

23 PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

ELDERS\MINISTERS TRAINING



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The concept of a spiritual leader stresses the **moral center** of the leader,

Characteristics of Spiritual Leaders

1. **Surrender to God's Sovereign Guidance** (He is submissive to and filled with the Holy Spirit of God)

You can not commit to the sovereign will of God without being baptized in Jesus Name and filled with the gift of the Holy Ghost. You must have the spirit of God to know and obey the will of God. "They that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth". Obedience to God is a sign of worship and is more important than sacrifice. "Obedience is better than sacrifice". The Spirit of God will help us hear His voice and know it is Him and submit to His will, even if it does not make sense. We have no more will when we are in God; it is His will we follow. God must be the driving force by which we do anything. He leads and guides and we follow, trusting in every word we hear Him say.

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2. **Humility**

A leader must be submissive to God and know that all that God has entrusted to him comes with a price. Self-will and pride must be crucified. A good spiritual leader does not try to impress others with his skill or his knowledge because he realizes that all he has comes from God. As quick as God has given it to him, He can take it away. God is the granter and giver of wisdom and knowledge. All that we have and are is because of Him. We can never think it is us. We are just clay used by God and we should always be appreciative of God choosing us to use for His glory. Humility is the consistent desire of the spiritual leader to exalt God instead of himself. A leader understands how insignificant he is when compared to a Holy, sovereign God.

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3. Strength

Having a spiritual backbone is necessary for a good leader. He can not be swayed by popular opinion or status that may be within or outside the fellowship that is contrary to the word God. Strength is directly related to a leader's relationship with God and obedience to God. A leader can have no stronger bond than the bond he has with God. "His strength is made perfect in our weakness". Strength of a leader can be recognized in his understanding that the battle is not his, but the Lords. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; therefore we must put on the whole Armour of God and use its spiritual weapons to fight against the armies of darkness. A leader's strength is in God, not himself.

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4. Benefit God's People

Leaders do not work for themselves, but for the people they serve. Ministry means to serve. A leader must constantly think how the word or a program or a talent in the church can be used to enhance, encourage and benefit the people of God. His life is about serving the people as he is being led by God. He works for God. The world is established to take out and take away from the people of God. The ministry must be structured to pour back into them power, strength and encouragement through the anointing and word of God. No one can make it by themselves, we all need support. There is no better place to receive that than in the house of God.

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5. They lead others into their own encounters with God.

A leader finds ways to share the love of God to others and to encourage them to find out more about God. He realizes that getting to know God is the foundation for a believer becoming a strong saint. He understands we will all have to stand before God to give an account for our life. Therefore, he works to prepare people for that day. He is not selfish, but is constantly concerned about the people he leads as God will hold him accountable for what is taught to His people. He has no problem in sharing how he came to know God and how his relationship with God has grown over time. He knows that a strong saint must have a strong relationship with God and that will make the church stronger.

As he leads through the direction of God, followers begin to discover the call God has on their life. They find value in having a purpose driven life in God. This begins their walk and relationship with God.

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6. They lead others into transformation

A leader understands that salvation is about transformation. Getting rid of the old man and old ways and taking on the life of Christ is the goal. Transformation will be different by person. Some will transform quickly and others will take more time. A leader recognizes this and works to minister to people on their level. God knew when to be compassionate and when to challenge. Salvation is not a one-time event, but it is a way of life. It is the constant evolution of our relationship with God. It does not stop but it is ongoing. True transformation allows the believer to clearly see how the right relationship with God has truly changed their life. It is this transformation that becomes the believer's testimony.

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7. They impact their atmosphere.

When a leader walks into the room, it does not take long for those around him to notice that they have arrived. There is a shift in the spirit when a leader comes in. They can bring calmness in chaos, set direction within confusion and provide Godly insight in matters of importance. They are the final authority, but his leaders are so in tune with his spirit he never has to exercise that authority. People love to be around him to glean from the wisdom and knowledge God has bestowed upon him. They help people see old things in new ways. They gain a following because of who they are—not because of a position they hold. No matter when you see them, they are the same. They are never too high and never too low. People are drawn to them because of their attitude and demeanor. When people see them they say things like, “there is something different about him”. Spiritual leaders influence more than they direct, and they inspire more than they instruct. Similar to how managers lead and bosses dictate.

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8. He possesses and practices discipline in his life.

Self-control is a strong attribute of a good leader. They are disciplined in family, work, salvation and are good stewards of the blessings of God. They see the bigger picture and understand that to whom much is given, much is required. From top to bottom they are concerned with maintaining a true Godly image in attitude, action and performance. This discipline allows them to get more done than most. Other mistakenly interprets it as arrogance, but a disciplined life allows you to set priorities and accomplish meaningful tasks for God. Leaders are consistent in their discipline and it is a part of their character. Discipline allows them to control their flesh and allows them to see and hear the devil when he arrives.

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9. He reads the Word of God and good books consistently.

A leader understands that their strength, power and direction come from the Word of God. The Lord can not bring things back to your remembrance if you have not read it. He seeks, asks for and uses God's wisdom found in the word of God and in life's experiences. He never believes he has all the answers and is constantly seeking the mind of God. He reads other literature and books to enhance his understanding of God, but the Bible is his source of foundational authority. Knowledge must be obtained through study. Knowledge teaches you what you know and wisdom teaches you how to use what you know. These work hand in hand with God's word.

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10. He has godly friends and stays accountable.

He is open to everyone regardless of their situation or life's choices that he may show them the way of God. He understands that the life he lives must speak to the forgiveness, love and mercy of God. He holds those close to him accountable to the word of God and to leadership of the church. The bible clearly states we must come out from among them, but it does not mean we separate ourselves to where we cannot be an effective witness of the power of God. We are the ambassadors of God; we must represent the land we come from. There is a difference in being spiritually right and morally right. Morally right is based on man. Spiritually right is based on the word of God. Religion is based on what you do, but Salvation is based on what God does. This walk is all about God.

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11. He knows how to forgive.

He never forgets that if it was not for God forgiving him, he would not be where he is today. He does not judge, but will encourage and challenge those through the word of God to live according to God’s precepts and commandments. He clearly understands that God did not come down from heaven, clothe himself in humanity, teach, preach, suffer, bled and die such a horrible death, to easily give up on us. God is longsuffering and we should be also. Never forget that we were once on the outside of the arc of safety and God had patience on us. “How often should I forgive my brother?” God will forgive anyone who truly repents. Repentance is not only a “turning from”, but a “turning to”. Leaders teach that and will stand by that as God call us all to repentance.

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12. He finds his acceptance in Jesus.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you”. As long as he is doing the will of God, a leader is comfortable with himself and the decisions he makes, even if the decision is unpopular to those around him. All that he does is done as unto the Lord in the spirit of excellence. He understands that God is the final authority. He is not concerned about the one who can destroy the body, but is concerned about the one who can destroy the body and soul into hell. He does not allow the negativity in people’s attitudes to affect his drive to obey God and complete the call that is on his life.

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13. He prays for others and works to help them succeed.

It is one thing to pray for someone when that is all you can do, but a leader will not only pray but is committed to help when and where he can. He seeks the mind of God in every situation. He understands that sometimes God uses trials and test to get the attention of His people. He understand when to support, when to just pray and when to offer advice. He understands that what we do to the least of these we have done to God. When our brother hurts, we hurt. When they succeed, we succeed. He refuses to think more highly of himself than he ought and boasts only in the power of God. He is not selfish, but is more concerned about others than himself and shows that in how he interacts with those around him.

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14. He is able to articulate vision.

He understands his calling and knows what God has called him to do and is comfortable in doing that and nothing else -- no matter how big the job or how small. He does not put his calling on others. He understands that not everyone is called to do what he does and that is ok. He understands his mission and his direction and stays true to that course. He is willing to accept help to see the vision come to pass. He understands that God sends talent and gifts from many places and he must use what God has sent or God will send them somewhere else. He is not intimidated or threatened by what others can do, but celebrates the fact that God has sent them to their church to support and bring the vision to fruition.

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15. He possesses a sense of urgency for God’s work.

He is not slow full in doing the work of God. He understands that God needs us to be His Ambassadors to a lost and dying generation. He understands that God has surrounded him with help and is not afraid to ask others for it or to even step back and allow someone else to lead that may be more qualified for that particular task. He is not threaten, but understands God fitly joined the body to be together to accomplish His task. What we do, must be done quickly for the kingdom of God. He has a fire within him that cannot be quenched when there is work for the Lord to be done. He is easily frustrated when others do not have the same sense of urgency.

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16. He stands on strong convictions.

His convictions are born out of wanting to be pleasing in the sight of God and being fit to be used for the Kingdom of God. He is not swayed by popular opinion when that opinion is contrary to the word of God. His standards are founded within the scriptures and can be articulated through the word of God. He is a strong individual and not a novice. Others may not agree with his convictions, but they will respect them and him. He knows what the bible says and what is required of him and he is dead set on completing the task. No matter who or what changes, he stands sure on what he believes and is consistent in his convictions.

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17. He is kind.

He understands that if he is going to win friends he must show himself friendly. He smiles and opens himself to others. He does not hide behind walls or throws up defenses to keep people away. He can carry on a conversation and fellowship with others outside the walls of the church. He is comfortable with who he is, without pushing others away. He adapts to the situations he is in, but does not adapt to his surroundings when they are contrary to his convictions or the word of God. People want to be around him because he makes people feel they are the most important person to him.

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18. He has a growing love for Jesus Christ.

The longer a leader is in the right relationship with God, he will learn to thank God for the little things. He becomes increasingly aware of his dependency and need for God in his life and can not go a day without having a conversation with God. Every day with God strengthens his resolve to obey and live a life that is pleasing to Him. Everything about him is wrapped up in God and he will have it no other way. Growing in God is an everyday task and each day can bring about a new revelation in God. A leader looks for those opportunities and chances to learn more about God. The stronger his relationship grows, the more he takes on the characteristics of God.

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19. He loves his family.

When you see him and his family together or in interaction with one another you can see and feel the love of God. He understands that God refers to the church as the bride of Christ and compares his marriage to the church with our natural marriage on earth. He works to honor his wife and leads his children according to the word of God. His family is cognizant of the call on his life and will continually pray for him and support him. They work as one not to bring a reproach upon God, him, the family or his ministry. Family is important to him and he begins training his children when they are young that they may form their own relationship with God. He prioritizes his family.

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20. A sense of call and inner integrity.

Whether the leader is in church, at home or on the job, to him right is right. They will not sacrifice their moral or standards of holiness to comprise, fit in or gain an advantage in any way. They believe in fairness and equity in all things. They are trustworthy and give sound spiritual advice to the benefit of the requestor not to themselves. They have a faith that God will work it out, so they are calm in crises and are not easily excited and never out of control. They understand that once you compromise your integrity for others, it is difficult to get it back and you destroy your witness. They guard their integrity close and work to keep it intact.

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21. Unwavering commitment

A spiritual leader is committed to God, because he realizes God is committed to him. He understands that when he was not thinking about God, God was thinking about him and holding back the hand of the enemy until he obeyed the voice of God. He is committed to prayer, fasting and service to God's people. He and his family are consistent in church attendance. It does not mean he dots every "i" or crosses every "t", but it does mean that every day he strives to please God. God, family and church are his priorities and he is committed to each of them. Trials and tribulations will come, but he has made up in his mind that he will live for God no matter what lies ahead. He understands that life is temporary, but eternity is forever. He is not committed to the world or its cares but is focused on doing the will of God and showing somebody who God really is through the testimony of his life.

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22. Challenging others to their best.

God grants His people favor, grace and mercy, but He also requires obedience. A good leader knows when to apply all appropriately. God gave us His best. He left nothing to chance and ensured the job was complete before leaving earth. We must use the same spirit when ministering to others. Leave nothing to chance. We have one opportunity to make it so we must work like it us up to us and pray like it is up to God. Do not accept second best because God did not give us second best. A leader shows mercy with accountability. Without accountability to God and leadership, you will have chaos and no unity in the ministry. The flesh does not like to be challenged, but a leader is not concerned with that. A leader will speak and hold others accountable in love, but he will hold them accountable because he knows their soul hangs in the balance.

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23. Know when to turn it off

Leaders know when to turn it off to refresh their bodies and minds to be effective for God. He takes care of his body by eating right and exercising. He does not drink, smoke or use drugs that can harm the temple which God is working in. He knows when it is time to sleep and take time for personal hobbies and activities that make him happy. He prioritizes his family and time with his wife and children as he is the priest of the home and they need him also. He knows when to say no and does not assume the role of a savior. That is God's job. Balance is maintained in his life and he recognizes when things are out of kilter and quickly reverts back to a prior state.

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The Study of the Kings of Israel was created by Alan S.L. Wong. His website is located at:

<http://www.vtaide.com/gleanings/Kings-of-Israel/kings.html>

I reached out to Mr. Wong via email and have received expressed written consent via email to reprint his materials for study and distribution to group that has requested the materials. Email of consent was received on January 14, 2013 at 7:36 PM at tbarnettsports@aol.com

Why Study the Kings?

Why should I bother to learn about the kings of Israel? Isn't this just history? And isn't history boring and irrelevant to modern life?

The accounts of the kings, in the Bible's books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, reveal God's expectations for leaders. What does God love in a leader? What does He hate in a leader? The stories of the kings give us the answers.

But why should I care what God wants from *leaders*? I want to know what God wants from ordinary people, not leaders.

But you *are* a leader! No matter who you are, you have a sphere of influence! And God cares how you use that influence!

You have neighbors, relatives, friends at work or school. This is your sphere of influence.

If you are a parent, you have a tremendous sphere of influence. You have more influence over your own children than anyone else, even the president of the United States!

Even if you are a child, you are a leader. Have you ever said, "Mom, will you make the little kids stop following me around?" You are a leader!

In the accounts of the kings, we see [King Saul](#), driven by greed and paranoia, on murderous missions to keep himself on the throne, losing the throne not in spite of his precautions, but because of them.

Alongside him we see the future [King David](#) — hunted and in constant danger, yet so loyal he refused golden opportunities to rid himself of Saul and make himself king — called "a man after God's own heart," guided by God to success in every venture.

We see [King Jeroboam](#), propositioned by God with a [wonderful promise](#), reject that promise in favor of bad advice, and as a result not only lose his own kingship, but in the end, doom the entire kingdom as well.

We see [King Jehoshaphat](#), who also had an [excellent promise](#) from God, believe that promise completely, and thereby defend his kingdom against three united armies each stronger than his own, without sending a single soldier into battle!

We see kings pleasing to God, and kings revolting to God. And we see what made them pleasing or revolting.

What does God love in a leader? What does He hate in a leader? The stories of the kings give us the answers!

Being a great leader, what to watch out for

On day 9 of my consecration, God dropped in my spirit the keys to being a great leader of the people of God. He has instructed me to look at the Kings and rulers of Gods People and what they did and did not do.

Here is the list of the rulers of Israel

Kings of the United Kingdom (c 1025-925 BC)		
King	Relationship to Previous King	God's Judgment
Saul	none	did evil
Ishbosheth*	son	(unknown)
David	none	did right
Solomon (AKA Jedidiah)	son	did right in youth, evil in old age

* The kingdom was divided during Ishbosheth's reign;

David was king over the tribe of Judah.

Kings of Judah (c 925-586 BC)			Kings of Israel (c 925-721 BC)		
King	Relationship to Previous King	God's Judgment	King	Relationship to Previous King	God's Judgment
Rehoboam	son	did evil	Jeroboam	servant	did evil
Abijam (AKA Abijah)	son	did evil			
Asa	son	did right	Nadab	son	did evil
			Baasha	none	did evil
			Elah	son	did evil
			Zimri	captain	did evil
			Omri	captain	did evil
Jehoshaphat	son	did right	Ahab	son	did evil
			Ahaziah	son	did evil
Jehoram (AKA Joram)	son	did evil	Jehoram (AKA Joram)	son of Ahab	did evil
Ahaziah (AKA Azariah or Jehoahaz)	son	did evil			

Athaliah	mother	did evil	Jehu	captain	mixed
Joash (AKA Jehoash)	son of Ahaziah	did right in youth, evil in old age	Jehoahaz	son	did evil
Amaziah	son	did right in youth, evil in old age	Joash (AKA Jehoash)	son	did evil
Uzziah (AKA Azariah)	son	did right	Jeroboam II	son	did evil
			Zachariah	son	did evil
			Shallum	none	did evil (surmised)
			Menahem	none	did evil
			Pekahiah	son	did evil
Jotham	son	did right	Pekah	captain	did evil
Ahaz	son	did evil	Hoshea	none	did evil
Hezekiah	son	did right			
Manasseh	son	did evil	Assyrian captivity		
Amon	son	did evil			
Josiah	son	did right			
Jehoahaz (AKA Shallum)	son	did evil			
Jehoiakim (AKA Eliakim)	son of Josiah	did evil			

Jehoiachin (AKA Coniah or Jeconiah)	son	did evil	Babylonian captivity		
Zedekiah (AKA Mattaniah)	son of Josiah	did evil			
Babylonian captivity					

Color Code Legend:	King did right	King did evil	Other
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Saul

Summary

The biography of King Saul is a tragic story of a good peasant corrupted by having great power thrust upon him, against his own and the LORD's wishes.

The people of Israel had for centuries been governed and rescued from military crisis by local leaders known as "judges." But the judge system had lost public support, and the population demanded that the last judge, the prophet Samuel, reform the political system and name a king to succeed him, in spite of the LORD's warning that this would be a disaster.

At the LORD's direction, Samuel named Saul, a young farmer, to be king. Though Saul didn't want the job and hid, he was quickly found, and a ceremony of anointing was observed. Then Saul, still avoiding the kingship, returned to his father's farm.

But a crisis arose when the Israelite city of Jabesh came under severe attack. Reasoning that national security was a king's job, Saul rose to the occasion and used an ingenious public relations campaign to assemble an army, and Jabesh was rescued. Upon this stunning performance, Saul became a national hero and took his throne.

But in spite of his heroism, Saul was unfit for leadership of God's people. Placing military strategy, pride, and greed above public service and faithfulness to the LORD, Saul ignored his kingly duties of national security, moral leadership, and obedience to the LORD, investing the latter part of his reign in a paranoid hunt for his faithful army general [David](#), whom he wrongly considered a rival.

As a result of many acts of disobedience, the LORD removed Saul from power, and removed his heirs from the throne that should otherwise have been theirs.

Where to read Saul's story: 1 Samuel 8 - 31; 1 Chronicles 10

Saul Chosen as King

Today's⁺ oldest generation can remember how the automobile changed the world, and even young adults remember how different life was before the internet. We have become accustomed to thinking of technology as a big driver of change, and for us, it is. But in Saul's day, politics was the big force driving change in the world. People-groups in Saul's part of the world were evolving from the city-state system to the nation-state system, and everyone recognized the advantages of the conversion.

Israel was under constant threat of invasion, and their enemies were becoming stronger by virtue of this political progress. In addition, Israel's political system was failing, for the godly prophet Samuel was aging, and his sons, in training to succeed him, were too corrupt to be allowed to take his place. Israel had toyed with the nation-state idea since the days of Gideon,¹ and now the nation's local leaders approached Samuel and demanded that he reform the political system to a nation-state, and name a king over Israel.

The LORD's intention was to keep the political system a theocracy, at least for a time. So Samuel, speaking for the LORD, violently objected, pointing out in detail the political corruption that was certain to result from this move. But the people were not to be persuaded. So God told Samuel to meet their demands. Samuel sent the people home with the promise a king would be named.

Meanwhile, Saul was a young man working his father's farm. He was well known locally for his height, being a foot taller than the other tall men. A herd of donkeys had escaped from Saul's farm, and his father sent him to search for them. Saul packed a few days' food and left with a servant. They searched from town to town until their food supply was exhausted, but didn't find the donkeys. Finally, being in Samuel's neighborhood, they decided to visit the prophet and see if he would ask the LORD to help them find the donkeys.

When they arrived they found Samuel, having been prompted in advance by God, preparing a feast. He made Saul his guest of honor, to Saul's bafflement. Samuel told Saul the donkeys had been found. Then in a private meeting, he told him the LORD had selected him to be king of Israel.

To validate this surprising statement, Samuel offered Saul several prophecies as signs, including a prophecy that the LORD's Spirit would change Saul into a different person, and he would do things uncharacteristic of him. All those signs were fulfilled the same day, but Saul, apparently not liking the idea, kept the whole thing a secret.

Nevertheless, Samuel hosted a coronation, inviting the entire nation. As was their custom, they held a lottery to discover the LORD's choice. God arranged for Saul to win the lottery, but when the result was announced, they couldn't find him. They asked God where Saul was, and God replied that he was hiding in the supply depot. When Saul was brought to the fore, the public was impressed with his height and handsome features. They celebrated, chanting "God save the king!"

Then Samuel presented king and people with a great innovation: a written constitution. Centuries ago God had foretold exactly these events, and had supplied Moses with regulations governing the king's actions.² Samuel explained these to the public, and the ceremony ended. Saul returned to his father's farm, and some of the people accompanied him, hoping to lend their support to the new king.

Source: 1 Samuel 8 - 10

Notes:

* This was written in 2002.

¹ Judges 8:22-23

² Deuteronomy 17:14-20

The Rescue of Jabesh

One day when Saul was returning from the field with his oxen, he heard the townspeople crying aloud. He followed the noise and asked what the news was. They told him this story:

The Israelite town of Jabesh was under attack by the Ammonite king Nahash. The people of Jabesh, recognizing their defenseless situation, tendered their surrender. But cruel Nahash would accept their surrender only if every man in Jabesh allowed Nahash to gouge out his

right eye. Nahash was probably leveraging his anticipated victory, reasoning that if the Jabeshites tolerated this, no other Israelite town would have the morale to resist him. The people of Jabesh requested 7 days to recruit an army, agreeing to submit to Nahash's condition if they were then still unable to fight. With the taste of future effortless conquests rich in his mouth, Nahash agreed.

Saul reacted like a true king, treating this as an emergency of the first magnitude. He immediately slaughtered the oxen he had on hand, and cut them into many pieces. He placed the pieces in the hands of his servants and supporters. He sent them to every city and town in Israel with the message, "If you don't want this to happen to your cattle, report for military duty *now!*" Shocked by this startling mode of communication, the men showed up, totally united in sympathy with Jabesh.

Learning of their coming rescue, the men of Jabesh were thrilled. They slyly repeated their message to Nahash, that if no rescuing army came, they would submit to his cruel demand.

King Saul divided his army into three divisions and surrounded the Ammonite army during the night. Toward morning they attacked. Apparently catching the enemy by surprise, they routed them so completely that by afternoon, what survivors were left were so scattered that no two were together. Jabesh was rescued.

Naturally, the nation was elated with this victory. They held a second coronation ceremony for Saul, at which Samuel retired from office, and Saul assumed day-to-day leadership of the nation. Samuel preached a great sermon, admonishing the people to be faithful to the LORD under their new king.

King Saul showed great magnanimity in an occurrence that day. At Saul's original coronation, certain people had opposed his appointment as king. Today, the entire nation came to be Saul's supporters, and they called for the death sentence against those who had opposed Saul earlier. But before anything could be done, Saul nullified their verdict, saying no one would be put to death during the celebration of a great victory given by the LORD.

The people of Jabesh never forgot their debt to Saul. Decades later when Saul was killed in battle and his body desecrated by the enemy, the brave men of Jabesh [risked their lives](#) to retrieve his body and give him an honorable burial.

Source: 1 Samuel 11

Saul's First Disobedience

It wasn't long, however, before King Saul abandoned his noble ideas, and from there his deterioration was continuous.

Failing to keep the momentum of this victory, Saul disbanded the army, keeping only 3,000 troops active. With a third of this tiny force, Saul's enthusiastic son Jonathan attacked Geba, a well-equipped Philistine outpost deep in Israelite territory. Realizing how the Philistines would react, Saul ordered another draft, probably hoping to amass an army as big as for the Jabesh battle, about 330,000 men.

The Philistine reaction was swift and strong. They assembled a massive army, equipped with 3,000 chariots — invincible against Israel's foot soldiers. The Israelites, lacking a

metalworking industry, weren't even equipped with swords or spears. They were badly outmatched in both numbers and equipment.

The prophet Samuel had made arrangements to meet Saul at a certain time, to offer sacrifices and ask the LORD's blessing on this military venture. Many times before, God had given his people great victories, even when they were similarly outmatched.

But as the time passed Israel's soldiers, seeing the brewing crisis and the king's worried state, began to go AWOL. Saul, seeing his army evaporating before his eyes, panicked. Rather than trust the LORD for victory, he decided he needed to stop the loss of manpower. So, without waiting for Samuel to arrive, he offered the sacrifices himself — an act prohibited by the LORD's law.

Just as Saul was finishing, Samuel arrived. Saul tried to make excuses for his violation, but Samuel replied that because of Saul's disobedience, the LORD would remove him from being king, replacing him with “a man after [God's] own heart.”

Source: 1 Samuel 13

Saul's Foolish Order

So many soldiers had fled that Saul's army numbered only 600 men. His son Jonathan took one man and set out on his own, not sure on what mission they would embark. They came upon a small Philistine outpost of about 20 men, and decided to attack it, seeking the LORD's help.

The LORD did help them — an earthquake struck, throwing the Philistines into panic. The attack was successful, and Philistines at other nearby posts, fearing the earthquake and hearing the cries of Jonathan's victims, were similarly thrown into panic. Saul sprang into action.

In those days a priest, using proper ceremony, could ask God a question, and God would answer. Saul began asking his priest to consult the LORD, but the situation was urgent, and he foolishly decided he couldn't afford to take the time. Just as in the [previous battle](#), Saul considered military considerations more important than having God's aid.

So canceling his call to the LORD, Saul sent his tiny force directly into battle, compounding his foolish decision by calling the LORD's curse on any of his men who stopped fighting to eat before sundown. As a result, his men, weak with hunger, were not fighting at their best.

However, the earthquake and Jonathan's assault had put momentum on their side. Many Israelites who had defected to the Philistines now changed sides again, and fought against the Philistines. This brought great confusion into the Philistine camps, and in many places Philistines killed each other. Ultimately, the Philistines were defeated, in spite of their vast superiority.

However, during the day Jonathan had stumbled onto a honeycomb. Being hungry, and having been absent during the announcement of his father's curse, he stopped a moment, ate some honey, was refreshed, and continued fighting.

When evening came, the soldiers paused to eat, and then Saul proposed that they resume the fight during the night, before the surviving Philistines could escape. Saul's priest Ahiah suggested they consult the LORD this time, and Saul agreed — fortunately, for God had honored Saul's curse, and as a result fighting further would have been a disaster. They called on God, but God did not answer.

Saul rightly assumed God kept silence because someone in the army had broken faith. Again following their custom, they drew lots to find out who was the violator. God arranged for Jonathan to “win” this lottery. Saul demanded that he confess his violation. By now Jonathan realized his father had called on the LORD to curse anyone who ate before sundown, and Jonathan confessed he had snacked on honey. Saul pronounced the death sentence on his son, but the soldiers violently objected, realizing that Jonathan's courageous attack had sparked the day's great victory. Jonathan was rescued.

But because of Saul's foolish management that day, the military momentum was lost. The army withdrew, and the invading Philistines were not expelled.

Source: 1 Samuel 14

Saul's Downfall Foretold

Later Saul graduated from ignoring the LORD to outright disobedience.

God sent the prophet Samuel to King Saul with a mission. We see how their relationship had deteriorated, because Samuel, introducing his message, pulled rank on the king, saying “You should listen to me, because I am the one the LORD used to anoint you king in the first place.”

The LORD's assignment to Saul was: attack the evil Amalekites; destroy them completely, taking no survivors and no plunder. This was unusual, for typically slaves and plunder were a soldier's pay.

Saul assembled his army, made special arrangements to protect nearby innocents, and laid an ambush against the Amalekites. With the LORD's help, the battle was a great success. However, Saul kept the Amalekite King Agag alive as a trophy, and his soldiers, following his example, kept much Amalekite livestock as plunder.

At this disobedience, the LORD spoke to Samuel, saying he regretted making unfaithful Saul king. Samuel lay awake all night, bitterly crying to God for the disaster that was coming on Saul.

The next day Samuel found Saul, who greeted him saying, “I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” Samuel answered, “If you obeyed the LORD, what are all these animals here for?” Saul made excuses, but Samuel was firm against all his arguments, pointing out that even if Saul sacrificed all those animals, as his excuse claimed, it wouldn't undo his act of rebellion. Obedience is precious to God.

Samuel turned to leave, realizing that there was no point in supporting Saul's regime further. But it would have been very embarrassing for Saul if Samuel didn't show his support. Saul begged Samuel to stay, and finally grabbed him by his robe, tearing it. This was a huge faux pas. Samuel replied, “The LORD has similarly torn the kingdom from you,

and won't change his mind." Still, Saul begged Samuel not to embarrass him by leaving without saying a few appropriate words.

Samuel demanded a sword, which was brought to him. His appropriate words were addressed to the Amalekite King Agag: "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless" — and he killed him, as the LORD had told Saul to do.

Samuel went home, grieving deeply for a long time over the loss of Saul. They never saw each other again.¹

Source: 1 Samuel 15

Note:

¹ Except for one hostile meeting, 1 Samuel 19:23-24.

Saul's Jealousy of David

In a private ceremony the prophet Samuel, acting under God's direction, anointed an obscure boy named [David](#) to be the future king of Israel.

Ever since Samuel disavowed Saul, Saul had had severe bouts of depression. His staff recommended music to sooth his mood, and so David, a skilled harpist and singer, was retained as Saul's private musician. David was also a courageous young man who mixed well with Saul's military staff.

Since the LORD was no longer aiding Saul, the Philistines were now able to encroach deeply into Israelite territory, and Saul's army was unsuccessful against them. One summer as the two armies were facing each other, each waiting for the other to strike, a huge Philistine soldier named Goliath, probably over nine feet tall, stalked the valley between the two armies, shouting taunts, and challenging any Israelite to one-on-one combat. Israelite soldiers scattered at his approach.

The Israelite who should logically have answered the challenge was King Saul — but he, like everyone else, was afraid. David, probably only [about 16](#) by now, was enraged that this evil man was allowed to insult the LORD this way, and he volunteered to fight. With no armor, and no weapon except a shepherd's sling, he killed Goliath with his first stone. He proceeded to take the giant's sword from him and cut off his head with it.

Seeing their hero felled thus, the Philistines panicked and ran. Saul's army sprang to action, chasing them and inflicting many casualties. For the rest of that summer campaign, the Israelites were successful. David himself led many successful battles.

It is a mark of David's obscurity that as he was advancing toward Goliath, Saul, who had employed David's services as a musician, said to general Abner, "Who *is* that kid?" and Abner replied, "I don't know."

After this summer, though, David was obscure no more. As the armies returned home in the fall, the civilians celebrated the successful war season. The artistically inclined wrote songs, and a line from one of these songs, "Saul has slain thousands, and David tens of thousands," brought joy to by everyone — but it galled Saul.

David's rapid rise to success, his great popularity with the public, and the (true) rumor that the LORD had named David the next king, convinced Saul that David wanted to eliminate him and seize the throne. This was far from the truth. As we shall see, David was supremely loyal to Saul. Saul, however, captured by depression and paranoia, hated David.

Saul became deeply depressed and moody, and his staff, not realizing his thoughts about David were the cause of his melancholy, called David to play the harp for him. While David played, Saul fondled his spear and nursed his anger. Suddenly, he hurled his spear at David, who fled from the room. However, loyal David remained in Saul's service in spite of this violation.

Deciding to avoid direct murder and kill David by subterfuge, Saul began sending him on very difficult military missions, with the hope that he would be killed. David foiled his plans, however, by successfully completing every mission. The public and the king's staff became more and more pleased with David, but this only made Saul hate him more.

Saul's next effort to kill David was also subversive. Saul's daughter Michal had a crush on David, and Saul offered her in marriage to David if he would kill 100 Philistines within a certain time limit, and provide evidence of the feat. Saul hoped David would be killed in the attempt. David, going beyond the call of duty, killed 200. And so this plot also failed.

Next, Saul openly ordered his staff to find David and kill him. Prince Jonathan, who had become David's best friend, first warned David to hide, and then spoke to Saul on David's behalf, reminding him of David's loyal deeds. Saul listened to reason, rescinded the order, and was reunited with David.

Then one day, while Saul was depressed and David was playing the harp for him, Saul again fell into a rage and threw his spear at David. David fled to Samuel's home where, in spite of the discouraging circumstances, the two of them along with some others worshipped and praised God. Saul sent men to arrest David, but when they arrived, the Spirit of the LORD seized them, and they began praising God with David and Samuel. Saul sent a second and a third group, with the same result. Finally, Saul himself went to capture David. Arriving at their praise meeting, Saul was overcome and began praising God too, abandoning his original intentions.

David next secured Jonathan's aid in appealing to the king. But as Jonathan pled David's case, Saul became enraged and threw his spear at Jonathan. Jonathan had previously defended his father's motives, but this convinced him of Saul's evil intentions toward David. In fury, Jonathan stormed away. He told David the whole story. The two swore an oath to be lifelong friends, and then David went into hiding.

Source: 1 Samuel 16 - 20

Saul Murders the High Priest

At this point King Saul graduated from merely disobeying the LORD to full-fledged hostility against him. If God favored [David](#), Saul reasoned, then God was a traitor to be punished.

When David fled from Saul, he rushed away with no supplies. Lacking weapons and food, but not wanting to implicate anyone as an accomplice to an accused traitor, David went immediately to the high priest, who knew nothing of David's situation and would be above

suspicion. David invented a story, telling the priest nothing that might compromise him, and asking for food and [Goliath's](#) sword, which was in storage there. These the priest supplied.

Saul had immediately formed a posse and began hunting for David. He raged irrationally at his staff, accusing them of aiding the "traitor," and bemoaning their lack of loyalty. One of them, Doeg, had been with the high priest during David's visit, and accused the priest of complicity.

Saul summoned the high priest and his extended family, 85 priests in all, for questioning. It was clearly impossible for them to have received advance word about David's supposed disloyalty — David had fled immediately, arriving before any messenger could have — and David's superb record of success and loyalty was known to all. But irrational Saul accused them and sentenced them all to death. No one on Saul's staff was willing to carry out the sentence, fearing the LORD's judgment. But Saul told Doeg to kill them, and he did. Then he went to their town, Nob, and killed the entire population as accomplices.

Only one man is known to have escaped the slaughter — Abiathar the son of the recently murdered high priest, and therefore the new high priest. Abiathar fled to join David, and the two refugees remained together.

This incident figured prominently into Saul's downfall. In those days a priest could ask God a question, and God would answer. From this time on, Saul could no longer inquire of the LORD, since he had no priest, having murdered them all. Later on, Saul [tried to communicate with God](#), but couldn't. But David could inquire of the LORD — he now had the high priest in his exiled community, and he made good use of this important resource.

Source: 1 Samuel 21 - 22

David Spares Saul's Life

By this time, King Saul had lost all traces of rational leadership. Abandoning his national security duties, he committed himself full time to a manhunt for exiled [David](#).

Exiles and unwelcome people of all sorts flocked to the resourceful and charismatic David, and he had in his care a community of 600 families. When the Philistines attacked the Israelite town of Keilah, Saul should have defended his borders, but he was too busy hunting for David. So David, after inquiring of the LORD, took his men, defeated the Philistines, and rescued Keilah. However, the LORD warned David that Saul was coming to Keilah to kill him, so David fled to the wilderness, hiding wherever he could in the desert and the hills. Saul hunted daily, but David eluded him, with help from God.

One day David and his men were hiding in a cave, while Saul and his elite troops marched by, searching for them. As it happened, the army stopped to rest right outside David's cave, and Saul entered the cave to relieve himself in privacy.

Having just come in from the bright desert sun, Saul was virtually blind, but the eyes of David and his men were adapted to the dark, from hours in the cave. Saul removed his clothing and weapons, then walked deeper into the cave, but David's men were fully armed. Saul was alone, but David had a small army with him.

David's men urged him to take advantage of this God-given opportunity to end the entire problem by killing Saul, who was, after all, trying to kill David. David, however, remembered that it was the LORD who had made Saul king, and reasoned that attacking Saul was therefore equal to attacking the LORD. Instead, he snuck to where Saul had left his clothes, and cut off a section of the hem of his robe. Later, he was conscience-stricken even for this, having caused Saul embarrassment when he faced his men exposed by damaged clothing.

Saul departed the cave, totally unaware of his escape from certain death. As Saul rejoined his men, David, showing extreme courage, persuasiveness, and trust in God, emerged from the cave alone and called out to Saul. Displaying the hem of Saul's robe, he preached a sermonette about his loyalty to Saul, even giving Saul face-saving opportunities to pass the blame for his wrong behavior.

Even the nearly-insane Saul was struck by David's words and his mercy. He called off the chase and went home.

But David knew too well that Saul's repentance could not be trusted. He remained in exile.

Source: 1 Samuel 23 - 24

David Again Spares Saul's Life

[David](#) was right. King Saul again took up the chase, taking his elite troops into the field to hunt for David. Feeling the need for some military intelligence to aid in planning his defense, David took his nephew Abishai and went on a nighttime patrol.

They trekked across the desert and found Saul's camp. To their complete surprise, every night watchman was sound asleep. Intrepidly, David and Abishai walked right to the middle of the encampment, where they found Saul, sound asleep, his spear standing by his cot.

Abishai whispered to David, "Gimme one shot — just one!" David said no — the LORD had made Saul king, and anyone who opposed him opposed the LORD. They retrieved Saul's spear and canteen, and then walked to a nearby hill to await daybreak.

As the sun rose over Saul's troops, David began calling taunts to Saul's sleepy general Abner. "Wake up, Abner, wake up! I have a message for you!" When Abner finally replied, David gave his message: "For falling asleep on guard duty, you deserve to die!" As they bantered back and forth, Saul realized it was David. He told Saul his story, displaying the spear and canteen as evidence of his good intentions. Momentarily coming to his senses, Saul again called off the chase.

But again, David realized this was only a temporary reprieve — he would never be safe while Saul lived.

Source: 1 Samuel 26

The Witch of Endor

Things had gone badly for King Saul and Israel ever since Saul had rejected the LORD. Enemies, especially the Philistines, pressed hard. On this occasion, the Philistines planned a major invasion of Israel. Saul was beside himself with worry.

Saul wanted advice and help from the LORD. He tried to inquire of the LORD, but he had cut the authorized line of communication back when he [executed the LORD's priests](#). Committed to evil, he had done nothing to repair the breach between him and God. So now, when he asked for God's advice, God was silent.

Deeply distressed, Saul apparently decided that if the LORD wouldn't talk to him, maybe Satan would. He asked his staff to find him a spirit medium — absolutely against the LORD's law.

Saul disguised himself — one wonders how, since he was a foot taller than the other tall men — and set out for the town of Endor, where the medium lived. He told the medium to raise the prophet Samuel, long dead now.

When Samuel appeared, the medium screamed in terror — suggesting she wasn't accustomed to *actually* talking to the dead, but perhaps only pretending to.

Samuel told Saul that the LORD refused to help him, and he wouldn't help him either. Saul had rejected the LORD's leadership, and the LORD had rejected Saul as king. Saul would die in the coming battle, and [David](#) would become king.

Saul returned, deeply depressed.

Source: 1 Samuel 28

Saul's Death

The major invasion launched by the Philistines against Israel was a huge success. King Saul and his army were badly defeated. Saul's heir and [David's](#) best friend, Prince Jonathan, was killed, as were two other sons of Saul.

Hard pressed by Philistine soldiers, Saul was wounded. Unable to escape, and afraid of being captured and tortured by the enemy, Saul urged his armor-bearer to kill him. Afraid, he refused. So Saul fell on his own sword and died. Seeing this, his armor-bearer did the same. This double suicide was one of only five suicide events recorded in the Bible.

Seeing the battle lost and their king dead, the Israelites in the region abandoned their homes, which the Philistines then occupied.

The Philistine soldiers found Saul's body. In spite of Saul's failures and sins, he had done much to protect Israel, and his body was a great trophy to his enemies. They cut off his head and strung his body outside the city wall for all to see.

This was too much for the men of Jabesh, whom [Saul had rescued](#) many years ago from a horrible fate. They journeyed through the night and removed the headless bodies of Saul

and his sons from the city wall. If they had been caught, they would certainly have been killed. They escaped to Jabesh, however, cremated and buried them, and hosted a proper funeral.

Source: 1 Samuel 31; 1 Chronicles 10

SAUL DID EVIL

As a young man, Saul was humble and noble. But against his wishes the throne was thrust upon him, and its power corrupted him. His behavior grew more evil year after year, until he was consumed by paranoia and completely unfit to lead.

Saul's rejection of the LORD grew and progressed all through his time as king. He began as a faithful and courageous leader, but soon valued military power above the LORD's blessing — a clear attitude of idolatry. After that, he rebelled openly, disobeying God's plain instructions. This increased to blatant opposition as Saul murdered the LORD's priests and spent the rest of his life trying to murder innocent [David](#). In the end, Saul became completely irrational and insane.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 So **Saul died for his transgression** which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

King Ishbosheth (ISREAL WAS SPLIT INTO TWO KINGDOMS)

Ishbosheth was the most senior son of [King Saul](#) to survive the Philistine invasion in which Saul and three of his sons died. He was never trained to be king; Jonathan had always been the heir-apparent. And so when his family was killed in battle, he was unprepared to assume the throne.

However, Saul's uncle and right hand man, the very capable general Abner, decided Saul's son should be king, and held a national coronation ceremony for him. Even so, Ishbosheth failed to rise to the occasion, and was always a puppet king. The nation's affairs were run by Abner.

The tribe of Judah, however, rejected Ishbosheth, choosing [David](#) as their king, because he was of their tribe, because of his great record of success, and because the LORD had chosen him to be king. During Ishbosheth's two years as king, there was constant war between Israel and Judah, and all throughout, Judah grew stronger and Israel weaker.

Ishbosheth lost Abner's support and guaranteed his own downfall when he foolishly accused Abner of seducing a concubine of dead King Saul — a serious infraction, if it had happened. Abner, whose loyalty to Ishbosheth and Saul was obvious to everyone except Ishbosheth, was furious. He publicly stated his intention to transfer his support to David and make him king of both Judah and Israel. It is a mark of Ishbosheth's weakness as king that he could do nothing against Abner in spite of his openly treasonous intentions — indeed, he seems not even to have tried.

Abner immediately began a campaign to make David king of Israel. After winning the support of a network of local leaders, he entered into negotiations with David, who accepted his support. However, David's jealous general Joab assassinated Abner before he could complete his mission.

Abner's death threw Ishbosheth and Israel into panic and confusion. Two military leaders conspired together and assassinated Ishbosheth while he napped in his home. Upon this, Israel's local leaders agreed to recruit David, already king of Judah, to be king of Israel as well.

Where to read Ishbosheth's story: 2 Samuel 2 – 4

The Bible gives no clear statement as to whether Ishbosheth's actions were good or evil. As one reads his biography, told in 2 Samuel chapters 2, 3, and 4, one gets the impression of neither good nor evil, but merely of incompetence. Ishbosheth was a puppet king, placed in office by the very capable army commander Abner, who generally ran things. Abner seems to have hoped that Ishbosheth would rise to the job, but eventually gave up on him and turned his loyalty to **David** instead.

DAVID

David's Rise

David's rise to power was not a smooth ride. It was fraught with danger, setbacks, risks, and near escapes. Yet the LORD's faithfulness to David, and David's to the LORD, brought him safely through all these problems. All the while, his fame spread, and he was highly regarded by the population long before he ascended the throne.

David was just a boy when **God endowed him** with great abilities in the martial and musical arts. His defining moment came when, at 16 years of age,^{*} he fought and defeated the giant soldier **Goliath**. Following this victory, David enjoyed a summer of unmitigated success.

The happy times were short-lived, however. By fall, **King Saul** had **grown jealous** of David, and dedicated the rest of his life to trying to kill him, ignoring the normal duties of a king. David spent this time — probably 15 years or so — living as a fugitive, hunted by the king, his future in doubt.

Even when King Saul **died**, David didn't immediately take his throne. David became king of **his own tribe, Judah**, while Saul's son **Ishbosheth** ruled the rest of the nation. Finally, Ishbosheth died, and David was invited to be king of **all Israel**.

As king, David's most notable contributions were religious. Always in love with the LORD, David coordinated worship, installing priests and musicians who worked in shifts, all day long. He himself wrote many psalms to the LORD, and he arranged those written by others into psalters. Forbidden by God from building a temple, he instead amassed a great amount of building materials, so his son could build the temple, as the LORD had said. As a result of this long-term accumulation of supplies, **Solomon's temple** was one of the most impressive works of architecture in the ancient world.

God Chooses David to be King

King Saul, though a talented king, had stopped obeying God early in his career, and had begun turning selfish and evil. So God told the prophet Samuel he would remove Saul from being king, and replace him with "a man after his own heart,"¹ a man who is "better than [Saul]."² Saul remained king for a long time, but declined steadily for the rest of his life.

To identify Saul's successor, the LORD sent the prophet Samuel on an unpublicized mission to Bethlehem, to look for a man named Jesse. One of his sons was to be the next king.

Jesse was a rich farmer, and his sons were all impressive and capable young men. When Jesse introduced his oldest son Eliab, he was so well built and confident that Samuel thought, "Wow! What a great king God chose!" But God told Samuel not to be impressed with his good looks, because "man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Similarly, God rejected all of Jesse's six oldest sons. Samuel was puzzled. God had told him one of these young men would be king, and then God had rejected every one. What could be wrong? He asked Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" Jesse answered that he had forgotten about his youngest son, David, who was too young to be included in important meetings, and was tending the sheep. Samuel insisted that David be summoned.

When David arrived, the LORD told Samuel to anoint him king. He did. Then Samuel went home, and David returned to his chores. However, he was not the same. From that day, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David," enabling him to do great things. For example, while protecting his sheep, he killed both a lion and a bear with his bare hands. He also became so musically gifted that soon he performed for the king.

Source: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Notes:

¹ 1 Samuel 13:14

² 1 Samuel 15:28

The Battle with Goliath

King Saul wanted a private musician, and one of his men, who knew Jesse, suggested his son David, who was a skilled harpist, singer, and songwriter. So David, probably **16 years old** now, got a part time job with the king.

David was also skilled in martial arts, and developed a good rapport with Saul's soldiers. And he began training to be an armor-bearer for the king.

The ongoing war with the Philistines had been going badly in recent times. This summer, the Philistine army and the Israelite army faced each other deep in Israelite territory. For weeks, nothing happened; each army was afraid to engage the other. During this lull, a huge Philistine soldier named Goliath, probably over nine feet tall, occupied his time by pacing the no-man's-land between the two armies, taunting the Israelites. He challenged

any comer to one-on-one combat. King Saul had put a big price on Goliath's head, but the Israelites scattered in fear on his approach.

It was into this scene that David arrived, reporting for his part-time duties with King Saul, while also running errands for his father, since three of David's older brothers were in the military. David was embarrassed by the cowardice of the Israelite soldiers, allowing this pagan to mock the LORD's army. All his life he had heard stories of victories the LORD had given his people in situations just like this, and David was certain the LORD wouldn't let his people down now.

David began asking who he had to talk to to volunteer to fight this giant, and soon he was introduced to King Saul. Saul began to dismiss this naive boy, but soon David's confidence and charisma won him over, and he permitted David to fight. He supplied David with armor and weapons, but David wasn't used to them, and insisted on fighting this well-equipped giant with only a shepherd's sling, with which he was an expert marksman.

As David advanced toward Goliath, the giant was enraged that the enemy had sent not a great warrior, but only an unarmed boy. In fury he screamed curses at David. David confidently replied that the LORD would defeat Goliath without the benefit of a sword, spear, or javelin, and beyond that, the entire Philistine army would be slaughtered by the God of Israel.

David approached Goliath on the run, sling in hand. His first shot penetrated the giant's forehead, and he fell facedown, dead. David proceeded to take the Philistine's own sword, and cut off his head with it.

Seeing their great hero thus felled by an unarmed boy, the Philistines panicked. As they fled, the Israelites chased them, slaughtering them all the way to the Philistine border and beyond.

And so David didn't just kill the giant; his bravery was responsible for a great victory that day, and it set the momentum for the rest of that battle season. David himself commanded many successful raids that summer.

But Saul couldn't even remember who David was. As he walked toward Goliath, Saul asked general Abner, "Who *is* that kid?" and Abner answered, "I don't know."

* Note about calculating **David's age** when he fought Goliath — David had six older brothers (1 Chronicles 2:15) and two sisters, whose birth orders are unknown. The three oldest brothers were in the military. The age of military service in those days was 20 (Numbers 1:3 & others). So if we assume David's mother had a baby a year — probably true, more or less — David's three oldest brothers were 22, 21, and 20 years old. The next three brothers were 19, 18, and 17, making David 16. But, depending on the birth order of his two sisters, David may be been only 15 or 14.

Source: 1 Samuel 16:14 - 17:58

Saul Turns on David

David was just an obscure farm boy and musician before he fought Goliath, but no more. During that summer battle season, his continuing victories made him famous.

When the war season ended and the soldiers returned home, the civilians met them with great celebration, because this summer, unlike recent years, had been a great success. The Philistine invaders had been beaten back in battle after battle.

It was customary for artists to write songs to commemorate events, and this successful summer inspired some songs. One had the line, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." This was intended as flattery, but King Saul took it as an insult — they loved David more than Saul. Probably by now Saul had heard that Samuel had anointed David king. In any case, from that time on, Saul considered David a rival to the throne, and therefore an enemy. This was irrational because, as we shall see, David was forever loyal to Saul.

His train of thought plunged Saul into a terrible mood. When he became moody, his advisors supplied music to calm him. So on this day after homecoming, his advisors, not realizing his thoughts about David were the cause of his melancholy, called David to play the harp for Saul. Saul listened, all the time fondling his spear and ruminating hateful thoughts about David. Suddenly he hurled his spear to kill him. David narrowly dodged the weapon and fled the room.

However, faithful David remained in Saul's employment. Saul decided it wouldn't be proper to murder David outright, so he tried to kill him indirectly. He sent him on the most dangerous military assignments, hoping he would be killed in action. But David frustrated him by completing each one successfully. This made everyone love David more, but fed Saul's insane jealousy.

Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David. When Saul found out, he decided again to kill David with subtlety. He offered Michal to David in marriage, provided David would kill 100 Philistines. Saul, of course, hoped David would die trying. David was so thrilled with this opportunity to become the king's son-in-law that he killed 200.

Finally, Saul decided his plots weren't working, and he had to resort to outright murder. He ordered his top men to hunt David down and kill him. However, Saul's son Jonathan, who was a war hero in his own right, had developed a wonderful friendship with David the giant-slayer. Jonathan argued David's case with Saul, and convinced him — for the moment, at least.

Again Saul became depressed, and again David played the harp for him. And again, Saul threw his spear, and David narrowly dodged. David finally decided he wasn't safe, and left town that night.

This opinion was confirmed with the help of David's best friend Jonathan, who confronted Saul and pled David's case, as he had once before. This time, though, Saul became enraged and hurled his spear to kill Jonathan. Jonathan had previously defended his father's motives, but this convinced him of his evil intentions toward David. He told David about it, and David went into hiding.

Source: 1 Samuel 18 - 20

David in Exile

On the lam and lacking supplies, David also didn't want to implicate anyone for helping a fugitive. Where could he run? He decided to visit the high priest, who would be above suspicion. He left immediately, so he would be sure to arrive before any messenger. The priest was suspicious, but David was able to calm his fears and obtain food and a sword.

Unfortunately, when **King Saul** found out about this, his paranoia overruled his intelligence. He executed not only this priest, but all the priests and their families as traitors. Only one man escaped — the high priest's son Abiathar. The high priesthood was handed down from father to son, and so Abiathar now became the high priest. But he was a wanted man, and so he fled to join David, another wanted man.

This event figured heavily into Saul's downfall and David's rise. In those days, a priest could ask God a question and God would answer. Saul no longer had a priest, having murdered them all. But now David had a priest — and he used him often to inquire of the LORD, obtaining excellent advice from God.

David placed his parents in asylum with distant relatives in neighboring Moab, lest irrational Saul kill them as traitors. Other relatives stayed with David as he fled.

David's first instinct was to leave Israel and defect to the Philistines. But when he made his appeal to the Philistine King Achish, his advisors remembered the song, "David has slain his ten thousands" — of Philistines, that is — and they advised Achish to kill him. Realizing his danger, David feigned insanity in the presence of superstitious Achish, who hurried David away, exclaiming to his men, "Did you bring him here because I have a shortage of madmen?" Once again, David narrowly escaped death.

Back in Israel, David wandered the wilderness, living in caves. Many other fugitives sought him out, and soon he had a community of 400 families in his care, and after a while, 600.

David heard the Philistines were running raids on the town of Keilah, deep in Israelite territory. David saw this as an opportunity to win friends and thereby provide for his community. After seeking the LORD's advice, he and his men went to Keilah and inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and rescued Keilah. They obtained much plunder from the defeated enemy, and this helped them survive.

When Saul heard about this rescue — which should have been Saul's responsibility as king — he didn't see David as a rescuer of Israel; instead, he saw this as an opportunity to capture and kill the traitor. He set out immediately for Keilah. But David, being warned by God, took his men and fled for the desert, where he lived for some time.

During this exile, David's best friend Prince Jonathan was able to visit him once, and the two had a wonderful reunion. Jonathan expressed great support for David, declaring "Someday you will be king, and I will be your right hand man." This was a great encouragement, coming from the heir-apparent to the throne.

Source: 1 Samuel 21 - 23

David Spares King Saul

By now, everyone knew **King Saul** had put a price on David's head, and David wasn't safe in any settlement. So he lived in the desert, far from civilization. Even so, some desert dwellers didn't like having a community of refugees in their neighborhood, and informed Saul of David's whereabouts. Saul immediately assembled a posse of 3,000 of his best men, and set out to capture David. But just as they were closing in on them, Saul received a report of a Philistine attack on his territory, and had to break off the chase to defend his kingdom. So once again, David narrowly escaped death at Saul's hand.

David moved on, but after the battle Saul and his elite troops again set off in pursuit.

David and his men were hiding in caves, while Saul and his men marched around the area looking for them. As it happened, Saul's army stopped for a break right in front of the cave where David was hiding with some of his men. This must have caused intense fear among David's men.

Then the king left his men and walked right into David's cave. While David's men held their breath, Saul laid down his weapons and robe, and went further in, to relieve himself in privacy.

Saul was nearly blind, having just come in from the desert sun. David and his men had spent hours in the cave, and their eyes were adapted to the dark, so they could see clearly. Saul had dropped his weapons, and was unarmed. David and his men had their weapons in their hands. Saul was alone. David had a small army with him.

Speaking in whispers and gestures, David's men urged him to take this heaven-sent opportunity to rid themselves of an evil man who was hunting them down without reason. But David refused, remembering that it was the LORD who had made Saul king — and anyone who attacked the LORD's king was attacking the LORD. David was determined to use this as an opportunity to show his faith in God, and to display that faith in front of everyone present.

So David went to where Saul had left his robe, and quietly cut off the hem. Then he waited until Saul left the cave.

As Saul was returning to his men, David came to the mouth of the cave, and bowed to the ground, as people in his culture did to show deep respect for someone. With great charisma, he told his story — he had just passed up a chance to kill Saul, out of respect for the LORD, and he displayed the hem of Saul's robe as evidence. He furthermore promised he would never harm the king the LORD had chosen.

By now Saul's conscience stung him. He announced he was calling off the chase, and he returned home.

But David knew this was only a reprieve — Saul was committed to evil, and virtually insane besides. David would never be safe while Saul lived. So he and his men returned to their cave, and before long moved on to hopefully safer grounds.

Source: 1 Samuel 23:19 - 24:22

Nabal's Folly

One summer, David and his men lived in the neighborhood of a rich rancher named Nabal, whose herds numbered in the thousands. David's men provided valuable service to Nabal, hunting predators that fed on his flocks, and guarding against thieves. Nabal's employees were well aware of the benefits provided by David.

However, David and his men worked without a contract, hoping only to receive necessary food in consideration for services rendered.

At shearing time — or as we might say, “payday” — David sent men to request a tip from Nabal's profits, and carefully provided evidence that those profits were much enhanced by the services of David's men.

Nabal, however, showed extremely poor judgment. He insulted David's men, and sent them away with nothing.

Take a moment to consider the stress under which David lived at that time in his life.

First, he was responsible for a community of 600 families. Perhaps you know the stress of providing for a family. David had to provide for a “family” of thousands of people.

Second, he was in constant danger of death, hunted by a powerful and irrational king.

Third, being a fugitive, he couldn't settle down for long, establish a business or employment, or build a base of repeat customers. While providing for this community, many times he had to drop everything and start over again in a new location.

Fourth, his strongest supporter, the prophet Samuel, had just died. Being a fugitive, he wasn't even able to attend the funeral.

That's a *lot* of stress.

It was against this backdrop that David, expecting to receive only a few weeks worth of food in return for valuable services provided, received nothing but insults instead.

None of this excuses David's sinful response. But anyone who has faced stress can sympathize with his reaction, doing something rash that he wouldn't have done in his better moments.

David, who was raised in a brutal culture, constantly surrounded by war and death, told his 600 men to ready their weapons. They were going to attack Nabal's ranch in revenge, killing every male they found. That David's actions were considered normal in their culture is shown by a servant's reaction.

Back at Nabal's ranch, a servant who had seen Nabal's treatment of David's men, and who was fully aware of services provided by David, panicked. Immediately sizing up the situation, he realized David would do something savage, and Nabal, his family, and his employees, were in serious trouble.

Nabal was not a man who could be talked to about this. Stubborn and insensitive, he wouldn't take advice from anyone. So the servant talked to Nabal's wife, Abigail, who was very intelligent, alert, and capable. Hearing the servant's story, she agreed something had to be done, and fast.

In a flurry of activity, she gathered food supplies, loading it on donkeys, and assigning servants to escort the gifts to David. After she had dispatched several donkey-loads of supplies, she herself followed them to meet David.

Meanwhile, David was leading his men into battle, raging in fury over their wasted efforts and ill treatment. As he ranted, Abigail approached him, bowed to the ground to show deep respect, and made a beautiful appeal. She pointed out that Nabal was mentally challenged — his name means “retarded” — and his insults shouldn't be taken to heart. She added that the LORD was at this moment saving David from doing something foolish, something that would be a skeleton in his closet later, when he became king. And of course, she presented the gifts of food.

David was deeply moved by her words. He humbly acknowledged her wisdom, and praised God for his mercy in sending her to him. He and his men returned to their camp.

Abigail returned home too. Nabal was drunk, and she couldn't talk to him in that state, so she waited till morning. Then, when she told him the whole story, he was struck with terror at his folly, had a stroke, and was paralyzed. Ten days later, he died.

David decided a woman like Abigail would be a valuable asset. A proper interval after the funeral, David proposed marriage to her, and she enthusiastically accepted.

Source: 1 Samuel 25

David Again Spares King Saul

David and his men continued living in the wilderness in the southeast of Judah. And again, certain residents reported his location to **King Saul**. And again, Saul and his 3,000 elite troops went on a mission to find and kill David.

In his desert hideout, David heard about Saul's renewed effort, and decided that in order to be prepared, he needed to gather military intelligence about Saul's forces. He invited his nephew Abishai, and the two of them went on a nighttime patrol into Saul's camp.

When they arrived, to their surprise, they found the night watchman asleep — the entire camp was unguarded. Quietly, they found their way to the center, where Saul was sound asleep, his spear standing in the earth near his cot.

Abishai saw this as a wonderful God-given opportunity to solve all their problems with a single stroke of a spear, also conveniently provided. He asked David for the honor, promising he wouldn't require a second stroke.

But as before, David said no, reminding his nephew that the LORD had made Saul king, and therefore no one who rebelled against him would be held innocent. Instead, he offered Abishai the honor of retrieving Saul's spear and canteen, and the two of them retreated to a nearby hill to await daybreak.

As morning dawned on Saul's camp, David began calling out to Abner, Saul's right hand man and bodyguard. Eventually Abner answered, and David taunted, "You deserve the death penalty! Someone came to kill the king, and you didn't protect him!" He pointed out Saul's missing spear and canteen as evidence of the crime.

As David and Abner argued across the sand, Saul recognized David's voice, and realized that David had again spared his life. David chided the king for sending him away from the LORD, who had a special presence in the heart of the promised land. David loved the LORD, and this exile was painful for that reason. He again promised to do nothing against the king, and Saul, faced with incontrovertible evidence, was again smitten with conscience and called off his murderous hunt.

But again, David knew Saul's repentance was not dependable. Even more, he realized he was unsafe even here in Judah's wilds. He would have to leave the country.

Source: 1 Samuel 26

David in Foreign Exile

Realizing that he could not hide from **King Saul** anywhere in Israel, David looked for asylum elsewhere. The Philistines were ruled by five kings. David **had met** one of them, King Achish, and now sounded him out. Achish offered David the border town of Ziklag, and David and the 600 families with him moved there.

In Philistine Ziklag, David lived a dangerous double life. He dared not do anything to offend the Philistines. But he also refused to harm his own people, the Israelites.

He made his living by running raids on enemies of Israel, carrying off plunder. To keep favor with the Philistines he lied, reporting to Achish that he had actually plundered towns in Judah, his former home. To keep Achish from learning the truth, David ran his raids far from Philistine territory, to the east of Israel. Furthermore, his attacks were carefully planned, and he left no survivors to report on him. Achish believed David's attacks on Judah made him forever an enemy of Israel, and forever faithful to Philistia.

When David had been with the Philistines for over a year, they planned a major invasion of Israel. David saw this as a wonderful opportunity, made special plans, and took heavy risks to execute his plans.

The exact nature of David's plans isn't given in scripture. He prepared his men to fight with the Philistine army against Israel. But we can be sure, from David's history, that he would never fight against King Saul or the LORD's forces. And we have already seen that David was leading a double life, pretending to aid Philistia by plundering Israel, while in fact attacking Israel's enemies. So exactly what *was* David planning?

When the five Philistine kings met for a counsel of war, they figured out David's scheme. Though King Achish trusted David, the other four kings didn't. They believed that during the battle, he would change sides, fight against the Philistines, turn an Israelite defeat into victory, and return home to Israel as a great hero.

Concluding that David couldn't be trusted in this situation, the other four kings overruled Achish and sent David home to Ziklag. David was furious, or pretended to be, over this

insult, and over the frustration of the plans on which he had placed his hopes of returning to the land of his birth.

David's normal practice was to take 400 men on his raids, leaving 200 home to defend the families.¹ But this opportunity had been so enticing that David had taken an extreme risk to bring it about — he had taken all 600 men to the battlefield, leaving their families undefended. This error stung him dearly.

When the men returned to Ziklag, they found the city burned to the ground, and the wives and children missing — all had been taken as slaves. David's men were crushed with grief. They cried and cried. Then, blaming this loss on David's poor judgment, they began planning to execute him by stoning.

In the meantime, David was praying, and as he did, God encouraged him. Calling for his priest Abiathar, he asked the LORD if they could find the raiding party. The LORD promised they would, and the rescue would be successful.

As David's army followed the trail, they came upon a man dying in the desert. They fed him, his strength revived, and he told his story. He was a slave who had accompanied a raiding party that had burned Ziklag, taking its inhabitants as slaves. Then he became sick, and his master abandoned him to die in the desert. After securing a promise of safety, he agreed to lead David to the raiding party.

They found them partying and drinking. Attacking at dusk, they kept the battle up for 24 hours, leaving no survivors, except for a group that escaped by camel. All their lost wives and children were rescued; none was missing. They also captured a huge amount of plunder.

David took the plunder and sent it as gifts to many people back in Judah who had helped him survive while in exile there.

Source: 1 Samuel 27, 29, 30

Note:

¹ For example, 1 Samuel 25:13

King Saul Dies in Battle

Meanwhile, the Philistine offensive against Israel proceeded on schedule. It was a great victory for Philistia and a defeat for Israel. Prince Jonathan and two of his brothers were killed in the battle. **King Saul** was mortally wounded, and fearing that his enemies would capture and torture him, he took his own life.

A fellow who saw all this thought it would give him a perfect opportunity to fall into favor with the new king; by now everyone knew David would succeed Saul. This fellow confiscated Saul's crown and fled to David's hideout.

Meeting David, he reported that the battle had gone badly, and that both King Saul and his heir-apparent, Prince Jonathan, had died. When David asked for details about their deaths, the fellow made up this story: Saul had been mortally wounded, and fearing that his

enemies would capture and torture him, had asked this fellow to kill him — so he did. Thinking like the people of his culture, he assumed David would consider this good news. He didn't understand how David would think.

Twice before, David had passed up opportunities to kill Saul, reasoning that because the LORD had made Saul king, anyone who killed Saul was attacking the LORD. David said to this fellow, "Why weren't you afraid to kill the LORD's anointed?" He sentenced the murderer to death, declaring, "Your blood is on your own hands."

Source: 1 Samuel 28, 31; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 10

David, King of Judah

Now that **King Saul** was dead, David was out of danger. Calling for his priest, he asked the LORD if he should return to Israel, and the LORD said he should go to Hebron, a town in Judah.

There at Hebron, the local leaders of the tribe of Judah agreed to make David their king. The other eleven tribes of Israel, however, followed Saul's right hand man Abner, who made Saul's son **Ishbosheth** their king. And so Israel was divided for seven and a half years.

During this time, there was ongoing war between the two halves, Israel and Judah. Under David's powerful leadership, Judah grew stronger and stronger. Under Ishbosheth's incompetence, Israel grew weaker and weaker.

At length Abner grew impatient with Ishbosheth's weakness. After one particularly offensive incident, Abner decided to withdraw his support from Ishbosheth, and campaign to make David king of Israel.

Abner sent a message to David expressing his intentions. David needed to find out if Abner was influential enough to be useful or not. To this end, David replied that he would work with Abner under one condition. King Saul, in order to hurt David, had given David's first wife Michal to another man. David demanded that Abner return her to him. If Abner couldn't extract a princess, he was obviously unable to move the kingdom.

Abner did this with ease, however, and so he and David met to plan their work. Abner had already lobbied throughout Israel, having built a network of local leaders who would transfer their support to David on Abner's signal. Their plans made, Abner set out for home.

However, David's nephew Joab, who was now his right hand man, was furious over David's meeting with Abner. Joab and Abner had been at war for some time now, and Joab was suspicious of Abner. Beyond that, he held a grudge, because Abner had killed Joab's brother in battle. So now, Joab secretly chased Abner and murdered him. So his efforts to make David king of Israel ended.

Source: 2 Samuel 2, 3

David, King of Israel

When Abner was assassinated, **King Ishbosheth** and Israel were thrown into panic and confusion. Ishbosheth was incompetent, and Abner had run things all along. Now Israel was leaderless. Two of Ishbosheth's men conspired and murdered him. He had been king two years. The assassins fled to David, expecting him to reward them for eliminating his enemy. But like **Saul's would-be killer**, they thought like people in their culture, and not like David. He had them executed as common murderers.

Israel was now truly leaderless, and remained so for five more years. After that time, all the local leaders met together and agreed to make David their king.

Early in David's reign he made it his goal to capture Jerusalem, a splendid city which, though in the center of Israel's territory, was occupied by hostile foreigners, who arrogantly considered their city impregnable. David was determined, however, and an advance party of his men snuck into the city via a drainage culvert, and Jerusalem was taken. David made it his capital, and it remained so as long as Israelites occupied the land.

David's rise to national power shocked the Philistines into action, for they were well aware of his history of military exploits against their invasions of Israel. They launched two major campaigns, with the objective of killing David and leaving the throne in less capable hands. Both times, however, using military strategies supplied by the LORD, David defended his borders, inflicting heavy casualties among the Philistines.

David's military prowess became legendary. He converted many nearby nations from aggressors into subdued vassalages. By the end of his life, his empire was so powerful that there was peace, and his son **Solomon** never had to fight a war.

Source: 2 Samuel 4, 5, 8, 10; 1 Chronicles 11:1-9, 18:1 - 19:19

The Ark of the Covenant

David's life-long love was the LORD. His years of exile were so painful, not because of privation, but because he was banished from the public services of worship to the LORD. When he became king, his greatest joy and his most memorable contribution was elaborating the LORD's worship.

Once Jerusalem became David's capital, he determined to establish public worship there, with reformed methods and grand scale. One of his first goals in this regard was to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD to Jerusalem. This was an artifact built at the LORD's command in Moses' day. Throughout Israel's history, the LORD resided on the Ark, in the form of a bright glowing presence, hanging in mid-air above the Ark, between the two angels sculpted on its surface. Sometimes the glowing was so bright it filled the area, even occasionally driving worshippers back with its splendor.

David hosted an elaborate celebration to accompany the great moment the Ark was ushered into Jerusalem. The whole nation gathered. To the accompaniment of a marching band, the procession began. The Ark itself was on a newly built cart, drawn by oxen. A handful of men of Levi, the tribe made responsible by God for religious affairs, walked alongside.

Foolishly, however, no one had inquired about proper handling of this most sacred symbol of the LORD's presence. Levites were to carry the Ark on their shoulders, never touching it, but raising it upon poles loosely attached to the Ark. Violation of these regulations was punishable by death.¹

But no one had bothered to read the LORD's regulations. Instead of carrying the Ark as prescribed, they followed the example of the Philistines, placing it on a cart. Then at one climactic moment, the oxen stumbled, the cart was upset, and the Ark was in danger of falling to the ground. One of the Levites, named Uzzah, reached out to steady the Ark, ignoring the prohibition against touching it. For this offense, the LORD instantly struck him dead.

Suddenly, the great celebration ended. The people became somber. Quite likely, at first no one knew why Uzzah was dead — until someone remembered the LORD's law about the Ark.

At first, David was furious with the LORD. He cancelled the celebration and sent the people home. He left the Ark in the care of a Levite sheik who lived nearby, afraid of what might happen if he dared continue to Jerusalem.

After a time, David got over his anger and dismay. Learning that the Ark's new host was prospering, he took that as a sign that the LORD would bless him if he renewed his attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem.

This time he took great care. The Levites handling the Ark, hundreds of men, were fully trained in their duties. Again the nation was invited for the celebration, which was intense. King David had a gift for every citizen present, adding to the jubilation. The event was a great success, and David's love for the LORD was contagious, infecting his people too.

There was a sad note, though — an argument between David and his wife Michal. During the celebration, he had danced vigorously, and she noticed other women admiring him. She also found fault with his attire. Perhaps his gymnastics left him immodest at times, or perhaps she simply found his chosen wardrobe — priestly rather than royal garb — demeaning. In any case, when he returned home, they argued, and the argument never really ended — Michal died childless, implying an end to their intimate relations over this argument.

Source: 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16

Note:

¹ Numbers 4:15

Preparations for the Temple

By this time, David rarely had to fight, having built an empire that dominated the region. He himself had a luxurious palace, and it bothered him that the LORD didn't have a proper temple. The Ark of the Covenant was housed in a tent.

David consulted his prophet friend Nathan, who advised him to go ahead with his intention to build the LORD a temple.

The LORD, however, had different plans. He told Nathan to go back to David and tell him he was not the one to build a temple. Instead, after David's death his son would be king in his place, and he would build the temple.

Furthermore, David's throne would endure forever — that is, a descendent of David would be king forever — though if David's successors sinned, they would be punished harshly.

David was thrilled to have this excellent promise from God. Still, he couldn't make himself stand by while the LORD had no temple. Though he was not permitted to *build* the temple, he could *prepare* for its construction.

He applied his considerable wealth and influence to the project. Workers dressed stone for masonry. Vast supplies of cedar logs were imported and put into storage. Large amounts of gold, silver, bronze, and iron were on hand. Architectural plans were drawn up. Furnishings were designed, staffing planned. Workers were recruited, donations solicited.

All throughout this process, David inspired and instructed the people to be faithful to the LORD, enthusing them with sermons about God's greatness, and their great privilege of being his people.

When David's son **King Solomon** eventually undertook the construction, he was so well supplied, trained, and aided with expert help, that the completed temple was admired throughout the region.

Source: 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17, 22, 28, 29

David's Decline

Somewhere in his middle years, David committed **a horrible sin**. Much evil resulted from this misdeed, and most notably, David himself was badly affected. Up to this point, he had shown great maturity and expert judgment. After his sin, he often failed to grasp important issues. Before, he handled great moments of crisis with courage and wisdom. After, he handled several crises so poorly that they nearly undid him.

After David's sin, he let one of his sons **get away with rape**, and another **with murder**. One son **publicly planned to overthrow him**, lobbying for public support on the platform of justice reform, thereby showing how badly the courts were managed in David's administration. David could have easily and bloodlessly foiled this plot. Instead, he took no action, with the result that he fought an expensive civil war. After the war, he would have pardoned the rebel son (hoping for another civil war later?) but his staff refused to allow it. And in the aftermath of the war, David humiliated the soldiers who had just protected him, and thereby nearly threw his kingdom into anarchy. After this, as David was negotiating with the nation to restore him to his throne, he committed a **faux pas**, throwing the nation into yet another civil war.

Yet in spite of all the troubles that resulted from David's sin, we cannot fail to note that David's repentance was pure and complete. He took the punishment God inflicted on him without complaint, made amends where possible, and protected the innocent when he could.

David's unflagging repentance is a model for believers everywhere, and undoubtedly a factor that caused God to call David "a man after his own heart."

Scandal!

One spring when all the men went off to war, and Jerusalem was therefore full of women, King David made a foolish choice — he stayed home. David knew — or should have known — that romance was a temptation for him. By this time he had at least seven of his wives;¹ the later total was in two digits, plus 10 concubines. This doesn't happen because a man is immune to temptation. Yet inexplicably, this man who loved God and was normally faithful chose to stay in a town full of temptation.

David's palace was near the women's bath house. Homes didn't have showers in those days. Instead, there were public bath houses. For privacy, the bathhouses had high walls surrounding them. However, this bath house had no roof. David's palace was quite high, and one evening, from the terrace on his roof, he looked over the wall of the bath house and saw a woman. She was quite a beauty, and David sent someone to find out who she was.

She was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of the top 30 men in David's cabinet. Uriah was, of course, in the field with the army, and wasn't expected home for months. David summoned Bathsheba, they had an intimate conversation, and in the end they slept together. Bathsheba went home, and David seems to have forgotten about her.

But after a time, she sent David a message saying she was pregnant. Suddenly, David had a scandal on his hands. This was the kind of thing that could ruin a king's administration. David, normally in love with the LORD, didn't seem to give thought to how God would view things. The scandal was an emergency.

To cover his tracks, David decided to call the woman's husband home. If Uriah spent a night with his wife, everyone would assume the baby was his, and David's crisis would be over. The whole issue would die quietly.

David sent a messenger to the battlefield to summon Uriah, on the pretext of debriefing him for military intelligence. Faithful Uriah arrived, King David interviewed him, and when the interview was over, David sent him to go home and relax. To assure Uriah and his wife had a good night together, David sent a romantic gift to their home.

But Uriah never went home. The soldiers who served under him were sleeping in tents or under the stars, living the spartan lives of men at war, and Uriah thought it would be hypocritical of him to enjoy a pleasant evening with his wife while his men were in the fields. So he slept in the palace, in the servants' quarters.

When David found out about this, he again panicked. He scolded Uriah for thus failing to solve David's problem. But David was determined to solve the problem, so he detained Uriah for another day of military briefings. That evening he invited him to a party to put him in a good mood. Then, to assure that he performed as expected, David gave Uriah drink after drink, until he was drunk.

But even in his inebriated condition, Uriah retained his sense of integrity. When David sent him home to his wife, he again refused to do what the men under him were unable to do, and Uriah again slept in the servants' quarters.

David realized he could not possibly solve his problem the way he had hoped — Uriah simply could not be corrupted. What could he do? Bathsheba was with child and soon everyone would know David was the father.

David decided that to prevent a scandal that might ruin him, he had to eliminate Uriah and marry Bathsheba. He wrote a message to general Joab telling him to place Uriah in a dangerous battle position and arrange for him to be killed by the enemy. He sealed the letter and placed it in Uriah's hand, knowing that he could be trusted to deliver it unmolested.

Some time later David received a battle report from general Joab telling of a disaster. Joab had mounted an attack using an obviously poor strategy, and a number of men were killed. Joab, who had known David all his life, knew he would lose his temper when he heard about this foolish battle, but he didn't want to commit the actual reasons for the loss to writing. So he gave the messenger an off-the-record verbal comment for the king's ears only: Uriah died in this battle.

When David heard this comment and realized why the loss had occurred, he calmed down and sent Joab a message of congratulations in spite of the disaster.

When Uriah's funeral was over and a proper time elapsed, David asked Bathsheba to marry him, and she did. So when the baby was born, everyone assumed he was David's legitimate offspring — or so David thought.

But what David had done displeased the LORD.

The LORD sent David's friend, the prophet Nathan, to expose David's sin. To win David's sympathy and make his point, Nathan approached David with a story, which he presented as true. In our day, if someone wants to get justice, they hire a lawyer and file court papers according to the lawyer's advice. In those days, a citizen would appeal to the king for justice. If you didn't know the king, you might get someone who did to talk to the king for you. So as David heard this story, he assumed this was a legal action being brought by a citizen in his kingdom.

Here is Nathan's story: There was a certain poor man who had very little, but his prize possession was a lamb. He had bought the lamb as a baby, not for meat, but as a pet. He treated her like one of the family. The children loved the lamb. She ate at their table, drank from the man's cup, and slept in the man's embrace.

The poor man had a rich neighbor, a rancher who had large flocks of sheep. One day this rich man found himself in need of some meat. But rather than slaughter one of his own sheep, he took the poor man's lamb, killed and served it.

As David listened to Nathan's story, he became furious. How could anyone commit so callused an act? David told Nathan the man who did this deserved to die! But David didn't order the death sentence² — instead, David ordered the man to reimburse his victim four times the lamb's value, in keeping with the law of Moses.³

At that, Nathan told David, "You are the man!" He recounted David's sins of adultery and murder, a rich king with many wives preying on a common citizen; and he pronounced God's punishment: David's family would be full of violence, and one of David's sons would one day lie with David's wives in full public view.

It is at this critical and abysmal moment in David's life where his integrity shines. Most of us, when our sins are exposed, resort to either denying it happened or blame-shifting. David certainly had opportunity to deny the murder; after all, Uriah had died honorably in battle. And he could have blamed his deeds on someone or something else. But he didn't.

Instead, David simply said, "I have sinned against the LORD." He didn't excuse or justify his actions. He didn't pass the blame. In grief, he simply admitted the truth.

The moment he did, the prophet Nathan gave the LORD's response: "The LORD has forgiven your sin." The moment David confessed, God forgave.

Even so, the sin had its consequences. The baby died, to David's deep regret. David's home was full of violence from then on, and one of his sons staged a rebellion that nearly sacked David's administration. Even worse, David himself seems to have suffered the loss of his previously excellent judgment, and made many severe mistakes after this.

Source: 2 Samuel 11, 12

Notes:

¹ Six pre-Jerusalem wives are listed in 1 Chronicles 3:1-6; his first wife, King Saul's daughter Michal, is missing from this list.

² According to the King James translation, he *did* order the death sentence.

³ Exodus 22:1

Amnon's Crime

David's son Amnon fell in love with his half-sister, David's daughter Tamar. In those days it was quite common for a man to marry his half-sister, and if Amnon had tried to arrange marriage, he would no doubt have succeeded. However, Amnon knew his father had taken advantage of a woman and suffered no great punishment so far, so Amnon decided not to marry Tamar, but to seduce her.

But a prince couldn't just walk up to a princess and carry on a conversation — they were too strongly chaperoned for that. So Amnon carried on an elaborate scheme. He pretended to be ill, and asked that his beautiful sister be allowed to serve him a meal. She came to his house and cooked a meal for him. But he lay in bed, pretending to be too sick to eat it. He demanded that all the servants leave, so Tamar could feed him without distraction.

When they were alone, Amnon invited her to his bed. She refused, eloquently appealing to him about how this act would affect her, and insisting that he could arrange marriage if he wanted to. But he refused to listen, and raped her.

As Tamar cried over her treatment, Amnon's attitude changed. He no longer saw a beautiful princess; instead, he saw an abused and wounded girl. And he hated her. He sent her away by force.

David's handling of this crime shows his loss of good judgment since his own similar crime. The king lost his temper. He probably screamed at Amnon, but that was all.

The law of Moses required a penalty for rape of either a shotgun marriage or death, depending on the circumstances. However, David, who had properly exercised justice before, and was well familiar with the law of Moses, did nothing.

In modern times, it has become customary for the court to interview a crime's victim, taking their wishes into account in deciding the sentence. The victim of this crime clearly expressed her wishes. She didn't hate Amnon, even after what he had done to her. She believed the outcome that gave her the best future was marriage to Amnon. But David never asked for her opinion. He never took a single step to punish his son's crime.

But someone else did.

Source: 2 Samuel 13:1-21

Absalom's Crime

When Amnon raped Tamar and then got away with it, leaving Tamar in disgrace, her brother Absalom was incensed. He was determined to have his revenge. But he could see how the system worked — the courts would never give him justice. Absalom didn't even try to raise a case, knowing what the outcome would be.

Absalom wanted to kill Amnon, but a prince couldn't just walk up to another prince, weapon in hand — the royal family was well guarded. So Absalom bided his time, waiting for his opportunity. After two years, he made his move.

Absalom enlisted the aid of a group of servants and friends, promising he would protect them by taking the blame himself. Absalom threw a big party and invited all the king's sons. But how could he be sure Amnon would come? Absalom personally invited King David, knowing he would refuse — if the king wanted a party, he would throw it himself. He pled for a while, and when the moment seemed right he said, "If you won't come, will you at least send all the princes?" He took special care to include Amnon in the group. Finally, David agreed. Under orders from the king, Amnon attended Absalom's party.

When the party was under way, Absalom gave a signal, and all his co-conspirators drew their weapons and killed Amnon. The other guests left in a panic, assuming Absalom intended to kill all the princes, making himself the certain heir to the throne.

Absalom was now a murderer deserving capital punishment. To escape death, he left the country and lived in exile.

King David was brokenhearted, not over the loss of Amnon, but of Absalom. Long after Amnon's funeral, David was so distraught over Absalom that he couldn't concentrate on his work. Important tasks were left undone. The kingdom was going to the dogs.

David's right hand man, Joab, tried to cover for him, but certain tasks require the king's attention, and David just wasn't there. Realizing fully what was on David's mind, Joab tried to convince David to pardon Absalom, so he could be comforted and then hopefully return to normal, but the king refused.

When this had gone on for three years, Joab decided to try something extreme to bring the king to his senses. He hired a clever actress to bring a fictional court case to the king.

The woman dressed the part and told her story to David: she was a widow with two sons. They got into a fight one day, and as it happened, one son killed the other. The townspeople were now demanding that the murderer be put to death, as the law required. But they were only doing it to get her property — with her husband and one son dead, if the other son were killed, there would be no heir, and they could confiscate the woman's real estate. She came here to beg the king for the life of her son.

King David was deeply moved by this woman's story. He sent her away, promising to issue a court order protecting her son. But the woman pressed for more certain protection. David promised that if anyone troubled her, he would personally put a stop to it. Still she pressed: would the king swear an oath in the name of the LORD? David swore the requested oath.

The woman asked, "May I say something else?" and David, intrigued with the woman, agreed. She said, "Since you feel that way about my son, shouldn't you feel the same way about your own son Absalom? Why don't you pardon him?"

A light went on in David's mind. He said, "Did Joab put you up to this?" She answered, "You are as wise as an angel of God!"

David was convinced. He pardoned Absalom and sent Joab to retrieve him from exile. Finally, his mind at ease, David could relax and do his job again.

Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but his father didn't restore his princely position. He lived as a commoner, unwelcome with the royal family. David didn't even see him. Even so, David felt much better, and affairs of state improved.

Source: 2 Samuel 13:22 - 14:24

Absalom's Rebellion

Almost as soon as Absalom returned to Jerusalem, he began conspiring to overthrow his father King David and take his throne.

But at first, he wasn't even admitted to the palace. His first step, therefore, was to regain his position in the royal family. Two years after his return, he decided to seek this concession.

He sent a message to David's right hand man Joab, who had arranged his return from exile in the first place, asking Joab to arrange a meeting with the king, so he could appeal for his restoration. Joab had had enough trouble on Absalom's account, and refused to even answer the message.

But Absalom wouldn't take "no" for an answer, and he looked for a way to force Joab's hand. As it happened, Absalom had a crop field adjacent to Joab's. So he ordered his servants to set Joab's field afire, burning down his crops.

Guess who came to visit Absalom? Joab knew how the king doted on Absalom. He couldn't take any action against him. So Absalom made his demand, and Joab arranged a meeting with David who, of course, granted his request and restored his place in the royal family. Returned from exile, and now restored to his position as prince, Absalom had literally gotten away with **murder**.

Next Absalom appealed to the public to support him as king. This campaign involved several methods. He obtained a chariot, horses, and 50 men to run alongside, and paraded in public places. People have always loved to gape at royalty, and Absalom gave them what they wanted. When someone approached Absalom, they would act with the proper protocol for a commoner approaching royalty. But Absalom would ignore protocol, treating them as royals treat each other. The commoners loved this. Absalom would sit along the path leading to the palace, and whenever someone passed to approach the king for a legal petition, Absalom would bemoan the deplorable condition of the courts, and tell people, "If I were in charge, things would be different around here!" His popularity increased greatly.

This behavior was treasonous. In a democracy, we encourage people to express their views, and to run for office. But in a monarchy, the same actions undercut the king's authority, and are not to be tolerated. As Absalom was doing these things in full public view, David's people certainly knew what was happening, and must have told David. He could have stopped Absalom's rebellion easily, by many methods. He didn't even have to resort to action against Absalom. For example, David could have ordered Absalom to reform the court system, since he was campaigning on that platform. This would have kept him too busy to conspire, and might even have won his good will.

But after his famous sin, David's judgment was impaired. He did nothing, and Absalom continued his rebellion.

After four years, Absalom decided the moment had come to strike. He traveled from Jerusalem to Hebron, where he set up his headquarters and began his conspiracy in earnest. He assembled an army, appealed to important people to join him, and then began his march on Jerusalem. In order to make himself king, he had to capture Jerusalem and kill his father David.

Absalom set out with his army in the morning, expecting to reach Jerusalem around noon. David learned of Absalom's approaching army only a few hours before it arrived. He and his advisors decided that rather than fight with insufficient forces or risk a siege, David and his top people would evacuate, knowing Absalom would take the city with ease but would not harm the population. They set out at once, with the goal of reaching the Jordan River by night and crossing over the next morning.

David's faithful priests brought the Ark of the Covenant of God, and prepared to join the exodus. But here David's integrity shined. He recognized that God was punishing him; this disaster was the fulfillment of **Nathan's prophecy** because of David's sin. How could David take the Ark — we might as well say, how could he take God — hostage? David determined to endure God's punishment without trying to strong-arm God by kidnapping his Ark. So he instructed the priests to return the Ark to its place, and to remain with it. They made

arrangements for secret communication, so that if they discovered anything David should know, they could send him a message. So the priests returned.

As David and his party fled eastward, they were met by a distant relative of dead **King Saul**, named Shimei. Shimei held a grudge because Saul had lost the throne in favor of David. So as David trudged on through Shimei's neighborhood, Shimei shouted insults and threw stones. This was not very smart. David, even though in flight, was surrounded by many valiant men, who would have been very happy to vent their frustration by removing Shimei's head.

David, however, couldn't help remembering that this rebellion was his punishment for sin, and he refused to fight against God's punishment. He kept his men under control, saying, "the LORD told him to curse David." And he continued his march, bearing with insults and stones.

David had on his staff two advisors who were considered godlike in their wisdom. Their names were Ahithophel and Hushai. Ahithophel had joined Absalom's conspiracy early, but now Hushai, an old man, joined David in his flight. David, however, told feeble Hushai he could help David more by returning to Jerusalem, pretending to join Absalom, but actually giving bad advice. David knew if Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice, his chances of success were great, but if Hushai could sell bad advice, David had a chance. So Hushai went to meet Absalom as a secret agent.

Absalom entered Jerusalem with no resistance, secured the palace and important buildings, and then held a staff meeting to decide what to do next. Ahithophel, David's godlike-wise advisor, gave this advice: the conspiracy's biggest weakness is that people are afraid David and Absalom will be reconciled. If that happens, Absalom would be safe — everyone knows how much David loves Absalom — but what about the other conspirators? They would be executed as traitors. Because of this, the people are afraid to commit themselves.

To solve this problem, Ahithophel said, Absalom must do something so repugnant that everyone would know there could be no reconciliation. His suggestion: David had left his ten concubines behind to care for the palace, certain no one would dare molest them. Erect a tent on the terrace above the palace, and rape David's concubines, in full public view. That, even David could never forgive. The people would know there could be no danger of reconciliation, and they would pour their whole hearts into the rebellion. This act further fulfilled Nathan's prophecy against David.

By the time virile Absalom completed this chore, it was early evening. He held a second meeting to ask, "What next?" Ahithophel gave this advice: you have an army of 12,000 troops. The king has no army, only a few guards and a body of civilians. Set out immediately. Overtake him while he is defenseless. Concentrate your full efforts on killing just one man — David. With him dead, the rest of the leaders and population will have no one to turn to except you, and the takeover will be completed this very day. Absalom's advisors agreed that this plan was sound.

Absalom, however, wanted to hear from his other expert, Hushai, not realizing Hushai was determined to aid David. Absalom explained Ahithophel's plan. Hushai realized that if this advice was taken, David was probably doomed. David needed to cross the Jordan into safer territory, and Hushai wanted to buy him time. So Hushai told Absalom that Ahithophel's advice was not good this time. David and his men had a solid reputation as fierce fighters, who would not be easily defeated. David was too smart to camp with his men, and would be

hiding in a cave somewhere. A premature attack would probably fail to net David, thereby doing more harm than good. Besides, David was likely laying an ambush, expecting exactly the attack Ahithophel recommended. In that case, there would be early casualties among Absalom's men, and the remainder would lose heart, and the entire conspiracy would be in danger.

Instead of Ahithophel's plan, Hushai recommended this: Absalom should take the time to amass a huge army, recruited from the entire nation. This army would cover the region like dew covers the grass, engulfing David's inferior force. Escape would be impossible.

Hushai left Absalom not knowing whether he would take Ahithophel's advice or his. So he found David's priests, and through them sent this urgent message to David: Don't stop and rest for the night! Cross the Jordan into safer country, because if Absalom launches his attack tonight, and catches you before you've crossed, all will be lost.

But as night fell, no army was assembled, and so Ahithophel and Hushai could both see that Absalom had taken Hushai's advice. Wise Ahithophel realized from this that Absalom's conspiracy was doomed. David's men were invincible — experienced and successful men of war. If Absalom failed to strike now when David was weak, he couldn't possibly win later, after David had time to regroup his forces. When the battle was over, David might possibly exonerate Absalom, but no one else. Ahithophel, realizing that both the cause and he himself were doomed, went home, set his affairs in order, and hung himself, one of only five suicides recorded in the Bible.

David and his community crossed the Jordan, found a suitable place to headquarter their forces, and prepared for the inevitable civil war. General Joab, however, knew that David would never harm Absalom — he had already proven he would preserve his son, regardless of any offense. Joab couldn't bear this — he knew security could only be achieved if its greatest enemy, Absalom, was dead. But, of course, Joab couldn't say this to David. So he quietly looked for a way to disobey orders.

David organized his forces, and during a council of war, stated his intention to personally lead them in battle. Joab saw his opportunity. He convinced the other two generals that David's life was so valuable, David must stay safely in the city. Only the generals and troops would face Absalom's forces. So Joab forced David into retirement, knowing this would make it possible to disobey David's order and kill Absalom.

During the battle, Joab's men found and chased Absalom. He became trapped in the branches of a tree. The men, unwilling to disobey David's order to protect Absalom, summoned Joab, who killed Absalom himself. The rest of the conspirators gave up all hope and returned to their homes when they realized Absalom was dead. And so the rebellion was over.

David, however, was crushed when he learned of his son's death. Being a very emotional man, he howled in agony all afternoon, in his room above the city gate. The triumphant soldiers returning to the city heard the king's wailing and stopped their celebrations. All became quiet. None of the victorious soldiers wanted to be associated with the cause that had caused the king all this grief. They began going AWOL.

Joab was furious. With Absalom's army dispersed to their homes, and David's army quickly doing the same, the nation would be left defenseless, completely vulnerable to the slightest threat. Joab, ignoring protocol, interrupted the king and ordered him: after a successful

battle, a king's job is to congratulate the troops. Instead, these men risked their lives for you, and you have humiliated them. If you don't get a grip on yourself, and go say a few appropriate words to your men, by tonight we will be vulnerable to disaster worse than any you've ever faced.

So David obediently got a grip on himself and spoke encouragingly to his men. The army reassembled itself, and a semblance of security was achieved.

Source: 2 Samuel 14:28 - 19:8

Sheba's Rebellion

During his **rebellion**, Absalom had been the de facto king over much of Israel. He was dead, and those portions of Israel now had no king. David, having abdicated the capital and left his nation in disarray, wasn't king again yet. He had to negotiate with the network of local leaders to regain the kingship.

From early on, Israel had naturally divided itself into two portions: the tribe of Judah, and the rest of the tribes. So David began separate negotiations with the two groups.

Negotiations with Israel were going along nicely, and David became afraid they would be completed before negotiations with David's own tribe, Judah. So David took steps to expedite his case with Judah.

Unexpectedly, the leaders of Judah immediately lent David their support. David should have then completed negotiations with Israel, so he could show equal respect for both parties. Instead, David returned to Jerusalem and took his throne without waiting for Israel's blessing.

In their culture, with so much emphasis on saving or losing face, this was a huge insult to Israel. The leaders of Judah and those of Israel quarreled, and in the end the nation was divided.

One of the leaders in the bickering, a man named Sheba, declared himself king of Israel, exclusive of Judah. He raised an army, and civil war began once again.

But Sheba's forces were no match for David's men, under Joab's leadership. As Joab chased and Sheba retreated to the north, his men abandoned his cause. By the time Sheba reached the fortified border town of Bethmaachah, his army was so tiny that the residents there seemed not even to realize he was their king. And when Joab began building siegeworks, they didn't understand why they were under attack.

The citizens of Bethmaachah were not prepared for war. While they fretted about how to handle this crisis, a wise woman stood on top of the city wall and got Joab's attention. "We are peaceful people," she shouted. "Why are you attacking faithful citizens?"

"That's not the way it is," Joab answered. "We're after a man named Sheba, a traitor against King David. Hand over this one man, and I will withdraw from your city."

"Give me a few minutes," she said. Soon Sheba was dead, Bethmaachah was safe, and the kingdom was once again secure.

Source: 2 Samuel 19 - 20

Adonijah's Rebellion

When King David was old, he lost awareness of much that happened around him. He seems, in fact, to have become a little senile. God had chosen **Solomon**,¹ and David had privately promised that Solomon would succeed him as king. But in his feeble condition he was losing control of his kingdom, and his ability to control who succeeded him was in doubt.

At this moment David's son Adonijah decided to make himself king. To feel out his father, he set himself in a chariot surrounded by 50 men on foot, and paraded in public, as his brother **Absalom had done** to make himself king. David never challenged this treasonous behavior, and Adonijah took his silence for approval. He secured the aid of David's lifelong right hand man Joab, and some other important people.

He decided the moment had come. Adonijah held a great festival just outside the city, inviting many important people who he knew would be sympathetic. He named himself king, and there was a great celebration.

Not everyone celebrated, though. David's good friend the prophet Nathan knew David had chosen Solomon, and he agreed with his choice. If something wasn't done soon, Adonijah would be in control, and it would be too late.

Knowing he would have to approach the king delicately yet convincingly, he enlisted the support of Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. She and Nathan each made an appeal to David. Bathsheba went first, reminding David he had promised Solomon would be king, and she feared if Adonijah was allowed to make himself king, after David died she and Solomon would be killed as rivals to the throne.

Immediately Nathan entered and made his appeal to King David, asking whether David had changed his plans, making Adonijah king, without notifying his loyal friend. He pointed out that Adonijah had rejected David's most loyal supporters, among them Nathan and Solomon.

This double appeal brought David out of his stupor and into action. He immediately and publicly made Solomon king, with full procession and formality. Solomon ascended the throne while David still lived, a very unusual arrangement, but a wise one.

As Adonijah and his party were returning to Jerusalem, they heard the noise of a celebration. Learning Solomon was king, Adonijah's party dispersed in fear. Adonijah himself, now a recognized traitor to the crown, begged King Solomon for his life. Solomon sent Adonijah home with the warning that if he ever showed the slightest sign of treason again, he would die.

Later, Adonijah schemed to obtain one of now-dead David's assistant girls for his wife. This seemed innocent enough, but it reminded Solomon vividly of similar schemes Adonijah's brother Absalom had used in his **treasonous bid** for the throne. Solomon interpreted this as the first step in Adonijah's renewed effort to overthrow Solomon, and ordered him put to death, along with some of the top people in Adonijah's original conspiracy.

Source: 1 Kings 1 - 2

Note:

¹ 1 Chronicles 28:5

For Discussion

- When Samuel looked for the future leader of God's people, he was impressed with Jesse's sons, who were handsome, strong, and charismatic — perfect for the job. But the LORD rejected them in favor of someone too young and inexperienced to even be invited to the meeting.

When we select leaders and workers, should we select the most qualified, or those whose hearts are right with God?

- When David was anointed king, he was probably about 15 years old. When he became king, he was 30. In between, he experienced years of hardship and injustice, often wondering if he would even survive to be king.

Are we willing to faithfully endure long times of hardship while we wait for God's promises to be fulfilled?

- Although David had done nothing wrong, Saul tried time after time to kill him. The injustice of this must have grated on David. Then he had two opportunities to kill Saul. No one would have blamed him — it was a clear case of self-defense. Yet David refused, reasoning that since God had made Saul king, rebelling against Saul was equal to rebelling against God.

Are there people God has placed around us, who treat us unjustly? How does God want us to treat them?

- When David committed his famous sin, involving adultery, murder, and the incidental killing of innocents, a friend later came to him and pointed out that what he did was wrong. David didn't deny what he had done, he didn't make excuses, he didn't pass the blame. With deep grief, he simply said, "I have sinned." As soon as he did, God responded, "Your sin is forgiven."

What should be our attitude when we become aware of our sin? How will God react when we admit what we have done, without excuses?

Kings Compared to or Contrasted with David

1 Kings 11:4, 6 For it came to pass, when **Solomon** was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was **not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David** his father ... And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and **went not fully after the LORD, as did David** his father.

1 Kings 14:8 ... thou [**Jeroboam**] hast **not been as my servant David**, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes;

1 Kings 15:3 And he [Abijam] walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, **as the heart of David** his father.

1 Kings 15:11 And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, **as did David** his father.

2 Chronicles 17:3 And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he **walked in the first ways of his father David**, and sought not unto Baalim

2 Kings 16:2 Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, **like David** his father.

2 Kings 18:3 And he [Hezekiah] did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, **according to all that David** his father did.

2 Kings 22:2 And he [Josiah] did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and **walked in all the way of David** his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

SOLOMON

Summary

The time of King David and King Solomon was the golden age of Israel. David's military skill had relieved his kingdom from the constant threat of foreign invasion, and had established an empire over the surrounding region. Solomon's diplomatic skill maintained this empire without the need for further war.

Solomon was prolific in art and science, having written three of the books of our modern Bible — the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and most of the Book of Proverbs. Early in his reign, God promised him great wisdom, and in fact his wisdom was legendary in his own time and today.

However, in spite of the great advantages of his heritage from David, wisdom from God, and the prosperity and security that resulted, late in life Solomon fell away from God and lived a life full of sin. As a result, the glory days of Israel were short-lived. As soon as Solomon died, **the kingdom was split**, Solomon's heir King Rehoboam retaining the smaller portion, and both kingdoms experienced much trouble that resulted from Solomon's sins.

Where to read Solomon's story: 1 Kings 1 - 11; 1 Chronicles 29:21-25; 2 Chronicles 1 - 9

Adonijah's Rebellion

When Solomon's father King David was aging, he lost his mental sharpness, and his son Adonijah, securing the aid of David's long time right hand man Joab, thought he would take the opportunity to seize the throne for himself. Years ago Adonijah's older brother Absalom had died in an attempt to similarly seize the throne.

Adonijah held a coronation ceremony just outside the capital city, Jerusalem, inviting only his supporters and excluding those not in sympathy with his cause. There were sacrifices, chariots, pomp and circumstance, partying and shouts of "Long live King Adonijah!"

God had chosen Solomon to be David's successor,¹ and David had promised accordingly, but David's declining awareness threatened to limit his ability to control who took his throne. During all Adonijah's preparations, David never challenged his actions, and his supporters took this as evidence of David's approval, or at least of his inability to object. But now the case was brought to David's attention by Solomon's supporters, his mother among them. David, coming to his senses, immediately named Solomon king and went into retirement himself — a very unusual arrangement, but one that secured Solomon's successful ascension.

As Adonijah's party returned to Jerusalem, they came upon another coronation ceremony — Solomon's. Since this ceremony was fully endorsed by the king, Adonijah's supporters recognized it as unstoppable, and immediately realized the treasonous nature of their own actions. In alarm, the guests dispersed to their homes.

It would have been normal for Solomon to execute Adonijah and Joab as conspirators and traitors to the throne. To save his life, Adonijah took hold of the LORD's altar and refused to release it until Solomon promised to spare him; the altar was a customary place of refuge for those begging for mercy. Solomon freed Adonijah, with the stipulation that if he offended again, he would be executed for treason.

Some time later Adonijah petitioned for the hand of Abishag, a servant of dead King David, in marriage. In this request Solomon sensed the first steps of a future conspiracy — this marriage would raise Adonijah to a higher station, and was similar to the early steps in his brother Absalom's rebellion. Upon this infraction, Solomon executed his sentence of death, previously stayed, upon Adonijah and Joab.

Source: 1 Kings 1 - 2

Note:

¹ 1 Chronicles 28:5

Solomon's Wisdom

One night early in his reign, the LORD gave Solomon a dream. In the dream, God told Solomon to ask for something — anything he wanted.

Solomon, young and humble, spoke to God about the great responsibility involved in governing God's people, and he asked for wisdom sufficient for the job.

The LORD was pleased with Solomon's request. He could have asked for wealth, political or military security, long life or fame, but instead he asked for wisdom to carry out the responsibilities God had given him. And so God promised he would give Solomon exceptional wisdom, unlike anyone else before or after him, and he would also give him those things he hadn't asked for — wealth, respect, security.

God kept his promise, for Solomon's wisdom is legendary. He was recognized by his peers, the kings of surrounding kingdoms, as the wisest — wiser also than any philosophers

famous in his day. He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs — a prolific output for any writer or musician. He was the acknowledged expert in botany and biology. He held seminars attended by cabinet members of kings from throughout the region. Even the **Queen of Sheba**, who traveled 1,000 miles to visit Solomon, was totally wowed by the magnificence of his operations.

Source: 1 Kings 3:1-15, 4:29-34; 2 Chronicles 1

A Difficult Legal Case

God had promised to give King Solomon exceptional wisdom. It wasn't long before God's promise was tested, and Solomon judged a court case of unusual difficulty. Two women, plaintiff and defendant, each had a baby. One baby had died, and each woman claimed to be the mother of the surviving infant.

Clearly one woman was lying, but which one? Any parent who has faced two children each saying "he did it" can appreciate the difficulty of Solomon's position. And failure to provide justice in this difficult case would set the tone for the rest of his administration.

Solomon ordered that a sword be brought to the courtroom, and a murmur must have rumbled through the crowd. Then he ordered, "Cut the living child in half, and give one part to each woman!" The observers must have been stunned with the bloody cruelty of this court order.

The woman who had filed suit couldn't bear to see her child killed. In a panic she immediately withdrew the suit, asking the king to judge in favor of her opponent, but spare the child's life. The defendant, more interested in winning than in the child's welfare, argued "I like the king's decision — cut him in two!"

Immediately King Solomon stopped the proceedings, rescued the child, and ordered, "Give the living baby to the first woman — she is his mother!"

Solomon's wisdom was immediately obvious to everyone present, and his reputation spread throughout the kingdom. God had indeed kept his promise.

Source: 1 Kings 3:16-28

Solomon's Temple

King Solomon built many houses and palaces, gardens and parks, irrigation projects and public works. But the most famous of all his achievements was the temple that bore his name. For nearly 400 years Solomon's Temple stood as the focal point for worship of the LORD.

The structure, though not over-large — it was about 90 feet by 30, and three stories high — was magnificent. **King David**, forbidden by God from building the temple, consoled himself by **accumulating** vast amounts of building materials, including timber, dressed stone, iron and bronze, silver and gold. Solomon followed this up with further imports of lumber and quarried stone. The amount was so great that, to transport the materials, Solomon conscripted a labor force of nearly 200,000 of his own people, not counting the workers of

the foreign exporters. The temple's interior walls were dressed with carvings of angels and nature scenes, and were plated with gold throughout — about 23 tons of it. Even with a huge staff of both paid and conscripted labor, its construction had taken seven years.

For the temple's dedication, Solomon hosted a festival, inviting the entire nation. A great parade accompanied the ushering of the Ark of the Covenant from its tent to its new home in the temple's inner sanctuary, the Holy Place. As the Ark was positioned in its place, the LORD showed his approval; the glory of the LORD, in the form of a cloud, at once dark and shining brightly, filled the temple. It was so intense the priests had to abandon their rituals and go outside.

Solomon preached sermons and prayed prayers, asking the LORD to be present in the temple, to use the temple to draw his people to faithfulness, and to bless all who worship him there.

When all was done, the LORD spoke to Solomon, promising that if his people were faithful, he would bless them, but if they turned to sin, he would destroy them. Even so, if they repented of their sin, he would bless them again, rescuing them from the troubles that resulted from their sin.

Source: 1 Kings 5 - 9; 2 Chronicles 2 - 7

The Queen of Sheba

God gave Solomon the great wisdom he had promised him. Solomon's fame spread throughout the region, and the queen of Sheba, 1,000 miles to the south, was deeply impressed with the stories she heard. Resolving to pick Solomon's brain, she gathered gifts fit for a king, assembled a caravan, and traveled to Jerusalem.

Solomon met her. She asked all her difficult questions, and Solomon answered them all to her satisfaction. Furthermore, the queen was overcome with awe for Solomon's wealth, vast dominion and smooth-running administration. The king gave her gifts fit for a queen, and she returned home.

It was this visit to which Jesus later referred when he said, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."¹

Source: 1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12

Note:

¹ Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31

Solomon's Apostasy

Though Solomon had long been faithful to the LORD, late in life he fell away.

Part of Solomon's diplomatic success had come through marriages with foreign royalty. In all, he had 1,000 wives, many of them foreign. The LORD had forbidden his people to marry

foreigners,¹ for fear their religious practices would corrupt the true worship of the LORD. And in fact, this is what happened to Solomon.

Out of love for his wives, Solomon built shrines to their idols. To please his wives, he personally participated in the worship of those idols. This was no small sin, nor a positive expression of religious freedom. Each of these idols was connected with detestable practices. For example, both of the idols Chemosh and Molech required human sacrifice of children or infants in their worship.

And so Solomon, previously pure and committed to the LORD, introduced much sin into Israel in the name of political success. And this apostasy came in spite of God's great blessing to Solomon — God had personally spoken to him on two occasions, and had given him great wisdom, wealth, and security.

For this apostasy, God told Solomon he had decided to remove him from being king. Yet out of respect for Solomon's father, faithful **King David**, he would not do this during Solomon's lifetime, nor would he remove him completely — Solomon's heir would retain a small portion of the kingdom. This was fulfilled when Solomon's son **King Rehoboam** foolishly **lost most of the kingdom**.

Source: 1 Kings 11

Note:

¹ Deuteronomy 7:3-4

For Discussion

- God offered Solomon the chance to ask God for anything he wanted. Ignoring the things a king might want — wealth, respect, security, health — Solomon asked instead for wisdom, so he could carry out the responsibilities God had given him. God was pleased with this request.

What kinds of things do we usually pray for?

- In spite of Solomon's great wisdom, and his multiple communications from God — desired by all who love God — Solomon turned to a life of sin. Do wisdom or communications from God guarantee our faithfulness?
- God appeared to Solomon three times — at the beginning, the middle, and the end of his time as king. The first time, God said, "Solomon, ask me for something good." Solomon asked for wisdom, and God was pleased. The second time, God promised Solomon that if he remained faithful, his kingdom would be secure, but if he abandoned God, he would lose his kingdom. The third time, God told Solomon that because he had abandoned God, he would lose the kingdom.

God has made us wonderful promises, if we remain faithful to him. What will we choose?

As a young man, Solomon followed God closely. But in his old age, he abandoned God.

1 Kings 3:3 And **Solomon** loved the LORD, **walking in the statutes of David** his father ...

...

1 Kings 11:4 For it came to pass, when **Solomon** was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart **was not perfect** with the LORD his God, as was the heart of **David** his father.

Solomon actively promoted the worship of several idols, and the sins associated with them, including human sacrifice.

As a result of Solomon's backsliding, God divided the kingdom, giving the larger share to Solomon's rival **Jeroboam**.¹ God also raised political and military problems in Solomon's later years, in contrast with the peace that had prevailed while Solomon was faithful.²

Notes:

¹ 1 Kings 11:11, 13

² 1 Kings 11:14-25

THIS SECTION IS THE KING OF JUDAH

King Rehoboam

Summary

King Rehoboam's legacy is one of loss — loss of half the kingdom, loss of integrity, loss of national sovereignty.

Loss of half the kingdom — During Rehoboam's first week in office, his grandiose ideas and failure to read the political climate resulted in a rebellion, in which 10 of Israel's 12 tribes seceded, forming the nation known from then on as Israel. Rehoboam's two tribes assumed the name of Rehoboam's tribe, Judah.

Loss of integrity — Rehoboam, like his father **King Solomon**, abandoned the LORD and sponsored idol cults and the sins associated with them.

Loss of national sovereignty — As punishment, the LORD declared that he would not aid them against the invasion being planned by Shishak, king of Egypt. However, king and people repented, and so God stopped Egypt from destroying Judah. However, Judah became a vassal nation under Egypt's supervision.

Where to read Rehoboam's story: 1 Kings 12:1-24, 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 10 - 12

The Coronation Disaster

Upon the death of **King Solomon**, his son Rehoboam assumed the throne. When the nation's local leaders gathered for Rehoboam's coronation, they retained **Jeroboam**, a man respected for his leadership skills, to represent them in a collective bargaining session with the new king. Solomon had placed an oppressive burden of taxes on the public in order to pay for his massive palaces and public works. The people wanted relief. Rehoboam said he would consider the matter and reply in three days.

The experienced cabinet members of Solomon's staff advised Rehoboam to submit to their demand; this action would assure their loyalty throughout his entire reign. The political trainees of Rehoboam's generation, however, having grown up among palaces, temples, parks, and public works of unsurpassed excellence, couldn't resign themselves to living less luxuriously than the previous generation. They wanted to construct even *more* excellent works, and recommended Rehoboam *raise* taxes to pay for their ambitions. Rehoboam agreed.

When Rehoboam presented this decision to Jeroboam and the local leaders, they stated their intention to secede from the union, and they quit the coronation. Rehoboam ignored their decision, and at the scheduled time, accompanied his tax collector on his duties as usual. However, the rebel tribes, united in their refusal, stoned the tax collector. Rehoboam himself narrowly escaped.

Still in denial, Rehoboam refused to recognize the independent nation, viewing it as an internal rebellion to be managed by police action. He assembled an army for this purpose

from the two tribes — Judah and Benjamin — that remained loyal to him. Jeroboam, now named king of the 10 tribes in rebellion, prepared armies for defense. But just as civil war was ready to begin, the LORD sent the prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam with the message that he must go home and not fight this war. God had arranged the split of the nation because of King Solomon's sins. So war was averted.

Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam, however, built extensive fortifications along their border; and wars were fought continually during their reigns.

The 10 tribes under Jeroboam retained the historical name of the nation, "Israel". The two tribes under Rehoboam assumed the name "Judah," the name of Rehoboam's tribe.

Source: 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10 - 11

Rehoboam's Apostasy and God's Judgment

All this time, King Rehoboam was faithful to the LORD. But after three years, the fortifications were complete, and Rehoboam relaxed both his military efforts and his morals. With the aid of his wife Maachah, an Asherah worshipper, he built pagan shrines, ignoring the LORD's prohibition. These cults involved the people in many sinful practices, including most notably male prostitution.

After two years of apostasy, Shishak king of Egypt launched an invasion force against Judah. The LORD sent the prophet Shemaiah to announce he would not defend Judah; because of their apostasy, he was abandoning them to their fate. Hearing this, Rehoboam and the local leaders agreed that they deserved this punishment from God. Seeing their contrition, the LORD changed his mind; he would not allow them to be destroyed. He would, however, allow Egypt to dominate Judah.

Egypt subdued Judah, and Shishak confiscated everything of value in Rehoboam's palace and **Solomon's temple**. Rehoboam replaced these with cheap imitations, and even these were kept under lock and key, being brought into view only when the king was present.

Rehoboam's repentance, however, was short lived. The remainder of his 17 years are summarized in the statement "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 12:14).

Source: 1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 11:17, 12:1-16

For King Rehoboam's first three years in office, he carefully obeyed the LORD, aided by the faithful who fled to his land from the evil **King Jeroboam** of neighboring Israel. Later, though, Rehoboam introduced cults into his land, aided by his wife Maachah. Although he repented, and so God stopped the punishment he had been planning, God's overall verdict of Rehoboam is evil:

2 Chronicles 12:14 And **he [Rehoboam] did evil**, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD

King Abijam

King Abijam succeeded his father **King Rehoboam**, becoming the second king of Judah. His reign was a continuation of his father's regime, characterized by continuing wars with **King Jeroboam** of Israel, and by abandonment of the LORD. Though his three years as king are declared to be evil, the only incident recorded does show some limited faith and success.

War broke out yet again between Judah and Israel. As the armies faced each other, King Abijam addressed a sermon to the enemy army. He recounted how Israel had abandoned the LORD in favor of Jeroboam's religion of **golden calf idols**, whereas Judah continued to faithfully obey the LORD. Reminding them that God had by a solemn covenant given the throne to **David**, and thereby to David's heir Abijam, he invited them to reject Jeroboam and his cult and return to the LORD and rejoin Judah, predicting that the LORD would fight on behalf of his faithful people.

While Abijam made his appeal, Jeroboam's people prepared an ambush, surrounding Abijam's army. Seeing their plight, the soldiers cried out to God. Though we are not told how, God routed Jeroboam's army. Judah inflicted 500,000 casualties on Israel, and captured many border towns, including Bethel, one of the centers of Jeroboam's golden calf cult. Jeroboam's administration never recovered from this setback.

Unfortunately, at this point Abijam expressed his faithlessness. Having captured Bethel, he failed to dismantle the golden calf, which continued ushering Israel's people into sin until **King Josiah destroyed it** 300 years later.

It is an indication of the continuing presence of a sub-population faithful to the LORD in Judah, and of the depth of Israel's rejection of the LORD, that even after Judah's decades of pagan worship sponsored by **Solomon**, Rehoboam, and himself, King Abijam could announce to the enemy's army, "The LORD is our God."¹

Where to read Abijam's story: 1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13:1 - 14:1

Note:

¹ 2 Chronicles 13:10

Little is known of King Abijam. His reign is characterized in scripture as a continuation of his father's evil reign.

1 Kings 15:1-3 Now in the eighteenth year of king **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat reigned **Abijam** over Judah. Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And he **walked in all the sins** of his father [**Rehoboam**], which he had done before him: and **his heart was not perfect** with the LORD his God, as the heart of **David** his father.

King Asa

Summary

King Asa was the third king of Judah, and the first one characterized in the Bible as a man of integrity. His 41-year reign was marked by revival in the worship of the LORD, and removal of paganism and its associated evils; by safety and reduced crime; and by military peace, interrupted by only two brief incidents.

As a measure of the stability that existed in Judah during Asa's time: his reign spanned the reigns of seven kings of Israel!

Unfortunately, late in life his faith wavered, and at two points of crisis, he ignored God and turned to secular sources of help. Nevertheless, God's overwhelming verdict is that "Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God."¹

Where to read Asa's story: 1 Kings 15:10-24; 2 Chronicles 14 - 16

Note:

¹ 2 Chronicles 14:2

Asa's First Revival

As soon as King Asa took the throne, he instituted a series of religious reforms. He went from town to town throughout the land, removing pagan altars and shrines and prohibiting the sins associated with them, and he restored proper worship of the LORD as the national religion.

In recognition of this good work, the LORD gave Judah military peace on every front for the first 10 years of Asa's reign.

Recognizing that peace would not last forever, Asa wisely used that time to build and supply border fortifications, and to train and equip an army of 580,000 men.

Source: 2 Chronicles 14:1-8

Rescue from the Invasion by Ethiopia

After this time of peace with preparation for war, the army of Ethiopia invaded Judah. The number of soldiers recorded in the Bible is one thousand thousand (i.e., one million), though this may have been hyperbole for "vast beyond numbering." At any rate, Asa's forces were far inferior. In addition, Syria boasted a mechanized army of 300 chariots, for which Asa's foot soldiers were no match. In a beautiful prayer, Asa expressed his helplessness and his faith in God to defend them.

When the battle began, the Ethiopian army was massacred. As they retreated, Judah's army pursued them to the Philistine border, inflicting such heavy casualties that Ethiopia could

not recover. On the return trip, they gathered a great amount of plunder from the fallen soldiers. The LORD had indeed defended them.

Source: 2 Chronicles 14:9-15

Asa's Second Revival

As the victorious army returned from this against-the-odds rout, a prophet named Azariah took the opportunity to remind Asa and the entire nation that this success had come from the LORD. He reminded them of the military vulnerability and crime that had prevailed in the pagan days of Kings **Rehoboam** and **Abijam**, compared to the peace and safety that existed since the revival ten years ago. And he urged them to renew their commitment to the LORD.

Hearing this, King Asa redoubled his efforts, and the former revival took on new life. He again toured the nation, destroying idols, abolishing the immoral practices associated with their worship, and reinstating worship of the LORD. This effort lasted five years, at which time the king called for a meeting of the entire population at Jerusalem. Here he added yet more force to his efforts, drawing the people into a renewed covenant with the LORD, even to the point of threatening with capital punishment any who maintained their pagan habits — in accordance with the law of Moses. The public was thrilled, and the celebration intense.

As a result of their dedication, God gave them peace on all borders for yet another 20 years.

Source: 1 Kings 15:9-15; 2 Chronicles 15

Asa's Decline

Late in King Asa's reign, **King Baasha** of neighboring Israel began to prepare for war with Judah. He closed the borders and fortified border cities.

Naturally, Asa saw this as a threat to be taken seriously. When Baasha's preparations were well along, Asa entered negotiations with Benhadad, king of Syria, now at peace with Israel, but historically an enemy. Asa reminded Benhadad of a treaty between the two kings' fathers, and paid him a large sum to break his peace with Israel, looting **Solomon's temple** and his own palace for the bribe. Benhadad agreed, and sent armies to attack various towns in Israel.

Baasha, finding his kingdom under attack, abandoned his preparations against Judah and left to defend his kingdom. Asa took the opportunity to dismantle the abandoned work and confiscate the building materials, implementing a nationwide draft to provide the work force.

And so Judah was safe; Baasha never rejoined the project. However, the LORD sent the prophet Hanani to tell Asa that he had been negligent. God had intended to bring disaster on Benhadad, who was always hostile to Israel and Judah. But Asa had failed to consult God in this crisis, and so Benhadad had escaped. Hanani reminded Asa that years ago he had faced a **great crisis**, called on God, and God had rescued him. But this time he had ignored God, and because of this, the remainder of his reign would be marked by war.

But rather than repenting, King Asa was furious. He had Hanani arrested, and abused his sympathizers.

A few years later, King Asa contracted a serious disease in his feet. Once again, he refused to turn to the LORD, seeking only the help of his powerless doctors.

In spite of these lapses late in his life, King Asa's legacy is one of a man faithful to the LORD, and the benefits of his faithfulness spilled over into his entire kingdom.

Source: 2 Chronicles 16

For Discussion

- Faithful King Asa faced two military crises in his life — invasion by Ethiopia and threatened invasion by Israel. Each time, God also had an agenda of crippling a marauding force — first of Ethiopia, then of Syria. In the first crisis, Asa trusted the LORD, and both Asa's crisis and the LORD's agenda were served — Judah was protected, and marauding Ethiopia was crushed. In the second crisis, Asa acted without consulting the LORD. As a result, his crisis was solved, but the LORD's intention to cripple marauding Syria was not fulfilled, and Syria was a problem to Israel and Judah for decades to come.

When we face a crisis, God has a wonderful agenda that we usually can't see. Whether his agenda is fulfilled or not depends on whether we trust him or solve our problem without consulting him.

King Asa's record of energetic reforms, wise use of time, and successful handling of extreme crisis through faith in God lasted through more than three decades of his time as king. His godly leadership was rewarded with peace and safety throughout his kingdom.

1 Kings 15:11-14 And **Asa did that which was right** in the eyes of the LORD, as did **David** his father. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed: nevertheless **Asa's heart was perfect** with the LORD all his days.

Unfortunately, Asa had a **time of backsliding** in his old age, recorded in 2 Chronicles 16; so one might argue that in our **chart** we should label Asa "did right in youth, evil in old age," as we did with some kings. Nevertheless, we follow the above scripture passage, and record Asa as a king who "did right," like his forefather David, who also had times of backsliding, but was overall faithful to God.

King Jehoshaphat

Summary

The story of King Jehoshaphat's 25-year reign simply glows with his devotion to the LORD. He never once fell into the pagan religion or practices that plagued neighboring Israel, and

many of Judah's kings as well. Much of his story is a record of his religious reforms, detailed below.

Jehoshaphat's most **shining moment** came when his nation was under attack by an alliance of three vast armies. Recognizing his totally helpless position, the king hosted a nationwide day of prayer. When the LORD, answering the prayers, told Jehoshaphat he would defeat this enemy without fighting, he trusted the LORD so completely that he dispatched an army — not of soldiers, but of singers, singing praise to God. When this army came upon the invaders, they discovered them completely destroyed by internal fighting.

Jehoshaphat was a man of great diplomatic skill, and his biggest weakness was his habit of forming alliances with evil men — first with Israel's **King Ahab**, then later with Ahab's son **King Ahaziah**, and finally with Ahab's son **King Jehoram**. The LORD soundly reprimanded him for supporting sin in that way.

In spite of this weakness, Jehoshaphat must be remembered as one of the great heroes of faith, completely dedicated to God.

Where to read Jehoshaphat's story: 1 Kings 22:1-50; 2 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 17:1 - 21:3

Jehoshaphat's Early Reforms

Jehoshaphat came to the throne in the wake of a time of war at the conclusion of his father **King Asa's** reign. For this reason, among his first actions were border fortifications, especially on the border with Israel.

From the beginning, he also instituted religious reform. He never once participated in the prominent Baal cult or the other idol-based religions that had snared Israel and Judah. He removed the Asherah shrines.

In his third year, Jehoshaphat established a traveling school, open to the public — a rare innovation in his day. It was staffed by 16 well trained men, and toured the land, teaching the law of the LORD to the population.

Jehoshaphat's leadership was so effective, and God's blessing so rich, that internal peace and military security became the rule. Even the Philistines, longtime adversaries, became a tribute paying vassalage.

Source: 2 Chronicles 17

The Death of King Ahab

King Jehoshaphat had, by his diplomatic prowess, established good relations with Israel, a previously threatening neighbor. To achieve good relations, he had arranged a marriage between his son Prince **Jehoram** and Princess **Athaliah**, daughter of Israel's **King Ahab**. This was certainly against the LORD's wishes, for God forbids marriages — and indeed all partnerships — between his people and people committed to evil.

During a meeting between the two kings, Israel's King Ahab expressed his desire to recover territories taken from him by Syria. Jehoshaphat agreed to join him in this venture, on the condition that they first seek the LORD's approval.

The LORD did not approve. The prophet Micaiah foretold that Ahab would be killed in this battle. However, Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to fight anyway, with the added precaution that Ahab would enter the battle incognito, to sidestep the prophecy, and Jehoshaphat would take Ahab's place at the head of the army.

The Syrian king, who held a grudge against Ahab, had instructed his men to focus solely on killing Ahab, ignoring every other battle objective. When these men saw a king at the head of Israel's army, they assumed it was Ahab, surrounded him, and fought fiercely. Jehoshaphat, realizing he was in serious trouble, shouted to the LORD for help. Hearing this, the enemy realized it couldn't possibly be Ahab, for with his lifelong commitment to paganism, Ahab would never call out to the LORD. So they abandoned the chase and began looking elsewhere for Ahab, and Jehoshaphat was saved.

Ahab was killed by a random arrow, and retreated to die near his palace at Jezreel.

When Jehoshaphat returned home, a prophet named Jehu informed him that the LORD was angry with him for entering the battle against the LORD's instructions, given by the prophet Micaiah. The partnership between godly Jehoshaphat and wicked Ahab was repulsive to God. However, because this was an aberration from Jehoshaphat's usual stance of faith and obedience, the LORD did not punish Jehoshaphat.

Source: 1 Kings 22:1-40; 2 Chronicles 18:1 - 19:3

Jehoshaphat's Later Reforms

King Jehoshaphat instituted another round of reforms, this time in the field of justice. He appointed judges in every major city and took precautions against judicial corruption. He took steps to educate the judges, the disputants in court, and the public at large, in the law of the LORD.

He also continued his religious reforms, including touring schools for the public, and elimination of pagan religion and practice.

Source: 1 Kings 22:41-47; 2 Chronicles 19:4-11

Invasion!

King Jehoshaphat faced his greatest crisis — indeed, it threatened to exterminate the nation — when three nations joined, forming a vast army, and launched an invasion. Scouting reports revealed the enemy was already nearby, and Judah was far overpowered.

In alarm, Jehoshaphat organized a national day of prayer. The entire population assembled at Jerusalem, fasting and praying. The king himself prayed a beautiful prayer expressing God's might, his history and promise of aid to his people, and their present helplessness, ending his prayer with the words, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

As the people waited, the LORD spoke through the prophet Jahaziel, instructing the army to march against the invaders without fear, take up their battle positions, and watch the LORD fight this battle; the army would not have to fight at all. In great relief, king and people worshipped the LORD.

Early the next morning, Jehoshaphat assembled his army. But God had told him they wouldn't have to fight — so the army was led, not by the bravest soldiers, as was customary, but by the temple choir! They marched to meet the enemy, singing praises to God. As the enemy heard the army of Judah approaching them, singing, they were thrown into confusion. The three armies began bickering with each other, then killing each other. By the time Jehoshaphat's army reached the battlefield, there was no sign of a single survivor.

The entire army was organized into a work force to carry away everything of value. It is a measure of just how outnumbered Jehoshaphat was, that it took this work force three days to collect all the plunder!

The battle was followed by intense celebration, and as the news spread, the nearby kingdoms were so struck with dread that no one waged war against Judah for the rest of Jehoshaphat's reign.

Source: 2 Chronicles 20:1-29

Jehoshaphat's Merchant Shipping Disaster

After the death of **King Ahab**, Jehoshaphat formed an alliance with Ahab's son and successor, **King Ahaziah**. Together they built a fleet of ships, intending to embark on the international shipping trade.

However Ahaziah, like Ahab, was wholeheartedly committed to evil, and God found the alliance repugnant. A prophet told Jehoshaphat that the LORD would destroy the ships, and in fact they were shipwrecked before their first voyage.

Ahaziah urged Jehoshaphat not to give up, but to rebuild and try again. Jehoshaphat, however, listened to the LORD and refused.

Source: 1 Kings 22:48-49; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37

The Moabite Rebellion

King Jehoshaphat joined **Jehoram**, now Israel's king, in a war against Moab. Moab had been subdued in **King Ahab's** time, but was now arming itself against Israel. King Jehoram, like his father Ahab and his brother **King Ahaziah**, rejected the LORD, clinging to the religion of the **golden calf idols**. Obtaining also the aid of the king of Edom, the three kings with their armies set out together across the desert.

A week into their journey, they faced mortal crisis when they exhausted their supply of water, finding no new supply in the desert. Jehoram blamed the LORD for this disaster, but godly Jehoshaphat inquired if there were a clergyman nearby, so they could seek advice

from the LORD. Learning the prophet Elisha was in the area, Jehoram and Jehoshaphat set out together to meet with him.

Elisha, having previously become disgusted with wicked Jehoram, was about to refuse to meet them, but changed his mind out of consideration for Jehoshaphat. Elisha requested music, and while he listened the LORD gave him this message: they were to dig the valley full of ditches, and the LORD, without benefit of inclement weather, would fill the ditches with water. Furthermore, the LORD would give them victory over Moab, and they were to impair Moab's future ability to arm themselves for war by destroying their timber, wells, and farm fields.

They dug ditches, and the next morning a flood ran through the valley, filling the ditches with water. So the armies were rescued from death by dehydration.

That same morning, the army of Moab looked out over the valley where the three armies had camped the night before. In the light of the rising sun, the water-filled ditches looked like blood-covered fields, and the Moabites concluded that the three armies had quarreled and slaughtered each other. Rushing without caution to collect the plunder, they ran unarmed into Israel's camp, and were routed.

Source: 2 Kings 3

For Discussion

- When Jehoshaphat faced an invasion force that far outnumbered and overpowered him, he trusted the LORD. He could have applied his very considerable diplomatic skills to gain the help of neighboring pagan armies, as other kings often did, but he didn't. What stance does God want us to take when we face challenges beyond our ability?
- Three times Jehoshaphat formed partnerships with men who rejected the LORD and followed the popular religion of the day — first with Ahab, then with Ahaziah, and finally with Jehoram. The LORD repeatedly made Jehoshaphat know how distasteful he found the partnerships. How does God feel about modern-day partnerships between people of God and people of the world?

King Jehoshaphat trusted the LORD completely and unflinchingly. In good times, he instituted reforms in the fields of religion, public education, justice, and military preparation. In times of crisis, he turned to the LORD reflexively, and the LORD rescued him from impossible situations. He never once fell into the vices that brought great trouble to Judah and Israel at other times.

In consideration of his outstanding faithfulness and success, the LORD recognized him with this judgment:

1 Kings 22:42-43 **Jehoshaphat** was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of **Asa** his father; he turned not aside from it, **doing that which was right** in the eyes of the LORD ...

King Jehoram

King Jehoram, son and successor of the godly **King Jehoshaphat**, must be remembered as one of the most decidedly wicked kings in Judah's history. Before becoming king, he was married to **Athaliah**, daughter of Israel's **King Ahab**. She was an evil woman who influenced Jehoram to reject the LORD and practice evil. Early in his reign Jehoram murdered his six brothers and some others he considered rivals. Later when Jehoram's son and successor died, his widow Athaliah committed the same crime, murdering all Jehoram's heirs to make herself sovereign.

During Jehoram's eight years as king, he abandoned the LORD and ruled sinfully, as Ahab and the other kings of Israel had done, and sponsored false religions as they had.

In consequence of his evil deeds, Jehoram faced two rebellions. First Edom, previously a vassal state, rebelled and achieved their independence. Trying to suppress the revolt, Jehoram was surrounded and narrowly escaped being killed. Later Libnah, a well fortified city in Judah near the Philistine border, declared their independence and seceded.

Because of Jehoram's commitment to sin, especially idolatry and the murder of his brothers, the prophet Elijah sent him a letter stating that the LORD would strike a heavy blow against his family, and that he himself would die a painful death from a lingering disease.

Soon after, Judah was invaded by enemies. They plundered the king's palace, and took his wives and sons away, later killing them. Of his sons, only the youngest, **Ahaziah**, escaped. Queen Athaliah must have somehow escaped too, since she figures into the later narrative. Then Jehoram contracted a fatal disease, causing intense pain for two years, after which he died, to no one's regret. There was no state funeral, and he was buried in a commoner's grave, apart from the royal family.

Where to read Jehoram's story: 2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21

For Discussion

- Jehoram's father, godly King Jehoshaphat, arranged a marriage between Jehoram and Israel's Princess Athaliah. Any alliance between good and evil is repugnant to God, and this marriage was no exception. Jehoshaphat knew better, but arranged the marriage anyway, to gain a political advantage. Justice being what it is, Jehoshaphat suffered no evil effects from the marriage, but his descendents did — under his wife's evil influence, Jehoram murdered his brothers; with the kingdom weakened by idol worship, enemies murdered Jehoram's sons; upon Jehoram's death, Athaliah murdered more of Jehoram's sons, and **Jehu** killed still more.

Our sins may not bring immediate consequences to us, but our children are almost certain to suffer for our sinful choices. If we love our children, how can we justify our sins?

Jehoram of Judah must be remembered as one of the most decidedly wicked kings in Israel's history. His first official act as king was to murder his six brothers as rivals to the throne. He followed this by sponsoring idol worship and the sins associated with it.

Jehoram quickly faced the consequences of his evil deeds, facing military defeat first abroad, and then at home, and finally succumbing to a horrible and terminal illness. His judgment is summed up in these words:

2 Kings 8:16-18 And in the fifth year of Joram [that is, the *other Jehoram*] the son of **Ahab** king of Israel, **Jehoshaphat** being then king of Judah, **Jehoram** the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for **the daughter of Ahab** was his wife: and he **did evil** in the sight of the LORD.

King Ahaziah of Judah

King Ahaziah's story is filled with tragedy and wickedness. The son of a brutal couple, **King Jehoram** and **Queen Athaliah**, and grandson of Israel's idol-addicted **King Ahab**, Ahaziah followed the evil path of his forbears during his one year as Judah's king.

He ascended to the throne upon the death by disease of his father Jehoram. The youngest son, only 22, he was chosen by default, all his brothers and his father's cabinet having been kidnapped and killed by an invading army, and his uncles having been slain by his father as rivals to the throne. His own family and friends thus absent, he turned to his mother's family for friendship and counsel. Ahaziah was the nephew, through his mother, of Israel's evil **King Jehoram** (brother-in-law of the other King Jehoram, Ahaziah's father), and the two became close confidants.

The only incident the Bible relates about Ahaziah involves his death. Ahaziah accompanied Jehoram in battle against Syria. Jehoram was wounded, and retired to his palace at Jezreel to recuperate. Ahaziah accompanied him there. As the two kings rested, Jehoram's general **Jehu** approached the city by chariot, having been sent by the LORD's prophet Elisha to kill all the descendents of evil King Ahab, and assume the throne of Israel. Both Jehoram and Ahaziah were descendents of Ahab. As Jehu's chariot approached, the two kings went together to meet Jehu, and he killed them both.

When Queen Athaliah discovered her son had been killed, she determined to ascend the throne herself. To this end, she killed the entire royal family. However, Ahaziah's baby son **Joash** was rescued by Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba, and later Athaliah's crime was capitally punished, and Joash made king.

Where to read Ahaziah's story: 2 Kings 8:24 - 9:29; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9

Ahaziah's brief reign was a time of confusion and evil. The son of a wicked couple, he made his friends among equally wicked relatives, and followed in their ways:

2 Kings 8:25-27 In the twelfth year of Joram [that is, Israel's **King Jehoram**] the son of **Ahab** king of Israel did **Ahaziah** the son of **Jehoram** king of Judah begin to reign. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was **Athaliah**, the daughter [that is, descendent; she was actually the granddaughter] of **Omri** king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of

Ahab, and **did evil** in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab.

Queen Athaliah

Athaliah was the daughter of Israel's **King Ahab**, was married to Judah's **King Jehoram**, and was the mother of Jehoram's successor, **King Ahaziah**. Jehoram died prematurely by disease, and Ahaziah was killed only a year later.

When this happened Athaliah, well schooled in evil, decided not to allow her baby grandson to become king, but to assume the throne herself. To this end, she murdered every heir who might be a rival to the throne, and declared herself queen. However, her daughter Jehosheba managed to rescue Ahaziah's baby son **Joash**, and with the aid of her husband, the faithful priest Jehoiada, kept him hidden for six years.

When Joash was seven years old Jehoiada, in a display of great courage, foresight, and faith, orchestrated a coup to overthrow wicked Athaliah and place the rightful king, **King David's** heir Joash, on the throne. Jehoiada secretly amassed a large force at the temple by the device of detaining all workers when their shift ended and the new shift arrived. These men he armed and stationed strategically in the temple perimeter. When all was ready he brought Joash out of hiding, crowned him, presented him with a copy of the constitution, and proclaimed him king. There was a great celebration, for no one was happy with Athaliah's rule.

When she heard the commotion, Athaliah came to inspect. Learning what had happened, she came to the temple shouting, "Treason!" — we cannot fail to note the irony in this pronouncement. Jehoiada ordered his men to kill her and anyone remaining loyal to her. This was done, and the people enjoyed a great celebration.

Where to read Athaliah's story: 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10 - 23:15

Queen Athaliah's commitment to evil was second to none. The child of an intensely wicked family, she learned well the ways of her father **King Ahab** and her mother Queen Jezebel. Her murderous selfishness infected her husband **King Jehoram**, and she fully earned her fate and her judgment.

2 Chronicles 24:7 ... **Athaliah, that wicked woman** ...

King Joash of Judah

Summary

Joash arose as a bright star in a dark time. For 15 years Judah had been ruled by **Jehoram**, **Ahaziah**, and **Athaliah**, a family infamous for their brutality. As a baby, Joash was rescued from murder by his aunt Jehosheba, and was raised by her and her husband, the priest Jehoiada. These two were a beacon for God in an otherwise cruel and vice-ridden age.

At the age of seven Joash, who was of the kingly line of **David**, became king of Judah. Mentored by godly Jehoiada, he eliminated many of the evils instituted by his forebears.

Most notably, he supervised the reconstruction of **Solomon's temple**, now deteriorating with age.

In kindness to Joash, raised without the benefit of father or mother or a stable community, God allowed Jehoiada to live to an extreme age, past at least Joash's 30th year. All this time Joash followed the wise counsel of this great man of God.

Even so, when Jehoiada died, Joash fell victim to political pressures and abandoned the LORD, letting his newly refurbished temple fall again into disrepair, and entering into cult worship and the sins associated with it. The LORD sent prophets to warn the king, but he refused to hear. Climactically, the LORD sent Jehoiada's son Zechariah to rebuke Joash. But rather than repent, Joash coldly plotted the murder of his rescuer's son.

Not long after, Joash himself was **killed** in a conspiracy.

Where to read Joash's story: 2 Kings 11 - 12; 2 Chronicles 22:10 - 24:27

Joash, King at Seven

When Prince Joash was just a baby, his father **King Ahaziah** was present during a coup in neighboring Israel, and was killed. Immediately the queen mother **Athaliah** seized the throne herself, killing all her own male descendents as rivals. Baby Joash, however, was rescued by the late king's sister, Joash's aunt Jehosheba. The wife of the LORD's priest Jehoiada, she hid him in the temple, and the two of them raised him.

When Joash was seven Jehoiada, in a stunning display of courage and loyalty to the LORD, overthrew the usurper Athaliah, and placed Joash, the LORD's choice, on the throne, providing him with a written copy of the LORD's instructions for a king, and presiding over a renewing of the national covenant to follow the LORD.

The king's first royal act, under Jehoiada's supervision, was to destroy the nearby temple of Baal, the idol whose worship had plunged the nation into a time of violence and vice. After this, there was a great celebration, for the people had suffered under the last three evil sovereigns.

Source: 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10 - 23:21

Reconstruction of the Temple

Young King Joash, seeing Solomon's temple, now about 150 years old and deteriorating, gave orders to have it repaired, invoking a previously authorized tax to pay for the work. In his inexperience, though, he failed to establish good lines of responsibility and accountability, and so for years the project floundered.

At age 30, Joash took a renewed interest in the temple, this time soliciting voluntary contributions, which were provided in abundance. He installed a proper organization, accountable to Jehoiada, and he hired professional builders rather than trying to fit the work into the priests' spare time, as in the first attempt. The work was a splendid success. The structure was completely refurbished, and with surplus funds they replaced the aging furnishings and trappings.

This done, the temple was restored to full time round-the-clock services of worship, as had been established in **King David's** day.

Source: 2 Kings 12:1-16; 2 Chronicles 24:1-16

Joash Becomes a Murderer

The LORD allowed Jehoiada to live to the extreme age of 130 years, thereby helping the nation recover from the preceding evil rulers. All this time, the faithful priest mentored Joash, who followed his lead with great respect. When Jehoiada died, he was buried in the cemetery of the kings, in recognition of his stellar work in rebuilding the nation.

After Jehoiada's death, the ousted pagans saw their opportunity. They flattered the king, who favored them by sponsoring their cults, which he had crushed in Jehoiada's day. He stopped worshipping the LORD, who then sent troubles on the nation in an effort to provoke them to repentance. He also sent prophets to clearly explain the connection between their faithlessness and their problems, but the king and his new cronies refused to hear.

Among the problems resulting from Joash's apostasy was an attack by Syria against Jerusalem. Rather than call on the LORD for aid, as other successful kings had done, Joash plundered the valuables from the LORD's temple and offered them as a bribe to the king of Syria, who then withdrew for the time being.

Finally, the LORD sent Jehoiada's son Zechariah to plead with the king. Because of his deep debt to Jehoiada, Joash should surely have paid at least a minimum of respect to his son, but instead he cooperated with a conspiracy against him. The pagan leaders brought capital accusations against Zechariah. Though clearly a frame job, the king sentenced Zechariah to death by stoning. As he lay dying, Zechariah said, "May the LORD see this and call you to account."

It was this martyrdom to which Jesus later referred when he said, "From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation." (Luke 11:51)

Source: 2 Kings 12:17-18; 2 Chronicles 24:15-22

Joash Assassinated

Syria launched a second attack against Jerusalem, slaughtering the nobility and plundering their wealth. Since this was only a small strike force, Joash quickly assembled a full army and struck in defense of his kingdom. However, lacking the LORD's support, he was unable to fight well, and was defeated by Syria's tiny force. Joash himself was badly wounded.

There was much discontent over Joash's recent poor leadership, and especially his ruthless treatment of Jehoiada's son, and so a group of opponents took this opportunity to conspire, killing him as he lay recuperating in his bed. In recognition of his turn to evil, Joash was refused burial in the cemetery of the kings, being laid to rest in a commoner's grave.

Source: 2 Chronicles 24:23-27

King Joash of Judah was raised and mentored by the priest Jehoiada. As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash did what was right. But after Jehoiada's death, Joash rejected Jehoiada's legacy and turned to evil. He even went so far as to murder the son of Jehoiada, who had once saved Joash from certain death.

His mixed performance is recognized in these scriptures:

2 Kings 12:2 And Jehoash [**Joash**] **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

2 Chronicles 24:17-21 Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they **left the house of the LORD God** of their fathers, and **served groves and idols**: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they **conspired** against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.

King Amaziah

When Amaziah was 25 years old, his father **King Joash**, having committed a repulsive crime, was assassinated, and so Amaziah became king. Like his father, he was faithful to the LORD at first, and later turned to a life of sin.

Amaziah's first act as king was to punish by death those who had murdered his father. In this, he deviated from the custom of also executing the criminals' heirs, instead executing only the conspirators themselves, acting according to the Bible's prohibition.¹

A border war broke out between Judah and Edom. Amaziah mustered his army of 300,000 men for the battle. Considering this insufficient, he hired an additional 100,000 men from neighboring Israel, at a price of nearly 4 tons of silver. After this large sum was paid and the army on hand, a prophet told King Amaziah that because of Israel's sin, the LORD would oppose Amaziah's army if Israel marched with them. Obediently, Amaziah sent Israel home, forfeiting the payment he had made.

The result was a great success. The army of Edom fled so swiftly that only 20,000 casualties could be inflicted. Amaziah captured Selah, deep in Edomite territory, and gave it the Hebrew name Joktheel. That Judah occupied it for a long time is indicated since the new name stuck.

After the battle, however, Amaziah looted Edom's temples and brought their idols home, there establishing his own center of idol worship. For this the LORD was angry, and sent a prophet to point out to Amaziah that those idols hadn't saved the Edomites from him, and so it was foolish for him to trust them. Furious, the king silenced the prophet, threatening him with death. He later prophesied that God would destroy Amaziah for refusing to hear.

Meanwhile, the army of Israel, greatly insulted by their abrupt dismissal and associated accusatory inferences, launched raids against border towns in Judah. Amaziah sent a message to Israel's **King Joash**, demanding that he put a stop to the raids or face Amaziah in war. Joash, probably unwilling to dismiss the insult to his army, advised Amaziah to allow the army to vent their frustration, and avoid war, for Amaziah would lose.

Amaziah, however, refused to listen to reason. He was now living a life of idolatry and its associated sin, and therefore lacked God's aid. Even so, he assembled his army, but was badly beaten by Israel. Joash captured Amaziah and in order to cripple his future offensive ability, broke down a large segment of Jerusalem's protective wall. He also looted the temple and palace and took some hostages.

At this horrible loss, Amaziah's people were so enraged that a group conspired to kill him. He fled to Lachish, near the Philistine border, but was killed there by the conspirators.

Where to read Amaziah's story: 2 Kings 14:1-21; 2 Chronicles 25

Like a number of other kings, Amaziah started out faithful, but later abandoned the LORD. In a moment of victory and elation, he fell into the temptation of idols, and his pride prevented him from ever repenting. As a result of his sin, his kingdom suffered serious encroachments, and Amaziah himself was murdered.

2 Chronicles 25:1-2 **Amaziah** was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart.

2 Chronicles 25:27 Now after the time that **Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD ...**

King Uzziah

Uzziah became king at 16 when his father, **King Amaziah**, was assassinated following a military disaster. Uzziah was faithful to the LORD for a long time, and during that time he and his nation prospered. Rising to power after a long period of decline, he restored to Judah much of the strength and influence that had been Israel's in the days of **David** and **Solomon**. He had a series of military successes against the Philistines, the Gurbal, the Mehunims, and the Ammonites. He fortified Jerusalem, whose walls had been broken down just before he took office, and he built military outposts throughout the land as well. Being an inventor, he constructed turreted crossbows and catapults, mounting these in towers at his outposts. He was also active in agriculture, digging wells and planting vineyards throughout the land.

Unfortunately, later in his 52-year reign Uzziah presumed to alter the worship of the LORD, placing himself in the spotlight by entering the temple and burning incense, a duty reserved by the LORD for the priests only. A group of 81 priests confronted the king, informing him of his violation — a courageous act, given the unquestioned power of the king in those days. Uzziah became furious. While he raged at the priests, the LORD showed his support for the priests by afflicting Uzziah with leprosy, which became immediately visible on his forehead. As no leprous person was permitted in the temple, the priests began urging the now-unclean king to leave. Uzziah, himself in a panic, rushed away.

Uzziah never recovered from leprosy. For the rest of his life he lived in seclusion, and his son **Jotham** acted as king during his absence.

Where to read Uzziah's story: 2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26

King Uzziah energetically and faithfully pursued the welfare of his people, being especially active in the military and in agriculture. His administration was marked by revival and restoration of the military and internal security that had been lost in recent generations.

Late in his life, Uzziah's pride drove him into sin, and he violated the LORD's temple. Since we are never told he repented, one might argue that we should judge Uzziah "did right in youth, evil in old age," as we did with some kings. However, a courageous group of priests withstood the king's evil act, and the LORD himself supported them by afflicting Uzziah with leprosy. As a result, even though Uzziah perhaps never repented, he retired from office, and the impact of his sin was thereby limited.

For this reason, we feel justified in agreeing with the scripture's assessment that "Uzziah ... did that which was right."

2 Chronicles 26:3-4 Sixteen years old was **Uzziah** when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father **Amaziah** did.

King Jotham

King Jotham ascended to become Judah's eleventh ruler while his father, **King Uzziah**, still lived, this unusual arrangement being necessary because of Uzziah's medical retirement. Jotham apparently reigned for 13 years while his father lived, then three more years after his death.

Jotham lived a life of steady integrity and success. His activities include rebuilding portions of the temple and the city wall of Jerusalem, building towns and military posts throughout the land as Uzziah had, and suppressing a rebellion by the Ammonites upon his father's death.

Where to read Jotham's story: 2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27

Little is known about King Jotham, except that he was faithful to the LORD all through his life.

2 Kings 15:32-34 In the second year of **Pekah** the son of Remaliah king of Israel began **Jotham** the son of **Uzziah** king of Judah to reign. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. And he **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done.

King Ahaz

King Ahaz devoted himself to pagan worship and its associated evil, touring the nation building shrines, and seeking the aid of every powerless religion he knew of. He even sacrificed his own sons, burning them alive in a ritual to the idol Molech. As a result of his infidelity, the LORD opposed Ahaz' administration, and during his 16-year reign Judah lost the empire built by his grandfather **King Uzziah** and his father **King Jotham**, suffered constant military raids by neighbors, and even lost national sovereignty, becoming a vassal to Assyria.

On one occasion, Israel invaded Judah and took 200,000 wives and children of Judah's warriors to be slaves. The LORD, unwilling to abandon Judah in spite of Ahaz' commitment to evil, sent a prophet to meet the conquering army, threatening them with the LORD's anger for kidnapping their brothers' families. Alarmed, the Israelites escorted the captives back to Jericho, where their husbands and fathers could recover them, even giving supplies and medical care to all who needed them. Yet in spite of this act of compassion prompted by the LORD, Ahaz refused to trust the LORD.

Later, when Judah was invaded by the combined armies of Israel and Syria, the LORD spoke through the prophet Isaiah, promising that the attack would not be successful — and within a couple years, both enemies' lands would be laid waste. But in spite of the LORD's offer of a miracle to verify the prophecy and aid Ahaz' faith, Ahaz wouldn't trust the LORD. He plundered the LORD's temple and his own palace to send a payment to the king of Assyria to rescue him. In response, Assyria captured Damascus, Syria's capital, and killed Syria's king. So Ahaz was rescued, but at a great cost: Judah became a vassal to Assyria.

After this incident, Ahaz visited defeated Damascus. Still refusing to turn to the LORD, he imported the idols of Damascus into Judah, building an imposing altar near the LORD's temple, after the pattern of the altar in Damascus. He even closed the LORD's temple, which was not opened again until Ahaz died.

In recognition of Ahaz' terrible leadership and its great cost to the nation, Ahaz was buried in a commoner's grave rather than the royal cemetery.

Where to read Ahaz's story: 2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28; Isaiah 7:1 - 8:4

Scripture says this about King Ahaz' reign:

2 Kings 16:2 Twenty years old was **Ahaz** when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and **did not that which was right** in the sight of the LORD his God, like **David** his father.

The above characterization is an understatement. Ahaz steadfastly determined to reject the LORD, in spite of repeated acts of mercy and aid on the LORD's part. Not merely dabbling in evil, Ahaz went the whole distance, even to the extent of sacrificing his own children to idols. The effects of his actions were felt brutally throughout his kingdom.

King Hezekiah

Summary

Hezekiah's great grandfather **King Uzziah** and grandfather **King Jotham** were godly and wise men who had increased Judah's prosperity and influence to levels unknown since the days of **David** and **Solomon**. Then Hezekiah's father, **King Ahaz**, through evil practices and poor leadership, lost all the two previous generations had gained, and lost national sovereignty as well, leaving Judah a vassal of Assyria.

King Hezekiah came to the throne in the wake of his father's disasters, and with the memory the glory days of his grandfather King Jotham, who still reigned when Hezekiah was a child. Rightly concluding that these hardships had come upon Judah because they had abandoned the LORD, Hezekiah instituted the most sweeping **religious reforms** of all the kings before or after him. As a result, during his 29-year reign he was successful in everything he did — no small accomplishment, given the very difficult times during which he reigned.

Hezekiah's lifelong ambition was to regain national sovereignty, willingly surrendered by his father Ahaz as a convenient solution to a relatively minor invasion. He ultimately **achieved this**, facing extreme crisis with the help of the LORD.

While this crisis was still fresh and his newly won independence still fragile, Hezekiah **became deathly ill**. No doubt worried how the nation would fare after his death, he prayed for healing, and God granted him another 15 years of life. Unfortunately, during these years Hezekiah's **pride overpowered and drowned** his love for the LORD. During this time he also fathered his heir **King Manasseh**, a man of extreme evil.

Where to read Hezekiah's story: 2 Kings 18 - 20; 2 Chronicles 29 - 32; Isaiah 36 - 39

The Revival and the Passover

The memory of the success of his grandfather, godly **King Jotham**, and the unmitigated failures of his evil father, **King Ahaz**, drove King Hezekiah to dedicate his career to instituting sweeping revival, more complete¹ than any of the other kings who made similar reforms.

King Ahaz, bent on pagan worship, had also closed the temple of the LORD. Hezekiah's first act as king was to reopen the temple. This was no small task. Repairs to the deteriorated structure were needed. Pagan artifacts were in storage there, and had to be removed and destroyed. The priests, once fired and now having changed careers, had to be recruited and retrained. But everyone took on the work with enthusiasm, under Hezekiah's skillful management, and the temple was ready to be used for worship in only 16 days. The temple was opened with a great celebration, sacrifices and music, the king presiding.

When the LORD rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt centuries earlier, he had instructed the population to commemorate the rescue annually by celebrating the Passover in a national meeting at Jerusalem. However, Passover was only celebrated occasionally and half-heartedly. Hezekiah was determined to follow the LORD's instructions completely.

He had come to office just two weeks before Passover, and since it took more than two weeks to prepare the temple, it was not possible to observe Passover on schedule. But Hezekiah didn't want to lose the momentum of the revival by waiting till next year. There was an ancient law² that someone who was unable to celebrate Passover at the usual time should celebrate it a month late. Hezekiah and his staff decided to invoke this law on behalf of the entire nation.

Since Passover was to be celebrated by all Israelites, Hezekiah sent invitations to every town in his own kingdom of Judah, and also in neighboring Israel. This forage into Israel was a crucial last-minute attempt by the LORD to secure their repentance, for Israel, long committed to evil, **was destroyed** just three years later. Only a few people of Israel came.

However, the people of Judah flocked to Jerusalem en masse, under the command of the charismatic Hezekiah. In preparation, the population cleared the entire city of its places of idol worship. The Passover lamb was sacrificed, the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread observed, and the public celebrated so intensely that they refused to quit, extending the festival for an extra week. The LORD showed his support by forgiving, at Hezekiah's request, some protocol violations committed by people who were whole-hearted but uninformed, having never celebrated a Passover before.

After the Passover, King Hezekiah sent the population home with instructions to comb the land, destroying all the pagan shrines, and also the local shrines built for the LORD, for the LORD had long ago forbidden worship in local shrines, requiring pilgrimages to Jerusalem instead.³ This shows Hezekiah's extreme commitment, for of many kings it is recorded that they eliminated pagan shrines but not the local shrines of the LORD. The shrines were eliminated, and the people returned home.

Hezekiah even destroyed the bronze serpent. Centuries ago, there had been an infestation of poisonous serpents. In response, God had instructed Moses to build the bronze serpent. Anyone bitten could go to the center of the camp, look at the bronze serpent, and in response to their faith, God would heal their fatal bite. But now, people were using the bronze serpent as an idol, and so Hezekiah destroyed it.

Source: 2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29 - 31

Notes:

¹ according to 2 Kings 18:5

² Numbers 9:10-11

³ The principle was spelled out in Deuteronomy 12. Jerusalem as the actual site was chosen later.

The Fall of Israel

Three years later an Assyrian general laid siege against neighboring Israel's capital, Samaria. 18 of Israel's 19 kings were judged by God as evil, and the wages of that evil came with Assyria. The siege lasted three summers. At the end, Samaria fell, its population was taken captive and resettled in other Assyrian lands, never to return.

Other people conquered by Assyria were brought to Samaria and resettled there. This was an Assyrian strategy to break people's loyalty to their homelands by moving them to other conquered lands.

The fall of Israel must have had deep meaning for the people of Judah, for though there were many wars between Israel and Judah, there was also a common heritage and much good feeling between them.

Source: 2 Kings 18:9-12

The Failed Bid for Independence

It grated upon Hezekiah that **his father** had given away Judah's national sovereignty, and he passionately wanted to restore it. After 14 years of reforms and preparations, he thought his moment had come — he refused to pay the annual tribute due to Assyria.

In response, the Assyrian King Sennacherib sent an army to give Hezekiah a strong warning about his rebellion. Assyria attacked Hezekiah's fortified border cities and easily conquered them all. At that point, his logical move would be an attack on Jerusalem.

Seeing how easily his defenses were overcome, Hezekiah sued for peace, humbly admitting his foolish action and offering to pay whatever tribute Sennacherib demanded in return for his withdrawal. The demand was large, and it was with difficulty that Hezekiah paid it. It must have especially grieved him to use some of the temple furnishings in this payment.

Source: 2 Kings 18:13-16

The Successful Fight for Independence

Recognizing that to gain independence, they would eventually have to suffer an Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, Hezekiah had spent years making preparations. He had a long aqueduct dug through solid rock to provide water to the city, and he plugged historic wells in the countryside to deprive the attacking armies of water. His armies were well trained and obedient.

The siege came. Even though Hezekiah had met King Sennacherib's **extreme demands**, Assyria didn't withdraw as promised. Sennacherib's army surrounded Jerusalem, with Sennacherib himself on site for occasional supervisory visits. He sent the officer in charge to ridicule Judah's rebellion. He boasted that Hezekiah's faith in the LORD was as futile as other nations' faith in their idols, and the LORD could not protect them. He challenged them to avoid a years-long siege, and come out and fight instead, arrogantly offering to supply more weapons than Judah could man. Appealing to Judah's army to rebel against Hezekiah in order to prevent their destruction, he made offers of payments to anyone who would overthrow Hezekiah and surrender to Assyria. Reflecting great faith in the LORD and their king, no one responded.

At this taunt, Hezekiah was crushed, recognizing his hopeless position. In great grief, he went to the temple to pray, comparing his bid for independence to a child about to be born, but lacking strength for the delivery. Hearing Hezekiah's prayer, the LORD sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah not to be afraid — the LORD would arrange for Sennacherib to

withdraw to handle another crisis, and he would be killed before he could return to Jerusalem.

An Ethiopian king launched an attack on Assyria, and Sennacherib was obliged to leave Jerusalem to defend his empire, leaving a small army to maintain the siege. He sent Hezekiah an arrogant letter about his soon return to Jerusalem.

Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter to the temple, spread it out for the LORD to see, and prayed over it. The LORD responded by inspiring the prophet Isaiah to write a long poem about Sennacherib's defeat. He promised Sennacherib would be unable to attack the city.

That night, a plague struck the Assyrian army surrounding Jerusalem, and 185,000 soldiers died. Sennacherib, spooked by this, withdrew. Not long after, he was assassinated. The Assyrian threat was over. Judah was independent.

Source: 2 Kings 18:17 - 19:37; 2 Chronicles 32:1-23; Isaiah 36 - 37

Source for aqueduct info: Unger's Bible Dictionary, topic "Hezekiah"

Hezekiah's Illness

Just after independence was won, and before Sennacherib was assassinated, King Hezekiah became sick. As he lay on his death bed, no doubt worrying what would happen to his newly won independence without him to defend it, the LORD sent the prophet Isaiah with the message that Hezekiah must put his affairs in order, because he would die of this illness.

Hezekiah was struck with grief at being removed at this point of crisis. Assyria might renew their recent hostilities any time, and the death of the king might even prompt an attack. Adding to his stress was the realization that he had no heir, and so his death would rock the stability of the nation at this critical hour. And so rather than blindly obey the LORD and make his preparations, Hezekiah prayed for healing, reminding the LORD of all Hezekiah had done in faithfulness to him.

The LORD answered his prayer immediately. Before Isaiah had even left the palace grounds, the LORD sent him back to Hezekiah with the message that he would recover and would live another 15 years. Furthermore, God would continue to protect Jerusalem from any further threats from Assyria.

This news put Hezekiah in a stressed position. He was probably making irreversible arrangements to hand the scepter to someone not of his line. If he lived, this arrangement would haunt him for the rest of his life — even more so if he eventually produced an heir. But if he failed to make the arrangements, and then died, the kingdom would be thrown into disarray. How could he be sure the prophet was right?

When prophets gave people instructions, they typically proved that their words were from the LORD by giving a verifying sign. To this end, Isaiah told Hezekiah that the shadow on **King Ahaz'** sundial would move backwards ten notches. When this happened, Hezekiah was assured, and took appropriate action. He did in fact recover and resume his throne.

Source: 2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24; Isaiah 38

Hezekiah's Decline

This healing marked a sad turning point in Hezekiah's life. Up to this time, his faithfulness to the LORD was total. After this, he became proud and selfish.

Diplomats from Babylon brought from their king a message of congratulations on Hezekiah's recovery from sickness. Their intention was apparently to find out how Hezekiah's God had defeated Assyria, for they too wanted to defeat Assyria. Passing up this God-given opportunity to publish to the up-and-coming world power his reforms and revivals, his prayers and the LORD's answers, Hezekiah instead showed them his armories and treasuries. By doing this, he demonstrated that his trust in the LORD had deteriorated, and he now trusted his military and economic strength.

The prophet Isaiah, foreseeing Babylon's rise, reprimanded Hezekiah's lack of faith, telling him that in generations to come, Babylon would abuse Hezekiah's descendants — and that Hezekiah, by his faithless influence on the diplomats, helped spur their evil cause. But Hezekiah, having grown selfish, took this as a good sign that during his own lifetime, peace and prosperity would continue — and he didn't care about future generations.

Also during the years following his recovery, Hezekiah fathered his heir, **King Manasseh**, who was recorded as the most wicked king ever to be enthroned in Jerusalem.

Source: 2 Kings 20:12-21; 2 Chronicles 32:25-33; Isaiah 39

Hezekiah was disgusted with the lamentable performance of his father **Ahaz** as king. Whereas Ahaz had devoted himself to evil and his kingdom suffered the consequences, Hezekiah devoted himself to the LORD, and the kingdom reaped the benefits.

Upon ascending the throne, Hezekiah immediately and energetically thrust his nation into revival, putting a stop to evil practices. The middle part of his reign was devoted to the successful defense of his kingdom against aggressors, with the LORD's help.

2 Kings 18:1-6 Now it came to pass in the third year of **Hoshea** son of Elah king of Israel, that **Hezekiah** the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that **David** his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He **trusted in the LORD** God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he **clave to the LORD**, and departed not from following him, but **kept his commandments**, which the LORD commanded Moses.

Like several other good kings, Hezekiah's faith floundered later in life. Yet even so, he did not turn fully to evil, but had a time of faithlessness, and then repented, again entering the LORD's good grace. The proof text is:

2 Chronicles 32:25-26 But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding **Hezekiah humbled himself** for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

King Manasseh

King Manasseh came to the throne at only 12 years of age, when his father, the good **King Hezekiah**, died.

Manasseh made it his mission to undo the good reforms instituted by his father, and to do a great deal of evil. Hezekiah had destroyed shrines of pagan worship throughout the land; Manasseh rebuilt them, adding also shrines to Baal and Asherah. He desecrated the LORD's temple by putting altars for idol worship in it. He sacrificed his own sons, burning them to death in worship of the idol Molech. Manasseh murdered so many people that the historian wrote that he "filled Jerusalem from one end to the other" with innocent blood.

The LORD sent prophets to warn of the disaster that would come because the people followed Manasseh in his great sins — Judah would be destroyed by their enemies. But king and people ignored the warnings.

Late in Manasseh's 55-year reign, Assyria attacked Jerusalem, captured Manasseh, and placed him in a prison 1,000 miles away. Humiliated and powerless, he sat in his cell and remembered his father's days. He began to pray, confessing his sin and asking the LORD's help. The LORD heard Manasseh's prayer, freed him, and returned him to his throne in Jerusalem. The no doubt fascinating details of how this happened are not given.

This was no foxhole conversion. Back in power, Manasseh was a new man. He destroyed all the idol shrines he had built, removed his desecrations from the LORD's temple, and restored the temple worship.

Unfortunately, Manasseh's conversion came too late to have any lasting impact on his kingdom. When Judah fell, the LORD **blamed it** on the sins of Manasseh.

Where to read Manasseh's story: 2 Kings 21:1-17; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20

For Discussion

- Manasseh spent a lifetime dedicated to evil, including many murders, and even the human sacrifice of his own sons. Then when he repented, the LORD forgave him. Will God forgive someone who has committed extreme evil?
- Manasseh repented, changed his entire life, and made great strides in doing right. Still, his primary legacy was one of great evil. Even though we know God will forgive, can we justify continuing in sin, even one more day?
- King Manasseh dedicated himself tirelessly to evil. He traveled the land destroying the good work of his father **Hezekiah** and erecting shrines to idols. He energetically participated in the worship of these false gods, including sacrificing his own children

to them. He was a ruthless ruler, guilty of many murders. God's judgment against him is summed up this way:

- 2 Kings 21:1 **Manasseh** was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.
- King Manasseh had a conversion experience in his old age, recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:10-13, and so one might argue that in our **chart** we should label him "did evil in youth, right in old age." However, we follow the Bible's record in classifying his reign as evil.
- In spite of his repentance and the excellent reforms that followed it, Manasseh is remembered in the Bible record as the most evil of all the kings — and there were some *very* evil kings. In fact, as these scriptures show, the LORD blamed the downfall of Judah on the sinful legacy of Manasseh:
- 2 Kings 23:26-27 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that **Manasseh had provoked him** withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.
- 2 Kings 24:3-4 Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the **sins of Manasseh**, according to all that he did; And also for the **innocent blood that he shed**: for he **filled Jerusalem with innocent blood**; which the LORD would not pardon.
- Jeremiah 15:4 And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, **because of Manasseh** the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

King Amon

The Bible gives only a brief sketch of King Amon, 15th of the 20 sovereigns of the separate kingdom of Judah. Like his father **King Manasseh**, he sponsored idol worship and its associated evils. Unlike Manasseh, he never repented of his evil.

After two years in office, some of his officials assassinated him. The murderers were brought to justice and sentenced to death, and Amon's son, 8-year-old **Josiah**, was made king.

Where to read Amon's story: 2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-24

Little is known of King Amon. Scripture sums up his time as king with these words:

2 Kings 21:19-20 **Amon** was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, as his father **Manasseh** did.

King Josiah

Summary

King Josiah was Judah's last gasp — the last good thing that happened to the Israelites before their kingdom was destroyed.

Josiah became king as a child of only eight, and soon took an interest in the LORD, contrary to his father **King Amon**. Early in life he instituted **reforms** and took steps against idol worship.

At 25 years of age, Josiah decided to rebuild the LORD's temple, deteriorated with age. As the workers were cleaning, they **found an obscure book** that no one had ever heard of — the Bible, forgotten by previous generations. As the king listened to his secretary read the Bible, he was struck with grief and terror, certain the LORD was furious with Josiah and his people for their disobedience.

Immediately, Josiah set upon a **sweeping program** to eliminate pagan worship and renew the ancient covenant of the LORD. He toured the land, destroying pagan shrines, and celebrated the Passover for the first time in decades.

The revival was wonderful. But as soon as Josiah **died**, the people returned to their evil ways, and before his sons reached middle age, the LORD's judgment for centuries of evil practices came, and Judah was no more.

Where to read Josiah's story: 2 Kings 22:1 - 23:30; 2 Chronicles 34:1 - 35:27

Josiah's Childhood Conversion

Josiah's father, **King Amon**, was assassinated when Josiah was eight, and he ascended to the throne at that age. At age 15, he "began to seek after the God of **David**."

At age 19, he undertook reforms to stop idol worship and the evils associated with it. He removed Jerusalem's shrines of Asherah and Baal. He exhumed the bones of idol priests and burned them in those places, to desecrate them so no one would use them again for idol worship. He toured Judah with the same mission. He even toured parts of Israel, now stripped of its nobility and populated only by those peasants too poor to have been worth Assyria's trouble deporting.

Source: 2 Chronicles 34:3-7

The Bible Found

At age 25, Josiah decided to rebuild the temple of the LORD, which hadn't been repaired since the days of **King Jotham**, a century earlier. He hired builders and placed his secretary Shaphan and the high priest Hilkiah in charge of the work.

While the workers were cleaning out long-unused portions of the temple, they found a book. It looked important, so they gave it to Hilkiah, who gave it to Shaphan, who brought it to

King Josiah. The book was the Bible — or rather, what they considered to be the Bible: the first five books of our modern Bible. It had been ignored for so long that no one knew there was such a thing as a Bible!

As Secretary Shaphan read the Bible to King Josiah, the king tore his robe — a sign of grief in their culture. Shaphan had no doubt read portions telling how, if the people disobeyed the LORD, he would punish them terribly. Josiah was certain the LORD was furious with Judah, for they had long lived in sin, sin now revealed by the Bible.

The king sent his men to find a prophet, who could ask a question and get an answer from the LORD. They found a woman named Huldah. She verified that the LORD was indeed angry with Judah for their pagan practices; the LORD had decided to bring disaster on Judah, laying their land waste, because of their long history of sin. However, because Josiah had responded appropriately, with grief and repentance, the LORD promised Josiah would die honorably before the disaster struck; he would not see it himself.

Source: 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28

Josiah's Revival

King Josiah immediately and energetically set out on a campaign to obey the LORD's instructions, found in the newly-rediscovered Bible.

First he assembled the population at Jerusalem and read the entire Bible (i.e., the first five books of our modern Bible) aloud to them. He renewed the LORD's covenant, to obey all that was written in the Bible he had just read. He invited the people to pledge themselves to the covenant, and they did.

Next, Josiah toured Judah and Israel, destroying shrines of false worship and stopping the sins committed on behalf of idols. The list in 2 Kings 23, of towns, shrines, idols, and sins, shows the depth of Josiah's commitment and the lengths of his efforts at revival. Among the shrines he closed down and desecrated against further use were sites of temple prostitution and human sacrifice.

When Josiah arrived at Bethel, he found the shrine of the **golden calf cult** built by Israel's **King Jeroboam**. To render the site unfit for future idol worship, Josiah exhumed from the nearby cemetery the bones of the idol priests, and burned them on Jeroboam's altar, thereby fulfilling **a prophecy** spoken 300 years earlier, in Jeroboam's day. Finding also the grave of this prophet, who had named Josiah in his prophecy, he left it undisturbed.

Finally, Josiah hosted the Passover celebration, commemorating the LORD's work in freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt. The LORD had instructed his people to celebrate Passover annually, but this had not been obeyed. Josiah called the people to celebrate, and he himself supplied them with 33,000 animals for sacrifice, all from his own farm. All of Judah came, and many people from Israel — those who had not been deported in the Assyrian Captivity. In that regard, this was the most complete Passover celebration since the days of the prophet Samuel, about 400 years earlier.

Source: 2 Kings 23:1-28; 2 Chronicles 34:29 - 35:19

Josiah's Death

In Josiah's 31st year as king, he faced a national security crisis. Egypt sent an army to attack a site on the Euphrates River. To get there, they had to cross through Judah's territory.

Josiah refused to allow this foreign army on his soil. The Egyptian king sent diplomats, expressing his intentions, innocent where Judah was concerned.

Josiah was not convinced. He mustered his army and took his stand to defend his borders. However, he was killed in the battle. His son **Jehoahaz** took his office, and Egypt's victory gave them power to abbreviate Jehoahaz' reign.

Source: 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

As a child, Josiah took a casual interest in the LORD, an interest that grew into love and increased all his life long.

In the beginning, Josiah knew only a little about God. But he was faithful to what he did know. Then, when **the Bible was rediscovered**, he came to know in detail what God was like. That was when his faithfulness shined. He was fully obedient to everything he learned about God, and energetically went about ridding the land of sin and teaching wholesome and prosperous ways to his people.

2 Kings 22:1-2 **Josiah** was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. And he **did that which was right** in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of **David** his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

King Jehoahaz of Judah

Little is known of Jehoahaz. The son of **King Josiah**, Jehoahaz came to power when his father was killed in an invasion by Egypt. Jehoahaz was enthroned in preference to his older brother, **Jehoiakim**, possibly because the nobility considered Jehoiakim too submissive — the Jews of this day were fiercely independent, and resented Egypt's interference. Upon their victory, Egypt imposed a tribute on Judah, which Jehoahaz apparently refused to pay. After three months, the Egyptian king dethroned Jehoahaz and took him captive to Egypt, placing Jehoiakim on the throne.

Where to read Jehoahaz's story: 2 Kings 23:31-35; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4

Though Jehoahaz reigned for only a moment, his time as king was a sharp departure from that of his father, godly **King Josiah**.

2 Kings 23:31-32 **Jehoahaz** was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

King Jehoiakim

King Jehoiakim, 18th sovereign of the separate kingdom of Judah, enjoys the dubious distinction of being the first sovereign of Israelites placed on the throne by a foreign power. When Judah was conquered and **King Josiah** killed in battle by Egypt, Josiah's son, Jehoiakim's younger brother **Jehoahaz**, took Josiah's office as king. However, the Egyptian king found Jehoahaz rebellious, refusing to pay the tribute he imposed. So he dethroned him, placing Jehoiakim in power, and giving him that name in place of his original name, Eliakim, as a symbol of Egypt's power over the king of Judah. Jehoiakim paid the tribute, initiating a new tax to fund it.

Jehoiakim was selfish and fully committed to his sin. In spite of the heavy tax burden, Jehoiakim added to the people's burden by building lavish palaces with forced labor.¹ He avidly practiced idol worship and the sins associated with it, including human sacrifice.² God sent the prophets Urijah and Jeremiah to expose Jehoiakim's sins and call him to stop. Jehoiakim went to great lengths to kill Urijah.³ Jeremiah he persecuted. When Jeremiah circulated his prophecies in a hand-written book, Jehoiakim burned the book and tried to imprison Jeremiah, who escaped.⁴

Egypt's power in Judah was short-lived. Babylon invaded, as prophets had said they would. Jehoiakim submitted for three years, then declared his independence, and so the Babylonian king laid siege against Jerusalem. He intended to capture Jehoiakim and deport him to Babylon, but it didn't work out that way. Jehoiakim's people apparently judged him treasonous, killed him, and threw his body over the wall to appease Babylon.⁵

Jehoiakim's 18-year-old son **Jehoiachin** became king in his place. But in light of Jehoiakim's rebellion, God had prophesied⁶ that his descendents would not reign. Accordingly, Jehoiachin ruled only momentarily, and his royal line came to an end.

Where to read Jehoiakim's story: 2 Kings 23:36 - 24:6; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8

Notes:

¹ Jeremiah 22:13-14

² Jeremiah 19:4-5

³ Jeremiah 26:20-23

⁴ Jeremiah 36

⁵ Jeremiah 22:18-19

⁶ Jeremiah 36:30

Jehoiakim came to power as his kingdom was in decline, having recently lost national sovereignty after being invaded. Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar kept him on the throne in order to keep Judah submissive. But Jehoiakim made not the slightest effort to properly guide his people through this difficult time. Instead, he selfishly added to the people's burden so he could live in luxury. He could have promoted justice and compassion. Instead, he practiced oppression and vice. He could have sponsored wise leadership. Instead, he persecuted and killed those who tried to lead the people in the LORD's ways.

In view of Jehoiakim's evil ways, the LORD rendered this verdict against him:

2 Chronicles 36:5, 8 **Jehoiakim** was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD his God ... Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his **abominations which he did**, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and **Jehoiachin** his son reigned in his stead.

King Jehoiachin

At 18 years of age, Jehoiachin was enthroned by Judah's conqueror du jour, Babylon. His father **King Jehoiakim** was judged rebellious, and Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar probably hoped Jehoiachin would be more submissive.

He wasn't. In response, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, and easily reconquered it. He deported everyone and everything of value — all the treasures from the palace and the temple, all the nobility and educated people, and the military. Only the poorest peasants were left. Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle, **Zedekiah**, as king over those few remaining, thereby fulfilling the prophecy¹ that no descendent of Jehoiachin would be king of Judah.

Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon and put in prison, where he spent 37 years. After that time, Babylon's new king released Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a job in government service until his death.

Where to read Jehoiachin's story: 2 Kings 24:8-17, 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10

Notes:

¹ Jeremiah 22:30 (Jeremiah calls him Coniah)

Jehoiachin was king for only a short time, during which he continued the notable evil of his father **King Jehoiakim**.

2 Kings 24:8-9 **Jehoiachin** was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

King Zedekiah

King Zedekiah, the 20th and last sovereign of the separate kingdom of Judah, was placed on the throne by the conquering King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The two previous kings had rebelled against Babylon's rule, and so Nebuchadnezzar extracted from Zedekiah a binding oath to the LORD that he would run his domain in proper submission to Babylon's empire. To show his command over Judah's king, Nebuchadnezzar changed the new king's name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah.

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of the LORD, repeatedly rebuked Zedekiah's ongoing preparations for rebellion and breaking free from Babylonian power, reminding him that the LORD had brought the Babylonian invasion because of the sins of the Israelites.

Other prophets communicated this same message from the LORD. Zedekiah and his staff responded by jailing Jeremiah for his supposedly treasonous words.¹ Powerless and without resources — everything of value, and every educated or capable person, having been taken to Babylon — and facing the world-class Babylonian political and military engine, Zedekiah nonetheless prepared his puny rebellion.

In his ninth year as king, Zedekiah severed relations with Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He personally led his army in a siege against Jerusalem. As the confrontation progressed, Jeremiah repeatedly communicated the LORD's word that resistance would result in disaster, but if Zedekiah would surrender, all lives would be saved.² Zedekiah listened, but stubbornly maintained his hopeless rebellion.

The siege lasted three summers. At its end, when the food supply was exhausted, the cowardly Zedekiah gathered his army, opened the city gate, and made a night-time escape.

Babylon's army made chase, and soon captured Zedekiah. Tried for treason, his sentence was cruel. Zedekiah's sons and best friends were killed, right before his eyes — and then his eyes were gouged out. He was taken to Babylon to die of old age in prison, thereby unwillingly fulfilling the prophecy³ that he would go to Babylon and die there, but never see it.

Nebuchadnezzar had thus squashed rebellion in Judah three times, and he would allow no more. He directed his army to break down completely the protective wall surrounding Jerusalem. They burned the king's palace, the LORD's temple, and many other important buildings to the ground. Everything of value was taken to Babylon. They deported the city's entire population, plus anyone from the countryside who wanted to surrender. Only some of the poorest and most powerless people were left to work the land, so it wouldn't become overgrown and useless.

The kingdom of Judah was gone, never to return. The people, however, did return — that is, their descendents returned — 70 years later, as the prophet Jeremiah had said would happen.⁴

Where to read Zedekiah's story: 2 Kings 24:17 - 25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:11-20

Notes:

¹ Jeremiah 32:3

² Jeremiah 38:2-3, 17-18

³ Ezekiel 12:13

⁴ Jeremiah 25:11, 29:10

King Zedekiah steadfastly refused to obey the LORD, and instead plunged his nation into grave danger by rebelling against the legitimate authority of the empire of Babylon. Babylon was powerful, and Jerusalem's power had been removed in prior invasions. His rebellion was hopeless from the beginning. Repeatedly warned by the LORD, Zedekiah refused to listen.

2 Kings 24:18-19 **Zedekiah** was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, according to all that **Jehoiakim** had done.

Babylonian Captivity

KINGS OF ISREAL

King Jeroboam

Summary

Jeroboam, acting under God's direction, led a rebellion against the evil **King Rehoboam**. The outcome was that Israel was divided. Jeroboam became the first king over the larger portion, still called Israel, and Rehoboam remained king over the smaller portion, named Judah, after Rehoboam's tribe.

Jeroboam will forever be remembered as the king "who caused Israel to sin." He became the prototype of an evil king; **15 later kings** were described as being evil "like Jeroboam".

Although God had **promised** Jeroboam a great and lasting dynasty, Jeroboam rejected God's promise, and in that way nullified it. In order to achieve political security, Jeroboam abolished national worship of the LORD, and replaced it with worship of **golden calf idols**. These idols, and the sins practiced in connection with their cult, brought God's wrath, ending Jeroboam's dynasty after only two generations. Jeroboam's legacy eventually caused the **downfall of the kingdom** of Israel as well.

Where to read Jeroboam's story: 1 Kings 11:25 - 14:20; 2 Chronicles 10:1 - 13:20

Jeroboam's Rise Prophesied

In a private meeting, the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh got Jeroboam's full attention by ripping his brand new robe into 12 pieces — a startling act, given the high cost of clothing in those days. Ahijah told Jeroboam to take 10 of the 12 pieces for himself, as a symbol that God was going to divide the kingdom of Israel, and make Jeroboam king over 10 of its 12 tribes.

God would do this, the prophet said, because **King Solomon** had rejected God, **establishing idol cults** whose worship required extreme sins, including human sacrifice. So Solomon's heir would inherit only a small portion of the kingdom — out of respect for Solomon's father, the faithful **King David**.

In this prophecy, God made Jeroboam a stunning promise: if, like David and unlike Solomon, Jeroboam would be faithful to the LORD, God would assure Jeroboam a great and lasting dynasty. Unfortunately, Jeroboam **ignored and rejected** God's promise.

When King Solomon learned of this prophecy, he ordered Jeroboam killed. But Jeroboam escaped to Egypt, and lived there until Solomon's death.

Source: 1 Kings 11:29-40

Jeroboam's Rise to Power

When **King Solomon** died, his son **Rehoboam** took his office. When Jeroboam learned of Solomon's death, he returned from exile in Egypt to attend Rehoboam's coronation.

At the coronation, the nation's local leaders met for collective bargaining with the new king, hoping for relief from the oppressive tax burden. Jeroboam's leadership skills were recognized by everyone; he had been a construction worker so capable that he was promoted to general manager for an entire tribe. So the local leaders procured Jeroboam to present their requests to the king.

King Rehoboam, however, refused to negotiate, insisting instead that he would *raise* taxes, probably to sponsor massive public works projects, as Solomon had done. Upon this, the leaders of 10 of Israel's 12 tribes abandoned the coronation, determined to secede from the union.

Jeroboam, having led the negotiations, was the obvious choice to be king of the newly formed nation of Israel.

King Rehoboam, naturally enough, refused to recognize the independent half-nation, instead viewing it as an internal rebellion to be brought under control. He assembled an army for this purpose. But just as civil war was ready to begin, God sent word to Rehoboam that he must call off the war and go home; the secession and Jeroboam's ascension had happened at God's bidding.

Source: 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1 - 11:4

Jeroboam's Apostasy

As soon as Jeroboam took office, he faced a political crisis. Many Israelites were heartbroken that the nation was divided, and there were rumblings of reuniting. A reunion could only happen under **David's** rightful heir, **King Rehoboam** — and the result would be certain death for King Jeroboam. So naturally, he was opposed to reunion.

Fueling the longings for reunion were the annual pilgrimages; the LORD required every worshipper to attend a festival at Jerusalem, Rehoboam's capital, three times every year. Jerusalem was a splendid place, rich with meaning for all the Israelites. Solomon had built beautiful palaces, and his temple was one of the architectural wonders of the world. Not only that, but King Rehoboam himself would be presiding over the ceremonies. All this was very inviting to Jeroboam's public.

God had promised Jeroboam that his kingdom would be secure. But Jeroboam didn't trust God's promise. He decided the pilgrimages to Jerusalem were too dangerous, and he had to stop them.

To stop the pilgrimages, Jeroboam changed the national religion. He abolished worship of the LORD and in its place built two golden calf idols, modeled no doubt after the one built centuries earlier by the high priest Aaron. He placed the idols strategically — one in the extreme northern city of Dan, very convenient for the northern population; the other in the southern border town of Bethel, so any pilgrim to Jerusalem would have to pass right by it on their journeys.

Jeroboam also fired all the Levitical priests, who were established according to the LORD's instructions, were familiar with the LORD's regulations, and would influence the people against Jeroboam's new religion. He established a priesthood of his own, designed to take their orders from him. Many Levites and others faithful to the LORD emigrated to Judah.

The golden calf cult, and the sexually immoral practices historically associated with their worship, became an ongoing snare to the people of Israel.

Source: 1 Kings 12:26-33

The Prophet from Judah Rebukes Jeroboam

It was customary for kings to preside over religious gatherings, and so on this occasion Jeroboam was front and center at Bethel, leading a public ceremony in a sacrifice to his golden calf idol there. As he was about this, a prophet visiting from Rehoboam's kingdom caused a disturbance.

The unnamed prophet made an announcement: a future descendent of David, named King Josiah, would someday desecrate Jeroboam's altar by burning the bones of Jeroboam's priests on it. This would happen because the altar and its associated worship and practices were offensive to God.

It was customary for prophets, when they made far-future and therefore unverifiable prophecies, to accompany them by a miraculous sign that could be easily verified; and for that purpose the prophet further announced that the altar would be split apart, and the ashes that had accumulated on it would be spilled all over.

This disturbance was a huge embarrassment for Jeroboam, who was not only on public stage, but was also implicated as the originator of the evil cult. So Jeroboam in anger pointed at the prophet and ordered his guards to arrest him. However, the arm with which Jeroboam pointed immediately became paralyzed, and at that same moment the altar was split apart and its ashes spilled out.

Even the stubborn Jeroboam was momentarily convinced by this display. He rescinded his arrest order and asked the prophet to pray for the healing of his paralyzed arm, which was immediately healed.

The prophet died prematurely and was buried, not in his hometown as was customary, but in Bethel, near the place where he had prophesied. And some 300 years later King Josiah, from David's line, exhumed the bones of Jeroboam's priests and burned them on Jeroboam's altar, in order to render it unfit for further use as a cult object.

Jeroboam, however, ignored this warning and continued sponsoring the golden calf cult.

Source: 1 Kings 13

Jeroboam's Doom Foretold

Later in his reign, King Jeroboam's son Abijah became deathly sick, and Jeroboam sent his wife to seek advice and help from the prophet Ahijah, who years ago had predicted Jeroboam's rise as king. She went in disguise, possibly because she was visiting in enemy territory, or possibly to avoid publicity over her son's illness.

But Ahijah, though old and blind, was not fooled by her disguise, having been instructed in advance by God. As soon as she arrived the prophet exposed her disguise and gave her a

message from God for Jeroboam: because Jeroboam had rejected God and introduced great sin into Israel, God was going to end his dynasty. Jeroboam and every male descendent would die in disgrace. The only exception would be the terminally ill Prince Abijah who, because of his integrity, would be allowed to die an honorable death — caused by his present illness.

The moment Jeroboam's wife returned home, Prince Abijah died. The nation observed a state funeral for him.

Source: 1 Kings 14:1-18

Jeroboam's Decline and Fall

Late in Jeroboam's career, one more in a series of wars broke out between Israel and Judah. It's not clear how the war started, but Judah's **King Abijah**, son of the late **King Rehoboam**, used the occasion to appeal to Jeroboam's cabinet to reject Jeroboam and his cult and return to the worship of the LORD, predicting that the LORD would give Judah victory over Jeroboam.

Jeroboam had masterminded an ambush, and the battle began. God did indeed fight on behalf of those who trusted him, and Judah inflicted half a million casualties on Jeroboam's forces, and captured and occupied several towns as well. Significantly, they captured Bethel, where one of Jeroboam's golden calves was housed.

This was a setback from which Jeroboam's administration never recovered.

Jeroboam died not long after, and was succeeded by his son **Nadab**. But soon Nadab was murdered by a soldier named **Baasha**, who pronounced himself king, and murdered the entire family of Jeroboam, fulfilling **Ahijah's prophecy**.

Source: 2 Chronicles 13; 1 Kings 15:28-30

For Discussion

- Jeroboam ignored God's promise of security, and instead turned to practices he knew were sinful, hoping this would provide security. It didn't — it was an unmitigated disaster.

Are there times when we, in spite of having excellent promises from God, ignore those promises and do things we know are sinful, hoping to gain things God has promised, but we don't trust him to deliver?

- After Jeroboam rejected God's promise and established his cult, God could have abandoned him to his fate. Instead, God graciously sent a prophet to warn Jeroboam, and accompanied the warning with impressive miracles. What does this say about God's patience and his desire for our repentance?
- God promised Jeroboam a secure kingdom and a long lasting dynasty if he would trust the LORD, but Jeroboam didn't believe God would deliver on his promise. In order to achieve security, he abolished the national worship of the LORD and inaugurated the golden calf cult. Sexual immorality had long been part of calf

worship, and in this way Jeroboam drove his people away from the LORD and into sin. In light of this act, 19 times scripture calls Jeroboam the man "who caused Israel to sin."¹

- 1 Kings 14:8-9 ... thou [**Jeroboam**] hast not been as my servant **David**, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; But **hast done evil** above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back:

...

1 Kings 14:16 And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of **Jeroboam, who did sin**, and who made Israel to sin.

2 Kings 17:21 ... **Jeroboam** drave Israel from following the LORD, and **made them sin** a great sin.

- Jeroboam, the first king of Israel after the kingdom divided, became the prototype of an evil king and the standard by which evil kings were measured. Of the 18 kings of Israel who succeeded Jeroboam, 15 are reported to have acted like "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." (The exceptions were **Elah**, **Shallum**, and **Hoshea**, who, though not compared to Jeroboam, were nonetheless evil kings.)
- Note:

¹ 1 Kings 14:16 1 Kings 16:26 2 Kings 10:31 2 Kings 14:24 2 Kings 15:28

1 Kings 15:30 1 Kings 22:52 2 Kings 13:2 2 Kings 15:9 2 Kings 17:21

1 Kings 15:34 2 Kings 3:3 2 Kings 13:6 2 Kings 15:18 2 Kings 23:15

1 Kings 16:2 2 Kings 10:29 2 Kings 13:11 2 Kings 15:24

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• **15 Kings Were Described as Being Evil "Like Jeroboam"**

- It was this sinful legacy that led to Israel's eventual destruction:
- 1 Kings 14:15-16 For the LORD ... shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers ... And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.
- 1 Kings 15:25-26 And **Nadab** the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and **walked in the way of his father [Jeroboam]**, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.
- 1 Kings 16:1-2 Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against **Baasha**, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou **hast walked in the way of Jeroboam**, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins;
- 1 Kings 16:18 And it came to pass, when **Zimri** saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died, For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in

walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin.

- 1 Kings 16:25 But **Omri** wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. For he **walked in all the way of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.
- 1 Kings 16:30 And **Ahab** the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to **walk in the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.
- 1 Kings 22:51 **Ahaziah** the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and **in the way of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin:
- 2 Kings 3:1 Now **Jehoram** the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he **cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.
- 2 Kings 10:29 Howbeit from the **sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, **Jehu** departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.
- 2 Kings 13:1 In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah **Jehoahaz** the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and **followed the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.
- 2 Kings 13:10 In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began **Jehoash** the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; he **departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.
- 2 Kings 14:23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah **Jeroboam the son of Joash** king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
- 2 Kings 15:8 In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did **Zachariah** the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he **departed not from the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
- 2 Kings 15:17 In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began **Menahem** the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
- 2 Kings 15:23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah **Pekahiah** the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
- 2 Kings 15:27 In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah **Pekah** the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he

did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Nadab

Very little is known about the second king of the separate kingdom of Israel. He was the son of **Jeroboam**, the first king. He reigned about two years, carrying on the evil work begun by his father. He was murdered during a war with the Philistines by a man named **Baasha**, who then proclaimed himself king. Baasha also murdered all Nadab's relatives, who were naturally rivals for the throne, thereby fulfilling a **prophecy against Jeroboam**.

Where to read Nadab's story: 1 Kings 15:25-31

Very little is known about King Nadab, except that he continued sponsoring the **golden calf cult** masterminded by his father, **King Jeroboam**, and the sins that were historically associated with it.

1 Kings 15:25 And **Nadab** the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of **Asa** king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he **did evil** in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

King Baasha

Little is known about Baasha's background. He was of the tribe of Issachar, of humble origin, and was probably a military commander, since he was with **King Nadab** in war. While at war, Baasha murdered Nadab and proclaimed himself king. He also murdered all Nadab's relatives, whom he considered rivals to the throne, thereby fulfilling a **prophecy against King Jeroboam**, but also bringing upon himself a prophecy that his own family would be similarly exterminated.

Baasha's 23-year reign was marked by ongoing war with neighboring Judah, and by a continuation of Jeroboam's **golden calf cult**.

Israel was not as prosperous as neighboring Judah, and many Israelites had warm feelings for their Judean neighbors. The kings of Israel generally saw emigration as a threat. Jeroboam had tried to **stop international travel** to Judah; Baasha similarly tried to seal the borders. He began building border fortifications at Ramah, for the dual purposes of enforcing travel regulations and for use as a base of military operations against Judah. But Judah's **King Asa** caused a diversion to draw Baasha's people away, then assembled a massive work force to remove the building materials so the fortifications couldn't be completed and used against Judah. Baasha was forced to abandon the effort.

Upon Baasha's death, he was succeeded by his son **Elah**. But Elah ruled only a short time before being murdered by **Zimri**, who also exterminated Baasha's heirs, as Baasha had done to his predecessor, and as the prophet had said would happen.

Where to read Baasha's story: 1 Kings 15:16 - 16:13; 2 Chronicles 16:1-6

Baasha's time as king was marked by continued sponsoring of the **golden calf cult** inaugurated by **King Jeroboam**, and by war. Rather than repent of his sin, Baasha oppressed his own citizens and picked fights with neighboring kingdoms.

1 Kings 15:33-34 In the third year of **Asa** king of Judah began **Baasha** the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years. And he **did evil** in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

King Elah

The Bible provides only the briefest sketch of Elah's life and career. He was the son and successor of **King Baasha** and the fourth king of the separate kingdom of Israel. His reign is characterized as evil. After only about a year in office, he was murdered by the captain of his army, **Zimri**, who succeeded him as king. Zimri murdered Elah's entire family, thereby fulfilling a **prophecy against Baasha**.

Where to read Elah's story: 1 Kings 16:6-14

Nothing is known of Elah's activities as king, except that he assisted his father **King Baasha** in his sinful endeavors.

1 Kings 16:13 ... For all the sins of Baasha, and the **sins of Elah** his son, by which **they sinned**, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.

King Zimri

Nothing is known of Zimri's origin. He served in **King Elah's** mechanized military, being captain over half of the army's chariots. When Elah had been in office for about a year, Zimri murdered him to make himself king. Zimri's only official act as king was to murder every male relative of Elah, as a **prophet had foretold**.

Zimri's conspiracy failed, however. **Omri**, the captain of Elah's army, acted promptly to obtain public support for action against Zimri. He immediately assembled a nationwide army and besieged Zimri's hideout at Tirzah, the capital. When Zimri realized his situation was hopeless, he set his palace afire and died in the flames, one of only 5 suicides recorded in the Bible. He had reigned only 7 days.

Where to read Zimri's story: 1 Kings 16:9-20

Zimri was a powerful military leader who spent his power in a failed bid to become king, conspiring and committing multiple murders along the way. He also practiced idolatry, repugnant to God. His brief reign is judged in these words:

1 Kings 16:18-19 And it came to pass, when **Zimri** saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died, For **his sins which he sinned in doing evil** in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of **Jeroboam**, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin

King Omri

Omri's rise to power was full of turbulence. He had been an army captain under **King Elah**. When Elah was murdered by **Zimri**, another of Elah's military leaders, Omri took decisive action to foil Zimri's conspiracy. After only 7 days, Zimri's cause was so hopeless that he took his own life.

At that point, yet another military figure, Tibni, having the support of half the population, tried to make himself king, launching a civil war that apparently lasted 4 years.¹ But he was defeated and killed by Omri, who then became king.

Omri's outstanding achievement was the founding of Samaria, Israel's long-time capital. Omri recognized the need for a new and well-fortified capital city. The weakness of the previous capital, Tirzah, became obvious from the ease with which Omri had defeated Zimri, who made his last stand there.

So Omri bought a tract of real estate in the center of the land west of the Jordan River, about five miles west of Tirzah. He named it Samaria after the seller, Shemer. There he built a city, protected by a state of the art stone wall, capable of repelling any invasion for three years. This remained the capital of the northern kingdom for the rest of its history.

Omri's 12-year reign is characterized in scripture as a continuation of **King Jeroboam's** evil. Because of this devotion to evil, he lacked the LORD's support, and so in the later part of his reign, was unable to defend his nation against significant encroachments by Syria on Israel's territory and sovereignty.²

Omri passed his commitment to sin on to his heirs. The founder of a brief but influential dynasty, Omri was father to **King Ahab**, and grandfather to **King Ahaziah**, **King Jehoram**, and Judah's **Queen Athaliah**, all unsurpassed in evil. Omri's influence for evil was so pervasive and long-lasting that over 150 years later, the prophet Micah spoke of it in the present tense.³

Where to read Omri's story: 1 Kings 16:16-28

Notes:

¹ By comparing 1 Kings 16:15 with verse 23.

² 1 Kings 20:34

³ Micah 6:16

In spite of his impressive political and military achievements — most notably the construction of Samaria, a fortress capable of defending against anything except a determined siege by a world power — Omri's legacy is one of great evil. Though scripture gives little detail about Omri's evil deeds, he must be remembered as the progenitor of four sovereigns whose capacity for evil was unmatched: **King Ahab**, **King Ahaziah**, **King Jehoram**, and Judah's **Queen Athaliah**.

Omri's evil influence was so pervasive and long-lasting that over 150 years later, the prophet Micah spoke of it in the present tense, saying, "For the [evil] statutes of Omri are kept ..."¹

1 Kings 16:25-26 But **Omri wrought evil** in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.

Note:

¹ Micah 6:16

King Ahab

Summary

Ahab is perhaps the most famous of the kings of the separate kingdom of Israel. The son and successor of the evil **King Omri**, Ahab became a pioneer and champion of evil. Not content with **Jeroboam's golden calf cult**, Ahab sponsored Baal and Asherah worship, introduced by his evil wife, Jezebel. Rituals of the Baal and Asherah cults involved detestable practices, including prostitution, homosexual prostitution¹, and human sacrifice of children.²

Ahab's evil was contested by the prophet Elijah in a struggle that lasted all through Ahab's career, and Elijah's biography is intermingled with Ahab's. Through Elijah's work, God repeatedly displayed his power, graciously giving Ahab many opportunities to change his ways.

Ahab's 22-year reign was also marked by three wars with neighboring Syria. God again graciously aided Ahab, **twice giving him victory**, clear evidence of God's power, and opportunity to repent. Though Ahab did eventually **repent**, it was too little too late to make any lasting change in his kingdom. In the third war, Ahab was ignominiously **killed**.

Where to read Ahab's story: 1 Kings 16:28 - 22:40; 2 Chronicles 18

Notes:

¹ 2 Kings 23:5-7, for example.

² Psalm 106:28 & 37-38, for example.

Ahab's Early Commitment to Evil

Ahab married Jezebel, a princess from Zidon, where paganism and its associated evil were rampant. Marriage to foreigners was, of course, forbidden by the LORD because of the pagan connection.¹ Jezebel was devious and wholly devoted to the evil of her upbringing. At her prompting, Ahab introduced the idol Baal, and built groves for the worship of Asherah. Worship of the LORD was outlawed, although pockets of the faithful survived throughout Ahab's reign.

Ahab's evil practices spread and increased throughout the land. Knowing that people are likelier to repent in bad times than good, the prophet Elijah had been praying for a famine.² In order to warn Ahab and give opportunities for repentance, God sent Elijah to announce the famine he had prayed for: there would be no rain or dew in Israel until Elijah said

otherwise. After making his announcement, Elijah fled for his life and lived in exile under God's care for three and a half years.

Source: 1 Kings 16:29 - 17:1

Notes:

¹ Deuteronomy 7:3-4

² James 5:17

The Contest at Mount Carmel

At God's prompting, Elijah came out of exile and again confronted Ahab, who was busy trying to cope with the famine. At this point Ahab would probably have liked to lop off Elijah's head, blaming him for the famine — but he feared that if he did that, it might never rain again, since God had said the famine would last until Elijah said otherwise. This advantage allowed Elijah to dictate terms to the king. Elijah proposed a test to find out whether Baal or the LORD was the true God. Ahab's 450 prophets of Baal were to face Elijah in a contest. Each party was to build an altar and prepare a sacrifice, but no one was to light the customary fire on their altar. Each party would pray, the prophets of Baal to Baal, and Elijah to the LORD. Whichever god responded by setting his sacrifice afire would be judged the true God, and the god losing the contest would be abandoned. Ahab agreed to host the event.

The contest began early in the morning, and the prophets of Baal went first. They stacked wood on the altar and slaughtered their sacrifice, then called out to Baal to light the fire. Their frantic shouting, dancing, and self-mutilation continued from morning to evening, when Elijah declared their efforts a failure and prepared his own sacrifice.

Elijah rebuilt the simple altar to the LORD, which had deteriorated from decades of neglect. Then he slaughtered his animal and prepared the sacrifice. To make God's fire-starting even more impressive, Elijah drenched his wood, no doubt very dry because of the famine, with so much now-precious water that it ran over his altar and filled a ditch prepared for that purpose.

Elijah then prayed a simple prayer, asking the LORD to demonstrate for all to see that he was the true God, and that the purpose of this famine was to turn their hearts back again to the LORD. At that moment something like a bolt of lightning struck Elijah's altar with such violence that the sacrifice, the wood, the stones of which the altar was made, and the water in the ditch were all destroyed.

The watching public was duly impressed, and Elijah took the opportunity to order the 450 prophets of Baal executed, as the LORD's law required. Then, under perfectly clear skies, Elijah advised Ahab to seek shelter from the rain storm, which came later that day, ending the years-long famine.

When Jezebel heard all that had happened, she was furious. She ordered Elijah killed, and Elijah again fled for his life, becoming deeply depressed in spite of his great success.

Source: 1 Kings 18:15 - 19:2

God Twice Defends Ahab from Benhadad

Benhadad, king of neighboring Syria, laid siege against Ahab in his capital, Samaria. He demanded payment in silver and gold, plus the best of Ahab's wives and children for himself, and on those terms Ahab agreed to surrender. Benhadad, however, pressed for further concessions that were unacceptable to Ahab, who retracted his surrender and prepared to defend his capital.

A prophet approached Ahab and announced that the LORD would defeat Benhadad, if Ahab would himself lead the attack. Ahab obeyed and, coming upon Benhadad's army in a drunken state, inflicted heavy losses on them.

Upon the victory, the prophet told Ahab to strengthen his position, because Benhadad would attack again in the spring.

Spring came, and with it, the Syrian army. Military scouts reported that the Syrians filled the countryside, while by comparison the army of Israel looked like two small herds of goats. Benhadad was encouraging his troops by telling them they had lost the last battle only because they had fought it in the hill country, where Ahab's God was most powerful; but if they fought in the valleys, Ahab's God was powerless there. On hearing this, the prophet told Ahab that the LORD was determined to display the unlimited reach of his power by defeating Benhadad in the valley.

They fought, and the Syrian army was routed. Benhadad himself, unable to escape, surrendered to Ahab and appealed for mercy. Without consulting the LORD, Ahab released Benhadad. A prophet then told Ahab that because he thereby misused the victory the LORD had given him, he would die. This prophecy was fulfilled 3 years later, when Ahab again fought Benhadad.

Source: 1 Kings 20

The Scandal of Naboth's Vineyard

About 20 miles north of his capital in Samaria, Ahab kept a palace in Jezreel. Wanting to improve his property, he tried to buy an adjacent parcel from his neighbor, Naboth. Though he made a generous offer, Naboth refused to sell; the land had been in his family for generations, and he couldn't part with it.

When Jezebel saw her husband, with sour mood and lost appetite because of his failed purchase, she was determined to solve his problem. Acting with his approval, she ordered the local leaders to frame Naboth on capital charges and execute him by stoning. This they did, and in keeping with their customs, executed Naboth's sons¹ as well. With owner and heirs dead, Ahab had no trouble acquiring the real estate.

As Ahab was dressing his new vineyard, God sent the prophet Elijah to him with this announcement: because Ahab had murdered Naboth and seized his field, in this same field dogs would lick up Ahab's blood when he died in disgrace. Furthermore, Ahab's entire family would be exterminated, and Jezebel would be eaten by dogs.

When Ahab heard these words, his dormant conscience sprang to life, and he repented in deep grief over his crime. When the LORD saw this, he honored Ahab's contrition by announcing that he would delay the prophesied extermination until the next generation; his sons were just as evil as Ahab, but never did repent.

Source: 1 Kings 21

Note:

¹ 2 Kings 9:26

Micaiah's Prophecy and Ahab's Death

Ahab invited Judah's **King Jehoshaphat** for treaty negotiations. Both had suffered losses of territory to the Syrians under their king, Benhadad, and Ahab wanted to regain those lands.

Jehoshaphat agreed to join forces with Ahab, provided they first ask the LORD's approval. Ahab called his staff of 400 false prophets of idol gods, who unanimously predicted victory. Unsatisfied, Jehoshaphat pressed Ahab to find a true prophet of the LORD. Ahab reluctantly suggested Micaiah, who, he complained, always prophesied bad things about Ahab. Jehoshaphat insisted that Micaiah be summoned.

At first, timid Micaiah was reluctant to oppose the formidable group and tell the truth. But under pressure, he revealed a vision he had had, in which Ahab's army was left leaderless. When Ahab told Jehoshaphat "I told you so," Micaiah revealed a further vision: the LORD had arranged for Ahab's 400 prophets — habitual liars in their own right — to falsely predict victory, in order to secure Ahab's death in battle.

Hearing this, Ahab would listen no more. He ordered Micaiah jailed until Ahab returned victorious. As he was being arrested, Micaiah announced, "If you return *alive*, I am a false prophet!"

To avoid being killed, Ahab entered the battle incognito, putting Jehoshaphat in his place at the head of the army. Benhadad had ordered his men to concentrate their attack on King Ahab, ignoring every other battle objective. Mistaking King Jehoshaphat for Ahab, Benhadad's men charged him with their full force. Under extreme attack, Jehoshaphat shouted to the LORD for rescue. Benhadad's men realized that idol-addicted Ahab would never appeal to the LORD, so they abandoned the attack and searched elsewhere for Ahab.

They never found him. However, Ahab was struck by a random arrow and mortally wounded, and he instructed his charioteer to take him home. He died outside the palace, in Naboth's field; and dogs licked up his blood, as **Elijah had prophesied**.

Years later, an army captain named **Jehu**, acting on the LORD's instructions, **ordered all Ahab's descendents slain**. He also ordered **Jezebel thrown from an upstairs window**; she died from the fall. Jehu sent men to bury her, but they found only traces of her body, which had been eaten by dogs, further fulfilling Elijah's prophecy.

Source: 1 Kings 22:1-40; 2 Chronicles 18

For Discussion

- God appealed to King Ahab many times, many ways: with a famine, a miraculous fire set to a sacrifice, against-the-odds military victories, ordinary spoken appeals, and more. What level of importance does God place on getting through to his people?
- In spite of a lifetime of ongoing evil habits, hatred of God, and even murder, when Ahab had a moment of true repentance, God immediately seized on it. Will God forgive someone after they have rejected him for a lifetime?

King Ahab wholeheartedly committed himself to selfishness, and ruthlessly oppressed those who challenged his evil. The LORD graciously sent prophets, miracles, and rescues to give Ahab opportunities to change his ways, but he unflinchingly persecuted them and bullheadedly continued his sin.

1 Kings 16:30 And **Ahab** the son of **Omri** **did evil** in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him.

1 Kings 21:25 But there was none like unto **Ahab**, which did sell himself to **work wickedness** in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he **did very abominably** in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

Ahab had a conversion experience late in life, recorded in 1 Kings 21:27-29. However, his repentance lacked depth. Ahab failed to dismiss his 400 prophets of Asherah, and continued to use their evil services. He also went to war at Ramoth Gilead against the LORD's instructions. This lack of depth, along with the short time between conversion and death, combined to minimize the impact of his conversion. Ahab's legacy is that of the most evil king of Israel up to that point.

King Ahaziah

Israel's King Ahaziah was the heir of the wicked **King Ahab**, and he continued his father's evil legacy. The Bible's account of his brief reign relates only two incidents.

Judah's **King Jehoshaphat**, who had achieved good relations with Ahab, attempted a joint merchant shipping venture with his son Ahaziah. However, because of Ahaziah's wickedness, the LORD caused the venture to fail due to shipwreck. Ahaziah urged Jehoshaphat to try again, but Jehoshaphat took the LORD's word that the effort was doomed, and refused.

Later, as Ahaziah was in his palace anticipating war with Moab, he suffered a fall and was mortally wounded. He sent servants to distant Ekron to ask advice of their idol god, Baalzebub. But the prophet Elijah stopped the messengers en route and returned them to their king with the message: "Are you consulting a foreign idol because there is no God in Israel? For this offence, you will not recover, but die!"

When Ahaziah heard this message, he sent an officer with 50 men to arrest Elijah. But Elijah refused to be arrested, instead calling fire from heaven to consume the officer and men. The king sent a second 50 men, with the same result. It was this incident that later

prompted Jesus' disciples to ask him for permission to call fire from heaven to destroy some people who had earned their ire.¹

Ahaziah sent a third party of 50 men. The officer of this group, knowing the fate of the first two groups, didn't try to arrest Elijah. Instead, he humbly and respectfully requested Elijah to accompany him. At the LORD's prompting, Elijah went, met the king, and delivered the same message he had given before: the king would die. He died soon after, and having no heir, was succeeded by his brother **Jehoram**.

Where to read Ahaziah's story: 1 Kings 22:48-53; 2 Kings 1; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37

Note:

¹ Luke 9:54. Jesus did not give his permission.

The Bible's brief account of Israel's King Ahaziah acquaints us with his hostility toward the LORD's prophet, and his affinity for the Baal cult. It also gives us just a glimpse of his greedy ambition. The LORD was not pleased with Ahaziah's brief performance as king.

1 Kings 22:51-52 **Ahaziah** the son of **Ahab** began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of **Jehoshaphat** king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And he **did evil** in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin:

King Jehoram

Summary

Jehoram became king upon the accidental death of his brother, **King Ahaziah**. The Bible account characterizes Jehoram as evil, and in his 12-year reign we see a back-and-forth wavering. At times he was friendly with the LORD's prophet Elisha, at times he persecuted him. Sometimes he was faithful to the LORD, other times he blamed the LORD for problems caused by his own sins. He took steps against the cult of Baal worship introduced by his father, **King Ahab**, but he observed the cult of **golden calf idols** introduced by **King Jeroboam**.

Time after time God displayed his power by rescuing Jehoram — in a **supply crisis** at war, in **preventing enemy raids** on Israel's territory, in miraculously breaking a **powerful siege**, in many great miracles worked by the prophet Elisha — and yet, in spite of all this evidence, Jehoram never fully trusted the LORD. In fact, because of Jehoram's sin, his time as king was plagued with multiple multi-year famines. These were wake-up calls from God, to which Jehoram never responded.

Because of Jehoram's commitment to evil, the LORD instructed one of Jehoram's commanders, **Jehu**, to **kill Jehoram** and assume his throne.

When reading the Bible account, it is easy to be confused about Jehoram, for three reasons. One, he is also known as Joram, and the two names are used interchangeably and without explanation. Two, neighboring Judah also had king named **Jehoram**, also known as Joram, who reigned at the same time. So both names are intermixed, sometimes referring to one

king, sometimes to the other. Third, in 2 Kings 5:1 - 8:6, he is referred to namelessly, simply as "the king," leaving the casual reader in doubt of his identity.

Where to read Jehoram's story: 2 Kings 3, 8:28-29, 9:14-24; 2 Chronicles 22:5-7

The War with Moab

During his brother **Ahaziah's** brief reign, Moab, formerly subject to Israel, declared their independence, and Jehoram's first act as king was to crush the rebellion. He secured the aid of Judah's **King Jehoshaphat** and the king of Edom, and set out across the desert. There they exhausted their water supply and stood in danger of defeat without even facing the enemy. Jehoram blamed the LORD for this disaster. Jehoshaphat, always turning to the LORD for aid, asked if a prophet could be found. Learning that Elisha was nearby, Jehoram and Jehoshaphat went together to consult him.

Elisha scorned Jehoram for his evil ways, but agreed to meet them out of respect for faithful Jehoshaphat. Elisha requested a musician, and as he listened to the music the LORD spoke to him. He told the kings to dig many ditches in the valley near their encampment, which the LORD would fill with fresh water. He further prophesied that the LORD would give the three kings victory over Moab. The next morning a flood filled the valley, the ditches were filled with water, and the army and their large herds were rescued.

That same morning, the army of Moab looked out over the valley, now covered with water-filled ditches. In the light of the rising sun, the water looked to them like blood, and the Moabites concluded that the three kings had quarreled and slaughtered each other, filling the valley with their blood, and leaving it full of plunder to be freely plucked. They rushed into the camp without caution, and were taken by surprise when the armies rose and attacked.

Israel inflicted huge casualties on the army of Moab, and proceeded to overthrow many Moabite towns. In order to impair Moab's future ability to fight, they ruined the land by plugging wells, cutting down oases, and destroying arable fields, before returning home.

Source: 2 Kings 3

A Miracle Demanded of Jehoram

Syria's King Benhadad made raids on Israel throughout King Jehoram's career. In one of these raids, the Syrians captured a girl, who became a slave to the wife of Naaman, one of Benhadad's best generals.

Naaman, though extremely successful, was afflicted with leprosy, and this affected him deeply. One day the girl told Naaman's wife about a prophet in Samaria, Israel, possessed of great power from God, and able to heal diseases. She expressed the wish her master would consult with this prophet.

Since the prophet was in enemy territory, Naaman consulted his king before taking action. Hearing his story, Benhadad thought it was an excellent idea, and agreed to give Naaman a letter of introduction to King Jehoram, who would then refer Naaman to the prophet.

Naaman brought expensive gifts in payment for the expected service, and presented Benhadad's letter to an incredulous King Jehoram. "This man wants me to cure an incurable disease!" he told his cabinet. "He is trying to pick a fight!" Jehoram placed his military in a state of alert.

Soon, however, word got around, and Elisha sent a message to the king, saying "Stop the military preparations! Send the man to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel!" — a fact that, ironically, Jehoram had obviously forgotten.

When Naaman arrived at Elisha's door, the prophet humiliated him by refusing even to meet him. Instead, he sent a servant to deliver the message that Naaman should bathe seven times in the Jordan River, and he would be healed.

Naaman felt insulted and at first refused. But at the urging of one of his servants, he complied, and was completely healed. In response, Naaman took home building materials for an altar to the LORD, and promised to worship only the LORD all his days.

Source: 2 Kings 5

Protection Against Syria's Aggression

In spite of this kindness, Benhadad once again waged war against Israel. He made careful battle plans, but Elisha, prompted by God, sent a message to King Jehoram revealing Benhadad's strategy, which Jehoram was therefore equipped to foil. This happened many times, and no doubt put Elisha and the king on the best of terms.

King Benhadad became enraged, certain there was a traitor on his staff. When he accused them, one of them told him that the prophet Elisha was revealing Benhadad's secrets to Jehoram. He sent an army to Dothan, where Elisha was visiting, to kidnap him.

When Elisha awoke in the morning, the city was surrounded. Unafraid, he calmly prayed to the LORD to strike the army blind, and it happened. He approached the blind army and convinced them to follow him 11 miles to Samaria. There he turned them over to Jehoram's guards, and prayed for their sight to return.

Jehoram was anxious to kill them all, but Elisha forbade him, telling him instead to treat them honorably, as prisoners of war. So Jehoram prepared a feast for them, and then sent them home.

As a result of this incident, Syria stopped all their raids on Israel. This great kindness on God's part no doubt prompted Jehoram to put his faith in the LORD.

Source: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Another Rescue from Syria's Aggression

After a while, though, King Jehoram resorted to old evil habits, and was apparently warned by the prophet Elisha that if he failed to repent, Syria would invade again.

Syria did invade, laying siege to Samaria. With the city surrounded by enemy troops, outside commerce was impossible, and the siege lasted for so long that all food was exhausted, and garbage was being sold as food at extreme prices. All this time, Elisha was telling King Jehoram not to do anything rash, but to wait for the LORD, who would rescue them at just the right time.

The depth of the crisis became palpable one day as Jehoram was touring his defenses. A woman caught the king's attention and filed a morbid lawsuit, stating that she and another woman had agreed to cook and eat their two children. They ate her son, but the other woman hid hers, and this woman was bringing suit to have the other son surrendered and eaten.

Hearing this, King Jehoram was rent with grief and anger. He blamed the siege on Elisha, who had probably prophesied it beforehand, and so he sent an executioner to arrest and kill the prophet.

Being warned by God, the prophet and his friends avoided arrest, barring the door to their house. The king arrived soon after, and ranted, still furious, blaming the disaster on the LORD.

At this, Elisha admitted the king, and gave him this message from the LORD: tomorrow food will be so plentiful that prices will plunge. Jehoram's right hand man thought Elisha was just trying to buy time. He said that the LORD wasn't capable of providing so much food, and Elisha replied, "You will see it, but you won't eat any of it." The king agreed to wait until tomorrow.

That night four men sitting outside the city gate, afflicted with leprosy and accustomed to being excluded, had a brainstorm. They were starving, and going back into the city provided no hope. So they decided to surrender to the Syrians, hoping that they would be treated as prisoners of war and fed. They reasoned that the worst that could happen is that they would be killed — but they were certain to die if they took no action. So they set out for the Syrian camp in the middle of the night.

Arriving at the camp, they found it abandoned, in disarray from the obvious haste in which the Syrians had fled, having heard a noise they interpreted as a rescuing army approaching. They had run for their lives, leaving all their supplies intact. The four men ate and drank their fill and carried off much plunder. Then, struck with conscience for their selfish behavior, they reported their finding to a guard, who passed the message to the king.

Jehoram believed it was an ambush — that the Syrians were nearby, waiting to pounce once the whole starving city arrived. His staff urged him to send a small scouting party. Jehoram resisted sending what he thought was a suicide mission, but his staff convinced him the risk to the scouts was no greater than staying in the city. The scouts returned to the king and reported that no ambush existed, the evidence clearly pointing to a terrified retreat. So the city gates were opened, the population quickly collected the plunder, including much food provisions, and food prices plummeted.

The king's right hand man, however, was trampled in the stampede, fulfilling Elisha's prophecy.

Source: 2 Kings 6:24 - 7:20

The King Meets One Raised from the Dead

One day King Jehoram had a long conversation with the prophet Elisha's assistant, Gehazi, who told story after story of Elisha's doings. In particular, he recounted how Elisha had raised to life a woman's dead son.

It turns out this woman had thereafter left Israel for seven years, and was just now returning. Finding her house occupied, she came to the king, filing suit to evict the squatters and regain her residence. Providentially, she entered the king's office with her son just as Gehazi was finishing telling how the son had been raised to life.

Gehazi interrupted the legal proceedings to point out the coincidence. The king, clearly impressed, asked the woman, who regaled him with her story. At length, the king gave her the most generous settlement the law would allow.

Source: 2 Kings 8:1-6

Jehoram's Overthrow

God had given King Jehoram ample evidence of his power and good intentions, yet Jehoram refused to give up his selfish ways. So God decided the time had come to end his reign.

Jehoram again secured the aid of the Judean king for war. By now Judah's king was the evil **Ahaziah**, second successor to **Jehoshaphat**, and the enemy was again Syria. In this war, Jehoram was badly wounded, and retired to his palace at Jezreel to recuperate. Ahaziah visited him there.

Meanwhile the prophet Elisha, in a private meeting with Jehoram's army commander **Jehu**, gave him this message from the LORD: Jehu was to be king of Israel, and his first duty as king was to destroy all of **King Ahab's** heirs. This, of course, included King Jehoram. When the other commanders heard this, they immediately gave Jehu their support, clearly ready for a change in leadership. Jehu promptly set out alone for Jezreel by chariot to carry out God's orders.

Back at Jezreel, Jehu's chariot was seen approaching the city. Sensing a crisis, both kings went together to meet Jehu. Jehu announced his intentions, and his first shot killed Jehoram. He fatally wounded Ahaziah, who escaped before dying. Next, Jehu entered the city and found the queen mother, Ahab's widow Jezebel, calling out an upstairs window. He ordered the attendants to throw her down, and she died on impact. Later Jehu sent servants to bury her, but they found only remnants of her body, which had been eaten by dogs in fulfillment of **Elijah's prophecy**.

Next, Jehu sent a message to the guardians of Ahab's heirs that they were to select the most worthy heir, name him king, arm themselves, and prepare for civil war, because Jehu was coming to kill them all. But having heard of Jehu's success so far, they declared themselves unable to stand against him. Jehu therefore demanded that they slay Ahab's heirs and present him with proof of the deed. This they did, further fulfilling Elijah's prophecy.

Source: 2 Kings 8:28-29, 9:14-24; 2 Chronicles 22:5-7

For Discussion

- When Jehoram's capital was surrounded by enemies and people were starving for lack of food, four men sick with leprosy decided to surrender to the enemy, hoping to be taken prisoner and fed. Instead, they discovered the enemy camp abandoned, and abundant food free for the taking. They ate their fill, but then were struck with conscience. "We do not well," they said, since they were keeping the food to themselves while nearby others were starving.

If we enjoy our wealth while much of the world is in need, both materially and spiritually, "We do not well."

God generously gave Israel's King Jehoram what many people of faith wish for: clear and compelling evidence of God's presence. This came in many forms: miracles of military victory, miraculous military intelligence, and miracles of healing and even of raising the dead.

Yet in spite of all this, Jehoram refused to trust God, and continued the sinful ways of his father, **King Ahab**.

2 Kings 3:1-3 Now **Jehoram** the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of **Jehoshaphat** king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he **wrought evil** in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he **cleaved unto the sins** of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

King Jehu

Summary

King Jehu, the tenth king of the separate kingdom of Israel, was raised to power by God's action, for the specific purpose of exterminating evil **King Ahab's** heirs, as **Elijah had prophesied** following the scandal of Naboth's vineyard. In this he took **strong and decisive action**, even going beyond God's requirement by also eliminating Ahab's chief legacy, the cult of **Baal worship**.

For this obedience, Jehu was rewarded with the longest dynasty in Israel's history — 5 generations long.

Jehu enjoys the distinction of being the only king of Israel to receive a **generally positive evaluation** in God's judgment. After Israel and Judah separated, every king of Israel except Jehu was committed to evil. By contrast, Judah had six kings who were wholeheartedly committed to the LORD, and two others who, like Jehu, did right some of the time and evil at other times.

During Jehu's 28 years as king, the legacy of 9 consecutive evil kings began to yield its fruit. National security suffered as Syria began significant encroachment of Israel's eastern trans-Jordan territory.

Where to read Jehu's story: 2 Kings 9 - 10

God Calls Jehu to be King

King Jehoram had declared war on Ramoth Gilead, continuing the **campaign begun** by his father, **King Ahab**. Jehoram had been badly wounded, and retired to his palace in Jezreel to recuperate. Meanwhile, all his military commanders remained at Ramoth, on Israel's border, about 40 miles east of Jezreel.

The prophet Elisha, acting under God's instruction, sent one of his students to King Jehoram's army commander, Jehu, with the message that the LORD was making Jehu king, and that his first act as king was to fulfill **Elijah's prophecy** by destroying all heirs of the evil King Ahab, including Israel's current king, Jehoram.

The student prophet found Jehu in a meeting with other army officers and asked for a private interview. He anointed Jehu's head with oil, a ceremony common when assigning someone a position, and passed on the LORD's message. Then, per Elisha's instructions, he fled, "like a madman," according to Jehu's associates.

The other officers pressed Jehu to reveal the secret message. When he did, they immediately gave him their full support, obviously dissatisfied with the administration of King Jehoram. Jehu asked them to keep the issue secret while he took immediate action to seize the throne.

Source: 2 Kings 9:1-15

Jehu Seizes the Throne

Jehu left by chariot for Jezreel, where **King Jehoram** was recuperating from a battle injury. When Jehu's chariot was seen by the lookout, the king assumed he must be bringing an urgent message from the battle front. So he sent a rider to meet the chariot and bring him advance word of the charioteer's business. The rider questioned Jehu, but not wanting to give Jehoram any advantage, Jehu refused to allow him to return any message to the city. When the rider failed to return, Jehoram sent a second rider, with the same result.

By this time Jehu was close enough to the city that the lookout recognized him by his furious driving style. Jehoram, sensing a crisis and puzzled by the curious behavior of his riders, decided to meet Jehu himself. Providentially, **King Ahaziah** of neighboring Judah, also a descendent of **King Ahab**, was visiting Jehoram, allowing Jehu to kill two evil birds with one stone. He joined Jehoram, each king in his own chariot.

When Jehoram asked Jehu the nature of the crisis, Jehu announced his intentions, drew his bow, and killed Jehoram with his first shot. Seeing this, Ahaziah fled. Jehu gave chase and mortally wounded Ahaziah, who managed to escape but soon died.

Source: 2 Kings 9:16-29

God's Judgment on Ahab's Heirs

Immediately Jehu set out on the LORD's assignment to exterminate **King Ahab's** heirs. As he entered the city of Jezreel, Jehoram's mother, Ahab's widow Jezebel, shouted a taunt from a high window in her palace. Jehu called up, asking Jezebel's attendants if they would support his conspiracy. Immediately a few of them appeared at the window. Jehu ordered them to throw her out the window. She died on impact. Later, Jehu sent servants to bury her, but they found only a few of her bones, her body having been eaten by dogs in fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy after she had innocent **Naboth framed and killed**.

Ahab's heirs were at a royal school in Samaria. Jehu wrote a letter to their guardians, saying their father the king was dead. They should choose the best of his sons, make him king, arm him, and prepare to defend him, since Jehu was coming to kill them all. Realizing their hopeless situation, they sent Jehu a message of submission. He demanded that they kill the heirs and present him with proof of their deed. This they did, and so Jehu not only eliminated Ahab's heirs, he also secured the loyalty of their former guardians.

Around the same time Jehu came upon a group of princes, heirs of Judah's **King Ahaziah**, who were visiting Israel, apparently on a sightseeing tour with the king's party. In keeping with God's instructions, he killed these, who were also heirs of Ahab.

Source: 2 Kings 9:30 - 10:17

Jehu Eliminates the Baal Cult

Jehu had eliminated **Ahab's** heirs; now he was determined to eliminate his evil legacy — the cult of Baal worship. He secured the aid of his friend Jehonadab, and the two of them constructed an elaborate and devious scheme.

Jehu announced that he intended to sponsor a bigger and better Baal worship than Ahab ever had, and his innovations were to be inaugurated at a huge festival. Priests of Baal who failed to attend were threatened with capital punishment, and when roll was taken, not one was absent. These priests were marked with special robes made for the occasion. Jehu then ordered the priests to assure that no one who worshipped the LORD was present — only priests of Baal. This done, Jehu escorted the priests inside the shrine.

While Jehu officiated over the sacrifice, his 80 co-conspirators surrounded the building. At his signal, they entered and began the slaughter; not one priest escaped. They then demolished the shrine and desecrated altars and implements, converting the site into a garbage dump.

The LORD rewarded Jehu's obedience with the promise that four more generations of his descendants would be his heirs as king of Israel. This was the longest line of kings in Israel's history. By contrast, every king of Judah was from the line of **King David**.

Even though he destroyed Baal worship, Jehu never took action against the **golden calf cult** established by **King Jeroboam**. Even so, Jehu enjoys the distinction of being the only king of the separate kingdom of Israel **applauded by God** for his obedience.

Source: 2 Kings 10:15-31

Jehu has the distinction of being the only one of the 19 kings of divided Israel who is not recorded as an evil king. Instead, both good and evil are recorded of Jehu. Because of the revival he led¹ and because he obeyed God in ridding the land of **Ahab's** legacy and heirs, God gave Jehu a dynasty that lasted 5 generations — the longest in divided Israel's history. By the same token, because he maintained the practice of **King Jeroboam's golden calf cult**,² his dynasty was limited to 5 generations. By contrast, God promised that faithful **King David's** dynasty would **never end**.

2 Kings 10:30-31 And the LORD said unto **Jehu**, Because thou hast **done well** in **executing that which is right** in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu **took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD** God of Israel with all his heart: for he **departed not from the sins** of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.

Note:

¹ 2 Kings 10:18-28

² 2 Kings 10:29

King Jehoahaz

Jehoahaz succeeded his father **Jehu** as king of Israel. During his 14-year reign, the consequences of the 9 evil kings who preceded Jehu began to be severe. Military raids by the neighboring Syrians brought such devastation that Jehoahaz despaired of Israel's survival.

Although the reign of Jehoahaz is recorded as generally evil, it is to his credit that at this point he remembered his father's legacy and turned to the LORD for help. The LORD answered his mayday by sending an unnamed rescuer who stopped Syria's advances, and so Israel, though left powerless and insecure, was not exterminated.

Where to read Jehoahaz's story: 2 Kings 13:1-9

Little is known of Jehoahaz, but we do know he continued to sponsor the **golden calf cult** started by **King Jeroboam**, and the sins associated with it.

2 Kings 13:1-2 In the three and twentieth year of **Joash** the son of **Ahaziah** king of Judah **Jehoahaz** the son of **Jehu** began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, and **followed the sins** of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

King Joash

Joash was the grandson of Israel's **King Jehu**, and succeeded his father **King Jehoahaz** as king. He reigned 16 years, and continued the evil legacy of **King Jeroboam's golden calf cult**. His reign was marked by continued vulnerability to raids by the armies of Syria and Moab.

In spite of his commitment to paganism, he had an affinity for the LORD's prophet Elisha, whom he visited on the latter's deathbed. While Joash grieved over his nation's coming loss — for Elisha had aided his nation with powerful miracles of God — Elisha made himself busy prophesying military victories for Israel, over the invading Syrian army.

To prepare for these victories, Elisha invited King Joash to participate with him in a ritual to demonstrate faith in God — faith, after all, was the vehicle through which God would provide the prophesied victories. The king took up his bow and arrows, and the prophet carefully showed him how he was to hold the bow for this ritual. He told the king to shoot an arrow out the window, in the direction of Syria (east). When he did, the prophet announced that because of his obedience, God would give him victory in the coming battle at the border town of Aphek.

Confident that the king understood the ritual and its implications, Elisha instructed Joash to take his bow outdoors and shoot arrows into the ground. Joash shot three arrows and quit. When he returned, Elisha was angry at his halfhearted compliance, telling Joash that since he had shot only three arrows, he would have only three victories over the army of Syria, rather than destroying their war-making power completely, as the LORD had intended.

In another incident, **Amaziah**, king of neighboring Judah, challenged Joash to meet him for war. Joash thought Amaziah was suffering from arrogance over a recent victory, and told him he preferred peace. Amaziah refused, however, and so the battle began. Joash routed Amaziah's army, captured Amaziah, and in order to cripple his ability to make further trouble, broke a large section of the protective wall of Jerusalem, Amaziah's capital.

Reading this account in the Bible can be a little confusing, only because the story of Joash, who is also referred to as Jehoash, is intermingled with the story of a king of Judah, contemporary with Joash, and also known by the same names, **Joash** and Jehoash.

Where to read Joash's story: 2 Kings 13:9 - 14:16; 2 Chronicles 25:17-25

Little is recorded about Israel's King Joash. We know that he helped keep alive **King Jeroboam's golden calf cult**. Also, though he had affection for the LORD's prophet Elisha, this didn't translate into faith or obedience.

2 Kings 13:10-11 In the thirty and seventh year of **Joash** king of Judah began Jehoash [**Joash**] the son of **Jehoahaz** to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.

King Jeroboam II

Jeroboam II, son and successor of **King Joash** of Israel, reigned 41 years, and continued the evil legacy of his namesake, the first **King Jeroboam**. Because of his commitment to evil, the prophet Amos prophesied that the LORD would punish Jeroboam, bringing “the sword” against his regime.¹ This was fulfilled when, just after Jeroboam's death, his son **King Zachariah** was murdered and his throne usurped.

During Jeroboam's time encroachments suffered in recent decades became so severe that Israel's continued existence was in doubt. The LORD, however, not yet willing to completely

give up on Israel, helped Jeroboam. At the prompting of the LORD's famous prophet Jonah, he organized military exploits that restored much lost territory to Israel.

Where to read Jeroboam II's story: 2 Kings 14:23-29

Note:

¹ Amos 7:9

The second King Jeroboam's career was long but unremarkable. He continued the **golden calf cult** started by the first **King Jeroboam**, and in spite of the LORD's help given through the prophet Jonah, Jeroboam II continued his evil ways.

2 Kings 14:23-24 In the fifteenth year of **Amaziah** the son of **Joash** king of Judah **Jeroboam** the son of **Joash** king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from all the sins** of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Zachariah

The Bible provides only the briefest sketch of the career of Zachariah, 14th king of the separate kingdom of Israel. He was the son and successor of **Jeroboam II**, and the fifth and last king from the family of **King Jehu**, fulfilling **God's promise to Jehu**. He had reigned for only six months when one **Shallum** murdered him in public and succeeded him as king. Zachariah continued the sins of the first **Jeroboam**.

Where to read Zachariah's story: 2 Kings 15:8-12

All we know of Zachariah's six-month reign is that he continued sponsoring the **golden calf cult**, which God hated.

2 Kings 15:8-9 In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah [that is, **Uzziah**] king of Judah did **Zachariah** the son of **Jeroboam** reign over Israel in Samaria six months. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he **departed not from the sins** of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Shallum

Shallum's origin is unknown. He ascended to the throne by assassinating **King Zachariah**, a deed he committed in full public view. After reigning only one month, he was similarly assassinated by **Menahem**, who succeeded him.

Where to read Shallum's story: 2 Kings 15:10-15

Shallum is the only king of the divided kingdom of Israel for which we have no definite statement that his deeds were good or evil. However, he came to power through a conspiracy that included murdering the previous king, Zachariah.¹ For this reason, we surmise that his brief reign was, like every other king of divided Israel except Jehu, evil.

Note:

¹ 2 Kings 15:10

King Menahem

Nothing is known of Menahem's origins. Just a month after **Shallum** brazenly assassinated **King Zachariah**, Menahem did the same to Shallum, taking the throne himself. He proceeded to reign ten years, all the while sponsoring the sinful **cult** founded by **King Jeroboam**.

Only two incidents are recorded of Menahem's reign. He mounted an attack against Tiphseh, a town at the extreme eastern limits of ancient **King Solomon's** empire, which must have been far beyond Israel's realm by Menahem's time. The city refused to surrender to him, and so once he penetrated it, he avenged himself by destroying the city and massacring its population, including even its pregnant women.

Another time Assyria invaded Israel. Menahem secured peace with a large payoff to Assyria's king, which he raised via a special tax.

When Menahem died, he was succeeded by his son, **Pekahiah**.

Where to read Menahem's story: 2 Kings 15:14-22

What little we know of King Menahem impresses us with the depth of his evil. He ordered and led a holocaust against the helpless citizens of Tiphseh, but taxed his own people to fund a bribe to avoid engaging powerful Assyria. He also participated in the **golden calf cult** originated by **King Jeroboam**.

2 Kings 15:17-18 In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah [that is, **Uzziah**] king of Judah began **Menahem** the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Pekahiah

Pekahiah succeeded his father **King Menahem** to become the 17th king of the separate kingdom of Israel. His 2-year reign was featureless, except to note that he continued **King Jeroboam's golden calf cult**. Pekahiah had no doubt followed his father's lead in maintaining his throne by buying the support of Assyria. One of his army officers, an ambitious man named **Pekah**, thought his people should fight for freedom from Assyria. Pekah conspired against Pekahiah, assassinated him, and succeeded him as king. (His efforts to declare independence from Assyria failed.)

Where to read Pekahiah's story: 2 Kings 15:22-26

Pekahiah was a relatively powerless king who nonetheless used what power he had for the evil purpose of sponsoring idol worship and the sins that were historically associated with it. The verdict on his brief reign is this:

2 Kings 15:23-24 In the fiftieth year of Azariah [that is, **Uzziah**] king of Judah **Pekahiah** the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from the sins** of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Pekah

Pekah secured the throne of Israel by murdering his predecessor, **King Pekahiah**. He reigned 20 years, all the time sponsoring the **golden calf cult**, which the LORD despised.

Pekah joined forces with Syria in an assault on Jerusalem, where **Ahaz** was king. The people of Judah were terrified of this confederacy, but the LORD sent word through the prophet Isaiah that it would fail, which it did.

Later Assyria marched on Israel, probably because Pekah declared Israel's independence and refused to pay the tribute the previous two kings had paid. Assyria took much of Pekah's territory and deported many of his people. At this failure, a man named **Hoshea** assassinated Pekah and assumed the throne himself.

Where to read Pekah's story: 2 Kings 15:25-38, 16:5; 2 Chronicles 28:6; Isaiah 7:1-9

Pekah gained the throne by assassination and lost it the same way. During his 20 years as king he sponsored idol worship and the sins associated with it; he launched an unprovoked attack against neighboring Judah; and he defaulted on his debt to Assyria, thereby plunging his nation into a needless and unwinnable war.

In view of his consistent record of sin, the historian records God's assessment of him this way:

2 Kings 15:27-28 In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah [that is, **Uzziah**] king of Judah **Pekah** the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD: he **departed not from the sins** of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

King Hoshea

Hoshea, the 19th and last king of the separate kingdom of Israel, murdered his **predecessor** and seized the throne in the wake of military failures against the invading Assyrian army. His 9-year reign is characterized as evil. The only significant event of his reign — but a supremely significant one — was the destruction of the kingdom. Hoshea rebelled against the Assyrians, to whom he was obligated to pay certain taxes. Upon his default, Assyria laid siege to the capital, Samaria. The siege lasted three summers. At its end, Samaria fell, the population was deported to Assyria, and foreign peoples were resettled into Samaria. The kingdom of Israel had come to its end.

Where to read Hoshea's story: 2 Kings 17:1-6, 18:9-12

Hoshea murdered his predecessor, defaulted on his obligation to Assyria, and brought destruction to his kingdom.

2 Kings 17:1-2 In the twelfth year of **Ahaz** king of Judah began **Hoshea** the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. And he **did that which was evil** in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.

Assyrian Captivity