

2 KINGS

2 KINGS 1-2 — ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION

HIS LAST COMMISSION (CHAP. 1)

The story of Ahaziah's reign in the last chapter of 1 Kings and the first verse of this lesson is a close link between the two books. It indicates that the death of Ahab and the accession of his son gave occasion to the Moabites for this uprising, the first since their conquest by David (~~1002~~2 Samuel 8:2).

"Baalzebub" (v. 2), "the lord of the fly," was the name under which the sun-god Baal was worshipped at Ekron, the city of the Philistines lying nearest to Ahaziah's capitol, Samaria. Probably the name comes from the supposition that he produced the flies and was consequently able to protect against them as a pest. The name is not to be confounded with "Beelzebub" of ~~1001~~Matthew 10, although there may be a relation between the two. Observe the phrase at the beginning of verse 3, and recall what we have learnt about the Christophanies of the Old Testament.

In verses 9-12 Elijah, as the representative of God, is speaking in judgment against malefactors, for such the soldiers and the king behind them must be regarded. Had Elijah been apprehended of them it would have meant his death and a victory of the kingdom of darkness over the kingdom of light. How the fire came down and consumed the soldiers is not stated.

HIS LAST JOURNEY (2:1-11)

The localities in the first five verses (Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho) were doubtless where schools of the prophets had been established, as far back as Samuel's time (~~1005~~1 Samuel 7:15-17). These schools were for the training of godly youth in the law of God and the experience of a holy life. Elisha seems to have been among them while Elijah was their head at this period (v. 3). The awesome event about to transpire seems to have been revealed to them to some extent, explaining their communications to Elisha as well as his determination not to separate from Elijah till the end. Elijah's

indisposition to have himself accompanied is difficult to explain, some attributing it to his purpose of testing the fidelity of Elisha as qualifying him for his succession.

Of what earlier events does verse 8 remind you? How would you interpret Elisha's request in verse 9? Shall we say that it refers to ^{<FR17>}Deuteronomy 21:17, where the law of the firstborn is recorded? Elisha would have Elijah regard him as a firstborn son, and give him, as compared with the other sons of the prophets, a richer measure of his prophetic spirit. He did not ask twice as much of the Holy Spirit as Elijah had which even on natural grounds Elijah could not have granted him. It is as a prophet that Elijah replies in verse 10. The translation in verse 11 suggests that of Enoch, that of Christ Himself, and that of the Church yet to occur (^{<OKK2>}Genesis 6:24; ^{<S105>}Hebrews 11:5; ^{<400D>}Acts 1:9; ^{<S3417>}1 Thessalonians 4:17).

HIS LAST TOKEN (2:12-18)

Elisha's expression (v. 12) means that Elijah had been the true defense of Israel rather than its military strength in chariots and horsemen. That defense was seen in his combating of idolatry which was Israel's real and only enemy. How otherwise does Elisha express his grief in this verse?

Compare the reference to Elijah's mantle (v. 13) ^{<119B>}1 Kings 19:19, and observe that its possession by Elisha is a token that his petition is answered and he has been endued for the prophetic office.

Is his question (v. 14) an expression of doubt or a prayer of faith? What does the result show (v. 15)?

The desire of the sons of the prophets (v. 16) is difficult to explain on the supposition that they had any clear idea that Elijah had gone into heaven. "Into heaven," might be rendered "toward heaven," and it may be questioned whether the prophet really went into heaven. "In My Father's house are many mansions," and Elijah, for the time being, may have been located at some other happy stopping place.

HIS SUCCESSOR'S INAUGURAL (2:19-25)

The concluding verses furnish two other tokens of Elisha's official character and power which may be considered in this lesson.

Of course it was neither the new bowl nor the salt that healed the water and made it usable (vv. 19-21), but the power of God. They were symbols. The new bowl was necessary because every vessel used for a religious act in the service of Jehovah must be as yet unused, i.e. uncontaminated. The salt symbolized the purifying, restoring power God would put in the spring.

The second evidence of Elisha's power (vv. 23-24), has its difficulties. "Little children" in the margin of the Revised Version is "young lads," and there is good authority for so considering it.

Lange suggests that the young people recognized him as a prophet and opponent of the popular idolatrous worship centered at Bethel. Therefore they called to him in mockery, "What dost thou want here among us?"

The epithet "bald head" was a standing insult for old or reverend people whether they were bald or not. It was not so much scorn of Elisha as of Jehovah Himself (compare ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 16:8, ~~Acts~~ Acts 5:4, etc.).

She-bears are ravenous, but how two could tear forty-two young people must remain a mystery for the present.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of "Baalzebub?"
2. Who commissioned Elijah in this case?
3. How many illustrations of swift judgment on sin does this lesson contain?
4. What may be understood by "the schools of the prophets?"
5. How has Elijah's desire to be alone been interpreted?
6. How do you understand Elisha's request of Elijah?
7. Of how many "translations" does the Bible speak?
8. What is the meaning of the "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof"?
9. Why did Elisha use means in healing the waters?
10. How would you try to explain the cursing of the children?

2 KINGS 3-5 — ELISHA'S MINISTRY BEGINS

MANEUVERING AN ARMY (CHAP. 3)

The incident about Mesha (vv. 4-5) is interesting from the point of view of Biblical criticism. This is the only time he is mentioned in Sacred Writ and his name does not appear in profane history. For this cause objectors to the Bible have demanded proof of his existence at the time named. Also, was Moab noted for its wool? Was it tributary to Israel at this period? Did this rebellion occur? etc.

It was impossible to answer these questions outside of the Bible until about forty years ago when the "Moabite Stone" was discovered, on which an inscription by Mesha recorded all these facts.

What earlier alliance does this between Judah and Israel recall (v. 7)? What earlier situation does Jehoshaphat's inquiry recall (v. 11)? Note the outward respect, at least, which the three kings pay to Jehovah's prophet (v. 12).

Why Elisha calls for the minstrel (v. 15) is not clear, except as a way of quieting his mind in the midst of turbulent scenes of battle, and so preparing him in the physical sense to listen to God's voice. In our own experience we see the value of worshipful hymns as we approach the throne of grace.

How water came "by the way of Edom" (v. 20), may be explained by a shower or cloudburst. The water was reddened by flowing through the red earth of Edom, an effect heightened by the red light of the morning sun (v. 22).

The act of the king of Moab (v. 27) was not exceptional, but his thought in presenting the sacrifice upon the wall was probably that the besiegers beholding it might fear the heathen divinity to whom it was offered. He would now be appeased, presumptively in favor of his subjects, and it would go hard with their opponents. The meaning of "indignation against Israel" is obscure. Some understand it as indignation the Israelites themselves felt at this act so abominable in their sight, and which made them prefer to renounce further possession of Moab than to pursue the

conflict. Or it may mean that God's wrath fell upon them for returning home with their work of judgment half done.

MINISTERING TO INDIVIDUALS (CHAP. 4)

Notice the contrast between a poor woman (vv. 1-7) and a rich one in the verses following. Both have needs which only God can supply, and He is as ready to show His power in the one case as in the other, and His prophet makes no distinction between them in his ministry.

In the story of the Shumanite notice that out of modesty and respect, when the prophet calls her (v. 15), "she stood in the door. It is well" (vv. 23, 26) is not to be understood as prevaricating, but as wishing to be let alone for the present.

The prophet's staff (v. 29) was the badge of prophetic office. Recall Moses' rod which was the symbol of divine power. It seems an error for Elisha to have dispatched his servant on this commission, but prophets are not infallible except where they speak or write by inspiration of God. (Compare Nathan in ~~1~~2 Samuel 7.) In his desire to hasten matters, hoping the child was not quite dead, he hurries his servant hence; but he has to learn that he can not delegate God's grace and power according to his own will.

How does Elisha's action (vv. 33-35) compare with Elijah's under similar circumstances? The miracle that follows corresponds closely with that in ~~1~~2 Kings 2:19-22, and may be understood in the same way. The concluding miracles of the chapter suggest Christ's multiplication of the loaves and fishes; but the difference is that here there was no multiplication, but the men were satisfied with the little each received. It was a miracle wrought on the men rather than the food.

MAGNIFYING HIS OFFICE (CHAP. 5)

That is a noticeable phrase in verse 1, "by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria," which shows that the inspired annalist regards Jehovah as the God of the whole earth without whose providence even the heathen nations gained no victories.

Observe God using "the weak things of the world" in the case of the little maid (v. 2), whose testimony influences the general, and the kings of Syria

and Israel, to say nothing of the prophet, and is handed down as a force for righteousness and truth for thirty centuries!

Both kings misunderstood the situation, however, he of Israel being without excuse. It is this that gives Elisha the opportunity to magnify his office (v. 8), which he does again in the case of Naaman (v. 10). The Syrian's greatness made no difference, he must be healed like any other leper, solely by the power and grace of God. The prophet's humility and disinterestedness are established by his reply in verses 15 and 16.

Naaman's request for earth (v. 17) was not superstition but reverence. His request in verse 18 indicates a tender conscience rather than a compromising spirit, or the prophet could hardly have bidden him "go in peace."

QUESTIONS

1. Give the story of Mesha and its value as evidence of the truth of the Bible.
2. What three kings were in this combination against Moab?
3. Why, probably, was the king's son offered on the wall of the city?
4. What lessons may be drawn from Elisha's treatment of the two women?
5. What lesson was Elisha to learn from Gehazi's failure?
6. How does the miracle of the food differ from that in the gospels?
7. How does Elisha magnify his office in the case of Naaman?
8. In what two ways is Naaman's conversion established?

2 KINGS 6-8 — ELISHA AND THE SYRIAN INVASION

THE STRATAGEM AT DOTHAN (6:8-23)

The incident in verses 1-7 seems an interpolation; and some think it belongs at chapter 4:38 in connection with the two miracles, having a somewhat similar occasion. "Swim" (v. 6) is in the Hebrew the same as "float," and the idea seems to be that by throwing the stick into the water

the iron was caused to come to the surface where the young man could get it.

It is difficult to say when the event of verse 8 occurred, but it is assumed in the reign of Jehoram, with which we have been dealing since Elisha's ministry began. At a time when the Syrians were intending to encamp at a particular spot, and attack the Israelites as they passed by, the prophet gave warning to Jehoram, which enabled the latter to station troops in the threatened position and frustrate their plans (vv. 8-10).

This disconcerted the Syrian king, and, learning the truth of the matter, he tried to get hold of Elisha (vv. 11-14).

The "servant" of verse 15 is not Gehazi. To "open the eyes" (v. 17) meant to give that soul-vision which the bodily members can never behold. The horses and chariots of fire were the symbols of Jehovah's presence and might. "Blindness" (v. 18) is not absolute loss of sight, but an inability to recognize the prophet.

Elisha's words (v. 19) are not an untruth, as his real residence was Samaria; and in the end he led them to himself, not to harm them, but repay evil with good (vv. 21-23). His inquiry of the king (v. 22) presents difficulty, but probably means "could'st thou be justified in slaying with sword and bow these whom thou hast taken captive?" (See ~~15:10~~ Deuteronomy 20:10-13.)

THE FAMINE IN SAMARIA (6:24-7:20)

An interval of some time must be considered since the close of verse 23. The famine caused by the siege was intense as gathered by the price paid for the meanest food (v. 25). "Dove's dung" is understood by some as an insignificant species of pease resembling it.

The king's putting the blame on the prophet (vv. 30-31) recalls what episode in Elijah's time? Had Elisha advised against the surrender of the city, or did the king think he might have put an end to the distress in some other way? Verse 33 suggests that the king, who had doubtless followed his messengers, had repented of his threat against Elisha, but nevertheless had lost hope in Jehovah.

This brings forth the new promise of 8:1-2. The remainder of the chapter presents no difficulties, but we should note the fulfilled prediction (vv. 19-20).

THE END OF BEN-HADAD'S REIGN (8:1-15)

The event referred to (vv. 1-6) doubtless took place sometime before this, as the records of Elisha's ministry are not arranged chronologically. Compare 4:38 for the period. Gehazi's appearance (vv. 4-5) further strengthens the thought that it was before his offense and punishment by leprosy.

The event that follows is tragical indeed (vv. 7-15). Hazael, though not related to Ben-hadad, had been the divine choice as his successor (^{<11915>}1 Kings 19:15). When Elisha says the king may recover, yet he shall surely die, he is telling the exact truth, as verse 15 portrays. Had Hazael not murdered him he would have lived. It was Elisha who looked at Hazael until the latter was ashamed, as he might well have been (v. 11).

QUESTIONS

1. Give in your words the story leading up to the event at Dothan.
2. How would you harmonize the prophet's words to the Syrian soldiers?
3. What striking prediction is fulfilled in this lesson?
4. What allusion in 4:38 leads to the supposition that the opening of this lesson refers to that period?
5. How would you harmonize Elisha's words about Ben-hadad?

2 KINGS 8:25-10:28 — THE OVER-ZEALOUS JEHU

PRELIMINARY EVENTS (8:25-29)

The last lesson should have spoken of the chronological difficulties in the history of the kings of this period. (Compare especially 8:16 with 1:17.) But all our space will permit is to say that all such difficulties are satisfactorily solved, without doing violence to the text, in "The Romance of Chronology," by Anstey; who in turn quotes Dr. John Lightfoot, of the seventeenth Century, *Beecher's Dated Events of the Old Testament*, and *The Companion Bible*, published by the Oxford Press.

The story of blood and awful judgment from God begins at 8:25, where Ahaziah succeeds Jehoram as king of Israel. This is not the earlier Ahaziah

of Israel (1 Kings 22:51) any more than the two Jorams or Jehorams were the same persons, of whom we studied in the last lesson. He is called Jehoahaz in ^{<1217>}2 Chronicles 21:17, and in 22:2, he is said to have been forty-two when he began to reign. This is an intentional variation intended to teach a divine truth. On its face it makes him two years older than his father, but it should read, "a son of forty-two years was Ahaziah when he began to reign and his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri."

The Holy Spirit will not have him for a son of David. He is an imp of the house of wicked Omri, and as such a son of forty-two years, which was exactly the age of that dynasty. (Compare to ^{<1493>}Psalm 109:13-15.) Note, too, that this interpretation is confirmed by Matthew (1:8), who omits him from the Kings of Judah, saying that Jehoram his father begat Uzziah, his great, great grandson, the fourth in the direct line of descent. (Compare ^{<1215>}Exodus 20:5.)

Like his father, he was a wicked man (9:16-18), and the fruit of his grandfather Jehoshaphat's compromising attitude towards Israel. (Compare 9:18.) The reference to his mother (v. 26) is not contradictory, as "daughter" may sometimes be rendered "granddaughter" in translating the Hebrew. He was closely affiliated with his uncle, king of Israel (vv. 28-29) and this led ultimately to his unnatural death in the next chapter.

JEHU ANOINTED AND PROCLAIMED KING (9:1-13)

Elijah received the commission from God to anoint Jehu (^{<1196>}1 Kings 19:16), but he was fulfilling it in his successor, as the latter was doing so in the representative of the school of the prophets whom he sent on the divine errand (vv. 1-2). Jehu's father is not the Jehoshaphat of Judah (^{<1224>}1 Kings 22:4).

This Jehu is a military commander in Israel, perhaps next to the king and, as the sequel shows, a bold and popular one. He is now in the company of his fellow captains near the scene of battle where Joram left them when he went to Jezreel wounded. These captains recognize the validity of his anointing and by laying their garments on the steps for him to mount on, do him obeisance as they sound the trumpets of proclamation (vv. 11-13).

HIS CONSPIRACY AGAINST JORAM (9:14-16)

The army is not informed of what is transpiring (v. 15), but Jehu and a few followers advance upon Jezreel and the king (v. 16). The latter thinks he is bringing news of the battle after he had left (vv. 17-21), but he is soon undeceived (vv. 22-23). "The whoredoms of thy mother" (Jezebel) doubtless meant her idolatry with Baal. "The Lord laid this burden upon him" (v. 25), means "the Lord uttered this prophecy against him" (see ^{<1200>}1 Kings 21). Be not deceived by the thought that Jehu is doing all this out of zeal for God, as the sequel shows that zeal for Jehu was the stronger motive.

THE MURDER OF AHAZIAH AND JEZEBEL (9:27-37)

Second Chronicles 22:8 gives other details of Ahaziah's death which, for want of light, are difficult to reconcile with the record, and which therefore must be passed over. Another difficulty is the discrepancy as to the date when he began to reign, whether it was the eleventh year to Joram (^{<1109>}2 Kings 9:29) or the twelfth as stated previously (8:25); but the explanation may be that he reigned with his father for one year before the latter's death. (The probable reason for this is in ^{<4011>}2 Chronicles 21:20.) For the significance of Jezebel's challenge to Jehu (v. 31) see ^{<1169>}1 Kings 16:9, which details previous actions of Zimri, one of Jehu's officials.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE FAMILIES OF AHAB AND AHAZIAH (10:1-14)

The "seventy sons" of Ahab (v. 1) mean doubtless his grandsons and all who might have any pretense to the throne. Jehu asks the men in authority at the capital (Samaria) and the summer palace (Jezreel) to place any of these on the throne, and rally to his support if they chose (vv. 2-3); but they are afraid to do so, and instead surrender to Jehu (vv. 4-5). Then he bids them go further (vv. 6-7); and subsequently uses their deed as an argument before the people that the leaders are on his side, and that the word of the Lord is fulfilled in his accession (vv. 8-10). The slaughter of the relatives of Ahaziah follows (vv. 12-14).

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL (10:15-28)

of Jehonadab we read in ^{<2601>}Jeremiah 34. He seems to have been an honorable man in Israel, a worshipper of the true God, whose presence

with Jehu contributed to the latter's influence with the people (vv. 15-16). This part of our story shows that, although Baal's worship received a serious setback in the days of Elijah, yet it had been restored to practically its former power in the kingdom (vv. 18-28).

Jehu's real character is shown in verse 29, in the face of which one is astonished to read verse 30. But God was dealing with him as one who was hired for what he did. Had his heart been right with God his kingdom might have been established for generations, but as it was he could not complain.

God now begins His final work in Israel (vv. 32-33). The time is coming when the axe will fall at the root of the tree and the whole nation be carried away for its iniquity; but intimations of this are sent to warn and, if possible, bring them to repentance.

QUESTIONS

1. can the chronological difficulties be solved in the history of the Kings of Judah?
2. How would you explain the difficulty as to the age of Ahaziah?
3. What kings of similar names are met with in Israel and Judah?
4. What have you learned of Jehu's history?
5. What are the circumstances under which he is proclaimed king?
6. What prophecies are fulfilled in this lesson?
7. What are some of the difficulties found in it?
8. What record has Jehonadab in Jeremiah?
9. How is Jehu's real character revealed?

2 KINGS 11-14 — A CENTURY OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

JOASH OF JUDAH (CHAPS. 11-12)

The chief events of this reign are the rescue of the infant king from the murderous grandmother (11:1-3); the coup d'etat of the high priest by which he was raised to the throne (vv. 4-16); the reforms of the high priest

as regent of the kingdom (vv. 17-21); the repairing of the temple by the king (12:1-16); the surrender to the Syrians (vv. 17-18); and the king's assassination (vv. 19-21).

Be careful to read the parallel chapters in 2 Chronicles (22-24), which add details, though at this distance it may be impossible to reconcile all the minor differences.

JEHOAHAZ OF ISRAEL (13:1-9)

This reign is notable not for what man did but for what God did (v. 4). That His compassion was awakened towards such a people commands the wonder even of the spiritually enlightened — a wonder the sacred narrator Himself expresses in the parenthetic verses (vv. 5-6). "Saviour," or delivered, is used in a military sense, as in Judges. He did not appear in Jehoahaz's time but in that of his successors Jehoash and Jeroboam II.

JEHOASH OF ISRAEL (13:10-25)

We need not speak further of the chronological difficulty here (v. 10 compared with v. 1) which we cannot solve, but pass on to the preliminary fulfillment of the promised "saviour" (v. 5), found in verses 14-25.

Jehoash, or Joash (v. 14), is in sore distress by reason of the affliction in verse three, and sufficiently penitent to implore Jehovah through His prophet (v. 14). The symbolism of the subsequent verses (15-19) is plain. "Take bow and arrows" means, arm thyself for war against the Syrians. "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance" means that the victory would come from God. The second part of the action was an enhancement of it, and showed the king to lack that zeal and persevering trust in God that would have brought the complete destruction of his enemy (Note verse 25).

The extraordinary event in verse 21 is to be accepted just as it is, but it is useless to speculate on the cause or the object of it.

AMAZIAH OF JUDAH (14:1-20)

An interesting event is the challenge Amaziah sends to Jehoash, the manner in which it is received, and the outcome of it (vv. 8-14). It is worthy of remark that he met death in the same way as his father whose murder he had been so prompt to avenge (vv. 19-20).

JEROBOAM II OF ISRAEL (14:23-29)

Now God fully redeems His promise to give a "saviour" to Israel (13:5). Observe the long reign of this king — the longest in the annals of Israel (v. 23). Observe his remarkable victories (v. 25). Observe the reference to Jonah who seems in succession to Elisha, and lived probably contemporaneously with Jehoash or even Jehoahaz. It may have been through him that God gave the promise to that king to which we have made reference. The close of his reign marks about a century from the beginning of that of Joash of Judah.

Another circumstance of interest is that Amos and Hosea both lived and prophesied in this reign (see the opening verses of their prophecies).

QUESTIONS

1. Name the first reigning queen of Judah.
2. Name the high priest who placed Joash on the throne.
3. How old was Joash when he began to reign?
4. What good work marked his reign?
5. Under what circumstances did he die?
6. Who was the "saviour" intended in 13:5?
7. In whose reign did Elisha die?
8. What nation was the constant enemy of Israel in those days?
9. Name some events making the reign of Jeroboam II the golden age of Israel.
10. Name three prophets of his period whose written works have come down to us.

2 KINGS 15-17 — THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY

AZARIAH OF JUDAH (15:1-7)

This king is called Uzziah in verses 13 and 30, and in 2 Chronicles 26. Read the last-named chapter for an enlargement of his history and an explanation of certain features not given here. Note his long reign, his

generally good character, the cause of his failure, and the circumstance that his son reigned with him jointly for a short period.

ISRAEL'S NEW ENEMY (15:8-31)

Zachariah is the last of the line of Jehu, in whom the prophecy of 10:30 is fulfilled (v. 12). Shallum is a usurper only permitted to reign how long (v. 15)? Menahem comes into power in the same way as he, although he reigned a reasonably long period (v. 17). In his time the new enemy of Israel appeared in Assyria, a strong nation of the East reaching for world dominion (vv. 19-20).

His son and successor, Pekahiah, reigns but briefly (vv. 23-26), when another conspiracy costs him his life. Pekah's reign is prolonged for twenty years (v. 27), but Israel's days as a nation are numbered, and Assyria is weakening her on every side. The first deportation of her people takes place in this reign (v. 29).

JOTHAM AND AHAZ OF JUDAH (15:32-16:20)

Jotham was in the main a good king, but like all his predecessors since Solomon, either unwilling or unable to uproot idolatry (v. 35) or cause the nation to serve Jehovah with a perfect heart. How ominous in consequence, the words of verse 37.

But no king of Judah thus far had the preeminence in wickedness of Jotham's successor (16:3-4). And yet God bore with him for the sake of His promise to the fathers. For a commentary on verses 5-9 read the contemporaneous prophet Isaiah, chapter seven.

Ahaz need not have turned for aid to Assyria had he trusted God; but now that he has done so, that nation has obtained a hold on Judah which practically is never loosed.

Note verses 10-18 and Ahaz's interest in the idolatry practiced among the Assyrians. This is the first time it comes into view, as it will be recalled that the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth was introduced by Jezebel for the Phoenicians or Zidonians. Something of what it meant may be gathered from the horrible reference in verse three, the actual significance of which it is difficult to determine. Is it possible that children were burned alive as

offerings to the gods? There are those who maintain such to have been the case.

THE END OF ISRAEL (CHAP. 17)

The first half of this chapter is a sad review of Israel's iniquity and the justification of the divine punishment (vv. 6-23). It was surer and safer for their conqueror to carry them away (v. 6), than to place governors over them in their own land. These latter they might not obey, or they might refuse to pay tribute to them, involving ceaseless war to keep them in subjection. Moreover the policy had the advantage that other conquered peoples could be transplanted to the vacated territory with like results (v. 24).

With these foreigners in the land of Israel begins the history of the "Samaritans," of whom we hear in the gospels (see John 4). Note the character of their religion (vv. 33-41).

It was not promised that Israel, as a separate kingdom would be restored again, and therefore God permitted her cities to be occupied with other peoples, but it was not so with Judah and for a good reason, as we shall see later. Of course when Judah was restored after the Babylonian captivity many Israelites returned with her, but these did not constitute the kingdom of Israel. Finally, in the last days when the Jews shall once more occupy and control Palestine, they will not represent two kingdoms, but one united people (^{2311b} Isaiah 11:11-16; ^{2311d} Hosea 1:10-11).

Many of the following lessons deal with Assyria, a great people which it is important to know something about. Any good Bible dictionary will furnish some information, and encyclopedic articles are valuable. Local librarians will give further help.

QUESTIONS

1. By what other name is Azariah known?
2. Why was he smitten with leprosy?
3. Name the wickedest king of Judah thus far.
4. What prophet whose written words have come down to us was contemporaneous with him?
5. What evil religious distinction is associated with his name?

6. How is it shown that the fall of Israel came as a judgment of God?
7. Is it right therefore to measure the history of Israel by the standard of any other ancient people?
8. What was Assyria's object in their deportation?
9. Do you suppose lions were purposely sent in to slay the Samaritans (v. 25), or may they have increased in number and boldness while the land was for a while desolate?
10. Nevertheless, if the latter be true, was not the circumstance a divine punishment?
11. How does this lesson show that the heathen nations believed in localized gods?
12. From what we know of the worship of Israel before the captivity, what is the probability that any returned "priest" could teach the Samaritans about the true God (v. 27)?

2 KINGS 18-20 — JUDAH UNDER HEZEKIAH

A SUMMARY OF THE REIGN (18:1-8)

For a more extensive history of this good reign compare 2 Chronicles 29-32, and also ²³⁰¹Isaiah 36-39. In the first eight verses we have the usual summary like that of Ahaz (16:1-4), after which follows in detail the chief events of the reign. The summary contains the age and period of the king (vv. 1-2); his attitude toward the true worship (vv. 3-4); a reference to the spirit animating his life and conduct (vv. 5-6); and in consequence the successes attained over foreign enemies (vv. 7-8).

Note his enviable distinction (v. 5) and the cause of it (v. 4).

SENNACHERIB'S INVASION (18:13-35)

The intervening verses (vv. 9-12) recapitulating Israel's captivity are probably inserted for the sake of contrast. Had the kings of Israel been as faithful to Jehovah as this king of Judah was, that calamity would not have overtaken them as it did not overtake him.

Sennacherib is on a tour of conquest against Egypt, Assyria's great rival for world dominion, and takes Jerusalem en route. At first Hezekiah tries to

make terms (vv. 13-16), which Sennacherib accepts and then wantonly disregards. While he proceeds on Egypt he detaches a force to attack Jerusalem (v. 17).

The language of Rabshakeh is insulting throughout. His claim to be acting for Jehovah (v. 25) is pure assumption as the event shows. Eliakim's protest (v. 26) was a blunder in that it encouraged him to greater boldness in seeking to influence the rank and file (vv. 28-35).

THE APPEAL TO JEHOVAH (19:1-37)

Rabshakeh did not commence the siege immediately, but joined the main army again at Libnah (v. 18), to which place Sennacherib retired on the approach of the Egyptian king (v. 9). Another attempt is made to move Hezekiah, this time by a letter, but as before he appealed to Jehovah through the prophet, he now does so directly through his own prayer (vv. 14-19), and is answered through the prophet (vv. 20-34).

This answer contains

- (1) a rebuke of Sennacherib's boast (vv. 21-24);
- (2) a refutation of his self-assertion (vv. 25-28);
- (3) an encouragement to Judah and Hezekiah (vv. 29-31); and
- (4) the divine decree in regard to the crisis (32-34).

The execution of the decree brings to mind such modern parallels as the destruction of the Spanish Armada by the storm, and the breaking up of the French army before Moscow when in one memorable night, twenty thousand horses perished of frost.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND RECOVERY (20:1-11)

It seemed to the king that he must have displeased God to be cut off in early manhood (see ~~20:27~~ Proverbs 10:27), hence his words (v. 3).

Figs were the ordinary remedy for boils (v. 7) but the prophet did not order their application until he was assured of the divine help. It was God, and not the figs that healed, just as is always the case in every remedy for bodily ills.

It does not seem wrong for Hezekiah to ask a sign in view of Isaiah's words to Ahaz (~~23711~~ Isaiah 7:11).

The reversal of the shadow on the sundial (v. 11) only can be regarded either as a miracle or myth, and as far as the true believer in the Bible is concerned, the former is accepted without seeking impossible explanations.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE (20:12-21)

Babylon at this time was trying to free herself from Assyrian supremacy, and when Sennacherib suffered so serious a calamity seemed an opportune moment for a forward movement. This doubtless reveals the reason for this embassy to Hezekiah with whom it was hoped to form an alliance. It also explains the latter's object in showing them his riches and strength (v. 13), which was not only a political blunder but an act of unbelief towards God. Hence the rebuke (vv. 16-18). Instead of help from Babylon that nation would at length prove Judah's ruin. This would not be on account of Hezekiah's fault alone, but because the whole nation had incurred guilt similar to his, and would continue to do so even in a greater degree.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you read the parallel Scriptures in this case?
2. Rehearse the four outline facts constituting the summary of this reign.
3. What special form of idolatry is here mentioned?
4. What two strong nations were rivals for world dominion at this time?
5. Analyze Jehovah's answer to Sennacherib's boast.
6. What practical lessons are here taught about divine healing?
7. Give what appears to be the true reason for the Babylonian embassy.

2 KINGS 21-23 — JUDAH UNDER JOSIAH

HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS (21:1-26)

Manasseh's history shows that a good father does not always make a good son. The summary of his reign (vv. 1-9) ranks him with Ahaz, as the two

wickedest kings Judah had known. Note that the same punishment which had fallen on Israel is soon to overtake Judah (v. 13), and this despite Manasseh's "humbleness," as indicated in ~~431~~2 Chronicles 33:11-19.

The brief reign of Amon (vv. 19-26) was in character a continuation of that of his father, and marks the lowest period in the history of the nation until that time.

HIS RESTORATION OF THE TRUE WORSHIP (CHAP. 22)

The youth of Josiah suggests that he may have been under a regency at first as in the case of Joash (12:3) though there is no mention of it. The temple had not been repaired since that king, 250 years before, which explains certain things in this chapter, especially when the wickedness and idolatry of some of the intervening reigns are considered.

"The book of the law" (v. 8) is regarded by scholars as the Pentateuch, which during the apostasy had been lost to public knowledge except as a tradition. Some of the older rabbis held that it was the original manuscript of Moses. Another theory is that Manasseh had ordered all copies to be destroyed, but that some faithful priest had concealed this copy until now.

Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophets contemporaneous with Josiah, but the reason Huldah was inquired of, and not they, is probably because she "dwelt in Jerusalem" (v. 14), while the others may not have been there at this time.

HIS EXTENSION OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT (CHAP. 23)

It will be noticed that after the king had put an end to all illegal worship in Judah, he extended the reform, or the revival, to the former kingdom of Israel, where that worship had originally arisen (23:15-20).

Observe from verses 26-27 that God has not changed His purpose concerning the removal of Judah, which proves that, although in this reign the law was kept externally, yet the nation was by no means converted.

HIS DEATH AND THE SUCCESSION (23:29-37)

The story of Josiah's death (vv. 29-30) is more fully related in 2 Chronicles. One reason he marched against Pharaoh was that although the latter's objective was Assyria, he was trespassing on Jewish soil to attain it.

Jehoahaz, whom the people preferred as his successor (v. 30), was a younger son, but he was soon deposed by the Egyptians, who placed his brother on the throne, making him their vassal (vv. 34-35).

QUESTIONS

1. How long did Manasseh reign?
2. What chastisement befell him during his lifetime, and why?
3. What effect had this upon his spirit?
4. What decree is now uttered against Judah?
5. What earlier king of Judah does Josiah suggest?
6. Name two or three parallel incidents in their histories.
7. How would you explain the loss of the book of the law?
8. With what is this book identified?
9. What two prophets, whose books have come down to us, were contemporaneous with this reign?
10. Did Josiah die a natural death?

2 KINGS 24-25 — THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

THE LAST OF THE KINGS (CHAP. 24)

In the previous lesson we left Judah tributary to Egypt, which had been victorious at Megiddo. This lasted five years, when Babylon, now master of her old-time enemy Assyria, and eager to cross swords with Egypt for world-supremacy, came up against her, and compelled allegiance.

After three years Jehoiakim revolted (v. 1), and for the remainder of his reign was harassed by bands of enemies (v. 2) perhaps incited by the king of Babylon, himself too occupied in other directions to attack Judah in person.

After he has defeated Egypt, however (v. 7), he turns his attention to Judah. Jehoiakim is dead, and his son, Jehoiachin, is on the throne (v. 8). The latter is taken captive, and with him many of the best people of the land (vv. 12-16), among them Ezekiel, as we learn from the book bearing

his name. (The prophet Daniel, with others, had been carried away by the same king on an earlier advance against Jehoiakim.)

Nebuchadnezzar shows the same consideration as the king of Egypt in placing another of the royal family instead of a stranger on the throne (v. 17), but his confidence is misplaced and the end comes. The whole situation is of God, and the execution of His judgment upon the unholy people (v. 20).

THE DEATH AGONY (25:1-21)

For a comment on this chapter, read Jeremiah and Ezekiel. ^{<200>}Jeremiah 21, 27, 32, 34, 37, 40 and 41 cover this period pretty thoroughly and also the first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel.

THE REMNANT LEFT IN THE LAND (VV. 22-26)

Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon made governor over the few people remaining, was, like his father, a friend of Jeremiah and joined with him in advising Zedekiah to surrender. Had this counsel prevailed, Judah would not have been plucked up out of her land. All this will be seen when Jeremiah is reached. This was known to Nebuchadnezzar, however, and explains his choice of Gedaliah, as well as the treachery of the people towards him, notwithstanding his oath (vv. 24-25). Read ^{<400>}Jeremiah 40-44.

THE FAVORED CAPTIVE (VV. 27-30)

This closing incident carries its explanation on its face. The Babylonian king was the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar. The grace bestowed on Jehoiachin is difficult to account for, except on some personal ground, especially as he is preferred before the other captive kings, who were retained at the court to enhance its triumph and glory.

In conclusion let it again be emphasized that the fall of Judah was God's judgment upon her faithlessness as a witness to Him. All the prophets testify to this. But, let it also be noted that it was His purpose that Judah should be restored after a period (seventy years, ^{<2512>}Jeremiah 25:12). Her land was not populated by other peoples, a striking fulfillment of prophecy in itself. She must needs give birth to the Messiah there as the prophets had

foretold, and so, when her captivity brought her in her senses she repented, and returned to Jehovah with a sincerity she had not before.

QUESTIONS

1. In whose reign was Judah tributary, first to Egypt and then to Babylon?
2. What two later kings of Judah reigned but three months each?
3. In whose reigns were Ezekiel and Daniel taken captive?
4. What additional light on the period have you gathered from Jeremiah?
5. In what respect does Judah's captivity differ from that of Israel?