

# **DIVIDED MONARCHY**

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# **DIVIDED MONARCHY I**

## Introduction

### I. THE BOOKS OF THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

The major sources for the history of the Divided Monarchy are the books of Kings and Chronicles (actually I Kings 12 - II Kings 25 and II Chronicles 10-36). Both pairs of books are anonymous, and both were compiled from written sources (all four books make frequent mention of “the annals of the kings of Israel and Judah”). Jewish tradition has identified Jeremiah and Ezra as the authors of Kings and Chronicles, respectively, though this must always remain in the realm of speculation. The Books of Kings were written early in the exilic period and cover both Northern and Southern Kingdoms in chronological order. They deal with the theme of God’s faithfulness to the covenant, bringing the blessings and curses given in Deuteronomy upon His people as they obey Him or turn to the worship of other gods.

The books of Chronicles concern themselves only with the Southern Kingdom of Judah, focusing on the Temple in Jerusalem and the worship of God that took place there. The work must have been composed sometime after 500 B.C. because the last event recorded in it is Cyrus’ decree in 538 B.C. allowing the Jews to return from exile (II Chronicles 36:22-23) and also because the genealogies at the beginning of I Chronicles mention Zerubbabel (3:19) and Shecaniah (3:24), both of whom were involved in the return from captivity, along with Shecaniah’s descendants. The latest possible date is the fourth century B.C. because fragments of the book were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Cave 4 at Qumran. Thus we know that the books of Chronicles were composed during the Medo-Persian period, but further narrowing is impossible. Support for Ezra as the author comes not only from long-standing Jewish tradition, but also from stylistic and thematic similarities with book of Ezra and from the fact that the closing verses of II Chronicles are repeated at the beginning of Ezra.

In addition to these major historical books, most of the prophetic books fall within the Divided Monarchy period; both Ezekiel and Daniel begin before the fall of Jerusalem though much of the material in those books occurs later, and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are post-exilic.

### II. THE BACKGROUND OF THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

#### A. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONARCHY

Though God had told Israel through Moses that He would give them a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), that king was to be one of God’s appointment in God’s time. Israel, however, clamored for a king “like all the other nations” (I Samuel 8:5), and God gave them Saul, who after a good start turned away from God, was rejected, and eventually defeated and killed by the Philistines.

Saul was succeeded by David, God’s choice, with whom God established an eternal covenant. David was a man after God’s own heart, and he was able to subjugate not only the Philistines, but

also the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. Despite his early successes, however, his domestic problems, stemming from polygamy in general and his sin with Bathsheba in particular, dominated the latter half of his reign.

David was succeeded by his son Solomon, his eldest surviving son by Bathsheba. Solomon began his reign with great piety, asking God for wisdom rather than riches or power and being granted all three. His first major project after consolidating his rule was the construction of the Temple. His reign was prosperous, and he expanded the kingdom to its greatest extent. Two problems arose in his reign that set the stage for trouble after his death. The first involved the heavy taxation needed to finance his building projects. The second was his method of forming foreign alliances - marriage. His seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines not only proved a distraction, but also led to idolatry, as Solomon placated his wives by building temples for their gods. These temples later became a snare to the people of Israel, who found their lure irresistible.

## B. THE BACKGROUND OF THE DIVISION

Though the immediate cause of the division was the foolish behavior of Rehoboam, the seeds had been sown hundreds of years before in the development of a rivalry between Judah and Ephraim. The following indications of this rivalry may be noted.

### 1. LINEAGE

Jacob indicated in blessing Judah that he was to be the father of kings (Genesis 49:10), but the right of primogeniture (the double portion of the firstborn) fell to Joseph, whose two sons became tribes. Of those two sons, the younger (Ephraim) was given precedence over the older (Manasseh - see Genesis 48).

### 2. WANDERINGS AND CONQUEST

Judah was the largest tribe and was given first place in the order of march in the wilderness, but the conquest of the Promised Land was led by Joshua, an Ephraimite. After the Conquest, Judah was given the largest territory, but Ephraim's territory contained the shrine cities of Bethel (where Abraham built an altar and God appeared to Jacob) and Shiloh (where the Tabernacle was set up for hundreds of years).

### 3. JUDGES

Ephraim twice complained of lack of recognition, once to Gideon, who pacified them (Judges 8:1-3), and once to Jephthah, who slaughtered them (Judges 12:1-6).

#### 4. SAUL

The first king was chosen by popular acclaim from the smallest tribe (Benjamin), but one whose territory served as a buffer between Ephraim and Judah.

#### 5. DAVID

After Saul's death, Judah immediately backed David, but the northern tribes, led by Ephraim, backed Saul's son Ishbosheth. After Absalom's revolt, Ephraim also supported the brief rebellion of Sheba the Benjamite (II Samuel 20). In addition, the capital was established in Jerusalem, in "neutral" Benjamite territory.

#### 6. SOLOMON

Because of Solomon's idolatry, God determined to divide the kingdom. In I Kings 11, the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam, one of Solomon's courtiers, that he would rule the ten northern tribes after Solomon's death. Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam when he found out, but he fled into exile in Egypt.

Thus, throughout Israel's history, a rivalry had been developing between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim for leadership of the nation. When the Davidic monarchy produced its first weak king, that rivalry exploded into rupture. Next week, we will examine in more detail the events surrounding the division of the kingdom.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY II**

### Chronological Matters; The Division of the Kingdom

#### I. THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

Several knotty problems arise in putting together the chronology of the Divided Monarchy. These problems stem from two facts. First, adding the numbers given for the reigns of the kings produces a number far larger than the Divided Monarchy period allows. Second, data given in Kings and Chronicles seem to be contradictory. The following factors allow us to harmonize the data and produce the chronology upon which this course is based.

##### A. CO-REGENCIES

Occasionally, especially in the Southern Kingdom, a son would begin to rule before his father's death. Thus their reigns would overlap. The precedent was set when David had Solomon anointed prior to his own death (I Kings 1). This served to preserve continuity and minimize dynastic disputes. It also was used if the king became seriously ill (e.g., Uzziah and Hezekiah).

##### B. DIFFERENT METHODS OF DATING REIGNS

###### 1. MEASURING REIGNS

###### a. NON-ACCESSION YEAR DATING

By this method, the first year of a king's reign began with his coronation, the second with the next new year. Thus transition years were counted for both kings.

###### b. ACCESSION YEAR DATING

The first year of a king's reign began with the New Year's Day after his coronation. Both Israel and Judah used both methods at various times.

###### 2. MEASURING YEARS

The Northern Kingdom measured reigns from Nisan, the beginning of the religious year, while the Southern Kingdom measured reigns from Tishri, the beginning of the secular year.

#### II. THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM (I Kings 11:9-12:20; II Chronicles 10)

##### A. GOD'S JUDGMENT ON SOLOMON'S IDOLATRY (I Kings 11:9-13)

We discussed this in last week's lesson.

## B. THE PROPHECY TO JEROBOAM THROUGH AHIJAH (I Kings 11:26-40)

Note the following:

- Verse 26 - Jeroboam was of Ephraim, Judah's arch-rival; he was an administrative officer under Solomon.
- Verse 27 - The Millo was a section of Jerusalem.
- Verse 28 - The House of Joseph consisted of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
- Verses 31-32 - The ten tribes include Simeon, which later migrated northward from Judah to Manasseh, but not Benjamin, which was the one tribe given to Rehoboam for Jerusalem's sake (Jerusalem was in Benjamite territory); it was assumed that Judah would remain loyal to the house of David. Note that Ahijah's prophecy echoes God's words to Solomon in I Kings 11:11-13.
- Verse 33 - Solomon had built temples to all of these to placate his many wives.
- Verse 38 - Jeroboam is offered something of great value here, an enduring dynasty similar to that promised to David and his heirs, if only he follows God's commands. Sadly, Jeroboam quickly turned away from God's law and his dynasty thus did not endure.
- Verse 39 - The unconditional nature of the Davidic Covenant points to its fulfillment in Christ.
- Verse 40 - Solomon got wind of the prophecy, so Jeroboam fled into exile in Egypt.

## C. REHOBAM'S FOLLY AND JEROBOAM'S REBELLION (I Kings 12:1-20; II Chronicles 10)

### 1. THE CORONATION AT SHECHEM (I Kings 12:1-2; II Chronicles 10:1-2)

The fact that the coronation was held at Shechem (in Ephraim) rather than in Jerusalem shows that the situation was dangerously volatile. Jeroboam, who had earlier fled Solomon's wrath, now returns from Egypt and is immediately put forward as spokesman for the northern tribes.

### 2. THE DEMANDS OF THE NORTHERN TRIBES (I Kings 12:3-4; II Chronicles 10:3-4)

The heavy taxation and conscription of labor characteristic of Solomon's later years had become an intolerable burden. The northern tribes were determined to have that burden reduced. They offer to serve Rehoboam, but only if he reduces the level of taxation to which they have been subjected. The alternative is implied, but not presented as an overt threat.

### 3. REHOBAM'S DECISION (I Kings 12:5-11; II Chronicles 10:5-11)

Following the I Kings passage, note the following:



- Verse 5 - Rehoboam asks for three days to consider their request. For some men taking time to make an important decision might have been an indication of wisdom, but not Rehoboam; for him it was a sign of weakness - he was incapable of making a decision on his own.
- Verses 6-7 - The courtiers who had seen the consequences of Solomon's policies know what will win the support of the people - if Rehoboam presents himself as the servant of those he desires to rule, they will in turn serve him gladly.
- Verses 8-11 - Instead, he listened to his friends and contemporaries, who, like spoiled children, thought of nothing but maintaining the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. Rehoboam foolishly followed the advice of his friends; he either was too weak to withstand peer pressure, or else he tended to be convinced by whatever group of people he had spoken to last.

#### 4. THE REVOLT OF THE NORTHERN TRIBES (I Kings 12:12-20; II Chronicles 10:12-19)

Again following I Kings:

- Verses 12-14 - When Jeroboam and the others who had gathered return for Rehoboam's answer, he follows the advice of his friends and promises an even heavier tax burden.
- Verse 15 - The sovereign hand of God is working behind the scenes, hardening the heart of Rehoboam in accord with the prophecies that had already been given. Note that the paradox of divine sovereignty and personal responsibility is not merely a New Testament phenomenon, but is present here as well. In fact, we will encounter it often in our study of the Divided Monarchy.
- Verse 16 - The ten northern tribes secede, borrowing their battle cry from the revolt of Sheba the Benjamite in the time of David (II Samuel 20:1).
- Verse 17 - Not all of the Israelites lived in their assigned tribal territories, so those living in the lands of Judah and Benjamin remain loyal to Rehoboam.
- Verses 18-19 - Rehoboam tried to brazen it out by sending his chief tax collector, Adoram, to reassert his authority over the northern tribes, but when he was stoned, Rehoboam turned tail and ran for the safety of Jerusalem.
- Verse 20 - Jeroboam is crowned king of the northern tribes. The ambiguity concerning the place of Benjamin, the buffer state between the two powerful tribes of Judah and Ephraim, is because, while Jerusalem remained firmly in Rehoboam's control, some in the tribe of Benjamin aligned themselves with Jeroboam. Thus the author can truly say that only one tribe, Judah, remained fully under Rehoboam's control.

Many applications may be drawn from this passage, but the most obvious is the value of listening to the advice of the wise and the dreadful consequences of keeping company with the foolish. It is far too easy to listen to those who tell us what we want to hear. Our real friends are those who tell us the truth, whether we want to hear it or not. It is worth noting that in all of this, Rehoboam never seems to have thought of consulting God.

Next week, we will examine the reigns of Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and their immediate successors.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY III**

Rehoboam and Abijam of Judah; Jeroboam and Nadab of Israel (931-909 B.C.)

### I. THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (931-909)

#### A. JEROBOAM I (931-909) (I Kings 12:25-14:20)

##### 1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM (12:25)

Jeroboam, an experienced and efficient administrator, quickly went about establishing his kingdom. Of this process we are told little, but we may assume it was well done. We are told that he fortified the cities of Shechem and Penuel (one on each side of the Jordan, and both with great religious significance), and these served as temporary capitals while he built the royal residence and permanent capital at Tirzah, six miles from Shechem.

##### 2. THE GOLDEN CALVES AT BETHEL AND DAN (12:26-33)

This was largely a pragmatic political move. The worship of God at the Temple in Jerusalem was the focal point of Israel's unity, so Jeroboam sought to replace Jerusalem with other places of worship. He also feared that his reign, and perhaps his life, would be of short duration if his people began to take pilgrimages to the southern capital. Notice how he justifies his action by telling his people this was done for their own good.

###### a. THE SYMBOLS (12:28)

Calves had a long history as symbols in worship. They were used by the Egyptians (cf. Aaron's abortive attempt at syncretism in the wilderness in Exodus 32) as well as the Canaanites. If Jeroboam was drawing on his Egyptian experience, the calves represented Yahweh; if he was using Canaanite imagery, an invisible Yahweh was to be seen as riding on the calf, as a symbol of strength and virility. In any case, he tried to pass off his new places of worship as locations for the veneration of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This act became the seminal sin of the Northern Kingdom. Ruler after ruler is condemned by the writer of the books of Kings because he perpetuated this idolatrous calf worship.

###### b. THE SITES (12:29)

Bethel in the south had been the site of Jacob's ladder vision, while Dan in the north (formerly Laish) was the shrine of the rival priesthood established by Jonathan, the grandson of Moses (see Judges 18:30). Thus the shrines were conveniently located at the extremes of Jeroboam's territory so that both would be more convenient than the Temple in Jerusalem. How easily people are seduced by appeals to convenience!

c. THE PRIESTHOOD (12:31)

The priests and Levites, unable to tolerate this idolatry, largely fled to Judah, so Jeroboam simply consecrated anyone who could pay the fee, again following the precedent of the rogue shrine established at the end of Judges.

d. THE FESTIVAL (12:32-33)

Jeroboam instituted a new feast, set exactly one month later than the Feast of Booths, which was the most heavily attended of the Jerusalem feasts. It was unlikely that many from the North would be able to attend both. Note the strategy here - if you want to destroy a form of worship, undermine its holidays. How different is this from the attempt by the Hébertists during the French Revolution to destroy Christianity by changing the calendar, thus eliminating both the Sabbath and all Christian holidays? Today, of course, Christian holidays are not eliminated, simply suborned for secular purposes until all Christian content is removed.

3. THE MAN OF GOD, HIS PROPHECY, AND HIS DEATH (I Kings 13)

a. THE MAN OF GOD AND JEROBOAM (13:1-10)

An unnamed prophet from Judah was sent to condemn Jeroboam's idolatrous altar and worship at Bethel. He prophesied that the altar would be destroyed by Josiah and its priests' bones burned on it (cf. II Kings 23:15-20). Note that the naming of Josiah as the desecrator of the altar is one of two places in the Old Testament where someone in the distant future is spoken of by name, the other being the reference to Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28. While the prediction is an amazing evidence of the divine inspiration of the prophetic Word, the author of Kings would have lived after its fulfillment.

The prophecy did not simply address the distant future, however. The man of God predicted that the altar would split open and its ashes fall on the ground. Jeroboam's response was to order the arrest of the prophet, but the hand the king used to order his men to seize the man of God shriveled up, after which the altar cracked in fulfillment of the man's words. Jeroboam, having ignored God's law in order to enhance his own political power, now suddenly turns religious and asks the very God in whose face he is shaking his fist to heal him (Pharaoh and Ahab are others who temporarily "got religion" in times of personal crisis). God reveals His amazing mercy by healing the disobedient king, then Jeroboam tries to make up for his attempted arrest of the man of God by inviting him home to dinner. He cannot be so easily fooled, however, and obeys the command given him by God to avoid table fellowship in the apostate Northern Kingdom.

b. THE MAN OF GOD AND THE OLD PROPHET (13:11-34)

An old prophet hears about what happened and goes to meet the man of God on his way back to Judah. He, too, invites him home to dinner, but again the man of God refuses because of the command God has given him. The old prophet then claims that an angel had appeared to him, giving

permission for the man of God to enjoy his hospitality (cf. Paul's warning in Galatians 1:8). The man of God relents, but during the meal, the old prophet is given a message from God condemning the man of God for breaking His command and telling him that he would die as a result. On the way home, a lion attacks the man of God and kills him, then stands guard over the body. When the old prophet hears the news, he retrieves the body of the man of God and buries him in his own grave. The terrible judgment against this small act of disobedience was a sign of warning that Jeroboam never heeded, leading ultimately to the downfall of his dynasty.

#### 4. THE DEATH OF ABIJAH, SON OF JEROBOAM (I Kings 14:1-18)

The only godly member of Jeroboam's family was his son Abijah. When Abijah became sick, Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to the blind prophet Ahijah at Shiloh (the same prophet who had told him he would be king originally). Ahijah was told by God who was coming and why, and delivered a scathing rebuke of Jeroboam's idolatry, indicating that the child would die and that he would be the only one of Jeroboam's house to die peacefully. He prophesied not only the extermination of Jeroboam's house, but also the eventual dispersion of Israel by Assyria.

An interesting contrast can be drawn with regard to this prophecy and that of Nathan to David after his sin with Bathsheba. Both sons died because of the sins of the fathers and both were mourned, but David, because of his repentance, saw the perpetuity of his line confirmed, while Jeroboam, who never repented of his sin, heard words of destruction against his line.

#### 5. MILITARY REVERSES OF JEROBOAM (I Kings 14:19-20)

In 925 B.C., Shishonq (Shishak), the Libyan founder of Egypt's 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty, invaded Palestine seeking to restore Egypt's influence there. His earlier friendship with Jeroboam did not prevent him from taking over a hundred towns, dozens of which were in the Northern Kingdom (corroborated by inscriptions discovered by archaeologists at Karnak in Egypt and Megiddo in Israel). While Shishonq was rampaging through Palestine, Rezon led the Arameans in a successful revolt, and at the same time the Philistines and Moabites threw off the yoke of Jeroboam.

In 912 B.C., shortly before his death, Jeroboam was soundly defeated in battle by Abijah, son of Rehoboam, at Mount Zemaraim.

#### B. NADAB (910-909) (I Kings 15:25-32)

Nadab succeeded his father Jeroboam and continued his policies. His first priority was the subjugation of the provinces lost by his father. He turned first to Philistia, laying siege to Gibbethon. During the siege, Nadab was assassinated by Baasha of Issachar, who proceeded to seize the throne and exterminate the family of Jeroboam, thus ending the Northern Kingdom's first dynasty.

## II. THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH (931-911)

### A. REHOBOAM (931-913) (I Kings 12:21-24; 14:21-31; II Chronicles 11-12)

#### 1. THE THREATENED CIVIL WAR (I Kings 12:21-24; II Chronicles 11:1-4)

Immediately after returning to Jerusalem, Rehoboam gathered an army of 180,000 men (or 180 troops or clans; the word may be translated either way, and the latter rendering is far more likely) and prepared to invade the North. He was quickly dissuaded by Shemaiah the prophet, who told him the division had been of God.

#### 2. THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE UNDER REHOBOAM (I Kings 14:21-24; II Chronicles 11:13-17)

For the first three years of Rehoboam's reign, the spiritual climate was enhanced by the godly men who had flocked down from the north, both Levites and otherwise. But the final evaluation of Rehoboam's reign is that it was one of idolatry. He increased the number of high places and shrines to Asherah, the consort of Baal, and introduced other forms of idol worship.

#### 3. POLITICS AND WARFARE UNDER REHOBOAM (I Kings 14:25-28; II Chronicles 12)

Sensing the coming Egyptian invasion, Rehoboam fortified fifteen cities to the south and east of Jerusalem, but the effort was futile. Shishonq stormed through Judah, and was only prevented from taking Jerusalem itself by the payment of a heavy tribute that drained the Temple treasury. Because Rehoboam repented when Shemaiah the prophet told him the reason for the Egyptian invasion, however, God mitigated the impact, reducing the consequences of Shishonq's military adventure to plunder and tribute rather than total devastation.

#### 4. REHOBOAM'S FAMILY LIFE (II Chronicles 11:18-23)

Emulating Solomon on a smaller scale, Rehoboam had 18 wives, 60 concubines, and 88 children. His favorite wife was Maacah, daughter of Absalom, and her son Abijah was designated by Rehoboam as heir to the throne. He administered the kingdom efficiently by using his sons to monitor activities in the major cities, but the overall assessment of his reign was one of sin and disobedience.

### B. ABIJAH OR ABIJAM (913-911) (I Kings 15:1-8; II Chronicles 13)

The son of Rehoboam went by two names, Abijah ("Yahweh is my father") and Abijam ("the sea is my father"). The religious ambiguity of his names reflects the religious ambiguity of his reign.

## 1. THE WAR WITH JEROBOAM (912) (I Kings 15:6-7; II Chronicles 13)

Tension and border skirmishes had continued ever since the division, but in 912 open warfare broke out briefly. Israel outnumbered Judah two to one, but Abijah boldly rebuked Israel for their idolatry and called on them to return to God. Jeroboam set an ambush and had Judah's army surrounded, but Judah cried out to God, who gave them victory in a battle in which Israel's army was decimated.

## 2. THE FINAL ASSESSMENT OF ABIJAH'S REIGN

Despite this outstanding example of godliness, Abijah's general policy was the same as his father's - idolatry. A man's spirituality cannot be judged by his words in a foxhole. We are told that, at this stage, it is only because of the promise made to David that God permitted the royal dynasty of Judah to continue.





## **DIVIDED MONARCHY IV**

Asa of Judah; Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri of Israel (909-873 B.C.)

### **I. THE NORTHERN KINGDOM**

#### **A. BAASHA (909-886) (I Kings 15:32-16:7)**

Baasha, from Issachar, was the founder of the Northern Kingdom's second dynasty, begun when he assassinated Nadab in 909 B.C. at Gibbethon. The Bible says little of his 24-year reign apart from his contact with Asa, king of Judah (we'll look at this when we talk about Asa). I Kings 16:1-7 records the judgment of God spoken against the house of Baasha through Jehu the prophet. Note that the fundamental sin for which Baasha is condemned is that he perpetuated the calf worship set up by Jeroboam. He may have overthrown Jeroboam's dynasty, but he brought no religious reform to the nation.

#### **B. ELAH (886-885), ZIMRI (885), AND THE CIVIL WAR (I Kings 16:8-22)**

Baasha was succeeded by his son Elah, who reigned less than two years. Elah, like Nadab the son of Jeroboam, desired the restoration of Philistia as tributary to Israel. Accordingly, he sent his army, under the leadership of the general Omri, against Gibbethon. While the army was at Gibbethon, another commander named Zimri assassinated Elah in Tirzah and declared himself king. Zimri promptly wiped out the entire house of Baasha, along with all of Elah's chief supporters. When word of the assassination reached Gibbethon, the army acclaimed Omri as king and marched toward Tirzah to oust Zimri. When Zimri saw that all was lost, he burned the palace to the ground around himself, having reigned all of a week. Interestingly, his week-long reign is also condemned for perpetuating the policies of Jeroboam despite the fact that he would hardly have had time enough to enact any policies at all. God, however, knows the heart. Note also that the repeated references to "The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" do not mean the books we know as I-II Chronicles, but rather one of the lost written sources of the historical books.

Omri then turned to challenge a rival faction led by a man named Tibni, who had gained the loyalty of a small segment of Israel. After four years of civil war, Omri was victorious and became undisputed king of the Northern Kingdom.

#### **C. OMRI (885-874) (I Kings 16:23-28)**

Omri is one of the best examples we have of the selectivity of biblical history. A capable and powerful ruler, he merits only six verses in Scripture, all highly negative in tone. Three major accomplishments of his reign should be noted:

## 1. THE BUILDING OF SAMARIA

He moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria, which he built himself on a nearly-impregnable hill, having purchased the land from a man named Shemer, after whom he named the city. Samaria remained the capital of Israel until its destruction in 722 B.C.

## 2. THE CONQUEST OF MOAB

Moab had been subdued by David, but had broken free during the reign of Jeroboam. The reconquest of Moab by Omri is not noted in Scripture, but is inscribed on the Moabite Stone, recorded in about 830 B.C. and discovered in 1868. In fact, Omri's reputation was such that, more than 100 years after his death, Israel was still being referred to by the chronicles of the Assyrian Empire as the "Land of Omri."

## 3. THE ALLIANCE WITH PHOENICIA

While David had maintained strong ties with the Phoenicians and Solomon had employed Hiram, King of Tyre, in his construction projects, they had never dabbled in the idolatry of their northern neighbors. Omri, however, had no such scruples. A political alliance with the great traders to the north is implied by I Kings 16:31, where we see the alliance sealed by the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal of Sidon. This, of course, was to produce disastrous results by introducing Baal worship into the Northern Kingdom. This alliance is the likely reason why Omri is described as one who "did more evil than all who were before him."

It is instructive to note that this competent, powerful king is evaluated by God only as an idolater who led his people down the path to ruin through the worship of false gods; his military prowess and political successes meant nothing in the broader scheme of things.

## II. THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM - ASA (911-870) (I Kings 15:9-24; II Chronicles 14-16)

While all these changes were going on in Israel, Judah was being ruled for 41 years (911-870) by one king - Asa the son of Abijah. Asa, like his son Jehoshaphat, was a good and godly king despite his occasional lapses. His reign is recorded in I Kings 15:9-24 and II Chronicles 14-16 (we will follow the account in II Chronicles). The highlights of Asa's reign are as follows:

### A. HIS GOOD INTENTIONS (I Kings 15:9-12; II Chronicles 14:1-8)

Asa was a godly man who desired to follow the Lord and cleanse the land of idolatry, including Canaanite altars and high places (the reference to high places in I Kings 15:14 indicates that Asa did not persist throughout his reign in preventing these illegal shrines from being established). Because of his initial efforts to bring the people back to the worship of the true God, the Lord gave him peace during the first ten years of his reign, which he used to fortify Judah's borders and build a substantial army with which to defend them.

## B. HIS VICTORY OVER ZERAH THE ETHIOPIAN (II Chronicles 14:9-15)

Ethiopia at this time was tributary to Egypt, so Zerah was leading a group of Nubian mercenaries. He came against Asa in his fifteenth year with an army twice the size of Judah's (the word translated "million" is literally "a thousand thousand," or better, "a thousand chiefs or trained warriors"). The two armies clashed near Mareshah, on the border between the hill country of Judah and Gaza. After a marvelous prayer by the king acknowledging the Lord as the only one who could win the battle, God routed the enemy, though the text gives no indication of how this was accomplished. The Ethiopian army is then pursued southward and annihilated, after which the men of Judah conquer several towns and take plunder.

## C. HIS REVIVAL OF RELIGION (I Kings 15:13-15; II Chronicles 15)

At the instigation of the prophet Azariah, Asa cleansed the land of idols (though he did not destroy the Canaanite high places) and initiated a large covenant renewal ceremony accompanied by solemn oaths. The revival attracted many defectors from the Northern Kingdom, and enthusiasm was so high that they agreed to put to death any who would not renew the covenant with God.

Asa even went so far as to depose his grandmother Maacah as queen mother (she was a wife of Rehoboam and daughter of Absalom; when she is called Asa's "mother," it means she served as Queen Mother in his reign) because she had set up an idol. He also smashed the idol, burned it, and threw the ashes into the brook Kidron.

## D. HIS WARFARE WITH BAASHA (I Kings 15:16-22; II Chronicles 16:1-10)

The reference in II Chronicles 15:19-16:1 must be to the 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> years of the Southern Kingdom, since by the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Asa's reign, Baasha was long dead. In this case, it would have been in Asa's sixteenth year when the trouble began. This would make sense, since the revival following the defeat of Zerah, with its accompanying defections from the north, would have motivated Baasha's attempt to erect his own "Berlin Wall" by fortifying Ramah, four miles north of Jerusalem.

Asa's response, unlike what had happened a year earlier, was to rely on the arm of the flesh. He sent a sizeable bribe to Ben-hadad, king of the Arameans, to get the latter to break his treaty with Israel. Ben-hadad didn't need much encouragement and quickly conquered most of Galilee, forcing Baasha to leave Ramah, which Asa soon stripped of its fortifications, using the material to fortify two nearby cities, Geba and Mizpah, for himself.

Asa must have thought this rather clever, but Hanani the seer came and rebuked him, saying that if he had trusted God, he could have conquered Israel and the Arameans as well. But because of his lack of faith, he would face wars for the rest of his reign. Asa petulantly responded by throwing Hanani in prison, meanwhile oppressing all those who sided with him.

E. LATER LAPSES (I Kings 15:23-24; II Chronicles 16:11-14)

Toward the end of his life, God sent him a disease of the feet for which he turned to pagan physicians rather than God. When he contracted the disease, he appointed his son Jehoshaphat as co-regent - the first example of this practice in Israel's history.

There are two basic lessons we can learn from these narratives. The first, taken from the life of Omri, is that the world's measure of success is meaningless to God. Omri was a great king in the world's eyes, but God saw him as a failure. Anything in our lives not done to the glory of God means nothing in the long run. Secondly, Asa's example teaches us that faith is not a one-time experience for the believer, but an ongoing lifestyle. As we are always tempted to trust our own strength rather than our Lord, we must continually look to have our faith renewed so that we are not guilty of the lapses that plagued the latter years of Asa, who went from ignoring God to openly opposing His servants.

## **DIVIDED MONARCHY V**

Ahab of Israel (874-853 B.C.)

This week we will look at the reign of Ahab, omitting only his death in the battle of Ramoth-gilead (I Kings 16:29-21:29). Next week we will study the reign of Jehoshaphat, Ahab's Southern Kingdom contemporary. Scripture devotes more time to the reign of Ahab than almost any other of the Divided Monarchy kings, mostly because of the ministry of Elijah, which largely corresponded with Ahab's reign, though in this course we will focus more on the king than on the prophet.

### **I. GENERAL SUMMARY OF AHAB'S REIGN (I Kings 16:29-34)**

The dynasty begun by Omri in the north was continued with considerable strength by his son Ahab. Though Ahab was a capable administrator, an energetic builder, and a successful military leader, he is evaluated by the writer of Kings as the worst king of Israel to date because of his encouragement of idolatry. The reason behind this was not so much blatant apostasy as moral spinelessness. Though Ahab at times showed flickers of conscience, it is obvious that he was henpecked by his Phoenician wife Jezebel, especially in matters of religion. He built for her a temple to Baal in the capital city of Samaria, thus in effect abandoning the compromise of the calf-worship of Jeroboam in favor of full-fledged idolatry.

A measure of the disregard for the things of God evident in Ahab's reign is seen in the bold action of Hiel the Bethlehemite in fortifying Jericho and bringing upon himself the curse proclaimed upon the city by Joshua (verse 34 cf. Joshua 6:26); whether the deaths of Hiel's sons were instances of human sacrifice, often practiced by the Canaanites during the dedication of building projects, or God's direct judgment is impossible to tell from the passage. Ahab could even have been behind the building project, since Jericho guarded a vital ford over the Jordan north of the Dead Sea and would have been important in protecting Israel from the Moabites.

### **II. THE THREE-AND-A-HALF-YEAR DROUGHT (I Kings 17)**

At this point one of the greatest figures in the Old Testament appears on the scene - Elijah the Tishbite. This "mountain man" from Gilead suddenly storms unannounced into Ahab's court and proclaims a drought, then disappears into thin air. The proclamation was a slap in the face of Baal, the storm god who was credited with crop fertility. Could Baal turn on the faucet Yahweh had plugged? Over the next three and a half years, it became obvious that he could not.

Elijah, meanwhile, spent this time, first at Kerith east of the Jordan, then in Zarephath, on the Phoenician coast between Tyre and Sidon (ironically, Jezebel's home territory - she looked for him everywhere else but there!), the beneficiary of miraculous provision by God (note Jesus' use of this incident in Luke 4:25-26, where He compares the unbelief of His listeners in Nazareth to that of the Israelites in the days of Elijah).

### III. THE DEFEAT OF THE BAAL CULT (I Kings 18)

All during the drought, Jezebel had been seeking Elijah, believing him to be the cause of the drought (probably by some magic), and had been hunting down and killing any prophets of Yahweh remaining in the land (apparently the schools of the prophets founded in Samuel's day were still operating despite the Northern apostasy, though their "graduates" were not of great quality).

At this point Ahab summoned Obadiah, one of his trusted advisors (who earlier had hidden one hundred prophets from Jezebel's wrath), and sent him on a search for water needed to preserve the king's horses. While searching, Obadiah met Elijah, who asked him to arrange a meeting with Ahab. Despite his misgivings, Obadiah agreed, and Elijah arranged the famous contest on Mount Carmel in which Baal, the storm god, theoretically had all the advantages on his side. Though Elijah requested that the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah attend, apparently only the former showed up. After God's glorious display of power the prophets of Baal were killed, and Elijah outran Ahab's chariot on the fifteen-mile trip to Jezreel while the drought came to an end. A few random notes may further clarify some questions about the passage:

- Verse 5 - Why search for water for the horses rather than the parched population? Probably because Ahab's army depended heavily on chariots, and without horses the country was defenseless.
- Verse 9 - Obadiah knows Ahab's temper only too well and is afraid that he might decide to kill the messenger who bore bad news.
- Verse 10 - No nation or kingdom except Jezebel's homeland, of course.
- Verse 17 - Ahab blamed Elijah for the drought, either because he had prophesied it or because Ahab thought he had angered Baal.
- Verse 18 - The blame for the drought lay squarely on the shoulders of the Omrid dynasty because of their incorporation of Baal-worship into Israel.
- Verse 20 - Mount Carmel was near the Mediterranean, jutting out at the far end of the Jezreel Valley with Philistia to the south and Phoenicia to the north.
- Verse 21 - The challenge is similar to the one given by Joshua in Joshua 24:15.
- Verse 31 - The use of twelve stones to build the altar is a rebuke for the division of the kingdom.
- Verses 33-35 - Where did he get the water during a drought? Possibly from the nearby Mediterranean.
- Verse 40 - The brook Kishon is at the foot of Mount Carmel.

### IV. THE INTIMIDATION OF ELIJAH (I Kings 19)

When Jezebel heard about the loss of her 450 prophets, she was determined to make Elijah pay for it; typically, Jezebel acts rather than the weak and vacillating Ahab. Elijah, in a state of physical and mental exhaustion, gave in to fear rather than trusting the Lord and remaining to press the advantage gained on Mount Carmel. He fled for his life and, like Jonah a century later, sought to resign his prophetic commission (verse 4). His flight took him down to Beersheba at the southern

end of Judah's territory, then down into the Sinai peninsula until he reached the very mountain where God had spoken to Moses.

God cared for him tenderly, then gave him a new commission. His ministry was no longer to be one of fire and brimstone, but of quiet, even indirect, influence. He was encouraged that seven thousand in Israel remained faithful; this was better than Elijah thinking himself alone, but still a relatively small portion of the population. He was also told to anoint three men - Hazael, who would succeed Ben-hadad as king of the Arameans and be a lifelong enemy of Israel; Jehu, who would eradicate the line of Omri and begin a new dynasty in Israel; and Elisha, who would carry on the prophetic work of Elijah himself.

## V. AHAB'S MILITARY SUCCESSES (I Kings 20)

We are now nearing the end of Ahab's reign. In 853 B.C. Samaria was besieged by Ben-hadad of the Arameans (probably the son of the Ben-hadad bribed by Asa; the name was common to many Aramean kings). Ben-hadad was confident, but not foolish. He knew he could win, but he also knew that a successful conquest of Samaria would be costly. So he offered Ahab a compromise - the payment of gold, silver, and royal hostages in return for lifting the siege. Ahab agreed, but Ben-hadad pressed his advantage too far, demanding the virtual right to plunder the city. Ahab refused, and Ben-hadad prepared for battle. By this time he was grossly overconfident, and he and his fellow rulers drank themselves into a stupor. Ahab was instructed by a prophet to press the attack immediately, and God gave Israel a glorious victory, though Ben-hadad himself escaped.

Ben-hadad's advisors then told him to engage in another battle, this time in a valley (since Yahweh was obviously a mountain god). Because of the arrogance of the Arameans, God gave Ahab another victory, and 127 companies of them were killed. Ben-hadad himself begged for mercy, and Ahab spared him. His generosity was motivated by several factors - the return of captured territory, trading rights in Damascus, and the need for a strong buffer state against the imminent threat of an Assyrian invasion (Assyria was by this time developing decided expansionist tendencies and had begun looking greedily toward the nations of the eastern Mediterranean). I Kings 20:35-43 contains a message of judgment the circumstances of which are remarkably similar to those of the prophecy against Jeroboam in I Kings 13.

The selectivity of Scripture is such that the greatest triumph of Ahab's career is completely ignored by the writer of Kings. Within months of Ahab's defeat of Ben-hadad, Shalmaneser III of Assyria launched an assault against the nations to the west. Ahab and Ben-hadad formed part of the alliance that stopped Shalmaneser at the critical battle of Qarqar in 853 - a battle that set back for almost a century the dominance of Assyria in the region. Instead of showing Ahab at his kingly best, the Bible shows him at his petty, whining, vindictive, henpecked worst in the incident of Naboth's vineyard.

## VI. AHAB'S MORAL WEAKNESS (I Kings 21)

In this incident, Ahab demanded what God had forbidden (the property allocated to his family at the time of the division of the land after the Conquest), Naboth rightly refused, Ahab sulked like a baby, Jezebel took steps common to most absolute monarchs of the day, framing Naboth using the testimonies of false witnesses, and Naboth was stoned.

Elijah then confronted Ahab with his sin and prophesied his doom, along with that of Jezebel and the entire Omrid dynasty. Note the poetic justice in Elijah's prophecy - the very land he had stolen would absorb his blood after his death in battle. But the grace of God is such that even the slight sign of repentance shown by Ahab was enough for God to postpone the destruction of his house until the next generation.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY VI**

### Jehoshaphat of Judah (873-848 B.C.)

It is somewhat ironic, not only that Jehoshaphat, the best of the Southern kings to date, ruled at the same time as Ahab, the worst of the Northern kings, but also that the two men got along rather well with one another. As we will see, however, such ties did not bode well for the godly Jehoshaphat.

#### I. THE RELIGIOUS REFORMS OF JEHOSEPHAT (II Chronicles 17:6-9; 19)

There were two great periods of religious reform in Jehoshaphat's reign, one at the beginning and one after his narrow escape at Ramoth-gilead. It is these reforms for which he is most widely praised in Scripture. The reforms consisted, not only in the removal of the Asherim, but also in two positive steps. In the first reform, he sent teachers throughout the land to teach God's law. In the second, he set up a judicial system that was both comprehensive and fair, modeled on that prescribed in the Law.

#### II. THE MILITARY MIGHT OF JEHOSEPHAT (II Chronicles 17:1-5, 10-19; 20:1-30)

When he became king, Jehoshaphat immediately sought to fortify his country so there would be no need to depend on foreign alliances as his father Asa had done. He instead trusted the Lord, and the Lord blessed him. The surrounding nations had such a healthy respect for Jehoshaphat's God and Jehoshaphat's army that no one tried to attack Judah during his reign until five years before his death - he enjoyed twenty years of peace - and even then, it was a three-nation confederation. Both the Philistines and the Arabians paid tribute to get on his good side. When an invasion finally came (II Chronicles 20:1-30), Jehoshaphat depended totally on God, and the enemies of Judah destroyed themselves - Moab and Ammon destroyed Edom, then turned against one another - so that all Judah's army had to do was pick up spoil for three days. Note the following from II Chronicles 20:

- Verse 2 - En Gedi is a lush oasis on the western bank of the Dead Sea.
- Verses 3-4 - Jehoshaphat's reflex response is to call for a national time of prayer and fasting. He knows that God is his only help; his army is not sufficient for these things.
- Verses 6-12 - Jehoshaphat's prayer demonstrates complete reliance on God.
- Verse 13 - What a testimony to the children!
- Verse 17 - God did not *help* the men of Judah win the battle, but won it for them through no help of their own.
- Verse 21 - Marching to battle singing hymns of praise to God in this case was the best weapon the men of Judah could wield (cf. Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years' War and Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War; both of their armies marched into battle singing hymns).
- Verse 26 - The site of the battle was the Valley of Beracah (praise) for obvious reasons.

Though he trusted God for his own defense, his willingness to run to the defense of others involved him in a disastrous alliance with the house of Omri in Israel.

### III. THE ALLIANCE WITH THE HOUSE OF OMRI (I Kings 22; II Chronicles 18; II Kings 3)

Much of the peace of Jehoshaphat's reign could be attributed to his ability to make peace with Judah's traditional rival to the north. Yet that alliance brought nothing but disaster.

#### A. THE MARRIAGE ALLIANCE (II Chronicles 18:1)

Jehoshaphat contracted the alliance by marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, around 863 B.C.

#### B. THE ARAMEAN CAMPAIGN (I Kings 22; II Chronicles 18)

The two chapters are virtually identical; we will follow I Kings 22.

- Verses 1-3 - In 853 B.C., Ahab sought to retake from the Arameans the territory around Ramoth-gilead.
- Verses 4-5 - He called on Jehoshaphat to help and the king of Judah foolishly agreed (see the prophetic condemnation of the alliance in II Chronicles 19:1-2), though he insisted on seeking godly counsel.
- Verse 6 - These apparently were the 400 surviving prophets of Asherah who opted out of the contest on Mount Carmel; not surprisingly, they tell Ahab what he wants to hear. The fact that they speak in the name of the Lord is just another example of the extent of syncretism in the Northern Kingdom.
- Verses 7-9 - Jehoshaphat sees right through the prophetic charade and asks if Ahab has a true prophet anywhere in his capital. The only one available (Elijah clearly was out of town at the time on other business) was Micaiah, who was in prison because he never said anything good about Ahab, unlike his paid flunkies. At Jehoshaphat's insistence, Ahab has Micaiah summoned from prison.
- Verse 13 - The messenger sent to get Micaiah warns him to play along with the prevailing atmosphere in order to avoid the king's renewed wrath.
- Verses 14-16 - Micaiah's response was clearly spoken in such a sarcastic voice that even Ahab recognized the mockery.
- Verses 17-18 - Micaiah prophesies death and disaster, and Ahab can only respond that such a prophecy is typical of the uncooperative man of God.
- Verse 19-28 - Micaiah then speaks of a vision revealing the lying words of Ahab's paid retainers, which gets him nothing but a slap in the face and a return to prison on bread and water.
- Verses 29-30 - Despite the warnings of the prophet, they went to battle. Jehoshaphat for some unfathomable reason went along with Ahab's suggestion that he wear his royal robes.

- Verses 31-33 - Jehoshaphat was almost killed (note that before leaving for battle he had appointed Jehoram as co-regent), but the Lord spared him.
- Verses 34-38 - Ahab, who went into battle in disguise, was killed by a random shot and his blood was licked from the floor of his chariot by dogs according to the earlier prophecy (nothing is random with God, of course, and His word never fails, whether it is a word of blessing or a word of judgment). It was after this battle that Jehoshaphat's second reform and the victory over Ammon, Moab, and Edom occurred.

#### C. THE COMMERCIAL ALLIANCE (II Chronicles 20:35-37)

Ahab was succeeded by his oldest son Ahaziah, with whom Jehoshaphat agreed to undertake a joint shipping venture. God disapproved, however, and the ships were destroyed before they ever left the harbor at Ezion-geber (Eilat) in the Gulf of Aqaba.

#### D. THE MOABITE CAMPAIGN (II Kings 3)

Ahaziah reigned for two years and was succeeded by his brother Jehoram (or Joram). In 850, Jehoram sought to regain control over Moab and asked for Jehoshaphat's help. Still smarting from the turncoat behavior of Moab three years earlier, Edom joined the expedition. Mesha of Moab, the author of the Moabite Stone, was the target of this aggression. The invaders foolishly tried to go around the southern end of the Dead Sea to catch Moab from behind and found themselves running out of water. They consulted Elisha, who after rebuking Jehoram for his idolatry and Jehoshaphat for the alliance, told them to dig trenches, which God filled with water (from a wadi, perhaps?). The Moabites saw the trenches at sunrise, thought they were filled with blood, came out to collect the spoils, and were slaughtered (note the devastation of the land - verse 25). Finally, in desperation, Mesha sacrificed his oldest son and heir and superstitious Israel fled in terror.

In conclusion, Jehoshaphat may be remembered positively for his cleansing of idols from the land, his trust in God to protect him from his enemies, his desire to teach his people the Word of God, and his attempts to administer godly justice in the land. Negatively, he illustrates very well the consequences of ignoring Paul's admonition to avoid being yoked together with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14) - wise counsel that extends to much more than the marriage bond.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY VII**

Jehoram, Ahaziah (and Athaliah) of Judah; Ahaziah and Jehoram of Israel (853-835 B.C.)

### **I. OVERVIEW - THE ISRAEL-JUDAH ALLIANCE**

Jehoshaphat and Ahab formed an alliance when Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, was married to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This alliance lasted until all parties concerned were slaughtered by Jehu in 841 B.C. Name similarities add to the confusion of the intermixed dynasties. Jehoshaphat was succeeded first by his son Jehoram, then by his grandson Ahaziah. Ahab was succeeded by two of his sons in turn, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Thus Ahaziah and Jehoram of Israel were brothers-in-law to Jehoram of Judah and uncles to Ahaziah of Judah. To make matters worse, the two Jehorams reigned almost entirely concurrently.

Today we will see Elijah's curse on the house of Ahab come to fruition. We will look first at the Northern Kingdom, then at the South.

### **II. ISRAEL - THE FALL OF THE OMRID DYNASTY**

#### **A. AHAZIAH (853-852 B.C.) (II Kings 1)**

Ahaziah reigned less than two years due to a fatal accident. He fell out of a latticed window in his palace (a similar fall later killed his mother). He then sent messengers to the temple of the Aramean god Baal-zebub ("Lord of the Flies") at Ekron to find out if he would recover (note what this says about the extent to which Baal worship had completely supplanted the worship of God in the Northern Kingdom under the influence of Jezebel). Elijah intercepted the messengers, rebuked them, and told them the king would die. Ahaziah then sent three consecutive military detachments to arrest Elijah. The first two were consumed by fire, but the third captain submitted and was spared. Elijah then delivered his message personally, Ahaziah died childless, and was succeeded by his brother Jehoram.

#### **B. JEHORAM (852-841 B.C.) (II Kings 2:1-9:26)**

Jehoram succeeded his brother and reigned for twelve years under the watchful eye of his mother Jezebel. Like the rest of his family, he was a Baal worshiper despite the fact that he removed the Baal pillar from Samaria (3:2). His reign is noted for two things - his military conflicts and the extensive ministry of the prophet Elisha. We will again focus on the activity of the king rather than that of the prophet.

#### **1. THE CONFLICT WITH MOAB (II Kings 3)**

We looked at this last week.

## 2. REPEATED CONFLICTS WITH THE ARAMEANS

### a. BORDER RAIDS (II Kings 6:8-23)

The Arameans apparently had been raiding Israelite towns for some time (5:2). God began to inform Jehoram of Aramean strategy through Elisha. The Aramean king Ben-hadad first thought he had a traitor in his camp, but then found out that Elisha was providing the information. He sent his army to capture Elisha at Dothan. After revealing to his servant the angelic army of God, the prayer of Elisha resulted in the blinding of the Arameans. They were then led to Samaria, their sight was restored, and they were fed and sent home, leading to a brief period of peace between the two kings. Note the following:

- Verses 9-10 - Jehoram was not a godly man, but God nonetheless protected His people.
- Verse 12 - How could Ben-hadad's advisers have known this? Perhaps they had spies in Jehoram's camp and thus discovered the source of the warnings.
- Verse 16 - cf. I John 4:4.
- Verse 19 - This appears on the surface to have been a lie, but Samaria and its king were the ultimate targets of the Aramean army.
- Verse 21-23 - Jehoram's eagerness to massacre helpless captives again says something about his character, but merciful treatment led to a temporary cessation of the border raids.

### b. THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA (II Kings 6:24-7:20)

Soon after, Ben-hadad laid siege to Samaria. The result was a severe famine during which donkey's heads were sold for food for eighty shekels and pigeon droppings were sold for fuel at about a shekel an ounce. Some of the people resorted to cannibalism, and Jehoram began to seek Elisha as his father had sought Elijah. Elisha promised an end to the famine, and that night the Arameans were frightened away by what they thought was the sound of approaching chariot wheels. Four lepers discovered the deserted Aramean camp and informed the startled populace. Note the following:

- 6:31 - Like Ahab during the drought, Jehoram seeks the prophet of God, not to repent and beg the Lord's forgiveness, but rather to blame the prophet (and the Lord) for the calamity.
- 7:1 - Elisha gives the Lord's promise of an end to the siege and accompanying famine - another indication of God's grace even when no signs of repentance were forthcoming.
- 7:2 - The captain's lack of faith will lead to him seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy without enjoying its benefits (cf. verses 16-20).
- 7:12 - In the face of a miracle, the king still lacks faith, more willing to believe in an Aramean stratagem than divine deliverance.

c. THE BATTLE FOR RAMOTH-GILEAD (II Kings 8:28-29)

Like his father Ahab, Jehoram sought to retake Ramoth-gilead from the Arameans and enlisted the aid of Ahaziah of Judah. Jehoram was wounded in battle and retired to Jezreel to recuperate, where he was murdered by Jehu, one of his generals (we'll look at this next week).

3. THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA

There is some debate among commentators as to whether the incidents concerning Elisha are in chronological order in II Kings 5-8. The main problem involves the mention of Gehazi in 8:4 after he had been stricken with leprosy in 5:27. Thus some wish to place the incident with Naaman in the reign of Jehu, or even Jehoahaz, rather than Jehoram. With no more compelling evidence, however, I would tend to assume a chronological narrative, which is obviously the case with the rest of the book. The incidents during the reign of Jehoram are briefly as follows:

- a. THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH (2:1-18)
- b. THE PURIFICATION OF JERICHO'S WATER SUPPLY (2:19-22)
- c. DESTRUCTION OF MOCKERS BY BEARS (2:23-24)
- d. SUPPLYING OIL TO PAY A WIDOW'S DEBT (4:1-7)
- e. PROVIDING A SON FOR THE SHUNEMITE WOMAN AND LATER RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD (4:8-37)
- f. PURIFYING POISONED SOUP (4:38-41)
- g. MULTIPLYING FOOD FOR THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS (4:42-44) - Elisha evidently spent a lot of time in the prophetic schools.
- h. THE HEALING OF NAAMAN (5) - An Aramean general!
- i. RECOVERING A LOST AXE-HEAD (6:1-7)
- j. RESTORING THE LAND OF THE SHUNEMITE WOMAN (8:1-6)
- k. THE ANOINTING OF HAZAEL AND HIS MURDER OF BEN-HADAD (8:7-15) - Elijah was to have done this (I Kings 19:15); whether he indeed had done so and Elisha was simply confirming the word of the Lord or whether Elijah was to anoint Hazael by proxy through his successor is uncertain.

III. JUDAH - THE FRUIT OF THE ALLIANCE WITH ISRAEL

A. JEHORAM (853-841 B.C.) (II Kings 8:16-24; II Chronicles 21)

Jehoram, influenced by his wicked wife Athaliah, did not follow after his father Jehoshaphat, but turned to idols. After a five-year co-regency (II Kings 8:16 is the first explicit mention of this practice) he gained the throne for himself and promptly executed all his younger brothers (typical of pagan rulers, but not common practice in Israel - only Athaliah did this later, and probably motivated this purge as well; this means, of course, that she advocated the slaughter of her own children and grandchildren). During his reign, both Edom and Libnah revolted against him. Later, the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah and carried off the entire harem except for Athaliah

(some people have absolutely no luck at all!), and all the king's sons but Jehoahaz, the youngest (these were the same nations that had paid tribute to Jehoshaphat). [NOTE: It was probably this incident that motivated the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom, though some scholars relate it to the Babylonian Captivity instead.] Jehoram was finally smitten with an incurable intestinal disorder that killed him two years later, at which point he was succeeded by his son Ahaziah. Note the following from II Chronicles 21:

- Verse 7 - God's determination to fulfill the Davidic Covenant kept Him from wiping out David's dynasty, even in the face of such horrors.
- Verses 12-15 - Elijah is still alive, but here communicates God's message by letter.
- Verse 20 - No one regrets the death of a wicked king; the people are so anxious to forget him that Jehoram is not even buried in the tombs of the kings.

B. AHAZIAH (841 B.C.) (II Kings 8:25-29; II Chronicles 22:1-9)

Ahaziah (same name as Jehoahaz with compound parts reversed) became king at age 22 and lasted less than a year before he, too, was murdered at the instigation of Jehu. He joins Jehoram of Israel in battle against the Arameans, then visits the wounded Jehoram in Jezreel. Jehu takes advantage of the fact that the two are together to murder both of them.

C. ATHALIAH (841-835 B.C.) (II Kings 11:1-16; II Chronicles 22:10-23:21)

A chip off the block of her mother Jezebel, Athaliah seized power after the death of her son (note that her mother and brother had been killed at the same time, and her husband had been dead less than a year), and promptly executed all of her grandsons except the baby Joash, who was rescued by Jehoshabeath, his aunt. Joash was hidden in the Temple (a place Athaliah certainly did not frequent) for six years by Jehoiada the priest (husband of Jehoshabeath) while Athaliah ruled. When Joash reached the age of seven, Jehoiada secretly planned his coronation. When the heir was revealed, Athaliah fled and was killed by an angry mob, ending the line of Ahab forever.

While the disasters that befell Judah during this time again illustrate the dire consequences of forming unequal yokes with unbelievers, the ministry of Elisha in Israel shows both the incredible mercy of God and the potential for influence by God's people in a fundamentally unfriendly environment. God continued to watch over those who belonged to Him in Israel, while Elisha was able to speak boldly again and again, reminding the rulers of the God they were so shamefully neglecting.

Next week, we will look at the beginning of the dynasty of Jehu in Israel and the reign of Joash in Judah.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY VIII**

Joash of Judah; Jehu and Jehoahaz of Israel (841-796 B.C.)

### I. THE NORTHERN KINGDOM - DYNASTIC CHANGE

#### A. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE OMRID DYNASTY (841 B.C.) (II Kings 9:1-10:28)

##### 1. JEHU ANOINTED BY ONE OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS (9:1-10)

At Elisha's command, a young prophet visited the camp at Ramoth-gilead and anointed Jehu, the commander of Israel's army, as king. Note that this anointing fulfilled the commission given to Elijah at Mount Sinai by proxy. At this time the king of Judah was visiting the king of Israel, so the timing was right for scouring the earth of the Omrid dynasty (both kings were descendants of Omri because of the marital alliance between the two kingdoms). Jehu's commission was a totally negative one - his task was to take vengeance on the house of Ahab, and Jezebel in particular, for the blood of the prophets shed at her instigation. This will be the third significant dynasty of Israel (and fourth overall, counting Zimri) to be completely destroyed by God's judgment.

##### 2. THE ARMY BACKS JEHU (9:11-13)

Jehu is at first reluctant to share the prophet's message with his troops, but when he does, they immediately acclaim him as their new king. Note the similarity to Jesus' Triumphal Entry.

##### 3. THE ASSASSINATIONS OF JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH (9:14-29)

Jehoram, who had been wounded in a battle against the Arameans, is recuperating in Jezreel, and Ahaziah is visiting him. Note the following:

- Verses 15-16 - Jehu keeps the news of his anointing secret and rides with a small company to Jezreel.
- Verses 17-20 - When the watchman on the city wall sends messengers out to see if Jehu is "friend or foe," he greets each one with a clear indication of his intentions. Jehoram obviously is sufficiently unpopular that the messengers immediately throw in their lot with the rebels. [Note that the description of Jehu's driving has often been the source of jokes directed at notorious speeders in certain churches.]
- Verses 21-22 - Jehoram and Ahaziah go out to meet the new arrivals still expecting a visit from a loyal military commander, but Jehu quickly disabuses them of that notion.
- Verses 23-26 - Jehoram turns and flees, but Jehu puts an arrow between his shoulder blades. In an act that is both the fulfillment of prophecy and poetic justice, Jehu orders the body to be dumped on the land previously belonging to Naboth - the same vineyard stolen from him by Jezebel's treachery.
- Verses 27-28 - Ahaziah is also shot in the back and seriously wounded. He dies in Megiddo and is taken home and buried in Jerusalem.

#### 4. THE MURDER OF JEZEBEL (9:30-37)

She wanted to die like a queen, so she dresses up, puts on full makeup, and loudly rebukes Jehu as a traitor and murderer. Two of her eunuchs throw her out the window, where she is trampled by the horses. After Jehu enjoys a hearty meal, he reluctantly orders his men to give Jezebel a royal burial, but they find that little remains. As Elijah had prophesied, the dogs had eaten her flesh so that virtually nothing was left to bury.

#### 5. THE DEATHS OF THE SEVENTY SONS OF AHAB (10:1-11)

Jehu now prepares to attack the capital city of Samaria. He gives fair warning to the elders there, telling them to put the oldest surviving son of Ahab on the throne and get ready to defend themselves. Lacking the strength to oppose Jehu, the elders of Samaria slaughter Ahab's seventy remaining sons, sending their heads to Jezreel in baskets. Jehu's fear tactics, stacking the heads outside the city wall, mimicked those of the dreaded Assyrian empire. He then ordered all supporters of Ahab's family, including his officers and appointed priests, to be slaughtered as well. [Note that despite the fact that Jehu performed these actions according to God's command and previous prophecies, he was still held accountable for these bloody deeds (cf. Hosea 1:4-5), perhaps because his massacre exceeded the divine mandate by stretching beyond the house of Ahab itself.]

#### 6. THE MURDER OF AHAZIAH'S RELATIVES (10:12-14)

Jehu is not yet finished sating his bloodlust. He now turns to the relatives of Ahaziah of Judah, slaughtering forty-two men from the royal house of Judah.

#### 7. THE RECRUITMENT OF JEHONADAB (10:15-16)

This devout and highly-respected ascetic (cf. Jeremiah 35) was more than willing to help Jehu stamp out Baal worship in Israel.

#### 8. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ELDERS OF SAMARIA (10:17)

Those who had thought to save themselves by killing the sons of Ahab found that this did not spare them from the wrath of Jehu.

#### 9. THE ERADICATION OF BAAL WORSHIP (10:18-28)

Jehu then called the priests of Baal in Samaria and announced a great celebration in which he would offer sacrifices to Baal in the presence of all his worshipers. He gathered followers of Baal from all over the kingdom and crowded them into the temple, then had his guards surround the building. After the sham sacrifice was over, he ordered his troops to slaughter everyone inside. This underhanded technique was effective, though immoral, resulting in the total destruction of the temple of Baal and the idol at its center. [Note: Is this one of the dangers faced by God-fearing men

(Jehonadab) who align themselves with right-wing militants (Jehu) who know how to spout religious language?]

## B. THE REIGN OF JEHU (II Kings 10:29-36)

Jehu was a terrific revolutionary, but a poor ruler. He knew how to overthrow, but not how to build. Note that his military weakness can also be explained by the loss of Israel's alliances with Judah and Phoenicia and the sudden dearth of experienced leadership in the land.

### 1. RELIGION UNDER JEHU (verses 29-31)

After wiping out Baal worship, he returned to the calf worship of Jeroboam for which previous kings of the Northern Kingdom had been condemned. This was somewhat akin to kicking a heroin habit and becoming a drunkard instead. As a result, God praises him for exterminating the house of Ahab, even to the point of assuring that his dynasty would last for four generations, but condemns his continuation of calf worship.

### 2. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION

In 841, Jehu's first year in power, Shalmaneser III of Assyria, the same king defeated by Ahab and others at Qarqar in 853 B.C., again moved westward, inflicting heavy losses on the Arameans and exacting tribute from Jehu. This invasion is recorded on the Black Obelisk, which shows Jehu bowing and giving tribute, but is not mentioned in Scripture.

### 3. THE ARAMEAN INVASION (verses 32-33)

About twenty years later, Hazael of the Aramean Empire conquered the entire Transjordan area, greatly reducing Israel's territory.

## C. THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ (II Kings 13:1-9)

Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, reigned from 814-798 and was a chip off the old block religiously. He, too, suffered at the hands of Hazael and his son Ben-hadad (yes, another one!). God granted relief in response to Jehoahaz' prayer (the "deliverer" of verse 5 was probably the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, who in the year 803 again attacked the Arameans, taking pressure off Israel temporarily). The Arameans returned, however, and exerted so much control that Jehoahaz was permitted a standing army of only ten troops of soldiers, with only fifty horses and ten chariots!

## II. THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM - THE PIOUS PRIEST AND THE BOY KING (II Kings 12; II Chronicles 24)

After the overthrow of Athaliah, Joash became king at the age of seven and reigned for 40 years (835-796 B.C.). Joash is evaluated as a good king, but was so only as long as Jehoiada the priest lived. He was essentially weak, and wicked advisors caught his ear after Jehoiada's death.

### A. THE GOOD YEARS

#### 1. THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE (II Kings 12:1-16; II Chronicles 24:1-14)

Joash's renewal of godly worship did not extend to the removal of the high places, but he did authorize the repair of the Temple in Jerusalem after the depredations wreaked by the supporters of Athaliah and their allegiance to Baal. He first tried to use tax money, but the flow of cash was insufficient for the job. What official collections failed to do, however, freewill offerings accomplished.

#### 2. THE DEATH OF JEHOIADA (II Chronicles 24:15-16)

Jehoiada lived to the age of 130, as rare then as it is now, and was buried with the kings - an appropriate honor for the real power behind Joash's good reign.

### B. THE DOWNFALL OF JOASH'S MONARCHY

#### 1. BAD ADVICE AND IDOLATRY (II Chronicles 24:17-19)

The lesser members of the royal house had never given their full allegiance to Yahweh, and after the death of Jehoiada they influence Joash to allow again the worship of pagan idols. God seeks to bring them back to true worship by sending prophets to warn them of their wickedness, but they fail to listen (see below).

#### 2. THE STONING OF ZECHARIAH (II Chronicles 24:20-22)

The son of Jehoiada speaks out and is murdered by command of the king. Note that this is the incident referred to by Jesus in Matthew 23:34-35; this is the Old Testament's final martyr because II Chronicles is the last book in the Old Testament as it is arranged in Jewish Bibles.

#### 3. THE ARAMEAN INVASION (II Kings 12:17-18; II Chronicles 24:23-24)

From their base in the subjugated Northern Kingdom, Hazael and the Arameans took the city of Gath and threatened Jerusalem, being bought off only by heavy tribute (c.796 B.C.).

#### 4. THE DEATH OF JOASH (II Chronicles 24:25-27)

Joash had made many people bitter by his treatment of Zechariah and was murdered in his bed at the age of 47 by two of his servants after having been wounded in the confrontation with the Arameans. He, unlike Jehoiada, was not buried with the kings.

#### 5. THE PROPHECY OF JOEL

It was probably during the latter years of Joash that the locust plague struck that elicited the prophecy of Joel, making him one of the prophets sent by God to warn the wayward king and his people.

What lessons are to be learned from this era in Israel's history? Certainly Jehu teaches us that the eradication of evil is meaningless unless it is replaced with good and that God's people cannot afford to ally themselves with those who fight the same enemies if they do not also use godly methods and seek godly goals. Joash shows us the importance of seeking and following wise counsel and the weakness of those who depend ultimately on counselors rather than on God.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY IX**

Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah of Israel (798-752 B.C.)

Last week we saw the founding of the longest dynasty of the Northern Kingdom, the dynasty of Jehu. This week we will look at the last three generations of Jehu's dynasty.

### **I. JEHOASH (798-782 B.C.) (II Kings 13:10-25; 14:8-16)**

The plundering of the Aramean Empire by Adad-nirari III in 803 had greatly weakened Israel's nearest enemy, and the house of Jehu took advantage of the situation to become the greatest Near Eastern power of their day. The rise corresponded to a series of weak Assyrian rulers and began with Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz.

#### **A. RELIGIOUS CLIMATE (13:11)**

The end of the Omrid dynasty may have put a stop to Baal worship in the Northern Kingdom, but the calf worship initiated by Jeroboam continued to hang like a millstone around the necks of the kings of Israel. Like all his predecessors, Jehoash is said to be an evil king because he perpetuates that particular form of idolatry.

#### **B. THE DEATH OF ELISHA (13:14-21)**

Elisha had a prophetic ministry that spanned more than 55 years. When he contracted a terminal illness, Jehoash mourned, alluding to the translation of Elijah. On his deathbed, Elisha predicted the military successes of Jehoash against the weakened Arameans and their new king, Ben-hadad III. The passage also relates the remarkable incident of the man who returned to life after his body was thrown into Elisha's grave.

The attitude of the king toward God's prophet shows the religious ambiguity characteristic of many of the rulers of the Northern Kingdom. Elisha was recognized as a prophet and greatly revered, yet the kings failed to listen to his words in the ways that counted the most. God's covenant faithfulness to His people is shown in His provision of victory over the Arameans despite the idolatry of the nation, while the king's lack of faith, leading to timid obedience at best in the matter of the arrows, shows the weakness of his regard for the Lord as well as for His prophet.

#### **C. VICTORIES OVER THE ARAMEANS (13:22-25)**

Hazael had been the scourge of Israel and served more than once as the instrument of God's judgment, but his son Ben-hadad was less successful. Jehoash defeated him three times, regaining all the territory previously lost by Jehu and Jehoahaz, though he could have had total victory had he shown greater faith beside Elisha's deathbed.

## D. VICTORY OVER JUDAH (14:8-16)

Amaziah was a godly king of Judah who, like Joash and Asa, was less than consistent in his obedience (we will talk about him next week). He challenged Israel to battle and was rebuked and then defeated by Jehoash, who called the ambitious Amaziah a “thistle.” In the battle, Amaziah was taken prisoner and 200 yards of Jerusalem’s city wall was destroyed. Jehoash also carried off the contents of the Temple treasury. The account in II Kings gives us no clue as to why God should have given the idolatrous Jehoash victory over the godly Amaziah, but the account of the battle in II Chronicles 25, which we will examine next week, fills in the gaps and pictures the defeat as God’s punishment for syncretistic worship on the part of Amaziah.

## II. JEROBOAM II (793-753 B.C.) (II Kings 14:23-29)

Before the battle with Judah began, Jehoash had appointed his son Jeroboam II as co-regent. Jeroboam reigned 41 years and was the greatest king in the history of the Northern Kingdom. The two most powerful kings of Israel are given a *total* of fourteen verses in Scripture. Jeroboam II, like Omri, is blasted for his idolatry rather than being praised for his prowess.

### A. MILITARY PROWESS OF JEROBOAM II

Jeroboam brought both strength and prosperity to Israel. Excluding Judah, the territory ruled by Jeroboam rivaled the empire of Solomon (Lebo-hamath is at the northern edge of Israel and the Sea of the Arabah is the Dead Sea). He even succeeded in subjugating the Arameans and adding Damascus to his domain.

### B. PROPHETIC MINISTRY UNDER JEROBOAM II

#### 1. JONAH

Having already prophesied the territorial gains of Jeroboam (14:25), Jonah was sent by the Lord to Nineveh, the chief city of Assyria. The Assyrian Empire was in a period of weakness and was well prepared to hear a message of doom. Jonah is so desperate to see Nineveh destroyed that he resigns his prophetic commission rather than preaching to them. As Jonah had feared, they repented and were spared, only to become the destroyers of Israel a generation later. Jonah, who up to that time was popular in Israel because of his prophecy of conquest and expansion, had no desire to return home as “the man who saved Nineveh” and instead asked God to take his life. God declined, teaching His prophet (and the readers of his book) a lesson in God’s amazing mercy, both for the sinful Ninevites and their (sadly brief) repentance and for His wayward people.

#### 2. AMOS

This Southerner, not trained as a prophet, was sent to cry out against the materialism and oppression of the poor that were rampant in prosperous Israel. He told them not to be fooled, that



judgment was at hand if they did not repent. Note that Amos is the first to cry out God's judgment against the *people* of the North; others had spoken against the rulers, and Joel had earlier prophesied against the South, Obadiah had spoken against Edom and Jonah against Nineveh, but Amos was the first to speak against Israel as a nation.

### 3. HOSEA

Hosea, whose own marriage was a graphic picture of Israel's unfaithfulness, delivered his prophecy during the reign of Jeroboam II, then appears to have fled to the South, though he continued to have a ministry that apparently covered almost 50 years. Though most of his prophecy is directed against Israel, it is intermittently laced with words of praise for Judah, which was ruled by godly men during his ministry.

### III. ZECHARIAH (753-752 B.C.) (II Kings 15:8-12)

The dynasty of Jehu came to an end in Zechariah, who reigned for six months before being assassinated by Shallum, one of his generals. He is noted only for continuing the calf-worship of Israel's founder. His assassination fulfilled the prophecy given to Jehu when God promised that He would allow his offspring to sit on the throne of Israel through four generations.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY X**

### Amaziah and Uzziah of Judah (796-740 B.C.)

Last week we looked at the fall of the dynasty of Jehu in Israel, examining the reigns of Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah. This week we will look at their contemporaries in the south, Amaziah and Uzziah, two “good” kings of Judah. Though both men are evaluated as good kings, their reigns are similar to those of Asa and Joash, who started well but fell away later in life.

#### I. AMAZIAH (796-767 B.C.) (II Kings 14:1-22; II Chronicles 25)

The accounts in II Kings and II Chronicles cover much of the same ground, but II Chronicles 25 gives greater detail as well as providing important reasons for the ultimate failure of Amaziah’s reign, so we will follow the Chronicler’s narrative.

##### A. CONSOLIDATING HIS POWER (25:1-4)

After securing the throne, Amaziah moved against his father’s assassins, but did not, as was customary, wipe out their families (cf. the actions of Jehu against the descendants of Omri in contrast with David’s treatment of the family of Saul, most notably Mephibosheth), but trusted God to protect him from reprisals.

##### B. THE VICTORY OVER EDOM (25:5-16)

###### 1. REORGANIZING THE ARMY (verses 5-6)

He put the army in order and also hired 100 troops of Ephraimite mercenaries. He clearly had not learned the lesson of previous generations about the danger of allying himself with idolatrous Israel.

###### 2. DISMISSING THE MERCENARIES (verses 7-10)

An unnamed prophet told Amaziah to dismiss the Israelites because God was not with them. Instead, he told him to trust God for victory rather than counting on the size of his military force. Amaziah was reluctant to do this because he had already paid them, but the prophet assured him that God was able to make up his losses and much more. He then sent the mercenaries back to Israel, but they were enraged because of the loss of potential plunder and looted the cities of Judah on their way home (verse 13).

###### 3. THE GOD-GIVEN VICTORY (verses 11-12)

The forces of Judah and Edom met for battle in the Valley of Salt south of the Dead Sea and God gave Judah victory. Ten troops were destroyed and the equivalent number of prisoners were thrown off a cliff to their deaths. II Kings 14:7 adds the fact that the army of Judah pursued the

Edomites to their capital city of Sela, the famed Petra (both words mean *rock*) concealed deep in a rocky crevice and made famous by the climactic scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

#### 4. ENLISTMENT OF THE EDMITE GODS (verses 14-16)

Amaziah apparently thought “the more, the merrier” as far as gods were concerned, but was rebuked by a prophet who logically pointed out the foolishness of worshiping gods who were not even able to protect their own people. The king then silenced him with the threat of death, but the prophet had the last word, telling Amaziah that his idolatry would result in his own destruction.

#### C. THE DEFEAT BY ISRAEL (25:17-24)

We looked at this battle last week, but II Chronicles adds some detail in relation to Amaziah and Judah.

##### 1. THE MOTIVES

The pride generated by the victory over Edom (verse 19), along with a desire to put a stop to the border raids (cf. verse 13), were the main causes of this battle. Jehoash accuses Amaziah of pride because of his victory, but an even deeper problem was that the king in his pride refused to acknowledge God as the source of that victory.

##### 2. THE REASON FOR THE DEFEAT

The text traces the defeat directly to Amaziah’s worship of the Edomite gods (verse 20).

##### 3. THE RESULTS OF THE DEFEAT

In addition to the destruction of the Jerusalem city wall and the loss of the treasury, Amaziah was taken captive. He probably remained in Samaria until Jehoash died while his son Uzziah acted as regent.

#### D. THE LAST YEARS OF AMAZIAH (25:25-28)

Even after his return from captivity, it is clear that his people no longer had confidence in his rule. The business with the Edomite idols damaged him in more ways than one. He was finally assassinated, as his father had been, after fleeing to Lachish.

#### II. UZZIAH (or AZARIAH - 790-740 B.C.) (II Kings 15:1-7; II Chronicles 26)

Uzziah had the longest reign of any king, North or South, up to this point - 52 years (remember that, according to some forms of reckoning, parts of years count for both kings). But only seventeen

years of this time involved sole rule, since he was co-regent with his father for 23 years and co-regent with his son for ten.

#### A. EARLY YEARS (26:1-5)

We know nothing of the 23-year co-regency with Amaziah other than what is said about that king's reign. After his father died, however, we are told that he regained control of Elath (Eilat), a port on the Gulf of Aqaba. He, like Joash, was a good king as long as he had a strong, godly advisor - in this case a prophet named Zechariah (not the author of the book of that name), but his obedience was incomplete, both because he did not remove all remnants of idolatry and because he failed to follow the Lord in his later years.

#### B. MILITARY MIGHT AND TERRITORIAL EXPANSION (26:6-15)

Uzziah made gains against the Philistines, Arabians, and Ammonites, fortified Jerusalem by rebuilding the walls that had been torn down during his father's reign and building watchtowers, equipped his army with "modern" weapons, and built great catapults to shoot arrows and throw stones. He also promoted agriculture by providing water in the Shephelah and the Negev. Between Uzziah and Jeroboam II, the territory controlled by the two kingdoms rivaled that of David and Solomon.

#### C. UZZIAH'S GREAT SIN (26:16-23)

Like Nebuchadnezzar years later, Uzziah's might made him proud, and his pride forced God to bring him low. Like Saul, he sought to usurp the priest's office and thus fulfill a role that only one could occupy - Christ alone could be both king and priest ("after the order of Melchizedek . . ."). The punishment for his presumption was leprosy. At this point he was isolated in a separate house in Jerusalem, and his son Jotham became co-regent.

#### D. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION

Though not recorded in Scripture, in 743 B.C. the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III mounted a campaign to the west. Uzziah, then the most prominent ruler in the region, was chosen to lead the coalition against him. Though Tiglath-pileser III claimed victory in the battle, it is evident that Uzziah succeeded at least in halting the Assyrian invasion. In the year that he died, Isaiah began his ministry.

In studying the lives of Amaziah and Uzziah, we are again confronted with essentially godly men who failed to "finish the course." This should not only encourage us to persevere, but should remind us that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to do so.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XI**

Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea of Israel (752-722 B.C.)

This week we arrive at the final tumultuous thirty years of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In this thirty-year period, Israel is ruled by five kings from four dynasties, two of which rule simultaneously. The major political force in this period is the revived Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, and much of the confusion in Israel stems from the division of the country into pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian factions.

### I. SHALLUM (752 B.C.) (II Kings 15:13-15)

Shallum had assassinated Zechariah, thus ending the dynasty of Jehu, and had replaced him on the throne. He lasted only a month, however, as he himself was assassinated by Menahem, probably to avenge the death of Zechariah. Thus the sixth dynasty of the Northern Kingdom outlasted only the week-long dynasty of Zimri.

### II. MENAHEM (752-742 B.C.) (II Kings 15:14-22)

Menahem was little more than a brutal assassin. Operating as head of the garrison at Tirzah (an early capital, and thus fortified), he not only murdered Shallum, but also moved against the town of Tiphseh, slaughtering its inhabitants in grisly fashion because of their opposition to his rule. Note, however, that God condemns him as an evil ruler because he perpetuated the idolatry of Jeroboam rather than because he was a brutal monster, though we may assume that God did not approve of his murderous ways either.

In 743, a year before Menahem's death, Tiglath-pileser III (called Pul in the text) mounted a westward campaign (it was during this same campaign that he fought the coalition headed by Uzziah). Menahem prevented the destruction of Israel only by paying a heavy bribe, raised by taxing 60,000 wealthy Israelites (fifty shekels was about 20 ounces or 1.25 pounds of silver; since a talent was approximately 75 pounds, sixty such contributions would have made up a talent). A year later he died and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah.

### III. PEKAHIAH (742-740 B.C.) (II Kings 15:23-26)

Pekahiah reigned only two years before being assassinated by Pekah, one of his officers, who overthrew the king with the aid of a band of fifty Gileadites. He, like his father, is condemned for perpetuating idolatry in the form of the calf shrines.

### IV. PEKAH (752-732 B.C.) (II Kings 15:25-31)

Pekah, described as an officer of Pekahiah, murdered him and seized his throne. He is said to have reigned twenty years, but we know he was assassinated in 732. Consequently, he must have reigned in Gilead in subordination to Menahem and Pekahiah for twelve years. Several factors are involved in this dual monarchy:

- Shallum had been from Transjordan, and the Gileadites might well have opposed his assassin.
- The fawning policy of Menahem toward Assyria was opposed by the Transjordan tribes, who were the closest to the Assyrian menace.
- The forced taxation to bribe the Assyrians probably galvanized any opposition already in existence.

Thus Pekah takes the throne as the representative of the anti-Assyrian party in Transjordan. Upon gaining sole power, Pekah made an alliance with Rezin of the Arameans, then tried to persuade Ahaz of Judah to join forces with them against Assyria. Ahaz refused, so Pekah and Rezin invaded Judah (II Kings 16:5). Ahaz asked Tiglath-pileser III for help, and in 734 the Assyrian ruler again invaded Palestine, storming down the coast into Philistia, conquering Galilee and Transjordan and making them Assyrian provinces, and overrunning the Arameans, putting Rezin to death in the process. Rather than killing Pekah, Tiglath-pileser supported Hoshea against him. Hoshea assassinated Pekah and became a virtual Assyrian puppet ruler over a much-reduced Northern Kingdom.

#### V. HOSHEA (732-722 B.C.) (II Kings 17:1-6)

Hoshea represents the ninth and last Israelite dynasty. Interestingly enough, in a backhanded compliment of sorts, 17:2 calls Hoshea the least wicked of the 19 Northern kings.

Hoshea had been a willing vassal of Tiglath-pileser III, but when his son Shalmaneser V became king in 727, he apparently raised his tribute demands. Hoshea, either unable or unwilling to pay, formed an alliance with Egypt and refused the Assyrian tribute; this foolish move is condemned by Hosea the prophet, who was still active at the time though he had relocated to the Southern Kingdom, in Hosea 7:11. Shalmaneser invaded in 724, imprisoning Hoshea, and laid siege to Samaria. Shalmaneser died in 722, but the capture of Samaria was accomplished later that year under his successor Sargon III.

#### VI. ISRAEL AS AN ASSYRIAN PROVINCE (II Kings 17:7-41)

The deportation is said to have come about because of the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom despite repeated warnings and pleas to repent from God through His prophets. The Assyrians prevented rebellion in their empire by mixing populations. In Israel, the upper classes were deported (17:6), while those from other parts of the Assyrian empire were moved in (17:24). This intermixing was completed sixty-five years later in the reign of Esarhaddon. The result was an even worse religious syncretism and an eventual loss of identity by the Israelites through intermarriage. The resulting population came to be known as the Samaritans. Verses 25-28 give an example of the gross religious superstition prevalent in the land during this time.

We have already seen that the books of Kings stress God's covenant with His people and His faithfulness in the face of their unfaithfulness, and the closing words of Scripture concerning the Northern Kingdom strike this theme repeatedly. The destruction of Israel marks the clear fulfillment



of God's covenant given at Sinai and reiterated by Moses before his death. Disobedience brought judgment, as it always will. It did not, however, foil God's purposes or nullify His grace. Even in this time of turmoil, a remnant was spared, fleeing to the comparative safety of Judah.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XII**

### **Jotham and Ahaz of Judah (750-715 B.C.)**

This week we will be looking at the kings who reigned in Judah during the last years of political chaos in the Northern Kingdom. Of the two, Jotham was a good king while Ahaz was wicked, and that largely because he followed the patterns and policies of the Northern kings.

#### **I. JOTHAM (750-731 B.C.) (II Kings 15:32-38; II Chronicles 27)**

Jotham is said to have been a good ruler, but little is told of his reign. That is because very little of his reign was as sole ruler of Judah. From 750-740, he was co-regent under his powerful father Uzziah. He then reigned alone until 735, when he made his son Ahaz co-regent with him. In most co-regency situations, the father served as chief ruler with his son in a subordinate position. It appears, however, that Ahaz superseded his father to become chief ruler upon his accession (this accounts for the discrepancy between II Kings 15:30, which credits Jotham with 20 years, and II Kings 15:33 and II Chronicles 27:1, which give him sixteen years on the throne).

Thus Jotham ruled alone for only five years. During this time, he did much building in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and succeeded in extracting tribute from the Ammonites for three years. His son Ahaz inherited a difficult situation, however. He was faced with an idolatrous people, even after four generations of good kings, and a northern coalition (Israel and the Arameans) determined to force him to join them in opposing Assyria.

#### **II. AHAZ (735-715 B.C.) (II Kings 16; II Chronicles 28)**

Ahaz was an idolater who not only practiced Baal worship but also engaged in human sacrifice (II Chronicles 28:2-3). Thus it is not surprising that God gave him a trouble-filled reign. Note that the dating here is similar to that of Jotham. Ahaz reigned sixteen years as chief ruler, but was succeeded four years before his death by his son Hezekiah.

##### **A. THE ISRAEL-ARAMEAN COALITION (II Kings 16:5-9; II Chronicles 28:5-21)**

At the beginning of Ahaz' reign, Pekah of Israel and Rezin of the Arameans tried to force him to join an anti-Assyrian coalition.

##### **1. THE SIEGE (II Kings 16:5)**

Pekah and Rezin lay siege to Jerusalem in 735 B.C. Ahaz was probably placed on the throne by the pro-Assyrian party in Judah to counter this siege.

## 2. THE WARNING (Isaiah 7-8)

Ahaz was terrified by the coalition that had formed against him and consulted Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah told him he had nothing to fear from the coalition because both nations would soon be destroyed. The prophet invited Ahaz to ask for a sign from God, but in false piety he refused to do so. God sent him a sign anyway, the birth of Isaiah's son Mahershalalhashbaz, but warned Ahaz that Assyria, not the coalition of the Arameans and Israel, was the real enemy.

## 3. THE MESSAGE TO ASSYRIA (II Kings 16:7-8; II Chronicles 28:16)

Despite Isaiah's warning, Ahaz gathered together the treasures of the Temple and royal palace and asked Tiglath-pileser III for help, which he gladly provided, invading the Arameans and Israel in 734. [Note the similarity between this incident and Asa's plea to the Arameans when he was threatened with invasion by Baasha of Judah; both incidents show stunning lack of faith in God.]

## 4. THE PLUNDER OF JUDAH (II Kings 16:6; II Chronicles 28:5-15)

Before leaving, Pekah and Rezin killed 120 troops of soldiers, including one of the king's sons and two of his leading officials, and captured 200 clans of women and children. When the captives arrived in Samaria, however, Oded the prophet persuaded Pekah to send them back. His rationale was that the defeat of Judah was God's judgment on Ahaz, but bringing consequences on women and children was another matter entirely. At this time Rezin also reclaimed Elath (Eilat), an important seaport on the Gulf of Aqaba (II Kings 16:6).

## 5. THE VICTORY OF TIGLATH-PILESER III

As we saw last week, the Assyrian king went on to devastate the Arameans and Israel. In the process, he took little care to avoid damage to Judah in the process (II Chronicles 28:20).

### B. THE IDOLATRY OF AHAZ (II Kings 16:10-18; II Chronicles 28:22-25)

We already noted that Ahaz worshiped in the high places, set up shrines to Baal, and offered human sacrifice. After God delivered him, his idolatry grew worse! In 732 he visited Damascus to congratulate Tiglath-pileser on his victory. While there, he saw a pagan altar he liked. He then sent home a copy of the plans and had a duplicate erected in the Temple (for which the brazen altar was moved to one side). Whether this showed a desire to worship the god of a successful king (II Chronicles 28:23) or whether he was buttering up Tiglath-pileser, the idolatry was blatant.

### C. LATER MILITARY SETBACKS (II Chronicles 28:17-19)

Weakened by the Israelite-Aramean invasion, Judah became easy pickings for neighboring nations. Successful attacks were mounted by Edom as well as the Philistines.

All of this toadying to the Assyrians did no good, however. Tiglath-pileser continued to demand more and more tribute, leading Ahaz to strip portions of the Temple and his own palace to provide it. The pro-Assyrian policy proved a dismal failure, and with the ascendancy of the anti-Assyrian party, Hezekiah was placed on the throne in 719 B.C.

#### D. THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

Both Isaiah and Micah ministered during this time. While Isaiah mainly addressed the court, Micah spoke to the people, condemning their idolatry, their oppression of the poor, and the false prophets who led them astray. He also speaks of the Assyrian invasion that was to come in the days of Hezekiah, whose reign will be the subject of next week's lesson.

What lessons may be learned from the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz? Certainly, we should pay attention to the failures of attempts to provide political solutions for what were essentially spiritual problems. The people needed to turn to God, not to the Assyrians, Egyptians, or Babylonians for help to heal the troubles faced by the land of Judah. Similarly, the problems faced by our nation cannot be solved through the political process. Republicans and Democrats are of no more help than were the Assyrians and Egyptians.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XIII**

Hezekiah of Judah - the Early Years (728-705 B.C.)

II Kings 18:5 identifies Hezekiah as the greatest of the kings of Judah. His reign is so eventful and is given so much space in Scripture that we will spend two weeks studying it. Today we will deal with some necessary background issues, then focus on his religious reform.

### I. THE CHRONOLOGY OF HEZEKIAH

The chronology of Hezekiah's reign is more difficult than that of any other king of the Divided Monarchy. Scripture gives us the following information:

- Hezekiah assumed the throne in the third year of Hoshea (II Kings 18:1) - this was 728 B.C.
- Shalmaneser IV besieged Samaria in the fourth year of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:9), 724 B.C.
- Samaria fell in the sixth year of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:10), 722 B.C.
- Sennacherib invaded Judah in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:13) - but, from Assyrian records, this is known to have been in 701 B.C.
- Hezekiah must have become chief ruler in 719 B.C., four years before Ahaz' death, since Ahaz, like Jotham, actually lived for 20 years after assuming the throne.
- Hezekiah is said to have reigned for 29 years from the age of twenty-five (II Kings 18:2).

What follows is a suggested harmonization of this admittedly difficult information:

- 728 B.C. - Hezekiah becomes co-regent with his father Ahaz in the third year of Hoshea, at the age of twelve. It is from the beginning of his co-regency that II Kings 18:1,9, and 10 are dated.
- 719 B.C. - Hezekiah becomes chief ruler at the age of 21, with Ahaz retiring in disgrace, though he lived four more years.
- 715 B.C. - Ahaz dies and Hezekiah becomes sole ruler. It is from this date that II Kings 18:2 and 13 are counting.
- 701 B.C. - Sennacherib invades Judah. This also turns out to be the year of Hezekiah's illness and the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors.
- 695 B.C. - Hezekiah, knowing he has less than ten years remaining, appoints his twelve-year-old son Manasseh as co-regent.
- 686 B.C. - Hezekiah dies, leaving the kingdom in the hands of Manasseh, now 21.

### II. THE RELIGIOUS REFORMS (II Kings 18:3-6; II Chronicles 29-31)

Upon gaining sole control of the kingdom in 715, Hezekiah instituted a thorough religious reform. There were three major aspects to this reform.

## A. PURIFICATION OF THE LAND (II Kings 18:3-6)

Hezekiah systematically went throughout the land, destroying the idols that had been established over the years, including the high places that had been left intact by so many of the “good” rulers who had preceded him (interestingly enough, this purification also included destroying the 700-year-old brazen serpent made by Moses in the wilderness, which had been given a name and had become the focus of a cult of its own - how perversely the human heart goes after idolatry!).

## B. PURIFICATION OF THE TEMPLE AND RESTORATION OF WORSHIP (II Chronicles 29)

We noted in the introduction to the course that the books of Chronicles give a great deal of attention to the Temple and the worship of God therein. Thus it is not surprising that the first three chapters devoted to the reign of Hezekiah deal with his reform of Temple worship. The Chronicler begins with a description of the reopening and purification of the Temple itself, which had been defiled and finally closed by Ahaz. The time of purification was followed by a great assembly during which sacrifices were offered for the consecration of the Temple and the people and praises were sung to the Lord. Note the following:

- Verse 17 - The time given for the purification of the Temple is eight days, cf. the similar purification that occurred during the Maccabean Revolt that gave rise to the celebration we know as Hanukkah.
- Verse 30 - Psalms of David and Asaph were sung; these, of course, are the two poets whose works play the most prominent role in the Psalter.
- Verse 34 - The number of sacrifices was so great that there weren't enough priests to offer them, so the Levites had to pitch in and help; the author also notes that the Levites were more conscientious and enthusiastic about the renewed worship than the priests themselves.
- Verse 36 - Hezekiah and the people recognized that what had happened had been God's doing, not theirs, and rejoiced at the rapidity with which the work had been done (“suddenly” here is better translated “quickly”).

## C. CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER (II Chronicles 30)

This apparently had not been done for many years, and Hezekiah was determined to do it. Note the following:

- Verses 2-4 - He postponed the celebration for a month to allow for the ceremonial purification of enough priests to hold the festival.
- Verses 5-9 - He sent an invitation throughout Israel, even to those still left in the North, encouraging them with the thought that repentance on their part might bring mercy from the Lord and an end to the Assyrian captivity of their brothers.
- Verses 10-11 - Most of them responded to the summons with scorn and mockery, though some took the long trek to Jerusalem to join the celebration.



- Verse 14 - It was at this time that the high places in Jerusalem were removed.
- Verses 17-20 - Many of the people, especially those from the North, came to the celebration unprepared, so additional sacrifices were made on their behalf and Hezekiah interceded for them with God, asking that He accept the worship of the people despite the fact that most of them were not in a condition of ceremonial purity - a prayer that God accepted.
- Verse 23 - The resulting celebration lasted for two weeks - a week longer than the time prescribed in Leviticus 23:6.
- Verse 26 - No such feast had been held in Jerusalem since the time of Solomon more than 200 years earlier.

#### D. REORGANIZATION OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES (II Chronicles 31)

An orderly procedure was once again established for carrying on the proper worship of the Lord. A few aspects of this are worth noting:

- Verse 1 - The cleansing of idolatry from the land involved not only the removal of the high places, but also of the shrines to pagan gods that had been used for worship during the reign of Ahaz and before. Note that the cleansing also extended into the territory of the former Northern Kingdom.
- Verse 2 - The reorganization included assigning the priests and Levites to divisions that could take turns carrying out the labors associated with regular Temple worship.
- Verses 3-11 - The king himself sets the example of giving to the Lord and the people follow suit. The result is that so much is brought into the Temple treasury that heaps remained, allowing all to see the extent of God's blessing on Hezekiah's faithfulness and that of the people. Storerooms were then added to the Temple in order to accommodate the wealth that continued to pour in from the people.
- Verses 12-19 - The priests and Levites were enrolled, assigned to divisions, returned to the cities throughout the land given them in the time of Joshua, and provisions made for their sustenance according to the Lord's instructions at the time of the entry into the Promised Land.

### III. GOD'S BLESSING AND HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE

Hezekiah's obedience brought God's blessing - spiritual, economic, political, and military. The kingdom, which had been reduced to penury under Ahaz, again amassed considerable wealth, established trade, and even managed a minor conquest, regaining some of the Philistine territory lost by Ahaz (II Kings 18:8). But, as happens all too often, this blessing brought pride. The pride manifested itself in several different ways in the middle years of Hezekiah's reign, all of which we will examine next week.

Hezekiah realized, far more than most of the kings of the Divided Monarchy, the priority of true worship. We have seen over and over again how kings whose reigns brought prosperity and military success to their people were evaluated as bad kings because they led the people into idolatry.

Hezekiah knew that, whatever else he did as king, God would approve of him if he led the people in the path of true worship. That became his first priority, and God blessed him for it.

## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XIV**

### Hezekiah of Judah - Later Reign (705-686 B.C.)

Last week we looked at Hezekiah's internal religious reforms, but this week we arrive at the major crises of his reign. The tale of this portion of Hezekiah's reign is told three times in the Scriptures (II Kings 18:13-20:21; II Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36-39).

#### I. THE CESSATION OF TRIBUTE TO ASSYRIA

Judah had been tributary to Assyria during most of the reign of the pro-Assyrian Ahaz, who had invited Assyrian intervention and then paid heavily for it. It was probably anti-Assyrian sentiment that brought Hezekiah to prominence in 719. Though Hezekiah favored resistance to Assyrian aggression, he was not stupid. He continued to pay tribute throughout the reign of Sargon III, the conqueror of Samaria. But when Sargon died in 705 and was replaced by his less-competent son Sennacherib, Hezekiah promptly cut off the tribute money. He aligned himself with other western nations seeking to throw off the Assyrian yoke and prepared for the invasion he knew would come. His preparations included stopping up all the springs surrounding the city of Jerusalem (II Chronicles 32:3-4) and digging a 1750-foot tunnel from the spring of Gihon to the Pool of Siloam to ensure a supply of fresh water for the city during a siege. The tunnel was discovered by archaeologists in the nineteenth century, and tourists today can still walk the length of it. The inscription left by the builders, a replica of which remains today (the original was plundered during the Ottoman Empire period and resides today in a museum in Istanbul), allowed archaeologists to determine that a cubit was about 18 inches long.

#### II. HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS (II Kings 20:1-11; II Chronicles 32:24; Isaiah 38)

We know Hezekiah's illness occurred fifteen years prior to his death. This would place it in 701 B.C., the same year as Sennacherib's invasion. Since God promised in II Kings 20:6 to deliver Hezekiah from Assyria, it must have happened before the invasion. Imagine how Hezekiah must have felt - all his careful preparation, the invasion imminent, and now God tells him he is to die! Worst of all, his son Manasseh was only six years old - there was no one to provide leadership in this time of crisis. Hezekiah begged the Lord for a reprieve, and received, through the prophet Isaiah, an additional fifteen years of life (Hezekiah's prayer for healing is recorded in Isaiah 38:10-20). Note that this is an example in Scripture of God performing a miraculous healing by the use of means. God could have healed Hezekiah without the fig poultice, but chose to use this medical treatment instead. We should never think that because healing occurs by means of medicines that God is any less the author of the healing that occurs.

Unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah did not hesitate to ask for a sign. The sign he received was the much-discussed miracle of the shadow, which retreated either ten degrees on a sundial or ten "steps" on some form of chronograph in the palace. One suggestion for such a chronograph involved two sets of steps facing each other, one facing east and the other west, with walls behind each set. Thus, in the morning as the sun got higher in the sky, the shadow would move down the east-facing

steps, reaching the bottom at noon. As the afternoon progressed, the shadow would then climb the west-facing set of steps until sundown (one such structure was found by archaeologists in Egypt). Note also that this miracle need not have involved a reversal of the earth's rotation or any other such cosmic calamity (claims of a lost astronomical day, supposedly providing evidence for the sun standing still in Joshua and the sun moving backward here, are specious). Instead, it appears to have been a localized miracle (II Chronicles 32:31) accomplished by the hand of God alone.

### III. THE BABYLONIAN EMBASSAGE (II Kings 20:12-19; II Chronicles 32:31; Isaiah 39)

This, too, must have occurred in 701, which was the last year of Merodach-baladan's reign. It occurred after Hezekiah's illness, but, since he had treasures to show the ambassadors, must have preceded the Assyrian invasion. Though the given reason for the visit was to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery and find out about the miraculous sign (the Babylonians placed great stock in heavenly bodies and their movements), the Babylonians in all likelihood sought information about the anti-Assyrian alliance. Hezekiah was completely open with them, providing information that would motivate a conquest a century later. Hezekiah's prideful response to Isaiah's rebuke implied, "Who cares so long as I die in peace?"

### IV. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION (II Kings 18:13-19:37; II Chronicles 32:1-23; Isaiah 36-37)

When Sennacherib moved westward, he first smashed Tyre, the ringleader of the confederation, then swept down the Mediterranean coast. At this point, Hezekiah realized that the situation was hopeless, sent a message of capitulation, and Sennacherib imposed a heavy tribute. To pay it, Hezekiah had to empty the Temple and palace treasuries and strip their furnishings.

#### A. THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM (II Kings 18:17-19:34; II Chronicles 32:9-19; Isaiah 36:1-37:35)

Sennacherib, however, was not satisfied, and sent three top officials (Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh are titles, not names) to demand further concessions. The negotiators sought to intimidate the defenders of Jerusalem, not only with their enormous army, but also by arguments and threats. The negotiators used six arguments:

- Egypt is an undependable ally, not to be trusted.
- Yahweh will not help you, since Hezekiah has destroyed most of His shrines.
- If you surrender, we will deport you to a peaceful paradise in Assyria.
- Yahweh has told Sennacherib to destroy Judah.
- The Assyrian army is invincible.
- No other god had been able to deliver his people from Assyria, so why should Yahweh be any different?

Hezekiah brought his fears to Isaiah the prophet, who encouraged him to resist Sennacherib's threats. Isaiah told Hezekiah that Sennacherib would believe the rumor of a supporting army coming

from Egypt and would return to his own country, where he would meet a violent death. When Sennacherib sends a threatening missive demanding the surrender of Jerusalem, Hezekiah takes it into the Temple and spreads it before the Lord, then receives assurance that the siege will not succeed. Isaiah brings him the Lord's answer, which acknowledges the fact that Sennacherib's defiance is really directed against God rather than against Judah and its king. The Lord, unlike the gods of the nations conquered by the Assyrians, is the True and Living God, fully able to protect those who are His.

#### B. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY AND THE DEATH OF SENNACHERIB (II Kings 19:35-37; II Chronicles 32:21-22; Isaiah 37:36-38)

God fulfilled His promise by destroying the entire Assyrian army in a single night, leaving nothing but corpses strewn about the siege grounds the following morning. Sennacherib returned home to Nineveh, and twenty years later was murdered by two of his sons in the temple of the god in whom he had put so much trust.

In these narratives, Hezekiah shows us both the glory of faith and the disastrous consequences of pride. No other king of Judah showed greater confidence in the Lord, yet his lapse into boastful pride before the Babylonian ambassadors cost his country dearly, though the damage was done long after his death.



## DIVIDED MONARCHY XV

Manasseh and Amon of Judah (695-640 B.C.)

### I. MANASSEH (695-642) (II Kings 21:1-18; II Chronicles 33:1-20)

When Hezekiah died, he was succeeded by his son Manasseh, who was then 21 years old and had already been co-regent for nine years. He was anything but “a chip off the old block.” He never knew his grandfather, but promptly adopted his policies. How can such a rotten son come from such a godly father? Was the pride of Hezekiah’s later years a factor?

#### A. THE WICKEDNESS OF MANASSEH (II Kings 21:1-9; II Chronicles 33:1-10)

Manasseh had the longest reign of any king in the Divided Monarchy. Judah would have been better off had it been the shortest. He promptly undid all of the reforms instituted by his father. Manasseh’s list of idolatries is a long one - high places, Baals, Asherim, astrology, human sacrifice (note the reference to the Valley of Hinnom; we will speak more of this next week), spiritism, idols in the Temple, etc. The result was a situation described as worse than that of the Canaanites whom God ordered Joshua to annihilate.

#### B. PROPHETIC WARNINGS (II Kings 21:10-16)

Prophets were sent to warn the king and the people, but they were ignored. The prophets warned that Judah would suffer the same fate as the Northern Kingdom (the reference to a measuring line and plumb line indicates that Judah did not measure up to God’s standard). The Babylonian Captivity is now clearly on the horizon.

#### C. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION (II Chronicles 33:11)

In 653 B.C., an anti-Assyrian coalition was formed in the Mediterranean area of which Judah was a part. Assyria was then at the height of her power under the mighty Ashurbanipal. An Assyrian army was sent to meet the challenge. In a five-year campaign (653-648), the coalition was defeated and Manasseh was captured and led ignominiously to Babylon, where he was imprisoned (it is interesting that his son, who was by then in his early teens, was *not* made co-regent at this point - perhaps he was already recognized as vicious or incompetent). We have no way of knowing how long this imprisonment lasted.

#### D. REPENTANCE, RELEASE, AND REFORM (II Chronicles 33:12-20)

While in a Babylonian prison, Manasseh, perhaps remembering the teaching of his father many years before, turned to the Lord (even *he* was not beyond the range of God’s grace). [It is worth noting that the prayer of Manasseh, mentioned in verse 18, is a part of the Apocrypha, though the Catholic version is from the Intertestamental Period and is not the text mentioned here. Whether the document represents an accurate tradition or is simply an attempt to fill a gap in the biblical narrative

is impossible to tell.] God responded by freeing him from prison, and when he returned to Jerusalem he showed that his repentance was real. He added fortifications to Jerusalem and the surrounding towns, but more importantly removed many of the idols he had earlier erected. Though he reestablished Temple worship, most of the people of Judah were influenced very little. Their conformity to the reform was merely cosmetic in that they now offered sacrifices to Yahweh on the high places. In the end, his reform was both too little and too late.

#### E. THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

Though the book of Isaiah makes no mention of Manasseh, according to Jewish tradition the elderly prophet was martyred during the reign of this wicked king. He supposedly was forced inside a hollow log and then sawn in half (cf. Hebrews 11:37). Also, it was in the years of Manasseh's belated revival that Nahum's prophecy was given. The prophecy is a condemnation of Assyria's brutality and a prediction of its destruction at the hands of Babylon, which happened about forty years later. Nahum also promises the residents of Jerusalem that they will never again be assaulted by the Assyrians.

#### II. AMON (642-640) (II Kings 21:19-26; II Chronicles 33:21-25)

While Hezekiah's reform came too early to influence Manasseh, Manasseh's came too late to influence Amon. He assumed the throne at age 22 and immediately undid his father's reforms, returning to the worst kinds of idolatry prevalent in Manasseh's early years. Several palace servants, unable to stomach this return to idolatry, murdered Amon in the palace. The assassins were apprehended and executed, and Amon's eight-year-old son Josiah was placed on the throne.

The major lesson of this era must be the impact fathers have on the lives of their children. Both Manasseh and Amon saw their fathers at their worst and remained untouched by the good that came too early or too late. We need constant reminders that the lives we live affect people besides ourselves. The passage also reminds us of the grace of God in that Josiah, the son of Amon and grandson of Manasseh, having before him no worthy examples at all, became one of Judah's greatest and godliest rulers.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XVI**

Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C.)

Today we see the Southern Kingdom's last gasp at following the Lord; next week, we will see its destruction. The revival of Josiah swept the country clean, but it could not root out the corruption that had permeated to the very depths of Judean society.

### **I. JOSIAH'S EARLY YEARS (II Chronicles 34:1-3)**

Josiah became king at the age of eight when his father Amon was assassinated. He must have had good advisors, probably including Hilkiah the high priest and Shaphan the scribe, for he shows no tendency whatsoever to follow in his father's footsteps. The situation here is totally unlike that of Joash. Joash was a good king as long as Jehoiada lived, but as soon as he was left on his own, he made a mess of things. This reform, however, was unquestionably Josiah's. We are told that he "began to seek God" at age 16, and at age 20 began to reform the land - his coming of age sparked the reform rather than extinguishing it.

### **II. JOSIAH'S REFORM (II Kings 22:3-23:27; II Chronicles 34:3-35:19)**

The extent of idolatry in Judah required far-reaching reform. From 628-622 B.C., Josiah purged the land. The work was begun before the cleansing of the Temple and renewed with greater enthusiasm after the discovery and reading of the Book of the Law. The following aspects are notable:

#### **A. THE REMOVAL OF IDOLS FROM JERUSALEM AND JUDEA (II Kings 23:4-20; II Chronicles 34:3-5)**

This thorough sweep included the following:

- The altars to the Baals and Asherim (II Kings 23:14; II Chronicles 34:3-4)
- The altars to foreign gods erected by Solomon (II Kings 23:13)
- The Canaanite high places, with their cult prostitutes (II Kings 23:7-8)
- The shrines erected by his father in the Temple (II Kings 23:4,6,11-12)
- The temples for human sacrifice (to Molech) in Tophet (the Valley of Hinnom) (II Kings 23:10) [Note: Jesus used the Valley of Hinnom ("Gehenna"), which was still used to burn refuse and dispose of the bodies of the indigent and criminals, as a picture of Hell in Mark 9]
- The practices of astrology and spiritism (II Kings 23:5,24)

#### **B. THE DESECRATION OF NORTHERN SHRINES (II Kings 23:15-20; II Chronicles 34:5-7)**

Most notable here is the desecration and destruction of the calf altar at Bethel in fulfillment of the prophecy of I Kings 13:2. All remaining calf-priests were executed as well, and other Samaritan

vestiges of idolatry were destroyed. Josiah was able to accomplish this because of the weakness of Assyria. After the death of Ashurbanipal in 633, Assyria declined rapidly, and within thirty years, the once-mighty empire had disappeared from the face of the earth, a victim of the growing strength and ambition of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

#### C. THE CLEANSING AND REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE (II Kings 22:3-20; II Chronicles 34:8-28)

Josiah not only wanted to stamp out false worship, he also wanted to reinstitute true worship. This involved several things, all centered around the repair and cleansing of the Temple, which Josiah initiated in the eighteenth year of his reign (622 B.C.), when he was twenty-six:

- II Kings 22:3-7; II Chronicles 34:8-13 - Carpenters were hired to repair the parts of the Temple that had been damaged over a half-century of abuse and neglect.
- II Chronicles 35:3 - The Ark of the Covenant was brought out of hiding.
- II Kings 22:8-10; II Chronicles 34:14-18 - The book of the law was discovered and read before the king. This book is not identified, but was probably the Pentateuch. Undoubtedly many copies of the Scriptures had been destroyed during Manasseh's reign. Until this point, Josiah had been functioning on the memories of his advisors. The contents of the scroll provided a major shock. [Some have suggested that the book was Deuteronomy because it contains extensive curses and blessings - liberal scholars, following Julius Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, even say that Deuteronomy was *written* at this time to spur the reform - but it was probably more than that, since Deuteronomy does not contain detailed instructions for the Passover, though advocates of this position argue that some instruction is given in Deuteronomy 16:1-8.]
- II Kings 22:11-13; II Chronicles 34:19-21 - Josiah, upon hearing God's Word, tears his garment in a public act of grief and repentance. He knows that the actions of his royal predecessors and the people over whom he ruled made the nation subject to the wrathful judgment of God. He then demands that a prophet be consulted to obtain a word from the Lord about their plight.
- II Kings 22:14-20; II Chronicles 34:22-28 - Hilkiah, Shaphan, and others go to the prophetess Huldah, and she predicts judgment after Josiah's death. The wrath of God is not to be stopped at this late date, but the penitence of the king will delay the outpouring of that wrath until after his death. [Note the somewhat ironic statement that Josiah would be gathered to his grave in peace, given the fact that he died in battle.]
- II Kings 23:1-3; II Chronicles 34:29-33 - The people are brought together to renew the covenant with Yahweh.

#### D. THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER (II Kings 23:21-23; II Chronicles 35:1-19)

This is said to be the most faithful celebration of Passover since the time of Samuel (remember, Hezekiah's had been a month late).

### III. JOSIAH'S DEATH (II Kings 23:29-30; II Chronicles 35:20-27)

The rapid decline of Assyrian power was accompanied by the rapid rise of a new power, Babylon, under the leadership of Nabopolassar. In 614 Asshur fell, followed by Nineveh in 612 (in fulfillment of Nahum's prophecy). Egypt was also on the rise and wanted to prevent a Babylonian takeover of the entire region. Thus, in 609, Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt marched northward to join an embattled Assyrian remnant at Carchemish, on the Euphrates River. Josiah, perhaps thinking to honor the friendship established with Babylon in the time of Hezekiah, tried to intercept Neco at Megiddo [marching eastward to the Euphrates was impossible because of the terrain; armies moving from Egypt to Mesopotamia moved northward along the Mediterranean, through the Plain of Jezreel, and then eastward and south], despite warnings from God to the contrary (II Chronicles 35:21). He disguised himself, as Ahab had done earlier, but was killed in battle. His body was taken back to Jerusalem, where this beloved king was mourned by all, including the prophet Jeremiah (the reference to Jeremiah's lament is thought by some to be a reference to our book of Lamentations, which according to tradition Jeremiah wrote, but the five acrostic dirges that make up Lamentations mourn, not the death of Josiah, but the destruction of Jerusalem; thus Jeremiah's encomium to Josiah has not been preserved for us).

### IV. PROPHETS DURING JOSIAH'S REIGN

Chief among these were Jeremiah and Zephaniah, both of whom undoubtedly helped in the king's reforms. Jeremiah continued to prophesy until after the fall of Jerusalem, but Zephaniah's ministry was much briefer.

Josiah's reform was too little, too late. Despite his personal zeal and sincerity, the hearts of the people were far from God. The removal of idols and the celebration of the Passover did nothing to change their hearts, as became evident shortly after his death. Only God can change hearts; we cannot bring about revival through the best of our efforts, no matter how much we might wish it to be so.



## **DIVIDED MONARCHY XVII**

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah of Judah (609-586 B.C.)

After the death of Josiah, God's predicted judgment came quickly. The four kings who presided over the last 23 years of Judah's history were little more than puppets.

### **I. JEHOAHAZ (609 B.C.) (II Kings 23:31-34; II Chronicles 36:1-4)**

As had been the case for many years, political factions favoring alignment with the major world powers of the day divided the leadership of Judah. Under Josiah's leadership, the pro-Babylonian party had gained influence, and after his death they succeeded in placing his fourth and youngest son, Jehoahaz (called "Shallum" in Jeremiah) on the throne (cf. I Chronicles 3:15).

But when Pharaoh Neco II returned from Carchemish, where he had temporarily forestalled a Babylonian advance, he removed Jehoahaz and replaced him with his pro-Egyptian older brother, Eliakim, exacting substantial tribute in the process, which the new king in turn took from the people in the form of additional taxation. Jehoahaz, after reigning only three months, was imprisoned at Riblah in Syria, then taken to Egypt, where he died. Despite his brief reign, the author of Kings evaluates Jehoahaz as an evil ruler; sadly, Josiah's religious reforms were short-lived.

### **II. JEHOIAKIM (609-597 B.C.) (II Kings 23:34-24:7; II Chronicles 36:5-8)**

When Neco placed Eliakim on the throne, he changed his name to Jehoiakim. This was common practice (cf. Nebuchadnezzar changing Daniel's name to Belteshazzar), and involved both redefining a person's identity and demonstrating power (Daniel's new name honored a Babylonian deity and showed Nebuchadnezzar's authority over him). In this case, the meanings were equivalent - Neco was simply asserting his authority over his puppet.

In 605 B.C., the balance of power shifted for good. Neco again moved northward to challenge Babylon. But the Babylonian army was now under the leadership of crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, and he delivered a crushing defeat to the Egyptian army. He then swept down into Palestine, exacting tribute from the kingdoms in the region, including the sacred vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem (II Chronicles 36:7). Jehoiakim was captured and put in irons for deportation to Babylon. Just then, however, Nebuchadnezzar received word that his father Nabopolassar had died and he was now king. He released Jehoiakim and hurried home, commanding that the choicest young men in Israel be brought after him (e.g., Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah).

Jehoiakim, meanwhile, had succeeded in making himself enormously unpopular. He had imposed a heavy tax to raise tribute for Neco, then built himself a new palace using public funds and forced labor (Jeremiah 22:13). He killed a prophet named Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23), twice imprisoned Jeremiah, and even cut up and burned a written prophecy sent to him by that same prophet (Jeremiah 36:23).

In his final act of folly, Jehoiakim ignored Jeremiah's warning and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king sent troops from Syria, Ammon, and Moab against him, and it appears that Jehoiakim was killed during one of these raids, for, as Jeremiah predicted, he was buried "with the burial of an ass" (Jeremiah 22:19). Needless to say, Jehoiakim, like his brother, was said to be an evil king.

### III. JEHOIACHIN (597 B.C.) (II Kings 24:8-17; II Chronicles 36:9-10)

In reality, Jehoiakim died just in time - Nebuchadnezzar himself was on the way westward to put down the rebellion. Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah or Coniah), who, like his uncle Jehoahaz, only reigned three months. He became king at the age of eighteen (Septuagint; Hebrew manuscripts give his age as eight, but this must be a scribal error - after all, he had wives! - the difference involving only the omission of a *yodh*, a tiny letter that looks like an apostrophe). When Jehoiachin was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, ten thousand capable men were carried off with him (including a young priest named Ezekiel) and the looting of the Temple was completed (note that these vessels play a key role in the story of the Handwriting on the Wall in Daniel 5). Jehoiachin himself was imprisoned in Babylon, where he lived out the rest of his life, eventually being given a large measure of liberty and privilege by Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Abel-marduk (Evil-merodach) (Jeremiah 52:31-34); he was one of three kings who ruled briefly during a six-year period of chaos after Nebuchadnezzar's death that came to an end with the ascent of Nabonidus. He was replaced on the throne of Judah by his uncle Mattaniah, the third son of Josiah to reign in Jerusalem.

### IV. ZEDEKIAH (597-586 B.C.) (II Kings 24:18-25:21; II Chronicles 36:11-21)

Mattaniah was renamed Zedekiah ("the Lord is righteous") by Nebuchadnezzar and forced to swear an oath of loyalty in the Lord's name (II Chronicles 36:13). Zedekiah was not recognized as king by the exiles, who continued to date events by the reign of the imprisoned Jehoiachin. In fact, the only ones who recognized Zedekiah were the leaders of the pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem, made up of noblemen, false prophets, and many priests (these are the same men who consistently accused Jeremiah of treason when he advised submission to Babylon). When Nebuchadnezzar faced a revolt in his own army in 594, these men were sure the captivity of their countrymen was about to end. Against Jeremiah's advice, they turned to Egypt for help and rebelled against Babylon. Eventually (588), Nebuchadnezzar retaliated and besieged Jerusalem. After a two-year siege that brought horrible hardships to the inhabitants, the city fell in 586 B.C. Tens of thousands were deported; Zedekiah was forced to witness the executions of his own sons, then had his eyes put out and was taken to Babylon. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, was given the responsibility of destroying the city, which he did with great thoroughness. Jeremiah was given the choice of remaining or receiving an honorable escort to Babylon (now his enemies *knew* he was a traitor), and chose to stay (Jeremiah 40:1-4).

Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar appointed the honorable Gedaliah (a friend of Jeremiah and thus pro-Babylonian) as governor of the new Babylonian province. Gedaliah, however, was murdered

within months by a group of pro-Egyptian nobles who had avoided the siege by hiding in the wilderness (II Kings 25:22-26). These same men then fled to Egypt, forcing Jeremiah to accompany them (Jeremiah 43:1-7). According to Jewish tradition, he was murdered there. The Jews who fled to Egypt never returned, but became the progenitors of Jewish settlements in such places as Alexandria (the city where the Septuagint was produced and the home of such notables as the proto-Gnostic Philo and the eloquent Apollos) and Elephantine, an island in the Nile where archaeologists have discovered the ruins of an ancient Jewish settlement, including a synagogue.

## V. PROPHETS OF THE PERIOD

### A. JEREMIAH

We have already spoken quite a bit about his involvement. He was God's mouthpiece in the royal court of Judah, suffering much because of his unpopular message of submission to Babylon.

### B. HABAKKUK

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, this prophet cried to God about the seeming injustice of punishing wickedness by an instrument more wicked still, but God told him that the righteous must live by faith and assured him that the Babylonians would eventually receive the judgment they deserved.

### C. DANIEL

Taken in the first wave of captivity in 605, he quickly rose to prominence in the Babylonian court and undoubtedly did much to advance the interests of his countrymen.

### D. EZEKIEL

Taken in the second wave of captivity in 597, he ministered to the captives, telling them by symbolic actions of the siege and fall of Jerusalem and assuring them of eventual restoration.

## VI. FINAL LESSONS FROM THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

- God is Holy - He will not tolerate idolatry among His people. The wicked will not go unpunished.
- God is Patient - He withholds judgment beyond human reason and relents at the smallest sign of repentance (Ahab, Nineveh).
- God is Faithful - He will do what He has promised, though it be long in coming from a human perspective. Note that many of the rulers who were such failures appear in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1.
- God is Gracious - He will preserve for Himself a faithful remnant, raising them up for His own glory.





## THE KINGS AND PROPHETS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

### THE UNITED MONARCHY

Kings and  
Prophets in  
the Northern  
Kingdom of  
Israel  
931-722 B.C.

SAUL (1051-1011)  
  
DAVID (1011-971)  
  
SOLOMON (971-931)

Kings and  
Prophets in  
the Southern  
Kingdom of  
Judah  
931-586 B.C.

JEROBOAM (931-910)*		930		REHOBOAM (931-913)
NADAB (910-909)				ABIJAM (913-911)
BAASHA (909-886)*		900		ASA (911-870)
ELAH (886-885)				
ZIMRI (885)*				
OMRI (885-874)*				JEHOSHAPHAT (873-848)
AHAB (874-853)	ELIJAH			JEHORAM (853-841)
AHAZIAH (853-852)		850	OBADIAH	AHAZIAH (841)
JEHORAM (852-841)				[ATHALIAH] (841-835)
JEHU (841-814)*	ELISHA		JOEL	JOASH (835-796)
JEHOAHAZ (814-798)				AMAZIAH (796-767)
JEHOASH (798-782)	JONAH	800		UZZIAH (790-740)
JEROBOAM II (793-753)				JOTHAM (750-731)
ZECHARIAH (753-752)	AMOS			
SHALLUM (752)*				AHAZ (735-715)
MENACHEM (752-742)*	HOSEA	750		
PEKAHIAH (742-740)			ISAIAH	
PEKAH (752-732)*			MICAH	
HOSHEA (732-722)*		700		HEZEKIAH (728-686)
				MANASSEH (695-642)
		650	NAHUM	AMON (642-640)
				JOSIAH (640-609)
			JEREMIAH	JEHOAHAZ (609)
			ZEPHANIAH	JEHOIAKIM (609-597)
			HABAKKUK	JEHOIACHIN (597)
		600	DANIEL	ZEDEKIAH (597-586)
			EZEKIEL	
		580		

\*indicates the beginning of a new dynasty in the Northern Kingdom