call to come out of stubbornness), Jeremiah 5:23, 7:26, 16:12, 17:23, 19:15, Nehemiah 9:16,17,29. Acts 7:51 shows that stubbornness still present in Israel, and 19:19 indicates how we should respond to stubbornness towards the message of the Gospel. Hebrews 12:1,-17 shows how stubbornness may come to Christian people as spiritual apathy, and warns us to turn from it, by strengthening our arms and knees in the way of the Lord.

The removing of the people from His presence in verse 18 may be linked to the following verses (21-23), in which case it refers to the start of the rebellion in the sins of Jeroboam and the closing off by him of access to the worship at Jerusalem. It is probably better though to take it to refer to the invasion by Shalmaneser and the exile of the people to foreign lands (which is what v. 23 seems to indicate). This then identifies the presence of the Lord with the land of Israel. All this is the action of the personal and jealous wrath of the Lord. And yet it is not the full abandonment of the people (as Hosea has indicated) - they will be brought back through saving grace. It will take full abandonment, but that will be borne by one who stands for the people of God in the terrible place of judgment - Christ on the Cross.

Meanwhile, Back In Samaria...(vv. 24-41).

These verses spell out the policy of resettlement that Shalmaneser undertook in the North when the Israelites had been deported. He filled the land with peoples from other nations that he had conquered. This was (and is) a fairly common military tactic of weakening nationalism and possible rebellion. Yet the Lord still remained Lord of Israel, and so his judgments came on those who were now in His presence but not worshipping according to the Law (v. 25). What resulted from this was that a priest of the Lord was sent back to them to bring true worship to bear, but again this worship was syncretised with other gods - see verses 27-41. It was that way still when this was read by the exiles of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in Babylon some 150 years later. This chapter serves as a warning to them, as they look forward to their return to the land.

7. Hezekiah, Repentant Believer

In 2Kings 18:1-20:21 we have set out for us the life and ministry of Hezekiah. His was a long reign - twenty nine years - and a good one. The narrator's summary of Hezekiah (18:3-8) is very positive, with his reign being described as exemplary in the reigns of the southern kingdom. He had been faithful in worship and had removed the unauthorised high places, the Baal stones and the Asherah poles. The bronze snake fashioned by Moses in the events of Numbers 21:4-9 had also become an object of false worship, and so this venerable relic had to be destroyed. Hezekiah was faithful in observing the commandments of the Lord, and so the Deuteronomistic blessings flowed to him.

His rebellion from Assyrian overlordship (18:7), which had been introduced by Ahaz, was part of that faithfulness, but Hezekiah had mixed that with faithlessness by turning to the Egyptian power for alliance and protection. We are not told that by the narrator, but Isaiah 31:1-9 backs up the assertion of the Rabshakeh in 18:19-21. The majority of the material concerning Hezekiah's reign deals with this judgment of this faithlessness.

The Lord's judgment came as an invasion. Hezekiah's initial response was to try to appease the Assyrians by paying a huge tribute (18:13-16), but this was fruitless. The issue was not one of 'Which was the better power to be aligned with?' but the real question is 'Who is the Lord?' Assyria had set itself up as the determiner of history (and so there is the call to hear not the word of the Lord, but the word of the great king, the King of Assyria - 18:19,27,28,31) and as the bringer of covenant blessing and cursing (18:31-32,33-35). The issue is not political. The Rabshakeh showed that the issue was one of the honour of the Lord against all the idols.

Ellul shows that Rabshakeh's argument has a number of points, all of which we see still in the case that non-believers make against God and the action of His reign. Firstly, he points out the necessity of political power and not simply words. He shows the futility of relying on God when clearly human means are needed to achieve any ends at all. Yet we know throughout Scripture that God has told and retold his people that they are to rely on words and not human means, and not simply words, but the Word of promise of God himself. So, manna is to be left uncollected and unstored, when human prudence says the opposite; a son is to be killed, when he is the one to inherit the covenant promise; thousands of men are to be turned away by Gideon and only 300 called to battle, when facing an immense enemy; David goes out to battle against Goliath without the sword, helmet and armour of Saul; starving widows give the last of their provisions to feed the prophet or to glorify the temple. Jesus himself commands us to go out with no money bag, no spare tunic, no sandals.

The second plank in his propaganda is to point out Hezekiah's failure. Unwittingly he pronounces a divine judgment on Hezekiah's seeking out of Egyptian alliance. Rabshakeh's reproach is true even if falsely motivated: God's people should not rely on Egypt. Hezekiah grasps this word from the Lord hidden under the spouting of Rabshakeh. How often it is that the world and the devil in their accusation put the finger on the sorest spot! We must not accept their advice or motivation, but we must look beyond that to the judgment which God pronounces. This judgment may be the very opposite to that which the world has in view. So, God's identification of sin in His people is for forgiveness and grace and not destruction. We must know God's logic in the events of our lives. Rabshakeh sees the logical response to his

threats to be that Judah should return to Assyria; God's logic is that Judah must trust none but Him.

The third element that Rabshakeh introduces is that of promise and gift: 'Abandon trust in the Lord and you will find us to be very trustworthy! We will make you politically strong, with horses.' This is linked to the fourth element which is to say that Hezekiah would be unwise to trust in the Lord because in fact he has acted against the god of the place in the removal of the high places, and 'holy' things such as the Canaanite deities, and the bronze snake. Obviously the fame of Hezekiah's reforms goes before him, but the Assyrian general is totally unable to understand them. What he cannot understand is that the Lord is not a god like other gods, and that when He confronts the so-called gods, there can only be annihilation. There is no connection between the gods of this world and the God of Heaven, who is totally other than all we would imagine. To Rabshakeh, the confusion of God and idol is sensible, a drawing on all that is religious and spiritual, the pragmatic and utilitarian use of religion. But this has no place in faithfulness, where we serve God for His ends and glory rather than employ religion and idols to further our own ends.

Rabshakeh's argument is essentially contradictory, as is the testimony of all who stand against God. For he cannot fully deny the reality of the Lord, even though he will attempt to do so. So in 18:25 he claims divine authority in his action. He has come at the word of the Lord, which word he does not himself believe. He attempts to exploit this word and use it for his own ends, but it is undoubtedly true that he has come in the providence and determination of the Lord. (Note: the prophet confirms this assertion of Rabshakeh in 19:25-28.) He has come as the scourge and discipline of the Lord for Hezekiah's sin, but this is the proof of the Lord's refusal to abandon His people, not the opposite. It is a scourge which is brought with the purpose of grace. It is a scourge which Hezekiah receives with repentance and faith. So the scourge will be lifted. the Lord does not punish forever; in wrath he remembers mercy; he desires not the death of a sinner.

We see the contradiction in his speech when Rabshakeh finally turns where all who oppose the people of God finally turn, the real object of their enmity and hatred - God Himself. He claims divine authority in his action and he warns of displeasing the god of the land, and yet he belittles this god, the Lord of Hosts. He opposes himself to God and reduces God to the status of an idol. The king of Assyria is given divine status greater than that of any idol. Hezekiah rightly does not enter into debate at this point for to attempt to defend the Lord would in fact tacitly agree with Rabshakeh's word. The true justification of God is to hear and live in His Word. Counter-propaganda cannot be used against propaganda. There can only be the declaration of the Word, and the timely refusal to speak that Word, which itself speaks volumes of the judgment of God.

The Lord Himself will answer the word of Rabshakeh, and so Hezekiah sends to the prophet to hear the Word of God. His anguish in 19:1-4 can only be understood in terms of anguish at the dishonouring and disgracing of the name of God, not as a sense of despair, or hopelessness, or fear. The Lord acts in part measure (19:7-8) in dealing with Assyria, perhaps with the purpose of giving opportunity for repentance, but that opportunity is ignored (19:9-13). Assyria refuses to see that the turn of events is from the hand of the Lord. So Hezekiah goes again to the Lord, this time directly in prayer in the Temple (19:14-19) and not through the prophet. Hezekiah is exemplary because he knows the limits of political power; he resists the temptation to take up God's cause.

He does not even badger God to take up his cause and give him victory. His prayer is a confession of faith. In the face of ranting unbelief, there is no debate, no apologetic, only confession. 'O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.'

Hezekiah does recognise the facts of the situation - what has been said of the idols of the nations is true: they have been unable to deliver their worshippers. But these were only idols and not God. It is easy to debunk an idol - cynical comedians do it all the time. But there is no question of the Lord being debunked. The prophetic word then comes in reply to thže prayer (19:20-34). And then the verdict, the true speech of the Lord is put into action in history (19:35-37). Note the reversal of judgments: the gods of Assyria are not able to save Sennacherib from even his own family!

At the end of his reign, Hezekiah again foolishly seeks alliance with a strong political power, this time Babylon, and the word of judgment is brought through the prophet Isaiah (20:12-21). The action of Hezekiah has in fact set in train the events of the invasion of the southern kingdom. Perhaps this judgment is reversible if Hezekiah again responds in faith - that may be the implication of the healing which has happened at the beginning of the chapter (20:1-11). But rather than repentant and active faith, Hezekiah responds with lethargy and weariness. The prophecy does not apply to his lifetime; his zeal is not so much now for the honour of the Lord and of Jerusalem but for his own ease.

8. Manasseh, Destroyer of Judah

In 2Kings 21:1-18 we are given the Deuteronomist's account of the life of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh. It differs in some important respects from the account given in the Chronicler's accounts of Manasseh's reign, most notably in that the Deuteronomist does not include any reference to an Assyrian captivity of Manasseh (which is confirmed in Assyrian inscriptions) and a subsequent repentance and prayer, of which the Chronicler lets us know (see 2Chr. 33:11-20). (This prayer of repentance is also part of the Old Testament Apocrypha, The Prayer of Manasseh.) The Deuteronomist is writing now with prophetic purpose, and wants to impress on us the certainty and indispensability of the judgment coming on Jerusalem. Manasseh's repentance does not swerve God from this purpose and so it does not feature in this account of the history of Israel.

In 2Kings 20:16-18 Isaiah had prophesied that the folly of Hezekiah in pandering to the Babylonians would lead to the invasion of Jerusalem and the exile of the kingdom in Babylon. The reign of Manasseh is the act that confirms this judgment of God. 2Kings 23:26 and 24:2-4 indicate that the exile is inevitable following Manasseh's reign, even given the reforms of Josiah. The promised land was not given to the people of God until the iniquity of the Amorites was ripe (Gen. 15:16). Now the iniquity of God's people has reached its full measure and the timely judgment of God will not be held back.

Manasseh came to rule when he was twelve years old (21:1). (Some commentators believe that there may have been a ten year co-regency with his father Hezekiah, but this seems to be an unnecessary speculation.) His reign was a long and gruesome 55 years - the longest of any of the kings of Judah, even than that of David - and it was also possibly the worst of the reigns. The length of the reign impresses on us that this is the action of God in judgment. Manasseh was given free rein in his evil; God had handed over his people to their sins (cf. Roms. 1:18-32). The whole nation, godly or wicked, suffered under this judgment.

Manasseh's reign was marked by an unrestrained casting off of the reforms of his father and embracing of the idols that surround him. And in his thorough pursuit of idolatry, he seduced the people to follow him - so 21:2 links with 21:9 as a bracket to the account of Manasseh's deeds. Manasseh lived during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal of Assyria, when Assyrian power was at its height. Judah was a vassal state during this time, but 'there is no evidence that Assyria enforced any vassal to change his religious policy, except in as far as he had to acknowledge his overlord's god as the one who would exact revenge for any infringement of a covenant-treaty, a copy of which may have been placed in the Temple.' (D. J. Wiseman) The only conclusion we can reach about Manasseh's decision to pursue idolatry was that it was his own decision.

His idolatry was thorough and went to levels that had not been present in Judah before (21:2-9). As with kings before, he followed the practices of the nations around about, and he syncretised worship of the Lord with worship of the local deities at the high places. He involved himself in Baal worship and made an Asherah pole, following the example of Ahab in the north. He bowed down to the stars, following the astrological worship of Assyria and Babylon, and even built altars to these false gods within the two courts of the Temple (21:4, cf. 2Chr. 33:3b-5). This introduction of idolatry into the temple is the new note within Manasseh's wickedness. He did not even syncretise any more (as Ahaz had done with the

altar design from Damascus, and Israel had done with the golden calf, giving it the name of the Lord). It was open defiance of the Lord, calling on another name in the very place where the Lord has set His Name. The burning of the son and occultism also is open defiance of the Name of the Lord (21:6, cf. Lev. 20:1-5).

The Lord is jealous for His Name - in fact His Name is Jealous (Ex. 34:14, Ezek. 39:25). In His Name we are given the revelation of the character, presence, and action of God. If the Lord were not jealous for His Name, He would not be jealous for His own holiness! When He set His name on the Tabernacle/Temple, He opened up access to Himself. To know His Name is to be able to call to Him. This access is not magical or powerful over God (as may have been understood in pagan settings) - there is the freedom and elusiveness of His Name, 'I am who I am' (Ex. 3:14-15). It is access of grace, not of power, that is given to His people. The sovereignty and grace of the Name of God is exegeted for us by Him in Exodus 34:5-7. The manner in which the Lord put His Name on the Tabernacle/Temple is terribly important too - He baptised it with the overflowing glory of His presence, so that no other was able to stand there, not even the ministers of God (Ex. 40:34,35, 1Kings 8:10-11)! When Christian believers are baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the glory and presence of the Lord fills them and no other is able to stand before them! No more idols, and no more mediators! There is in Christ, the one mediator, the immediacy of the presence of God in all His fullness; there is full access to the throne of grace.

What an appalling evil then to set another name in this place! Particularly of evil note is the placing of the carved Asherah pole in the temple (21:7). It stands totally against the covenant grace of God, and so can only bring covenant judgment. The prophets bring this covenant word of judgment (21:10-15). Note that in verse 12 the judgment is brought by the Lord, the God of Israel - again covenant faithfulness is revealed in judgment (this name, God of Israel, is used also 32 times in Jeremiah). This is a recurring theme of the book, like the chorus of a majestic hymn. In the judgment, Jerusalem is like a bowl. The judgment is thorough - it involves exile (the wiping clean of the bowl) and the reversal and overthrow of all social institutions (turning the bowl over). Those who hear of the judgment will be numbed by it - their ears left ringing. The judgment will be of the same severity as used against Ahab in the north. But it does not result in the bowl being broken. There is mercy remembered in wrath! Unlike a vessel decreed for destruction, this vessel, as unholy as it has become, is one destined for grace and glory, a vessel on which will be inscribed, 'Holy to the Lord'. This will be the healing and cleansing and purging judgment of God, which points to the great judgment of the cross.

From Chronicles we hear of Manasseh's repentance and reforms, but this was only short lived and was immediately overthrown by his son, Amon. He was removed after two years by assassination, and a good king, Josiah, his son, succeeded him.

9. Josiah, Wholehearted Man of God

Josiah was the last 'great' king of Judah. His reign was lengthy - 31 years - which is nearly ten years longer than the total reign of the four kings who followed him until Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Babylonians. He began his reign while very young (eight years old) and also died tragically young (forty years old). Josiah's rule is marked by two seemingly opposite truths, which remain in stark, unrelieved tension with each other. On the one hand, Josiah is the most righteous king Judah ever had, but on the other hand, God has irreversibly decided to destroy Judah for the unfaithfulness of idolatry. In this we see the theme of what Ellul calls 'inutility'. Our faithfulness is not to be governed by its effectiveness in reaching certain ends or guaranteeing certain outcomes. Faithfulness will very often change nothing. In fact, faithfulness may only serve to further and hasten the judgment of God. Faithfulness must be on the basis of faithfulness only. Genuine faith transcends any desire for gain, even the gain of God's blessing. The covenant of God is '...no commercial arrangement, no religious transaction entered into with the hope of personal benefit.' (R. Nelson) In his covenant faithfulness, Josiah shows us what it means to love God with all our heart, soul and strength.

Unlike Joash, who had been largely influenced by the tutelage of the high priest Jehoiada and who fell into foolishness when Jehoiada died, Josiah had a personal zeal for the Lord. The reforms that occurred came at his instigation. He is typified as a king who followed unswervingly in the ways of David, doing right in the eyes of the Lord (22:1-2). The narrative speaks very little of the many events of his reign other than the purification of the worship. This began ten years into his reign (22:3-10). The only way to understand this reform is not economic or political, but in terms of faithfulness. It was a continuation of the Temple repair of Joash, and bore similar marks of trust (22:5-7). In the beginning of this process of restoration, the Book of the Law was found in the Temple. Quite likely this was the copy of Deuteronomy that the king should have been reading day by day. It was recognised immediately, but not its significance - Shaphan the secretary mentioned its discovery to the king almost as a throwaway line.

The significance of the book was recognised by Josiah on hearing it read aloud. The Word cut him like a two-edged sword (22:11). The covenant promised blessing and curse, and Josiah recognised that Judah is as good as dead given covenant judgment. The action of the tearing of clothes is the action of mourning for the dead. Having initiated the repairs, Josiah took another initiative - he commanded a delegation to go and enquire of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah (22:12-14). The Word of God through her (22:15-20) was not overly encouraging in human terms. The king had sent to find out how the nation stands in the face of the anger of the Lord. Huldah's prophetic answer fell into two halves - vv. 15-17 and 18-20. Firstly she pointed to the unswerving determination of the Lord to cleanse by judgment. Secondly she showed that the Lord is not unmindful of Josiah's faithfulness - in fact He has been attentive to all that Josiah has been doing. He is promised peace in the middle of the judgments.

Particularly, the Lord has noted Josiah's grief over the coming judgment. There is a terrible evil in gloating over judgment. Edom is punished for it (the message of Obadiah). Jonah has to come to repent of that viciousness of attitude toward Nineveh. Jesus wept for Jerusalem as he saw the coming judgment on her - Josiah serves as a type of Christ in his zeal and sorrow for the Temple and people of God. Yet there is the proper worship of God in the face of His judgments, as the hymns of praise in the Revelation of John show us - see Rev. 11:15-18,

12:10-12, 15:1-4, 15:4-7, 18:2-3, 19:1-9. Such worship does not gloat - gloating is always self-righteous. It is the worship which springs from grace and which stands in fear of the great holiness of the Lord.

Josiah was not disheartened by the Word. He knew the inutility of his action, given the prophetic word, and yet he set in place a covenant renewal ceremony for all the nation (23:1-3). Absolutely everyone was present and they all pledged themselves to the covenant. In this way Josiah ensured the outworking of judgment on Judah. He knew that there was no easy peace, that the wounds of the people of God could not be healed easily. He did not seek to avoid the pain that true healing would bring.

The fourth initiative (23:4-20) of the king began with the purification of the temple from the idolatrous altars and articles. Pagan priests were removed and the high places were closed. The cult prostitutes linked with Baal and Asherah worship were deposed from the Temple of the Lord. The reforms then spread out to the countryside, and the worship was centralised at Jerusalem. Josiah was careful to desecrate the idolatrous articles and places so that they could not be used again. There was an orderliness and firmness about this action. What is clear is that the idolatrous perversion and pollution of the worship had been longstanding (from Solomon onwards) and had been shockingly deeply ingrained. The pollution of idolatry was spread like plutonium in the Maralinga lands. Yet even such a thorough reform could not stay the hand of the Lord (23:26-27). Judgment is decreed and will come. Josiah's reforms may have been largely institutional and outward - there seems much evidence that the heart of the people was still filled with wanderlust. Only the cleansing of judgment, finally effected in the Cross, would bring about this deep cleansing.

The fifth initiative of Josiah (23:21-23) was to command the celebration of the Passover. This festival had not been celebrated for centuries. Idolatrous identification the Lord who brought the people out of Egypt with the local idols had led to a forgetting of the great act of salvation that had brought the people into the land. A true renewal will be seen in true celebration of salvation. Where the Word of God is rightly heard, there will be the great knowledge of God's saving acts, made known to us in Christ Jesus. Josiah's reform sprang from this fountainhead.

10. The South - Subjected To Futility In Hope

From the untimely and unfortunate death of Josiah, the rest of the book of 2Kings records, through the reigns of four more kings, the rapid and total dismantling of the nation of Judah. All the institutions which had been so gloriously introduced in the first book during the reign of Solomon had decayed chapter by chapter and at the last the pace of dissolution snowballed. Judah collapsed under the punitive brutality of, firstly, Egyptian vassalage (2Kings 23:31-35) and then, two Babylonian invasions (24:1, 25:1-21), and finally a tragic return to Egypt (25:25-26). The narrator pulls no punches in describing these events - the utter tragedy of what has happened in Judah hits home with relentless and terrible force. And he wants us to now particularly that this comes to Judah by the hand of the faithful God of covenant.

Chapter 25 shows the absolutely thorough way in which Judah had been judged - not one skerrick of hope can be gleaned from what remains; the absolute worst has happened. Firstly there was the terrible siege of the city for two years - and the famine which accompanied it (25:1-3). Then the army and king deserted and attempted to flee, leaving the people to whatever fate befell them (25:4-6). But the king Zedekiah was himself captured, his sons were slaughtered in front of him and then he was blinded, put into chains and taken into exile (25:6-7). The kingship having been reduced to nothing, the Lord then sent Nebuchadnezzar against His city. The temple, the palace and the notable buildings were burned down (25:8-9), and the wall which protected the city was torn down (25:10). The skilled and notable people, the leadership were carted off to Babylon or killed (25:18-21), and the poor were left to maintain what was left (25:11-12). All the great gifts of Solomon to the Lord for Temple were melted down and taken away (25:13-17). The summary is that even the land is now no longer Judah's (25:21). There was nothing left by which Judah could think positively that 'It'll be alright, we'll make it.'

The only thing that was left to Judah was God Himself and the word of His promise. It was this word of promise that stood behind the comforting words of Gedaliah (25:22-24). He echoed Jeremiah (29:4-23) and Daniel, speaking the comfortable words that, if the people live quietly, obediently and hopefully under the judgment of God, 'it will be well with [them].' It was the word of the false prophets that gave false hope of imminent rescue from Babylon (see Jer. 28:1-17, cf. 2Kings 25:25-26). (The people of God are foolish and rebellious to reject the Lord's word of judgment, and to be triumphalist in their view of how God deals with them. It causes only deeper grief. Shall we receive good from him, and not bad? In the midst of judgment we must have the spirit of God to cry out, 'You are just! You are just! The God of all the earth is just!') The rejection of the judgments of the Lord led to the assassination of Gedaliah and then to the return of the people to Egypt. This is the last nail in the coffin. The exodus has been reversed; Israel is in captivity in Egypt yet again. The hankering after Egypt has now issued in the judgment of being returned there.

This seems to be a hopeless situation for Judah and for the promises of God. As Ezekiel says, 'Our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' (Ezek. 37:11). Yet God is acting in covenant faithfulness, and this is the basis for hope to God's people in exile. The last word in the book (25:27-30) seems to give a glimmer of light of the restoration of the people by God. There is a wild card in the deck of history! Jehoiachin is shown favour by the new Babylonian king, and in some ways this is a further low point. The king now receives grace/favour from, and his

head is lifted up by, Babylon, and not the Lord. Yet underneath this is the grace and promise of the Lord. At least the hope of the return of the Davidic kingship is a possibility.

In many ways the later return of Israel from exile, spelled out in Ezra and Nehemiah, did not really redress the losses that came in the judgment. The temple was rebuilt, but in a far less glorious state than before, and its dedication was not marked by the same outshining of the shekinah glory that had marked the dedication of tabernacle and the first temple. The kingship was not reinstated, except in the servile manner of the Herodian kingship. The nation remained from that point onwards continually in subjection to foreign powers - Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. It is still a nation in captivity and in the judgment of God.

The coming of Jesus Christ is then incredibly significant. The covenant hope is finally realised. Jesus is a direct descendant of Jeconiah (another form of Jehoiachin, the last king) just as he is of David, the first king, and as he is of Abraham the receiver of the first covenant promise (Matt. 1:1-17). When he was led down to Egypt and brought out again, he joined his people in the exodus reversal, and showed us that he is the one who leads us out of Egypt, out of all captivity and slavery. The Jews thought they had never been slaves to anyone - Jesus is the one who comes to rescue us from deepest slavery of all, the slavery to sin and rebellion against God. He is the one who brings true restoration. He is the one who will rebuild and glorify the Temple and who brings us to the full knowledge of the presence and the glory of God.

So as the people in exile were caused to look in hope to the coming of Messiah, so we are to look to him in faith for the church. We look again to the words of Isaiah, 62:6-12:

6 Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, 7 and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth. 8 The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have laboured; 9 but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."

10 Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. 11 Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." 12 And they shall be called The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.

Chronology in Kings

Bible refs.	Kings of Judah/Israel	Contemporary prophets	BC	Kings of Assyria:	Babylonia:	Egypt:
UNITED KINGDOM						
1 Sa. 16:1 1 Ki. 2:10	David (40) (1010-970)	Nathan	1010	Ashur-rabi II (1010-970)		Dynasty XXI
1 Ki. 1:11	Solemon (40) (970-930)*	Gad	970	Tiglath-pileser II (966-935)		
DIVIDED KINGDOM						
JUDAH			ISRAEL			
1 Ki. 12:1-24 12:25-14:20	Rehoboam (17) (930-913)		930	Ashur-dan II (934-912)		Dynasty XXII
1 Ki. 15:1-8	Abijah (3) (913-910)					
1 Ki. 15:9-24	Asa (41) (910-869)					
1 Ki. 15:25-31	Nadab (2) (909-908)					
1 Ki. 15:32-16:7	Baasha (24) (908-886)		900			
1 Ki. 16:8-14	Eiah (2) (886-885)			Ashur-nasir-aph II (883-859)		
1 Ki. 16:15-20	Zimri (7 days) (885)					
1 Ki. 16:21-22	Tibni (5) (885-881)					
1 Ki. 16:21-28	Omri (12)* (885-874)	Elijah				
1 Ki. 16:29-22:40	Ahah (22)* (874-853)		870			
1 Ki. 22:41-50	Jehoshaphat (25)* (872-848)			Shalmaneser III (858-824)		
1 Ki. 22:51 2 Ki. 1:18	Ahaziah (2) (853-852)					
2 Ki. 1:17 3:1-8:15	Jehoram (12) (852-841)	Elisha	850			
2 Ki. 8:16-24	Jehoram (8-)* (853-842)					
2 Ki. 8:25-29 9:27-29	Ahaziah (2) (842-841)					
2 Ki. 9:1-10:36	Jehu (28)* (841-814)					
2 Ki. 11:1-16	Athaliah (7) (841-835)					
2 Ki. 11:17-12:21	Joash (40) (835-796)		800			
2 Ki. 13:1-9	Jehoahaz (17)* (814-798)					

Bible refs.	Kings of Judah/Israel	Contemporary prophets	BC	Kings of Assyria:	Babylonia:	Egypt:
2 Ki. 13:10-25	Jehoahaz (16)* (798-781)*	Joel				
2 Ki. 14:1-22	Amaziah (29) (796-767)	Jonah	795		Shalmaneser IV (793-773)	
2 Ki. 14:23-29	Jeroboam II (41)* (793-753)	Amos				
2 Ki. 15:1-7	Azariah/Uzziah (52)* (792-740)	Hosea				
2 Ki. 15:8-12	Zachariah (6 months) (753)					
2 Ki. 15:13-15	Shallum (1 month) (753/2)	Micah			Tiglath-pileser III (745-727)	Phankhy (747-716)
2 Ki. 15:16-22	Menahem (10)* (752-742)	Isaiah				
2 Ki. 15:23-26	Pekahiah (2) (741-740)					
2 Ki. 15:32-38	Jotham (16)* (750-735)		750			
2 Ki. 15:27-31	Pekah (20)* (752?-732)*					
2 Ki. 16:1-19	Ahaz (16)* (735-719)					
2 Ki. 17:1-23	Hoshea (9)* (732-722)*		730		Shalmaneser V (727-722)	
2 Ki. 18:1-20:21	Hezekiah (29)* (715/727*-698)	(Fall of Samaria 722)*			Sargon II (722-705)	Shabako (716-650)
2 Ki. 21:1-18	Manasseh (55)* (697-642)	Nahum	700		Sennacherib (705-681)	Taharqa (690-664)
2 Ki. 21:19-26	Amon (2) (642-640)	Zephaniah	650		Esarhaddon (681-669)	Psamtichus I (664-610)
2 Ki. 22:1-23:30	Josiah (31) (640-609)	Jeremiah			Ashurbanipal (669-627)	
2 Ki. 23:31-33	Jehoahaz (3 months) (609)					
2 Ki. 23:34-24:7	Jehoiakim (11) (609-598)	Daniel	600			Nubakad-negar II (605/561)
2 Ki. 24:8-17	Jehoiachin (3 months)* (597)	Ezekiel				Necho II (610-595)
2 Ki. 24:18-25:26	Zedekiah/Mattaniah (11) (597-586) (Sack of Jerusalem 587/6)	Obadiah?	587/6			Psamtik II (595-589)
2 Ki. 25:22-26	Gedaliah (3 months)* (Governor)		580			Apries/Hophra (589-570)
						Amasis II (570-526)

KEY () Total years of reign * Reign overlaps as co-regent
 (-) Less than a year † Named in extra-biblical documents