

Kings & Chronicles

As with Samuel, Kings is one book in the original Hebrew. It was divided into 2 scrolls in the Greek translation because written Greek includes vowels and requires more space on the page than Hebrew.

1 Kings 1-2 – the chronological narrative in 2 Samuel concluded in 20:22 with the defeat of the uprisings against David's reign and restoration of the status quo. The storyline picks up again in 1 Kings 1 with David a few years later being substantially incapacitated by age and infirmities, probably intensified by enduring grief over Absalom and the conflicts in family and kingdom. Consequently, David was again blind-sided by a coup attempt led by the son who was next in line after Absalom by age. This time, Joab who had always previously shown loyalty to David, threw in his influence for Adonijah, along with Abiathar the priest (a descendant of Eli), contrary to David's expressed intention to have Solomon as his heir to the throne. No doubt those men who'd been with David for more than 40 years thought Adonijah a more appropriate king than young Solomon, but they were wrong, because Solomon was God's choice, not merely David's whim.

1 Kings 1:10 highlights the political nature of this conspiracy to have Adonijah as king, omitting members of David's inner circle who knew and supported his intention to have Solomon as king.

Bathsheba is revealed in these chapters as a woman with a good heart, and good intentions, but also politically naive. She didn't see or act on the mortal danger posed by Adonijah and his allies until Nathan the prophet gave her direction.

Although David had apparently become somewhat withdrawn, his mind quite intact and he was able to act decisively when provoked to do so. He promptly set Nathan, Bathsheba, Beniah the commander of his palace guard, and Zadok the priest in motion to anoint Solomon at the Gihon Spring below Jerusalem at the edge of the Kidron Valley, and bring him into the city riding the king's mule with shouts of acclamation for King Solomon, which they did. Jesus recapitulated these events in his triumphal entry, riding not a king's battle mount but an untrained young donkey. The shouts of acclamation were there for Jesus on his ride, but at the end of the day the priests and elders did not receive him as king.

Solomon however was successfully enthroned by David's hasty maneuver and the conspiracy was temporarily derailed. Solomon, like his father before him, chose the path of mercy for the conspirators who'd plotted against him. However, they were each warned severely to be faithful to the young king.

2:1-9 continues with David given the young regent warnings and advice about enemies he would surely have to deal with. Despite Joab's constant previous support of David, once again David denounced him as dangerous, violent, and self-serving. He was a continuing threat to Solomon. There were other threats to be mindful of, and obligations to reward others. v1-9 are a bit like the separating of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25.

2:3 notes again the importance of the written word in the continuity of the nation.

2:10-12, David must have been about 70 when he died, since he began to rule when he was 30 (2 Samuel 5:4). He'd been blessed and shepherded by the Lord, but had also lived a demanding and difficult life.

After David's death, 2:13-35 tells of the end of the conspiracy to take the kingdom from Solomon for Adonijah and his allies. The ploy to take a concubine (virgin though she was) of king David was a ploy to strengthen Adonijah's claim to the throne (recall 2 Samuel 3:6-8, 16:20-22). Again, Bathsheba is seen as trusting Adonijah, naively missing his maneuvers for the throne, while Solomon saw the ruse for what it was. The deaths of Adonijah and Joab, and then of Shimei, and the removal of Abiathar from functional priesthood (long ago prophesied for the whole house of Eli) came about because of their own failures to keep their word. Solomon exercised restraint and showed mercy, until they brought down judgment on their own heads.

"...the throne of David shall be established before the LORD forever." (2:45) And it has been.

1 Kings 3 continues the story of Solomon's early reign with an Egyptian marriage alliance. From a political standpoint, this seems very sensible, but in terms of godly leadership of Israel it was fraught with dangers. The king was ignoring the warning in Deuteronomy 17:16. At the same time he was diligently worshiping God... but the hodge-podge of religious practices with worship at the high places, including Gibeon where the remnants of the Tabernacle had come to rest (1 Chronicles 16:39, 21:29), were a blemish on his record and the nation. Nevertheless, in those imperfect circumstances Solomon pursued God, and the Lord revealed himself to Solomon in a dream and promised him the wisdom to govern that he coveted, and wealth and honor beyond all other kings... and the potential of a long life if he was faithful to the Lord.

The tale of 2 prostitutes highlights the wisdom of Solomon, but also gives us a glimpse of who had access to the king. Like the divine Son of David, even prostitutes could come to the king for discernment and mercy.

1 Kings 4 gives an overview of Solomon's governing officials, and once again we see 12 prominently in the organizational structure. Like the rotations of the priests and Levites, the 12 stewards who supplied food served on the basis on the 12 months of the year.

We don't know how many children Solomon had, but we do see 2 of his daughters mentioned here in their marriage connections to these royal stewards, v11 and v15.

In v20 we have a highlight, one of several, pointing to the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham (Genesis 22:17). The borders of Solomon's kingdom fulfilled the boundaries God had promised, and the abundance they enjoyed was that of a land that flowed with milk and honey. The "vine and fig tree" motif in v25 became a symbol of the coming kingdom of God initiated by Jesus (Micah 4:4, Zechariah 3:10).

The abundance of horses and chariots are a mark of success, yet they again echo the warning in Deuteronomy 17:16, things kings were not to do.

As were the people (4:20) so was Solomon's mind and wisdom to govern (4:29). We have only a small sample of his many proverbs, and only 2 of the Biblical psalms carry his name (72, 127). It is noteworthy that his wisdom was first and foremost a gift for governing, and that he deployed his wisdom in matters of the natural world, the physical realm (4:33-34). His wisdom was great, but not especially directed toward the understanding of God.

2 Chronicles 1 opens with a statement substantially like that in 1 Kings 2:46, referring to the actions Solomon took to subdue his rivals, with the addendum that God was with him and made him great. Solomon's visit to Gibeon (v2-13) where he had the dream of God bestowing wisdom upon him was in 1 Kings 3:3-15, but the Chronicler includes the information about the tabernacle remnants being at the high place, which was not in Kings. The account of Solomon's reign in Chronicles focuses on things pertaining to the temple and the worship of God.

The description of Solomon's prosperity in v14-17 is included later in the narrative of Kings (1 Kings 10:26-29). Solomon's trade policies, again, were in conflict with God's ordinances for kings in Deuteronomy 17:14ff.

The mention of silver and gold being "as common in Jerusalem as stone" (1:15; Kings only mentions silver in the parallel passage) sets the stage for the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 with the street of it paved with pure gold.

1 Kings 5-6, 2 Chronicles 2-3

When Solomon communicated with Hiram of Tyre about his plans to build the temple he referred to the LORD putting his enemies "under the soles of his feet" (1 Kings 5:4). We have in Solomon's words an echo of David's words in Psalm 8:6 which Paul in turn cites in reference to Jesus Christ reigning now in 1 Corinthians 15:25, 27.

The temple building project was enormous, both in terms of materials and manpower. Much of the structure as described is hard to picture, but the inner rooms with their proportions were like the tabernacle, but on a larger scale. The Most Holy Place where the Ark was located was a 20 cubit cube with all the walls, floor and ceiling overlaid with gold. The original cherubim on the cover of the Ark were overshadowed by two larger cherubim built in place whose outstretched wings touched one another and the walls. The various engravings of palm trees, flowers, and cherubim along with motifs of pomegranates and original almond patterns of the 7 branched lampstand all hinted at humanity's first home in the Garden of God.

In the Chronicles account of the same plans notice the emphasis recorded for Solomon's initial interest in observing the rituals of the Law (2 Chronicles 2:4-4). We also see the emphasis on Israel's God being the greatest of gods, and beyond containment in anything built by men.

The city of Dan was northernmost in Israel, and their proximity to the Phoenicians is highlighted in the character of the craftsman Hiram/Hiram the son of a Danite woman and a man of Tyre. He is not described in the same terms of the Spirit of the Lord being upon him as was Bezalel (and Oholiab) who saw to the building of the Tabernacle at Sinai (Exodus 36) but the descriptions of the craftsmen are similar.

Chronicles again emphasizes the Mt Moriah location of the temple in 2 Chronicles 3:1. The (current) traditional dating chronology would put the 4th year of Solomon at 966 B.C. The pillars at the front of the temple are a bit mysterious, in that they seemed to have a meaning or purpose we aren't completely sure of. The names Boaz and Jachin are not explained, and are interpreted as "in him is strength" and "he establishes."

1 Kings 7, 2 Chronicles 4

Solomon's house was a grand edifice, both a home and a center of government for the king. Assuming the two buildings, temple and palace, were built consecutively we have a period of 20 years of epic building beginning in about 966 B.C.

After the description of Solomon's palace and a note of his attention to a place for Pharaoh's daughter, 1 Kings 7 continues with the accouterments of the temple, and 2 Chronicles likewise tells of those furnishings and tools.

Temple ritual for Israel in the days of the United Kingdom required a lot of offerings, a lot of priests, and hence a lot of water and many tables and basins. Once again we have motifs of cherubim, oxen, flowers and fruits in the construction of these items, symbols of power and beauty and the Paradise (enclosed garden) of God.

The work of stone carving and the work of metal casting were all done offsite, and then the finished products transported to the building site of the temple. A few things were still singular, including the table where the bread of the presence was placed each Sabbath, and the incense altar placed before the veil just outside the Most Holy Place. The structure and all its furnishings were resplendent with the gold and polished bronze and magnificent stone work all around. The intention was to honor God and draw attention to Him through these visual displays and the ostentatious wealth invested in the building and furniture, and to also be beautiful, pleasing to the eye.

1 Kings 8, 2 Chronicles 5

Solomon began to build the temple in the 4th year of his reign (considered to be 966 B.C.), which was the 480th year after Israel left Egypt (1 Kings 6:1, putting the Exodus at 1446 B.C.), in the 2nd month of the year, between Passover and Pentecost. The construction was finished in his 11th year (1 Kings 6:37-38, 959 B.C.), in the 8th month of the year. Perhaps the various furnishings and decorative trim were finished up in the next several months (1 Kings 7:13-51), and then 11 months after the structure was finished the Ark of The Covenant was brought from the tent David had erected up the hill into the temple in the 7th month at the feast (1 Kings 8:1-2), which would be the Feast of Tabernacles, with a grand assembly to celebrate the feast and the dedication of the temple. It was at the Feast of Tabernacles the Ark came into the temple, and the Glory of the Lord filled the temple (1 Kings 8:11), and it was at the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus declared his divine purposes in the temple courts (John 7, especially v37-41).

Both Kings and Chronicles note the length of the poles attached to the Ark of The Covenant, that they protruded past the veil into the Holy Place (recall that the Most Holy Place was 20 cubits square, about 30 feet). At the time this portion of Kings and Chronicles was written "they are still there today" was the author's comment, but in the days when the records were compiled into the books of Kings and Chronicles the temple of Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and the Ark of The Covenant was never seen again.

The contents of the Ark, the stone tablets of the Testimony, are the only objects ever recorded as being placed within the Ark. Other items, including the jar of manna, Aaron's rod, and a copy of the Law, had been placed in proximity to it, before the Lord. Considering what had happened to Uzzah and what had happened when the Ark came home from the Philistines and was inappropriately handled, it must have taken some serious consideration and preparation to handle the Ark, opening it, probably thoroughly cleaning it, and then transporting it to its intended permanent housing.

Solomon's blessing and prayer of dedication have clauses that are often cited, including 1 Kings 8:22, and 8:41-43 is perhaps especially noteworthy for invoking blessings upon any from the nations who look to God in faith. The temple of Jesus' time had certainly not been used to draw the nations to God, but rather was regarded as inaccessible to any but those born of Israel. See Isaiah 56:7, Mark 11:17.

2 Chronicles 6-7

When Solomon dedicated the temple we see his affirmation of God keeping his promises in 6:4ff. He had pictured the temple as a divine dwelling place "forever" in v2, and Jerusalem as the permanent place for God's name to dwell (recall Deuteronomy 16:6), with David ruling over God's people, Israel (6:6). Ultimately, what we see in fulfillment is a divine sanctuary, a temple not built with human hands (1 Corinthians 3:18) in a new, heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:25-26) where the throne of David is completed in the reign of Jesus, the Lamb of God (Acts 2:34-36), and the Israel of God includes all those who walk in faith (Galatians 6:10, 16).

In the ceremonial prayers and blessings of 1 Kings 8:12-61 and 2 Chronicles 6 we have mention of Solomon standing with hands lifted up (6:12) and kneeling with hands lifted up (6:13), and everyone bowing to the ground in worship and thanksgiving (7:3). It is our loss that we have substantially distanced ourselves from similar expressions of prayer and praise in our posture before God, publicly and privately.

Solomon's prayers and benedictions in Kings and Chronicles are reported essentially the same, but there are some different details of emphasis. Kings for example mentions the Exodus and God making a new nation of Israel (1 Kings 8:51-53) while Chronicles instead takes us back to the dedication of the Tabernacle and priests with not only the glory of the LORD filling the temple, but the fire of God consuming the sacrifice (2 Chronicles 7:1-3, Exodus 40:34, Leviticus 9:22-24).

Solomon's benediction in 6:41 echoes Moses in the travels of Israel when the Ark was moved, Numbers 10:35-36.

As in Kings we're told that the ceremonies of dedication were in the 7th month, at the feast of Tabernacles/Booths and note the joy and gladness of God's people (7:10) which is recapitulated in the dedication of the church, Acts 2:42-47.

When the LORD appeared to Solomon the 2nd time 7:12, it was after the completion of his big building projects, which is to say after 4 years, + 7 years building the temple, + 13 years building

the royal house. He'd been reigning 24 years or more the 2nd time the LORD spoke to him, affirming his good work up to that point and his own faithfulness, and also warning Solomon against turning aside from God's word. We'll see why this was a timely warning especially when we read Ecclesiastes and Solomon's description of the emptiness that followed his great achievements as a builder (Ecclesiastes 2:4-6, 11).

In the divine message of 7:12-22 we see again the conditional nature of many of God's sure promises. He will always do as he says, but often what he promises is contingent upon what we do in response.

I Kings 9, 2 Chronicles 8

In 1 Kings 9:1-9 as in 2 Chronicles 7:11-22 we have the account of the LORD's 2nd appearance to Solomon, after the building of the temple and the king's palace, apparently 24 years into Solomon's reign. Presumably the prayer God heard in v3 was the prayer at the dedication of the temple, at the time when the glory of the LORD descended visibly, and apparently this was at least 13 years later after the building of the royal house. God's answer to prayer isn't always timed by our expectations.

Notice the emphasis on "forever" for the king and the sanctuary, but at the same time the conditional emphasis for both, depending on keeping God's covenant commands and being faithful to him. Israel could be a light to the nations and testify of God, or they could lose everything and be a testimony of God's holiness by the consequences. The latter was sadly the actual process.

Despite the great wealth and prosperity of Israel under Solomon, his vast expansions and enterprises apparently left him indebted to Hiram, king of Tyre, so that Solomon signed over 20 cities in Galilee to him (1 Kings 9:10-14). Dealing with the world has entanglements that can be costly. The towns were not impressive to Hiram, and 2 Chronicles 8:1-2 speaks of Solomon rebuilding the towns he received from Hiram, probably the same towns once the debt had been appropriately settled in their various enterprises together.

During Solomon's reign the remaining Canaanite inhabitants of the land were drafted into slavery, forced labor, initially for Solomon's great projects but as the writer of this portion of Kings noted, "so they are to this day." Israelites were also conscripted for military and civil responsibilities, as Samuel had foretold (1 Samuel 8:11ff).

1 Kings 9:25 suggests Solomon was observant of the 3 annual feasts all Israel was to keep, and Chronicles amplifies with the information that he was observant of the various Sabbaths, New Moons and holy days, as Moses commanded. Chronicles again emphasizes his support of the priests and Levites in their duties as reorganized by David. He was also aware of the problems associated with having a pagan (Egyptian) princess in Jerusalem and made some special accommodations in her behalf, though later he no longer seemed to make such distinctions for other pagan princesses in his harem, but instead was drawn into their rituals.

I Kings 10-11, II Chronicles 9

The visit of the Queen of Sheba is famous, but also in many ways obscure. The location of her kingdom is generally thought to have been in southwestern Arabia, enriched by sea trade with Africa and India transported north via caravan routes. We can surmise that her visit was after 20+ years of Solomon's reign since the text mentions her seeing the house he had built. The story highlights the wealth and fame of Solomon's kingdom, and his personal charm and wisdom. One has to wonder whether her assessment of how happy Solomon's men, servants, and wives (2 Chronicles 9:7) all were was still true in his older years. The gift of 120 talents of gold, etc. was in turn recompensed by Solomon giving her bountiful gifts, probably sealing a treaty or trade agreement between the kingdoms. At least when the Queen visited it was still evident that Solomon's success was due to God's blessing (1 Kings 10:9) which might not have been as apparent in his later years. Jesus of course referenced this visit and testimony of the gentile queen in Matthew 12:42 asserting that "something greater than Solomon" was present in himself.

The great wealth of Solomon is highlighted in 1 Kings 10, in terms of opulence and the wide world in which Israel participated in those days. It was the perfect moment in time for Israel to be a light to the nations as God wanted. Unfortunately, the "golden age" ended up being a flash in the pan, with spectacle and luxury and self indulgence overwhelming and tarnishing the testimony noted by the Queen of Sheba.

Once again in Solomon's chariots and horses and Egyptian alliance and many wives we see a direct contradiction of God's rules for the king in Deuteronomy 17:14ff.

And so we have the account of Solomon's many princess wives from many nations, and still more servant wives without the royal connections. The nations listed in 1 Kings 10:1 are specifically highlighted in v2 as nations in the regions Israel was to occupy with whom they were not to intermarry. His attraction to the women seduced Solomon into compromise with their gods and rituals. Solomon polluted the hills and valleys around Jerusalem with idols and shrines of the gods of the nations, and participated in their sacrifices and rituals. It's an incredible downward spiral for a man who'd been and seen what he'd been and seen. "Put not your trust in princes."

Solomon's failures resulted in adversaries being raised up against him (the old cycle we saw in the Judges). Sadly, Solomon responded to God's judgment against him much as Saul had in his day, trying to destroy the one God had appointed to rule 10 tribes. Solomon was no more successful in destroying Jeroboam than Saul had been in destroying David.

Despite Solomon's unfaithfulness, God resolved to honor his covenant with David and preserve the kingdom and the lineage that would eventually bring the Christ into the world.

1 Kings 11:41 and 2 Chronicles 9:29 once again give us footnotes pointing to the original sources, which we no longer have, used by the editors (very likely Jeremiah and Baruch for Kings and Ezra for Chronicles) to compile this divine history.

Solomon's death after a 40 year reign was in about 930 B.C.

1 Kings 12-14 Rehoboam and Jeroboam

The Lord had forewarned Solomon that his folly would cause the kingdom to be divided, and most of the tribes would be torn from his hand. An industrious young man named Jeroboam was chosen by God to lead the 10 northern tribes. When Solomon learned this he tried to kill Jeroboam, and so the young man fled to Egypt for a time. Here in chapter 12, with Solomon's death and the accession of his son Rehoboam, Jeroboam's time had come.

The first indication of trouble for Rehoboam is in 12:1, that the coronation was set to take place in Shechem, in the hill country of Ephraim, not in Jerusalem the capital of the united kingdom. An indication of the mood of Israel is that not only did they have Rehoboam come to Shechem, but they invited Jeroboam to the gathering as well. The story of the demands of the people for lower taxes and less civil service are common enough. The response of the older counselors is measured and politically expedient. The heavy handed belligerence of the younger counselors (friends) of Rehoboam is all too typical of people who feel secure in their power, and was the path to the national disaster already prophesied to occur. These events had a chain of human failures and mistakes leading to the breach, but ultimately it was a failure of hearts to follow God and so what happened was "a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD" (12:15) fulfilling the words of the prophets who had warned Solomon and Jeroboam of what lay ahead.

Did 3 days catch your eye in 12:5, 12?

The words of the elders in 12:7 describe what godly leadership is always based on. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, be the servant of all.

Despite all of Solomon's building projects the phrase "to your tents" in 12:16 suggests that many Israelites still lived as nomadic herdsman in those days. In contrast v17 mentions the cities of Judah. To some extent the division may have been an urban/rural lifestyle divide.

The principle revealed by Shemaiah in 12:21-24 is consistent with God's requirements in the Exodus generation that Israel bypass the lands of Edom, Ammon, and Moab which God had given to their relatives (Deuteronomy 2). God deplores brothers battling one another. This is one occasion when a king listened to a prophet who chastened him for his decisions.

Despite the divine blessing and promises he had received, Jeroboam soon descended into what he saw as political expediency, creating 2 shrines in Israel as substitutes for the temple in Jerusalem. The temples and golden calves at Bethel and Dan became fixtures of Israelite religion, ironically dedicated with the very phrase used in Exodus 32 for the first golden calf.

Chapter 13 has a dynamic account of a prophet confronting Jeroboam. He didn't have the recognition or stature of the prophet who told Rehoboam not to attack Israel, who had been obeyed, but he had divine power and authority behind his words. Despite the miracles displayed through this man, Jeroboam made no meaningful changes and the dire words were ultimately fulfilled (some of them about 280 years later, 2 Kings 23:15-18). The deception of the man of God by the old prophet's clumsy lies display the unfortunate truth that often God's servants don't see the wisdom of God's commandments and are eager to rationalize exceptions. The young prophet's death seems extreme, but he was on an extreme mission with grave

consequences, and his disobedience to God's explicit command undermined his mission and message.

The prophets were busy in 12-14. In 14 we have the illness and death of Jeroboam's son. The irony of consulting a prophet, and trying to deceive him as to who was asking, is humorous, but it's dark humor in the tragic circumstances. Ahijah was not happy bearing the bad news.

14:11-14 are especially noteworthy, with the message that the death of Jeroboam's son was actually divine mercy toward the youngster, because God thought he was the best of the clan and an early death was his best option.

Shishak of Egypt would have been king of a different dynasty than the one Solomon had allied with. Conventional historical chronology for the Middle East since the 19th century has been based on an assumption about who Shishak was among the pharaohs of Egypt, but the traditional identification is very problematic, built on several questionable assumptions. The pharaoh who plundered the treasuries of Jerusalem carried away vast quantities of gold and other treasures.

Chapter 14 ends again with footnotes referring to the original historical sources for the brief accounts in Kings. We also have a footnote reminding us that Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite (recall 11:1, Deuteronomy 23:2).

2 Chronicles 10-12

The account of Rehoboam's errors and Jeroboam's rise to rule the northern tribes of Israel is substantially the same in Kings and Chronicles. 2 Chronicles 11:5-23 does focus on Rehoboam's kingdom and family with details that were not included in Kings. This is part of the overall theme of Chronicles, which focuses on the house of David and the kingdom of Judah, while Kings focuses attention on the failings of the northern kingdom.

11:13-17 highlights the response of many Levites to Jeroboam's innovations in the worship and priesthood in Israel. While v8-12 highlighted Rehoboam's physical military preparations to hold the kingdom, v13-17 note that the God-fearing Levites were a great resource for the strength of Judah of Israel, at least for a time, 3 years. Chronicles also mentions "goat idols" made by Jeroboam (11:15) which were not included in the record in Kings.

The Chronicler also noted that Rehoboam made some good administrative decisions with his many sons from his many wives in 11:18-23. However, despite some good decisions and good years, Rehoboam "abandoned the law of the LORD" in his success (12:1) and "all Israel" likewise. His unfaithfulness resulted in the wealth of Jerusalem being pillaged by the Egyptians. They had abandoned the LORD and been abandoned by him (12:5), but when the king and the leaders heeded the words of the prophet and humbled themselves the LORD limited the damage and permitted Judah to be vassals of Egypt rather than destroyed by them. Note the emphasis in 12:6-7 and 12:12 on the humbling of Rehoboam and the leaders.

Rehoboam's reign was from 930-913 B.C. His heir Abijah was son of Rehoboam's favorite wife, Maacah (also called Micaiah in 13:1). She is referred to as Absalom's daughter in 11:20-21 (spelled Abishalom in 1 Kings 15:20). Probably Maacah was daughter of Absalom's daughter

Tamar and Uriel of Gibeah, and daughter of Absalom here means granddaughter.

Iddo the seer in 12:15 is also listed as a source for inspired material in 9:29 and 13:22. While we know nothing of his life story or other deeds he was clearly an important prophet in the days of Solomon and Rehoboam, and had an important role in the writing of Scripture.

1Kings 15, 2 Chronicles 13-16

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, had a relatively brief reign of 17 years, and died when he was about 58 years old (1 Kings 14:21). As noted in 2 Chronicles 11:18-23 several of his wives were from the family of David, apparently including Maacah, (grand)daughter of Absalom (Abishalom; Absalom's mother had been named Maakah, 2 Samuel 3:3). Rehoboam's favored son Abijam (or Abijah), taking the throne in 913 B.C., is given poor grades overall in Kings. Meanwhile, 1 Kings 15:1-8 explains that God put up with the bad behavior of Rehoboam and Abijam because of the covenant promises he had made to David, and not because they themselves were worthy or faithful. God had committed to a plan, and he would see it through. Chronicles focuses on their Davidic pedigree, and highlights one particular instance which was a shining moment in Abijah's reign.

"There was war between" Jeroboam and Rehoboam, and between Jeroboam and Abijam. God had forbidden Rehoboam attempting to reunite the kingdom by force when he became king, nevertheless, hostility between the two dynasties persisted and there was not peace. Even so, it is evident there was a lot of cultural interaction, as we will see over and over again examples of the same or very similar names being contemporaneous in the 2 kingdoms.

Despite the many failings of Abijah(m) the Chronicler recounts an event in battle between the more numerous forces of Jeroboam and the men of Judah, in which Abijah prevaricated somewhat in his recollection of how Jeroboam became kind (2 Chronicles 13:3-7) but asserted that the proper priesthood and proper worship belonged to Judah (2 Chronicles 13:8-12). While the faithfulness of Judah may have been overstated by Abijah, the LORD gave the men of Judah victory over the Israelites when they called upon him (2 Chronicles 13:13-22), humbling Jeroboam as the prophets had warned. The theme of victory over mighty enemies through prayer and praise will recur many times in Chronicles.

Note again that the reign of Abijah(m) is much more briefly recounted in Kings than in Chronicles. Generally, the Chronicles focus much more on the kings of Judah, while Kings often follows the misadventures of the northern tribes. The account of King Asa in Kings is much shorter than that in Chronicles (about 1/3). The editor of Kings gives Asa high marks for faithfulness to the LORD and the ways of David, even removing his own mother from a position of influence because of her idolatry. It's a common lament in Kings that the high places where God was worshiped apart from Jerusalem were not removed (1 Kings 15:14). The war between Asa and Baasha in 1 Kings 15:16 gains context later in the chapter when learn how Baasha became king of Israel, through another coup. Kings merely states that Asa hired the king of Syria/Aram to attack northern Israel. This episode was very late in Asa's reign (see 2 Chronicles 16), and Chronicles recounts the LORD's displeasure with Asa's decision to call on a pagan king rather than call on the LORD. Asa responded badly, and spent the final 5 years of his reign

seemingly alienated from God.

The LORD had offered Jeroboam a covenant like that he established with David, but Jeroboam chose his own path. After a reign of about 22 years his son Nadab began to reign (1 Kings 15:25), in about 908 B.C. His reign was brief, and the ascendancy of Ephraim through Jeroboam's dynasty was short lived, an army commander named Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar, assassinated Nadab and took the throne. We'll see in 1 Kings 16 that the LORD had used Baasha as an instrument of judgement against the house of Jeroboam.

Chronicles recounts many of the positive accomplishments of Asa, in 2 Chronicles 14:1-8. In v9-15 we read of an attempted invasion by an Ethiopian ruler. This ruler would have either been a pharaoh of Egypt or else a commander of forces under the pharaoh. About 30 years earlier Pharaoh Shishak had taken enormous wealth from Jerusalem, and the pharaoh contemporary with Asa had similar ambitions, and an enormous military force. However, vastly outnumbered, Asa cried out to the LORD and the LORD defeated the invading army, leading to a route that carried Asa's forces victoriously to the southern extreme of Philistine territory.

Immediately after the victory through prayer Asa was confronted by a prophet of God urging Asa to continue in faithfulness to God. All too often success and wealth turn good folks aside from their sensible choices. 15:57 sounds like Moses's admonition to Joshua and very much like Paul's admonition to Christians (1 Corinthians 15:58). Asa was motivated to cleanse and refresh the temple and eliminate idolatry where he could. Men of Israel were included in the covenant renewal he initiated, at a time that reflects Israel's arrival at Sinai and the feast of Pentecost.

The Chronicler states that Asa had a true heart all his days (15:17). Then he proceeds to recount the same failings of Asa reported in Kings. Chapter 16 describes Asa's crisis of faith when he turned to wealth and foreign alliances instead of prayer for delivery. It worked, but the LORD was not pleased and Asa's means of victory was actually an invitation to continual war in the region. Asa was angry about the message, and punished the messenger. His deterioration at that stage of his life was in opposition to his own convictions, and sometimes I wonder if he suffered some form of dementia, not wholly responsible for his behavior, bearing in mind again the assessment in 15:17.

The "eyes of the LORD" in 2 Chronicles 16:9 refers to the Spirit (or 7 spirits) of God, Zechariah 4:5-10, Revelation 5:6.

Asa died in about 869 B.C. His son Jehoshaphat began to reign in about 872 B.C., reigning as regent in his father's declining days.

1 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 17

The central story of Kings is the story of Ahab and Jezebel.

"The word of the LORD came to Jehu son of Hanani..." Jehu isn't one of the "writing" prophets with a book named for him, but he was clearly an important spiritual leader in Judah and Israel

during the 9th century B.C. He's mentioned 3 times in 1 Kings 16, and also in 2 Chronicles 19:2 and 20:34. He dealt with kings Baasha (Israel) and Jehoshaphat (Judah) over a span of more than 40 years. The 2 Chronicles 20:34 reference tells us Jehu was in fact a writing prophet, and that his records were one of the sources of the book of Chronicles. Jehu's father Hanani had also been a prophet (seer) and chastened King Asa with God's word in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10, which resulted in Hanani being punished for speaking the truth.

1 Kings 16 emphasizes the rapid decline of the kingdom of Israel from Jeroboam to his son Nadab to the usurper Baasha to Elah to the usurper Zimri and then his assassin Omri, the worst ever, and Omri's son Ahab who was even worse. There are assassinations, conspiracies, and civil wars in plenty in unfaithful Israel. Divine judgements of utter destruction against unfaithful royal houses in Israel are stated in almost the same words by the prophets for Jeroboam (14:10-11) and Baasha (16:3-4) and Ahab (21:19-24).

Omri's reign begins in about 880 B.C., Ahab's in 874. Their dynasty was very successful in some respects, but is characterized as "more evil than all who were before" them. Under Omri and Ahab an alliance with Phoenicia, Tyre and Sidon, was sealed with a marriage of the princess Jezebel to the prince Ahab. That marriage led to normalization of Baal and Asherah worship in Israel as state sanctioned religion, and a prolonged attempt to exterminate the prophets and followers of the LORD. The southern kingdom was contaminated with the same virulent disorder by the pact between Ahab and Jehoshaphat, likewise sealed by a marriage between Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah. The lineage of David through Solomon was nearly annihilated as a result of that poor judgment. The Omri-Ahab dynasty is a center piece of the story of Israel's decline and fall, running from 1 Kings 16 through 2 Kings 11. Elijah and Elisha both served the LORD during the Omri-Ahab dynasty.

The snippet in 16:34 about Jericho highlights the failure to listen to the word of the LORD in Ahab's kingdom. Ambition defeats wisdom and the fear of the LORD, but such ambition is costly.

Jehoshaphat is mentioned in Kings, but mostly in connection with his dealings with Ahab. He has a much greater role in the emphasis of Chronicles where the "good" kings of Judah are emphasized for their fidelity and support of the Law and Temple and Priesthood.

2 Chronicles 17 gives the overview of things Jehoshaphat did right. His reign appears to have overlapped that of his father Asa by a couple of years, beginning in about 872 B.C. v3 gives the assessment that Jehoshaphat was blessed by God because he sought the paths David had followed. His campaign to have priests and Levites teach the Law to the people in v7-9 is admirable, and contributed to "the fear of the LORD" bringing peace and tribute to Jehoshaphat's kingdom.

I Kings 17-19

The protracted story of Ahab and Jezebel is also the story of Elijah and his successor Elisha. Elijah was an ordinary man who acted in faith, and in particular prayed with faith (James 5:17-18). His sanctuary by the brook, then in the Phoenician town of Zarephath, covered altogether a period of about 3 ½ years (James 5:17, Luke 4:25). Jesus cited God's mercy toward

the Phoenician widow through Elijah as emblematic of his own ministry (Luke 4:24-26). The prophet Malachi, 400 years after Elijah's days, predicted a 2nd Elijah (Malachi 4:5) who would prepare the way for the coming of the LORD, and Jesus identified the 2nd Elijah as John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14, 17:10-13).

While Elijah had great faith and remarkable miracles were done through him, he was also subject to disappointment, discouragement, and fear. The great victories over hunger, and death, and idolatry in chapters 17-18 came crashing down around him in 19 when he realized his apparent total victory on Mt. Carmel had not changed the heart of Jezebel in particular, and things would go on as they had been. It's very easy to slip from a momentary high into dejection as Elijah did in chapter 19, and thankfully, the LORD understands that. He nurtured Elijah when he needed to be nurtured, and gave him relatively simple tasks to perform. It is perhaps noteworthy that he didn't do 2 of the 3 tasks at all, anointing Hazael and Jehu, but left those to his successor, and only somewhat gruffly summoned Elisha to follow him, without a ceremonial anointing.

Obadiah in chapter 18 is a remarkable character, hiding and feeding 2 companies of 50 prophets in caves, under the noses of Ahab and Jezebel in whose household he served. No doubt he received "a prophet's reward" (Matthew 10:41).

7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (19:18) is a small percentage of all Israel, but much more than "I, only I am left." Generally speaking, when we're down and out we just aren't seeing the picture as God sees it, and we need to trust him in all circumstances. Elijah felt like a total failure, forgetting what he already knew about Obadiah, and the prophets he saved, and God's mighty works through his own prayers.

1 Kings 20-21

During the Ahab-Jezebel days of Israel there was almost constant war between Israel and Syria/Aram. In 1 Kings 19:15 Elijah had been instructed to anoint Hazael to be over Syria, in place of Ben Hadad that we read about in chapter 20. Hazael was not anointed at that time, but some years later was anointed by Elisha, 2 Kings 8:7ff. In 2 successive years 1 Kings 20 recounts invasions of Israel by Syria under Ben Hadad's rule. In a common instance of God choosing one wicked king/nation to chasten another wicked king/nation, God used Ahab and Israel to humble Ben Hadad, not for Ahab's greatness but that men might know something of the God of Israel.

In the first instance, 20:1-22, the Syrians besieged Samaria, the capital, in the hilly country. The Bible writer highlights the over confident foolishness of the Syrians in v12, 16, and 18. There is some irony in the numbers of the story, where the Syrians count 32 kings in their host (citystate kings) while the Israelites marshal 232 servants of the governors to lead. And then, after we've seen the divine message to Elijah in 19:18, the whole force Ahab can muster is 7,000 men. Unnamed prophets of the LORD deal repeatedly with Ahab in these stories. As a result of divine intervention the Syrians were routed and Ben Hadad barely escaped with his life. However, the prophets warned the king of Israel that Ben Hadad would come back the next spring.

Ben Hadad's advisors urged him to blame the location, surmising the LORD specialized in hills,

and blame the kings who were his drinking buddies, replacing them with army officers. So he did. In 20:23-43 the battle the following spring is set near a city in the plains, but once again divine intervention delivers the much larger force of Syrians into the hands of Israel. That's when Ahab vainly chose politics, economics, and his own image over divine leadership and took it upon himself to make a covenant with the utterly defeated Syrian king. God's prophet foretold Ahab's doom for his grasping misuse of God-given opportunities. Ahab's reaction in 20:43 seems typical of his character.

The story in chapter 21 is of the final straw in God's dealing with Ahab and Jezebel. It is a story of murder and theft, but at its core it is a story of false witness, the 9th commandment. We had the violation of the commandments to have no other gods, and to make no images to worship in Exodus 32. The commandment not to take God's name in vain was highlighted in Leviticus 24:11. The Sabbath violator was executed in Numbers 15:32ff. Then Moses set forth the hypothetical stoning of a child who did not honor father and mother in Deuteronomy 21:18ff. Stealing was crime of Achan in Joshua 7, and murder the crime of Abimelech in Judges 9 (and of the men of Gibeah in Judges 20:5). Then in Samuel we had David's adultery (2 Samuel 11) and finally we have false witness taking center stage. As with most of the crimes violating God's covenant commandments, the 10th commandment was a driving force, coveting what belongs to someone else. The betrayal of justice for Naboth, not only by the Sidonian princess who thought kings are above the law, but by the elders of his community, demanded divine retribution. Elijah the prophet reentered the story to pronounce doom upon Ahab and Jezebel and all their family. However, in an ironic echo of Ahab's mercy toward Ben Hadad in chapter 20, God shows mercy to a penitent Ahab, a delay of consequences. The irony is in the fact that Ahab's "mercy" was self-serving, while God's mercy was genuine compassion and justice.

The fact that Ahab could receive mercy from God when he showed humility is an assurance to all of us that God can forgive the worst of sinners, and certainly you and I can be assured of his mercy.

1 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 18

In Kings, the king of Israel (Ahab) is at the center of the story, and we know very little of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. In Chronicles, Jehoshaphat is the central character and Ahab's demise is part of Jehoshaphat's story. The differences in emphasis, focusing on the failures of the kings of Israel and Judah in Kings, and the blessings for faithful service to God in Chronicles, reinforce different messages, both needful, for God's people, using the same historical events. In Kings we proceed from the condemnation of Ahab in chapter 21, with the amelioration of judgment because of his humility at the time, leading into his death in chapter 22. In Chronicles, we move from the greatness of Jehoshaphat in chapter 17 to his ill fated decision to ally with Ahab, and Ahab's death with Jehoshaphat's narrow escape and subsequent reign. Kings devotes only the mention of Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 15:24 and the brief account in 22 to his reign, while Chronicles has 2 Chronicles 17-20. The "marriage alliance" with Ahab is a necessary part of the story to setup what follows in Chronicles with Jehoram, Athaliah, and Joash.

Notice the interlude explaining Jehoshaphat's "inducement" to assist Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18:1-3. The events that follow with the state supported prophets are almost word for word the

same in 1 Kings 22:4-35a and 2 Chronicles 18:3-34. One tiny but noteworthy difference is in the words of Micaiah who says in Chronicles “As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak.” The same conversation in Kings has “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak.” Both are true, but the shade of difference appears to me to be an intentional emphasis in Chronicles to point out that not everyone who speaks in the name of the LORD knows him as “my God.” The hired prophets of Ahab did not.

The incredible irony of paying prophets, advisors, counselors, to say what you want to hear rather than proffer sound reasoning is not to be lost on our generation. The contrast between the court of Ahab (and Jehoshaphat) at broad expanse near the city gate and the divine court in heaven is also ironic. The omniscient LORD God in heaven solicits actual thoughts and ideas from his council, while the human king seeks affirmation of his own desires. The absurdity of Jehoshaphat requesting a genuine prophet of the LORD and then continuing with Ahab’s plan despite that prophets’s words is also sad to see.

The divine council described by Micaiah is also glimpsed in Psalms 89:7, 82:1, Job 1:6, Jeremiah 23:16-22, Isaiah 6:1ff, Revelation 4-5, and elsewhere. As also noted in 1 John 4:1-6, there are other spirits that “inspire” people/prophets besides the Spirit of God, and God’s people must pay attention with thoughtful scriptural discernment. God’s employment of hostile spirits like the one described here with Ahab’s prophets are also seen in Saul’s experiences (1 Samuel 16:14) and suggested in descriptions of the plagues (Exodus 12:23, Psalm 78:49) and Ezekiel 9:1-5, along with Revelation 7:2-3.

2 Chronicles 19-23

Chapter 19 highlights some of king Jehoshaphat’s accomplishments, though he had been chastened by the prophet Jehu (we’ve seen mentioned before in 1 Kings 16) for his alliance with the house of Ahab. Jehoshaphat attempted to implement governing principles of the Law throughout the land of Judah, from north to south, with local judges and Levites trained in the Law. These were guiding principles that the Jews of the Chronicler’s generation could follow as well, though they were under foreign rule and had no king of their own.

Chapter 20 extolls by example the power of humility before God, and the power of prayer and praise. Facing an overwhelmingly superior force of enemies (their cousins) with little forewarning the king and the people turned to God for deliverance, and, assured by a prophetic word, they went out in faith and praised God for victory they had not yet won. Important principles for the godly run all through this story, especially in the confession of v12, the assurance of v15, and the decision to praise God for unseen victory in v22. Victory through prayer and praise. Notice that gathering up the spoil was a matter of 3 days time. The valley of victory was not far from Jerusalem, and is most likely the Valley of Jehoshaphat and Valley of Decision referred to in Joel 3:12, 14 where God again delivers his people from the hostile nations.

The tragedy of Jehoram (Joram)s reign is recounted in chapter 21. Though Jehoshaphat was a godly man he yoked his son in a marriage alliance to the house of Ahab, Ahab’s daughter Athaliah. Jehoram followed the example of some horrible predecessors who killed their own

brothers to presumably secure their power, and his reign and succession was a time when the ancient Serpent tried to exterminate the line of David and thwart the covenant promises of God. However, the promise of a lamp for David (v7) was maintained.

We learn in 21:12 that Elijah was a writing prophet, though again we have no books with his name attached. While Elijah has a prominent role in his opposition to the house of Ahab in Kings (and the house of Jehoram is part of Ahab's dynasty, due to Athaliah), he's only mentioned here in Chronicles. His prophecy against Jehoram was fulfilled and he died horribly, leaving only one heir to the throne, his and Athaliah's son Jehoahaz, also called Ahaziah. The telling comment for Jehoram and his fratricide and pursuit of the sins of the house of Ahab in 21:20, "he died to no one's regret." That was in about 841 B.C.

2 Chronicles 22 describes the reign of Jehoshaphat's grandson, Ahaziah, which again is a tale of woe. He's also the grandson of Ahab, great grandson of Omri, king of Israel. His mother, the queen mother, is Athaliah of the household of Ahab and Jezebel, and very much of the same mind as Jezebel in terms of power and the use of religion.

The mention of Ahaziah joining his uncle, king Joram (also spelled Jehoram) of Israel in battle at Ramoth Gilead takes us back to 1 Kings 22, 2Chronicles 18, when Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined together as allies to take Ramoth Gilead, leading to Ahab's death. Now the same alliance fighting the same enemies in the same place in another generation will again lead to disaster in divine judgment against the house of Ahab, including Ahaziah king of Judah. When Jehu the military commander was finally anointed (Elijah had been told to anoint him, and Elisha finally arranged his anointing) he saw to the overthrow of the house of Ahab as predicted by Elijah, including Ahaziah and his relatives, along with Jehoram of Israel. 22:7 sums up the story.

When her husband died in chapter 21, after murdering his own brothers, and then her son died along with his close relatives in chapter 22, Athaliah the daughter of Ahab seized upon the power vacuum and murdered as much of the royal (Davidic) family of Judah as she could, including her own grandchildren. Except a woman of the house of David, Jehoshabeath, probably half sister to Ahaziah, rescued and hid one heir, a son of Ahaziah, grandson of Athaliah. That boy, Joash (Jehoash) was kept in secret by his aunt and her husband the priest Jehoiada, in the house of the LORD, for 6 years.

Notice the first line of chapter 23, "Jehoiada took courage..." and a conspiracy was formed. It took courage certainly to shelter the heir of the throne, but even more to act on the need to remove Athaliah in favor of the boy. Notice the prominent role of the priests and Levites, along with military commanders, in securing the safety of the boy king and overthrowing the self-serving queen. Notice too that Jehoiada doubled his forces by acting on the Sabbath day when they would normally have a rotation of the divisions of priests and Levites.

When Joash was anointed and acclaimed in the temple, the response of the people was overwhelmingly positive, much to Athaliah's dismay. While Joash was grandson of Athaliah, he had been raised to that point in the household of a godly priest, and so Athaliah's death signaled the end of the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy against the house of Ahab in 1 Kings 21.

Note the emphasis in 23:18 again on doing sacrifice and temple observances based on the written

instructions from Moses and David.

23:21 says it was a good thing to have the boy king in place of his corrupt grandmother.

2 Kings 1-4

The opening statement in 1:1 connects back to the assessment of Ahaziah, son of Ahab, in 1 Kings 22:51-53. One more step on the road to destruction for Israel. This is about 850 B.C.

Falling through the lattice in the royal house is an ironic comment on failure to observe the Law of Moses, which required parapets (safety railings) to prevent people from falling (Deuteronomy 22:8) from an upper story of a home.

The name Baal-zebub is an intentional distortion of the name of the god of Ekron, from Baal-zebul, Baal (Lord) the Prince, to Baal-zebub, Baal (Lord) of The Flies. In the New Testament the name is used as a term for the devil, Matthew 10:25, 12:24, the “prince of demons.”

God’s message to Ahab’s son is that he will die, his fate sealed by his decision to inquire of Baal and not the LORD.

The description of Elijah might mean he was a hairy man, or he was dressed in (coarse) garment made of hair. The latter seems to connect with John the Baptist, the 2nd Elijah (Matthew 3:4).

There is a sort of symmetry between the two squads of 50 trying to arrest Elijah, and being consumed in fire, and the two squads of 50 prophets protected by Obadiah (1 Kings 18). When Jesus’ disciples wanted to emulate Elijah Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:54).

The 3rd captain (3 again) showed humility and saved himself and his troupe.

A second son of Ahab (and Jezebel) became king over Israel when Ahaziah died, Jehoram (also spelled Joram), while Ahab’s son-in-law Jehoram (also spelled Joram) reigned in Jerusalem.

The departure of Elijah in a whirlwind has numerous intriguing nuances, including Elijah’s suggestion 3 times that Elisha stay put while Elijah proceeds. Each time Elisha insisted on continuing with Elijah, and finally he is told that only by being present will he be Elijah’s heir (2:10). That is the meaning of Elisha’s request, the double portion referring to the inheritance of the first born (Deuteronomy 21:17).

The parting of the waters of the Jordan should remind us of the Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea and the passage of Israel into Canaan on the dry bed of the Jordan river. The fact that Elisha received the “anointing” of the spirit of Elijah beyond the Jordan was imitated by Jesus going to John (the 2nd Elijah) at “Bethany across the Jordan” (John 1:28), where he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and acclaimed by the Father as “my beloved son.” Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Holy Spirit in the same area where Elijah was taken up.

While Elijah's ascent in a whirlwind accompanied by a fiery chariot was remarkable, Jesus suggested angelic wings are part of the story when the upright die and are carried to comfort and abundance in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Luke 16:22.

The miracles done through Elisha are often echoed and amplified in the signs and wonders done by Jesus. Jesus demonstrated power over the waters by calming storms and walking on the waters. While Elisha "healed" the waters of Jericho, Jesus turned water into wine at Cana.

There are several principles in play in the account of the young men torn by bears (2:23). The "boys" may have been of almost any age, generally anywhere from 12 to 30 years old. Their mocking "go up" may have been aimed at skepticism about Elijah's reported going up to heaven, or may have been mocking Elisha's position as prophet of the LORD, since Bethel was a "high" holy place of Israelite worship, enjoining Elisha to join in the worship of the national cult at Bethel. Mocking his appearance was just that, and baldness was less common of the ancient Israelites than in our time and place. The happenstance that the 2 bears tore 42 of the miscreants highlights one of those recurring Biblical numbers (42).

The account of the battle against Moab involving Jehoshaphat is also alluded to in an ancient Moabite inscription, and here highlights the folly of the king of Judah when it came to alliances with the house of Ahab. The conclusion of the story in 3:26-27 is ugly, but difficult to understand. The horror of the king of Moab sacrificing his oldest son on the wall produced wrath, but the phrasing isn't clear as to meaning.

The stories of the impoverished widow and wealthy married woman in chapter 4 echo miracles done through Elisha (recall 1 Kings 17) and anticipate miracles Jesus would later do, but also teach lessons in the breadth of God's concern for the low and the high, and the need to ask, seek, and knock. The food miracles in 4:38-44 foreshadow Jesus healing ministry and feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fishes.

2 Kings 5-8

The intriguing account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 reminds us that pagans are terrible people, Naaman's wife has an Israelite girl taken into slavery in a raid. Meanwhile, the enslaved girl had genuine compassion for her captor. On the other hand, pagans too can show humility and learn obedience and faith, as Naaman did. At the same time, Elisha's ever helpful servant didn't quite believe "freely you have received, freely give," and he undermined Elisha's word of the LORD to Naaman by seeking wealth from the (former) pagan, bringing divine justice to bear upon himself. The LORD's kindness to Naaman is seen not only in his healing, but in the blessing, "go in peace," indicating God would honor Naaman's prayers as Naaman requested.

2 Kings 5:14 has the Greek word "baptizo" (dipped, immersed) in the Septuagint translation usually quoted in the New Testament. In the New Testament, English versions almost always transliterate the word rather than translate it. Naaman dipped/baptized himself in the Jordan river 7 times.

One nifty feature of the story of the axe head in 6:1-7 is the affirmation that God cares about the

trivial things that disturb his people. The man of God was willing to help, and the LORD was willing to do a miracle because one of his people was fretting about losing an axe head in the river. He certainly cares about the minor matters of our lives as well.

We don't have a specific time for the attempt to capture Elisha, but we see in the story that a true prophet of God could be an important asset for the people, the nation, the king. When the king of Syria (or Aram) wanted to take Elisha (6:13) I think he had in mind capturing him and perhaps using his "abilities" for his own advantage. This would be a typical failure to understand the nature of being God's prophet, as expressed by many of them, that it was God's power, and not anything any man could do. Nevertheless, it's somewhat funny to see that they thought they could somehow take Elisha by surprise when we have the testimony that he knew all their plans before they put them into action. The chariots and horses of fire all around Dothan are a reminder of Elijah's transit heavenward in chapter 2, and a reminder that unseen forces are active in this world all around us, affecting the destiny of nations, and a reminder as in 1 John 4:4, that God's people overcome the world because he who is in/with us is greater than those who are in the world.

Elisha intentionally humbled the Syrians, to teach both them and the king of Israel a lesson, but God had no desire for their deaths, only for their learning and perhaps making a change as Naaman had done.

Peace between Syria/Aram and Israel never lasted long in those days, nor in our times. In 6:24-7:20 we have a resumption of hostilities and a prolonged siege of Samaria. The siege produced miserable hunger in the city, and the king blamed God. Since he couldn't reach God he decided to kill Elisha, who was present in his house in the city. We see that in spite of sometimes sharing purposes the animus between the king, a son of Ahab, and Elisha, was very strong. Nevertheless, Elisha promised divine intervention and an immediate end of the famine, cheap abundant food, which would require an end of the siege. Here we see an example of the prophetic formula often repeated in the Bible. Elisha made a prediction (7:1-2), what Elisha said would happen did happen (7:16-17) and the writer reminds us that the prophet's word was fulfilled (7:18-20).

When Elisha's servant Gehazi was entertaining the king of Israel with the exploits of Elisha, 8:1-6, we aren't given a specific chronological reference to know exactly when this happened or who the king was. Elisha's ministry lasted altogether from the taking up of Elijah early in Jehoram's reign, about 849 B.C., into the reign of Jehoash, grandson of Jehu, (2 Kings 13:14), around 800-785 B.C., a very long prophetic ministry of 50 or 60 years. Sometime in those years by the word of Elisha and the providence of God the woman who had been hospitable to Elisha many times was blessed for her generosity.

The anointing of Hazael in 8:7-15 had been commanded by God back in 1 Kings 19, one of Elijah's 3 assignments. After several years Elisha carried through on that. (Interesting that while the son of Ahab wanted to consult Baal-zebub in chapter 1, the king of Syria wanted to consult Elisha the man of God.) Elisha took no joy in delivering God's message to Hazael, knowing what a cruel adversary of Israel he would be.

We're reminded in 8:16-24 of the corruption Jeshoshaphat brought into his house, the house of David, by his alliance with Ahab. Those decisions had far reaching consequences, all of them tragic. Joram's son, Ahaziah, grandson of Ahab through his daughter Athalia, and of Jehoshaphat through his son Joram, had a very brief reign which brings us to the end of the Omri-Ahab dynasty in Israel in chapter 9.

2 Kings 9-11

About 15 years after the death of Ahab (1 Kings 22) his son Joram, king of Israel, and grandson Ahaziah, king of Judah, were battling together against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead (the same place Ahab and Jehoshaphat fought the Syrians in Ahab's last battle). Injuries in this instance took Joram from the battle scene back to his palace in Jezreel, and his nephew Ahaziah visited him there. Meanwhile at Ramoth Gilead a prophet sent by Elisha anointed Jehu as God had told Elijah to do more than 15 years earlier.

It is noteworthy that the prophet sent by Elisha was recognized by the commanders of the army of Israel who mockingly referred to him as a crazy person, but knew he really wasn't. He not only anointed Jehu privately, but reminded him of the prophecy against Ahab's house, just like the prophecies in previous generations against Jeroboam and Baasha.

Jehu was affirmed by the other commanders in a manner we see recapped when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem (9:13, Mark 11:7-8). Jehu's driving style is noteworthy, just because (9:20), actually suggesting something about the man and his gung-ho methods. Jehu promptly headed for Jezreel to see the anointing and prophecy through, with a minimal force to support him, leaving most of the troops and commanders to continue the battle at Ramoth Gilead.

The meeting at Naboth's vineyard is not only ironic, it is prophecy in fulfillment (see 1 Kings 21). The attribution of "whorings and sorceries" to Jezebel (ESV, 9:22) reflect on her paganism and her Phoenician royal heritage. Another woman called Jezebel is similarly attributed in Revelation 2:18-29. Both had actively attempted to subvert the faith, worship, and morals of God's people. The word "sorceries" here in the Greek language is the same as that in Gal 5:20 and Revelation 18:23 and refers to religious/spiritual practices that include drugs and mind altering substances.

The death of Joram and Jezebel ought to have been the end of the Ahab saga that began in 1 Kings 16, but it isn't quite. There were offspring of Ahab scattered about the cities of Israel, and in the royal family in Jerusalem as well. And the pernicious Baal worship as state religion promoted by Jezebel and Ahab was not only common but politically powerful, and needed to be destroyed. Jehu set out rather brutally to destroy the house of Ahab completely, and to kill those active in promoting the worship of Baal. Jehu had good success in both his enterprises, but fell short of really leading a revival in Israel and restoration of the worship of the LORD. Some of his exuberance, or that of his heirs, in putting opponents to death was excessive, as pointed out a couple of generations later by the prophet Hosea (Hosea 1:4).

When Jezebel died in full form, freshly made up, she was stubbornly and proudly Phoenician royalty to the end. Cosmetics were a thriving product in Phoenician trade, and numerous

examples of their beauty products and the tools for their application remain to this day.

One of the things Jehu set in motion was a coup in Judah, with Ahab's daughter killing her own grandchildren to secure the throne for herself, attempting to extinguish the lamp of David. Only one of her grandsons survived, a toddler who grew up under the tutelage of a faithful old leading priest, crowned after 7 years in hiding. The plot to remove Athaliah and enthrone Joash (Jehoash) depended heavily on the priests and Levites for success, and the priest Jehoida led the way in reaffirming Judah's covenant with the LORD. For a time, due to the old priest's influence, upright rule returned to Judah, and the people rejoiced, to be rid of the self-proclaimed queen and to have the young king securely on the throne.

2 Kings 12-13, 2 Chronicles 24

The chronology of Kings and Chronicles puts us at 835 BC for the beginning of the reign of young Jehoash (Joash). Solomon's reign had ended in 930 B.C., so the events from 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 12 covered about 95 years. Ahab had begun to reign in Israel in about 874 BC, almost 40 years before Joash began to reign in Judah. Those years were a time of great spiritual conflict, and turmoil in the kingdoms, with blatant attempts to institutionally paganize Israel and exterminate the royal line of David. Despite some definite failures of Joash and Jehu, their restorations of the 2 kingdoms were watershed episodes in God's preservation of a people a lineage to bring the Savior into the world.

Notice the credit for Joash's best work in 2 Kings 12:2. Yet even the best of men don't get everything done, as with Jehoida and the priests dragging their feet on temple repairs. Sometimes the important gets lost in the seemingly necessary daily labors. The emphasis on trust in the story of repairing the house of the LORD is interesting... everyone getting what was rightfully theirs.

The editor(s) of Kings did not include the reason Joash's people conspired against him, his rejection of sound godly guidance after his foster father Jehoida died, 2 Chronicles 24:15ff. Unfortunately Joash didn't continue to stand with God, being seduced by leaders of Judah into the wrong values and goals. Abandoning the house of the LORD, a major theme in Chronicles, was a pathway to disaster for Joash and the kingdom. A prophetic warning from the son of the priest who had raised him aroused hostile rejection and a violent reaction against the prophet, urged on by the rich and powerful in Jerusalem. The downturns of Joash's later years are specifically attributed to the abandonment of the LORD in 2 Chronicles 24:24, and his own demise is attributed especially to the blood of the murdered prophet.

We've just read of the death of Joash king of Judah (796 BC) in 2 Kings 12, so 13:1 steps backward in time to his 23rd year, 814 BC, when Jehu's son Jehoahaz became king. When God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha, Jehu and Hazael he'd mentioned the sword of each one destroying what the other did not. Because the changes in kings/dynasties had produced little real change in Israel, war with Syria between the house of Jehu and the house of Hazael continued unabated, generally trending in Syria's favor. The decline of Israelite might (13:7) was devastating. However, God had promised Jehu four generations of rulers, and Joash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king in Israel (798 BC). Thus in 13:10, 798 BC, we have Joash the son of Ahaziah reigning in Judah, and Joash the son of Jehoahaz reigning in Israel (both are

also spelled Jehoash). The summary of the reign of Joash king of Israel is brief and typically bad (13:10-13), but then we have a story from his time, in the last days of Elisha.

Joash of Israel began to reign in 798 BC and died in 782 BC. (14:23, 13:13). It was during his reign that Elisha died (13:14), and Jehu's grandson Joash did honor him. Notice again "the chariots of Israel and its horsemen" reflecting back on previous episodes in Elisha's life. The curious story of the arrows, which Joash was to strike on the ground, indicates an opportunity lost. Neither the LORD nor the prophet were being capricious. When the LORD or the man of God commands an action, do it vigorously, with commitment, until the LORD says otherwise. Joash should have done as Elisha commanded until Elisha said otherwise. The lack of commitment or zeal, despite his giving honor to Elisha, would lead to only limited success against the enemies of Israel.

A final sign associated with Elisha is the revival of a dead man hastily put into his tomb. As Elijah foreshadowed John the Baptist, Elisha foreshadowed Jesus in many ways, including this shadow of a greater revival from death to come through Jesus whose tomb was left open and empty.

God's mercy to Judah and Jerusalem is often attributed to his covenant promise to David. Note in 13:23 the basis of mercy for Israel in the covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As predicted by Elisha, Joash had victory against Syria 3 times, but much less than he might have if he'd been zealous for the LORD.

2 Kings 14, 2 Chronicles 25

These chapters deal with the reigns of Amaziah son of Joash in Judah/Jerusalem, especially his conflict with Joash king of Israel/Samaria. Then with the emphasis on northern kings in the book of Kings we also have a brief treatment of Jeroboam son of Joash in Israel/Samaria (14:23-29). 2 Kings 14 cites written sources in v6, v15, and v28 by name, and also notes the prophetic message of Jonah in v25. Of the sources cited only the book of the Law of Moses still exists as such, other than the citations in Kings and Chronicles. We have the book of Jonah, but it doesn't record Jonah's prophecies to Israel.

Amaziah is assessed as doing "what was right in the eyes of the LORD" in 2 Kings 14:3, but most of the account in 2 Kings 14:8-22 deals with his failures. The primary failure we might note in Kings is his pride after enjoying some success in building and in battle. However, in his attempts to expand his influence he over-reached when he went against the kingdom of Israel led by Joash, grandson of Jehu. The Chronicler, with his focus on Judah and the direct results of obedience to God, mentions prophetic intervention that facilitated Amaziah's victory over Edom (2 Chronicles 25:7-10), and the costly consequences of his attempt to buy victory apart from God. Then in Chronicles we have the description of Amaziah's folly in worshiping the gods of Edom (v14) which is hard to explain, when those gods had been ineffective against Judah and the LORD. Amaziah however silenced the prophet who warned him the 2nd time. These decisions led to the choice of bad counsel (a recurring theme in Kings and Chronicles, kings following the self-serving advice of the rich and powerful, the greedy and arrogant) and picking

a fight with Israel. The background of rebellion recorded in Chronicles is skipped over in Kings, and both accounts have the interchange that led to the battle and humiliation of Amaziah and Judah by Joash and Israel. Both accounts highlight Amaziah's pride, and Chronicles directly connects the circumstances to the idolatry Amaziah had indulged in. For a time, Judah and her king became vassals of Israel and her king. Amaziah, like his father before him, was assassinated and the throne passed to his son.

The 2nd Jeroboam, great grandson of Jehu, is briefly described in 2 Kings 14:23-29, with his 41 year reign (793-753 BC, 12 years as coregent with his father, 793-782 BC). We also know from Kings that this is when Jonah prophesied in Israel. This is also when Amos prophesied, and Hosea, both in Jeroboam's kingdom, and is the same general time frame as the prophets Isaiah and Micah in Judah. From Hosea and Amos we know more about the prosperity of some, oppression of others, and overall excesses and sins of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II.

2 Kings 15, 2 Chronicles 26

As is typical of Kings treatment of the southern kingdom, 7 verses are to the 51 year reign of Azariah/Uzziah in Judah/Jerusalem, and then attention is shifted back to the kings of Israel/Samaria. And as is typical of the focus in Chronicles we have 3 times as much material describing the reign of Uzziah/Azariah, and little attention for the kings in the north.

Azariah/Uzziah began to reign, according to the chronologists, while his father Amaziah was still alive in 792 BC, and he became sole ruler in 767 BC, reigning until 740 BC, a total of 52 years. His reign overlapped the ministries of Jonah, Hosea, and Amos, who prophesied in the northern kingdom, and the prophets Isaiah and Micah who prophesied in the southern kingdom where he ruled.

While Uzziah like his father before him is commended for his good decisions, we also see some definite failures in the longer Chronicles record.

Uzziah's godly counselor, Zechariah, shares a name with many Biblical characters but is otherwise unknown. Chronicles again affirms that Uzziah's fear of God and seeking the LORD were paramount to his success (2 Chronicles 26:5).

Israel under Jeroboam II and Judah under Uzziah both prospered in the first half of the 8th century BC, but the prophets warned that injustice, especially the trampling down of the poor by the rich, and unfaithfulness to God, would bring it all down unless there was widespread humility and revival.

Uzziah is noted for his fear of the LORD, and his love of the soil (2 Chronicles 26:10) and his technological progress (26:15). Unfortunately, he is also remembered for the pride that grew with his strength, 26:16. Kings mentions his leprosy, without clear explanation, and the story is told in Chronicles that he attempted to usurp the role of the priests. The priests courageously opposed him, first with words, and then when he was suddenly stricken with leprosy in the holy place they physically removed him. The sanctity of the temple and the proper role of priests and Levites is an important recurring theme in Chronicles for the 2nd temple Jews who came back

from Babylon.

Because of his father Amaziah's capture by the king of Samaria (apparently), Uzziah had begun to reign when he was 16 while his father still lived. Sadly, because of his pride and usurping the role of the priests, Uzziah also spent the last years of his life in seclusion and shared the throne with his son Jotham. While Isaiah wrote a history of King Uzziah (26:22), we only have the brief excerpts in Kings and Chronicles and some mention of his reign in the Prophets.

After the brief summary of Azariah/Uzziah in 2 Kings 15, the story refocuses on the northern kings, a series of bad characters, 2 of them reigning only a few months. The prophecy that Jehu would have a 4 generation dynasty was fulfilled when Jeroboam II's long reign was followed by the assassination of his son Zechariah after only 6 months. The assassin himself, Shallum, reigned only 1 month before being defeated and executed by another upstart, Menahem, whose reign lasted 10 years. He reigned and waged war in the way pagan's typically do. Under Menahem Israel became a tribute paying vassal of Assyria, then ruled by Pul, also known as Tiglath-Pileser III (see v29). The hefty tax on the wealthy was not popular and shortly after Menhem's son Pekahiah began to reign there was a rebellion led by a military commander, Pekah, who assassinated Pekahiah and took the throne. The rebellion involved no correction of direction before the LORD, only continued wickedness, and also amounted to a rebellion against the Assyrian overlords. The result was an invasion of the northern kingdom by Assyria and many Israelites carried away into captivity. During the disaster of the Assyrian suppression of Israel Hoshea assassinated Pekah and took the throne. The rise of Hoshea as a vassal of Assyria appears to have been in 732 BC.

The reign of Jotham in Judea overlaps that of Pekah in Israel and was a time of struggle once again between the two kingdoms after a relatively long time of peace.

2 Chronicles 27

Jotham, son of Uzziah, was 25 years old when he began to reign, which was at the time his father became leprous because he trespassed in the temple with a scoop of hot coals to present incense before the LORD, as only the priests were authorized to do. The first 10 years of Jotham's reign, 750-740 BC, were the last 10 years of Uzziah's. Notice v6 which is the repeated reminder in Chronicles that success accompanies doing things God's way. While Jotham has good "grades" in Chronicles, 25 years old + 16 years of reigning = about 41 years old when he died.

2 Chronicles 28, 2 Kings 16-17

Both Kings and Chronicles devote several verses to the reign and great sins of Ahaz, king of Judah. He was featured too in Isaiah 7, the "Immanuel" passage, where the LORD offered him counsel and a sign, but he refused.

Ahaz began to reign in 732 BC, just 10 years before Assyria put an end to Samarian Israel. Israel and Syria together were in a league of nations opposing Assyria, and when Ahaz would not join them they attacked Judah. Rather than turn to the LORD, Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria. He did achieve a brief respite by plundering the wealth of the temple and Jerusalem to reward the

Assyrians, but it was brief as Assyria was a hungry beast, not a friend of Judah, and soon turned on them with a ravenous appetite for wealth, power, and slaves.

Both Chronicles and Kings deplore the rampant idolatry of Ahaz, including sacrificing his own son in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. That place of idolatry and child sacrifice, Ben Hinnom (son of Hinnom in Hebrew) came to be the symbol of degradation and divine condemnation. Over the centuries the name Ben Hinnom was transformed into Gehenna, the place of undying worms and unquenchable fire Jesus warned against, usually called hell in English.

Ahaz's was "faithless" (2 Chronicles 28:22) and his idolatry was "the ruin of him and all Israel" (2 Chronicles 28:23).

The story of the prophet Oded informs us that even at this late date when Israel was nearly at an end there were important people among them who would still hear and respond at least somewhat to the Law and the Prophets. What courage those prophets had, standing up to kings and armies enflamed with victory and loaded with stolen wealth!

2 Kings 17 refocuses the lens of divine history from the excesses of Ahaz in Judah back to the last king of Israel. Israel was leading the way on the path of self destruction that both kingdoms were following. Oddly, Israel's last king, Hoshea, is mentioned somewhat respectfully in 2 Kings 17:1-5, but he chose a political alliance with Egypt rather than fealty to the king of Assyria who had taken Israel as a vassal in his predecessor's reign. The result of turning to Egypt when he might have turned to God was disastrous.

2 Kings 17 is the climax of Kings. This is what the story had been building up to. The end of Israel because of idolatry, injustice, immorality, sins both public and private. They had the Law, and God warned them over and over again by "every prophet, every seer ... my servants the prophets" (v13). The condemnation of Israel in v14-18 identifies the failures as persistent from the wilderness of Exodus to the last king in Samaria, and mourns that Judah was right on her heels in stubborn rebellion. Israel's fate was removal "out of" the LORD's sight because they had done so much evil in the sight of the LORD.

Of the locations the people of Israel were removed to by the Assyrians, the most recognizable is the cities of the Medes (17:6). Since the Israelites mostly assimilated into the pagan cultures they were settled in, there were undoubtedly descendants of Israel in the army of Cyrus when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and began to reign over the land of Israel (see Daniel 5).

The 2nd half of 2 Kings 17 recounts the origin of the Samaritans, a people with some bit of Israelite heritage but mostly foreigners resettled in the land by the Assyrian king, with some instructions from an Israelite priest of dubious legitimacy. The Samaritan religion was a blend of pagan deities and worship of the LORD, really having much in common with what had been taking place in Israel prior to the Assyrian conquest.

2 Kings 18, 2 Chronicles 29-31

Hezekiah is shown to have been one of the most god-fearing of the kings of Judah. He was more

faithful in leading the people toward keeping the Law and worshiping as divinely commanded than any of his predecessors had been all the way back to David. What his father Ahaz had done in idolatry, Hezekiah largely undid. What his father Ahaz had undone in the services of the temple, Hezekiah largely restored. Both Kings and Chronicles describe his devotion to the LORD and the Law and the Temple, and Chronicles also stresses his efforts to revive the faithful service of the priests and Levites.

After reigning for a time as coregent with his father Ahaz, Hezekiah became sole ruler in 715 BC. Under his authority idols in the various shrines and the temple itself were destroyed, including the bronze serpent Moses had raised up in the wilderness, which had transitioned from a relic reminding them of their history to an object of adoration and worship. As reported in some detail in 2 Chronicles 29 he restored the regular services of the Levites, including the temple singing. This was a time of searching the scriptures and archives to restore the ancient order of Moses and David (remember the mention of Hezekiah in Proverbs 25:1).

Once things were substantially restored in the temple services Hezekiah determined to have a grand celebration of the Passover which had been neglected, and as recorded in 2 Chronicles 30 they invited the remnant of Israel that remained in the land to join them in Jerusalem for a lawfully delayed Passover (recall Numbers 9:1-14). All of the ancient territory of Israel was informed of the plan, and in many places the messengers were scorned and laughed at, but still, as with gospel preaching, some men of some of the tribes (2 Chronicles 30:11) did respond with good will and journey to Jerusalem. The language of 30:12 is echoed in the description of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32. The Passover celebration proved to be a time of great revival for the pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem, and also for the priests and Levites that had been reluctant to take up their duties in the temple. In such a great effort after years of neglect many mistakes were made (30:17-18) but the LORD honored their honest efforts to obey him and answered Hezekiah's prayer for the poorly prepared worshipers (30:18b-20). God understands our circumstances and desires the opportunity to "heal the people" who come to him with a "heart set to seek God." Note the gladness and fervor in the worship in 30:21, 25-27, and the way Hezekiah himself contributed to the bounty that made the celebration work. Notice the accolade for Hezekiah's leadership in 30:26.

The aftermath of Passover included the pilgrims for Israel destroying shrines and altars all over the southern kingdom and the assimilated northern region. People coming away from fervent religious meetings tend to be especially zealous, at least for a time. Chapter 31 continues to describe the reinstatement of giving to support the priests and Levites that served in the temple. The abundance of giving by the reconsecrated people exceeded the need of the moment, and so provisions were made to store the abundance for future need, to distribute it as needed, and not let it go to waste.

2 Chronicles 31:20-21 would make a great conclusion and epitaph for the story of Hezekiah, but it's not the end, and we have troubles with Assyria in 2 Kings 18:13ff, as we'll also see in 2 Chronicles 32ff and Isaiah 36ff.

2 Kings 19

2 Kings 19 tells the same story in substantially the same words as Isaiah 37. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah was the source for this section of Kings. King Hezekiah's understanding of the LORD in 19:15 may reflect the preaching of Isaiah, stressing God's uniqueness and sovereign power over all the earth. In 19:19 we see Hezekiah repeating a frequently stated purpose of God's works, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." God's purpose in Israel was always, even in times of chastening and judgment, to make himself known to all the world.

Again in 19:25 we are reminded of the function of the prophets to make God's word known, and future prophecy was part of the mechanism for making God known to Israel and the world. God's knowledge of everything everywhere all the time is pointed up in v27, which is in contrast to the deities of Assyria or any other nation.

19:31 has application to the captivity of Jerusalem about 100 years after Isaiah, but also points toward the gospel going out from Jerusalem after Jesus ascended to the throne in glory. The "remnant" is a term for the redeemed in Isaiah 11:11 and Romans 11:5, and elsewhere. "The zeal of the LORD will do this" links us to Psalm 69:9 and John 2:17, when Jesus came in the zeal of the LORD.

The ironic circumstances of Sennacherib's death (v36-37), murdered by his sons while worshiping his god, according to Assyrian sources occurred in 681 BC, 20 years after his retreat from Jerusalem.

2 Kings 20-21

Chapter 20 of 2 Kings parallels Isaiah 38-39, but does not include the prayer of Hezekiah. "In those days" indicates that the time of Hezekiah's illness was around the time of the Assyrian invasion, which is dated at 701 BC. Note that v6 includes a promise that God would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian king, which happened at the end of chapter 19. Hezekiah's death is considered to have occurred in 686 BC, 15 years later. If we look back to 18:2 we find Hezekiah beginning his reign when he was 25. This illness and pronouncement of imminent death was when he was about 40 years old, and even with the gracious extension of 15 years he only lived to be about 55 years old. ... Notice "the third day" in v5. ... The sign of the movement of the shadow, indicating the movement of the sun relative to the earth, might remind us of Joshua's long day at Gibeon in Joshua 10:12-15. It certainly testifies to the LORD's high regard for Hezekiah, and may have been a reason for the visit by the Babylonian emissaries in 20:12ff. They were ardent astrologers and a heavenly sign like that would have been quite intriguing to them. One might remember other travelers from the east who came to Bethlehem of Judea because of a sign in the heavens, a portent of the King of the Jews. ... Hezekiah may have been naive and overly exuberant when he showed the Babylonian envoys all his treasures, or then again he may have been like Solomon when the Queen of Sheba came to see what the LORD had done for him. Nevertheless, it was an occasion for Isaiah to deliver a prophecy of the eventual capture of Jerusalem by Babylon, about 100 years later. Hezekiah's reaction to the prophecy is perhaps disappointing, him taking the short view of "peace" in his own time. God really wants us to plan for the future, to do our best to leave a solid basis for the next generation(s) to thrive (see 2 Timothy 2:2, 2 Peter 1:12ff). Hezekiah isn't to blame for what happened a couple of generations later, but the impression is that his lack of concern for that generation was short

sighted. Nevertheless, Hezekiah was one of the best kings Judah had in the approximately 450 years of the kingdom. And then came his son Manasseh.

Chapter 21 briefly describes the very long reign of Judah's worst king. The earliest years of his reign (697-642 BC) are thought to have overlapped the final years of Hezekiah's reign. His initial reign at the age of 12 is thought to have been while Hezekiah still lived. His reign is described with words like "evil" and "despicable." Where Hezekiah had attempted to undo the state sanctioned idolatry of his father Ahaz, Manasseh went the opposite direction and set out to lead Judah into more idolatry than ever before, including the temple itself, and including the horrors of burning his own son as an offering to some horrific demon. Practices now viewed as benign "spiritual" options, found in daily newspapers and storefronts across America, are enumerated in v6 along with the most extreme kinds of pagan worship. Such practices all accompany the same moral failures and degradation of humanity. Note the emphasis on directly affronting God in v4 and v7. Rejecting God's presence truly set the stage for the removal of Israel from the land of promise. Manasseh's provocations, with the people's willingness, was the peak of evil in Canaan (v9). ... The words of the prophets in v10-15 are not attributed to a specific prophet, but are perhaps an amalgam of the messages of several prophets who spoke in similar terms, including Isaiah in Manasseh's generation and Jeremiah and Ezekiel later. ... The evil of idolatry always spills over into degradation, injustice and violence, as in v16. ... In Chronicles we read of a change of heart on Manasseh's part, not included in the account in Kings, but the next generation followed through with the same evil Manasseh pursued for years when his son Amon likewise abandoned the LORD and served idols. Amon's reign was cut short by an attempted coup, but his assassins were put to death and his very young son Josiah was made king in 640 BC, the last good king in the line of David until the Messiah came.

2 Chronicles 32-33 recounts the Assyrian invasion of Judah and aborted attack on Jerusalem in 701 BC, as recorded in somewhat more detail in Kings and Isaiah. Remnants of Hezekiah's fortifications of the Jerusalem wall can be uncovered in ancient Jerusalem, as well as the water tunnel he dug to bring the spring water from Gihon inside the walls to the pool of Siloam (32:30). Hezekiah echoed other godly leaders, including Moses and Joshua, "Be strong and courageous..." (32:7-8). The words of King Sennacherib's envoys (v10-15) reflect not only their arrogance but also their ignorance of the LORD and Hezekiah's efforts to bring worshipers down from the hills into the temple, according to the Law. Conflating Israel's God with the gods of the nations (v19) was a huge mistake. These Assyrians great grandparents in Ninevah had shown more sense when Jonah preached there. "So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem..." (v22). In 32:23 we have a likening of Hezekiah to Solomon (recall 2 Chronicles 9:22-24). Like Solomon Hezekiah also erred in his pride (32:25) but unlike the account of Solomon, Hezekiah humbled himself when troubles came (32:26). The Chronicler didn't give the same account of Hezekiah and the Babylonian envoys as Kings and Isaiah, because the reader has that in Kings and Isaiah (note 32:32), but he does refer to the incident as a test for Hezekiah. And the Chronicler associated the visit with "the sign" (32:31) which in v24 was the backward movement of the shadow on the steps.

The reign of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33 includes details not in the brief Kings record. There is a similar recounting of Manasseh's wickedness in idolatry and injustice (33:1-9, 2 Kings 21:1-9). Both Kings and Chronicles emphasize that Manasseh and the people ignored the

prophets the LORD sent to them, and Chronicles includes a 2nd invasion of Judah by the Assyrians during Manasseh's reign, in which he was captured and taken to Babylon in great distress. During that suffering Manasseh humbled himself and turned to the LORD for help, and just as God responded even to Ahab (1 Kings 21:27ff) he also responded to Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:12-13). No one who breathes can be so bad or so far from God that God will not hear and respond to humble entreaty. After his repentance and restoration Manasseh followed in the footsteps of his father, Hezekiah, in building instead of consuming, and following the faith of his father. Reporting the Manasseh story, the Chronicler mentioned a typical historical source in v18 and one that hasn't been mentioned before in v19. Unhappily, while Manasseh tried to undo his own wicked influence, he was only marginally successful, his repentance didn't lead to a national change of heart, and his own son Amon chose the path of rebellion rather than godliness. There is great stress on the value of humility and repentance in the accounts of Manasseh and Amon. Amon's reign was so bad that his servants murdered him after only 2 years, but the lineage of David was preserved when the people put to death the assassins and set Amon's son Josiah, 8 years old, on the throne in Jerusalem.

2 Kings 22-23, 2 Chronicles 34-35

King Josiah's father Amon "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Ki 21:20). He was only 22 when he began to reign, and 2 years later he was killed by assassins. Josiah soon was put on the throne by "the people of the land" (21:25) at the age of 8 (22:1). So, Josiah's was fathered by Amon when he was about 16 years old. Several of the kings of Judah and Israel were fathering children in their teens. The practices of royal marriages may well have contributed to the problems of the monarchy.

It was 640 BC when Josiah became king, about 370 years after David first took the throne of Judah.

Josiah, unlike his father and grandfather, is reported to have done "what was right in the eyes of the LORD," walking "in the ways of David..." In fact, alongside his great-grandfather Hezekiah he is one of Judah's best kings. His story in Kings and Chronicles really begins in the 18th year of his reign, when he was 26 years old and set out to refurbish the temple of the LORD. Like Hezekiah he not only attempted to rectify the errors that had been introduced into the temple itself, but also to curtail the worship of the LORD and various idols on the high places and at various shrines. His efforts extended well into the territory of Samaria. During the refurbishment of the temple the priests found "the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14). Upon examination they were surprised and alarmed by some of the ordinances of the Law, and the prescribed consequences for disobedience. What they found may have been a copy of the Law like that described in Deuteronomy 31:26, which was to be kept near the Ark of the Covenant as a testimonial remembrance. It's very possible, based on Jeremiah 8:8, that written copies of the law had been corrupted by scribes inserting changes, adding and deleting to support the practices of the various corrupt kings and priests. The clean copy found in the temple set matters right in disturbing ways.

The prophet Jeremiah was called by God in the 13th year of Josiah, 627 BC (Jeremiah 1:2), about 5 years before the efforts to refurbish the temple, and Jeremiah describes himself at that time as

being very young. Though he had begun to prophesy, apparently the most respected prophet in Jerusalem at that time was a woman named Huldah who was consulted about the veracity of the book found in the temple (2 Kings 22:14 , 2 Chronicles 34:22). In previous generations when a king asked a high priest to inquire of the LORD for them, the priest most likely would have done so directly, probably with the urim and thumim (see 2 Samuel 14:41, 28:6), but this priest went to a known prophet.

The message from the prophetess Huldah was good news/bad news. As the former prophets had foretold, the clock was ticking down on unfaithful Judah, but because Josiah was zealous for the LORD and showed penitence and humility (2 Kings 22:18-19) there would be a respite during his lifetime, and the doom would fall upon Judah after his death. The LORD also made a promise that Josiah himself effectively nullified, that Josiah would “gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace.” I’ve no doubt God did gather him to his fathers, as the LORD had done for Abraham and others over the centuries, but the peaceful end of life was not to be, when Josiah chose to engage in a battle that was not his to fight.

Both the editors of Kings and of Chronicles considered Josiah’s efforts to purge the evils of idolatry and its associated immorality and injustice from Jerusalem of utmost importance. Including the final destruction of the temple and altar at Bethel foretold 300 years earlier in the days of Jeroboam I (1 Kings 13). The unnamed man of God who died for a meal was proven again to have been a true prophet (2 Kings 23:16) and his bones were left in peace, along with the lying prophet who deceived him.

Josiah also officiated at a Passover celebration beyond anything done by any former king. Hezekiah had led a great celebration of the Passover, but there were many errors that plagued that well intentioned observance. Josiah, and the priests and Levites (very important in the Chronicles narrative) got it right in conformity with the Book of The Law. Josiah is attributed in 2 Kings 23:25 with living according to the core principle of the Law in Deuteronomy 6:4-6. Unfortunately, all that Josiah did didn’t really change the hearts of the people, and the curse of the Law still hung over them (2 Kings 23:26-27). Jeremiah observed with great disappointment that the reforms led by the King did little to change the people inwardly.

Notice in Chronicles the references to written sources for Josiah’s guidance in 2 Chronicles 34:30, 35:4, 35:12, as well as other sources available to the editor in 35:25, 26.

Thirty one years into his reign Josiah was caught up in the regional politics and died of battle wounds, a battle he surely should have stayed out of. The Pharaoh of Egypt was en route to a battle at Carchemish in 609 BC. The Babylonians and their allies led by Nebuchadnezzar’s father were set to finish off the last Assyrian king, having already defeated Nineveh 3 years earlier. Pharaoh Neco was on his way to assist the Assyrians against the Babylonians, when Josiah got in his way. The route to Carchemish from Egypt ran through the Valley of Jezreel, and Josiah met him in battle there. The Chronicler recounts that Pharaoh had divine sanction from the LORD to pursue his course (2 Chronicles 35:21-22), and so Josiah’s maneuver was entirely his own judgement and was not God’s will. Thus the promise of a peaceful transition to the grave was thwarted by Josiah’s own decision to engage in a battle that was not his to fight.

Josiah's death signaled the beginning of the end for Judah and Jerusalem. Over the next 20 years 3 of his sons and one of his grandsons would occupy the throne in Jerusalem, none of them good men. First Josiah's son Jehoahaz served very briefly and was soon removed by Pharaoh Neco, to be replaced by his older brother Eliakim/Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim initially was vassal to Egypt and paid heavy tribute, from 609/8 to 605 BC. He "did evil in the sight of the LORD" as most of his predecessors had done, and Judah was back on the path to destruction.

Notice again the ages of these kings. Josiah was 8 years old when he became king, so his father had been 16 when he was sired. Josiah died of battle wounds after 31 years as king, so he was 39. His son Jehoiakim became king as Pharaoh's vassal shortly after that at the age of 25, so he was fathered when Josiah was only 14 or 15 years old. The royal need for an heir was probably part of this process, but it's hard to think the marriages and production of children at such early ages wasn't part of the whole problem of the reigns of the kings.

2 Kings 24-25, 2 Chronicles 36

2 Kings 24 lists the last Judean kings in Jerusalem, 2 sons and a grandson of Josiah. The same problems of idolatry, immorality, and injustice persisted under each of those kings, despite persistent warnings from "my servants the prophets" (24:2). The disaster did not happen all at once, there were signs and opportunities to repent for several generations. Once again in 2 Kings 24:5 our editor/compiler, probably Jeremiah and Baruch, cites an original source for the account. We have reasons for the divine judgement, "the sins of Manasseh," which were not his alone but the sins of the people who went down that path, and continued down that path even after he was gone. "Innocent blood" is emphasized and reemphasized.

The circumstances of Jerusalem becoming vassal to Egypt were recounted in 23:31ff. The change to Babylonian fealty is reported in 24:1, which was 605 BC, when Daniel went to Babylon. Then the Babylonian reconquest in 597 BC when Ezekiel and many others went to Babylon is recounted in 24:8-17. Then finally the reign of Zedekiah as vassal to Nebuchadnezzar, and then rebel, and then prisoner in the 3rd conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon is recorded in 24:18-25:21. Much of this is alluded to in the book of Jeremiah, and some of it reported explicitly.

Vast quantities of metals were salvaged from Jerusalem in the final conquest when the wall were broken down and the city was burned. The value of that plunder was beyond computation, and no doubt funded some of Nebuchadnezzar's fantastic building projects.

Also recorded in Jeremiah, in a more personal way, we have the account of the assassination of the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar by a rogue captain of the Judean army, and the subsequent abandonment of Jerusalem and Judah by many of the people who still remained in the land, choosing Egypt as what they thought was a more attractive option. But they were wrong.

The final note of 2 Kings 25 reports the release of Josiah's grandson, Jehoichin, the next to the last king of Jerusalem, from his prison in 561 BC (March 22), by Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-merodach (Babylonian "Awel-Marduk" = "man of Marduk." Marduk was the chief

Babylonian deity). The freedom and promotion of Jehoiachin may have given some of the Jews in Babylon hope for restoration, but Babylon would still stand until 539 BC and even though a small percentage of Jews went back to Jerusalem. Perhaps the comparison isn't fair, but Daniel's approach to life in Babylon began with declining to eat the rich food of the royal table, which doesn't appear to have been a problem for Jehoiachin. He seems to have assimilated. There happen to be Babylonian accounting records from the period that document the allowance assigned to Jehoiachin noted in 25:30.

We will see that 2 Kings 25 is almost identical to Jeremiah 52, suggesting the same hand completed both volumes, probably Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe.

2 Chronicles 36 also recounts the final years of Jerusalem from 609 to 586 BC, but also includes a final conclusion from the end of the Babylonian kingdom in 539 BC when Cyrus the Persian took the throne of Persia and conquered Babylon. The editor of Chronicles (perhaps Ezra and/or Nehemiah, and/or helpers in their time) again notes original source material (36:8) including the book of Jeremiah (36:21).

Zedekiah is excoriated for rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar (36:13) and violating his oath taken before the LORD, stiffening his neck and hardening his heart against turning to God. The people he led "polluted the house of the LORD," a persistent liturgical theme that runs through Chronicles. As noted in Kings also, there was a steady stream of God's messengers (the prophets, and faithful priests) who warned the people, to no lasting avail.

The Chronicler also noted the overall failure to keep the Law, noting specifically the Sabbath law pertaining to the land (36:21, see Leviticus 26:34). Seventy Sabbath years would not only coincide with Jeremiah's prophecy, it would amount to 70 sevens, the prologue of the whole kingdom era leading to the epilogue of 70 sevens in Daniel 9 until the coming of the anointed one.

The report of the proclamation of Cyrus in 36:22-23, for Jews to go up and rebuild the temple, leads right into Ezra chapter 1, which begins in the same place Chronicles ends. Ancient documents from the 6th century BC, the time of Cyrus, have virtually identical accounts of Cyrus freeing exiles to return home and rebuild.