

A LOOK AT A BOOK: 2 KINGS, Pt. 2

October 13, 2013

Elisha Anoints Jehu of Israel, 2 Kings 9:1-13

Here the Israelite dynasty of Omri and his infamous descendants Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram comes to an abrupt end, and a new dynasty begins under Jehu.

“Jehu” means “Yahweh is He.” He was probably the commander of the army of Israel, which was still occupying the city of Ramoth Gilead. Jehu is mentioned twice in the cuneiform inscriptions on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. The Shalmaneser inscriptions also give us an objective date for this period in Hebrew chronology, 841 B.C.

When Elisha’s messenger arrived, he found the captains of Israel’s army sitting in a council with Jehu, their commander. Possibly they were already plotting a military overthrow of Jehoram’s regime. If so, they were in a receptive mood for the announcement that Jehu was God’s choice for the throne.

Jehu Slays Jehoram of Israel and Claims the Throne, 2 Kings 9:14-26

Scattered along Jezreel’s city wall were a number of watchtowers. The one in verse 17 was obviously on the east side of the city where the plain falls away toward the valley. Two mounted horsemen were successively sent out to investigate, and each one, instead of returning, joined Jehu’s rebels. Then when the guard in the watchtower recognized Jehu, Jehoram himself boldly rode out to meet him, driving his own chariot. The two kings may have feared that a Syrian counterattack had broken Israel’s occupation of Ramoth Gilead and had driven Jehu and the army back to Jezreel in retreat.

Jehu sharply rebuked Jehoram for the sins of his mother Jezebel and the rest of the dynasty. “Harlotries” and “witchcraft” are figurative terms often used by the prophets for idolatry and faithlessness. The quotation from Elijah in verse 26 is one Jehu and his captain Bidkar had overheard when they were young soldiers in Ahab’s army.

Jehu Slays Ahaziah of Judah and Jezebel, II Kings 9:27-37

Since King Ahaziah of Judah was a blood relative of Ahab, Jehu’s purge included him too. He was buried in Jerusalem in the tomb which had been prepared for him during his lifetime. Next on Jehu’s list of condemned enemies was Jezebel, who must have been quite elderly by this time. With typical sarcasm, Jezebel addresses

Jehu as “Zimri, murderer of your master.” Zimri was the one who murdered King Elah and those who remained in the family of Baasha (1 Kings 16:10). He managed to hold the throne only a few days and committed suicide. Following her violent death, Jehu drove his horses and chariot over her body and then casually went inside to eat and drink, showing intentional disdain for the queen. Later he relented a little and ordered her burial. “She was a king’s daughter” is a reference to the fact that Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians. By then, however, the dogs had already devoured most of her body in fulfillment of the prophecy in 1 Kings 21:23.

Athaliah Assumes the Throne, 2 Kings 11:1-12

Israel’s King Jehu reigned for 28 years after his bloody purge of the nation’s Baalists. He had also slain Ahaziah, the king of Judah, who had become Jehoram’s ally, but Jehu seemed to have no further interest in interfering with Judah’s royal descent.

Normally, following the death of a king like Ahaziah, one of his sons would have become the ruler in his place, but the devious queen mother had other plans. As soon as the news of Ahaziah’s assassination reached her, she set about to wipe out all her son’s descendants and claim the throne for herself. Seeing what Athaliah was plotting, Jehosheba acted quickly to save one of the royal heirs, her infant nephew, Jehoash. She and her husband, the priest Jehoiada, hid him and his nurse in their living quarters in the temple compound. Jehoash must have been almost eight years old when the events in verse 4 took place.

Traditionally, the temple guard, as well as the priests and Levites, served in shifts on a rotating basis. The military contingent who guarded the temple also had the responsibility for protecting the royal palace in Jerusalem. Since the shifts changed on the Sabbath, Jehoiada chose the next Sabbath day as the time for his carefully planned coup. All the contingents of soldiers would be at the temple at the same time, giving Jehoiada full military strength to carry out his plan. In addition to the regular weapons they routinely carried, Jehoiada also issued them the ceremonial spears and shields that were kept in the treasure house of the temple. Standing by the appropriate pillar near the altar in the temple court, the boy prince received the royal crown on his head. Jehoash also received in his hands “the Testimony,” that is, a copy of the law. The word in verse 12 is *eduth*, meaning a scroll of the Torah. Young Jehoash was now officially the king of Judah.

Athaliah is Killed, 2 Kings 11:13-21

Sounds of the tumultuous celebration in the temple could be heard all the way to the royal palace. When Athaliah arrived, no one had to tell the queen was happening. She understood all too clearly the joyous acclamation of the crowd, “Long live the king!” To deal with the possibility that some of her personal guards might be foolhardy enough to try to defend her, Jehoiada publicly commanded his captains to “slay with the sword whoever follows her.” The guards led her out of the temple compound by the back gate, the one used for horses being led to the royal stables. Choosing such an ignoble spot for her execution was an intentional insult to the wicked woman who was the only queen ever to reign in Jerusalem.

Notice the contrast between verse 19 and verse 16. The condemned queen was taken out by the lowly horse’s gate, while the newly crowned monarch was led out through the prestigious royal gate used by the kings and their escorts.

2 KINGS 12-13

Jehoash Restores the Temple, 2 Kings 12:1-16

Jehu was in his seventh year on the throne in Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, when the boy king Jehoash, was crowned in Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom. For the next twenty years these two neighboring rulers held the line against Baalism in their respective nations. The author of Kings gives Jehoash high marks for his leadership, but not straight A’s. His good grades continued only as long as he remained under the godly influence of his adoptive father, the priest (v. 2). But as soon as Jehoiada died and his oversight of the young king ended, Jehoash began to drift away from the ways of the Lord (2 Chronicles 24:2, 17ff.). His greatest accomplishment, in fact his only recorded accomplishment during his forty-year reign, was his restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, which was in need of repair.

Verses 4 and 5 report Jehoash’s first attempt at a building fund drive. It should have succeeded, but it didn’t. Twenty-three years later, when the king was thirty years old, the repairs had still not been made, so he took matters into his own hand and instituted a new plan (vv. 7-12). He took the responsibility for collecting the money away from the priests and assigned it to his own secretary (the king’s scribe, v. 10). Then he placed a collection chest in a strategic location on the right side of the altar, giving the repair project a high priority and a corresponding high visibility.

Elisha Prophecies and Dies, 2 Kings 13:14-21

Elisha has not been mentioned in the narrative of Kings for fifty years, since his anointing of Jehu in 2 Kings 9:1-10. Unlike the flamboyant Elijah, whose life ended in a dramatic whirlwind exit in a fiery chariot, Elisha died from a wasting disease. But God was just as near to him as he passed through the shadows of the valley of death as He had been to Elijah as he passed through the skies on his fiery chariot.

Jehoash's weeping lament over the "chariots of Israel and their horsemen!" has been variously interpreted. Some suggest that he was describing a situation similar to that in 2 Kings 2:12 when the chariot of fire transported Elijah to heaven. Still others believe that Jehoash considered Elisha himself to be a miraculous substitute for their lost military forces.

It was characteristic of Elisha to use symbolic actions to reinforce his prophecies. He was a "show-and-tell" prophet with a flair for using visual aids effectively. So the last act of the prophet was a visual symbol using a bow and some arrows, dramatizing the future victory of Israel. Most commentaries understand verse 18 to mean that the king held the arrows in his hand and struck them against the floor of Elisha's room. Either way, the point of the passage is that the king stopped too soon. He lacked perseverance and determination. He was content with half measures and incomplete achievement, and therefore the future victory over Syria would be a limited victory. If he had continued to "strike" with the arrows, Israel's victory would have been absolute.

Verses 20-21 tell the curious account of Elisha's burial and the crowning miracle of his career. The event described in these verses could have happened some time after Elisha had been buried. In fact, according to verse 21, his body had already deteriorated so that nothing but bones remained.

Who the dead man was is not disclosed. But as he was being carried to the burial site, suddenly a Moabite raiding-party appeared, and the pallbearers were forced to implement a contingency plan. Instead of preparing the man's own tomb, as they no doubt had planned, they stopped at the first sepulcher they could find, rolled away the stone, and quickly deposited the linen-wrapped body. But before they could reposition the stone and flee from the approaching invaders, a strange thing happened. When the dead man touched the decaying bones of the body already in the tomb, "he revived and stood on his feet" (v. 21).

Israel Recaptures Cities from Syria, 2 Kings 13:22-25

Picking up again the story of Jehoash, which he began in II Kings 13:10, the writer now adds more detail to his brief reference to Syria's oppression of Israel and explains how Yahweh, in spite of Syria's opposition, kept His promise to deliver Israel. Here we see only the turning of the tide in favor of Israel; but their complete domination of Syria, in fulfillment of God's promise, would come during the next reign, that of Jeroboam II.

Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, came to power in Syria during the reign of King Jehoash of Israel. Israel's victories over Ben-Hadad probably came when Adad-Nirari III, king of Assyria, attacked Syria, giving Israel the opportunity, while Ben-Hadad was distracted, to seize again the cities Hazael had taken from them. Notice that Israel overcame the Syrian army on three different occasions, equivalent to the number of times Jehoash had struck the ground with the arrows (2 Kings 13:19).

This oppression in 733 BC (*2 Kings 17:6*), a precursor of the major captivity in 722 BC, seems to be the first test of Assyria's strategy of reducing a conquered nation into an Assyrian province by deporting the upper classes to another part of the empire and replacing them with foreign immigrants. These were dark days for Israel, her territory now reduced to a tiny kingdom only thirty miles wide by forty miles long. The Northern Kingdom was down to its last ruler. Hoshea would be the final king of this dying nation.

2 KINGS 18-19

Hezekiah's Initial Reforms, 2 Kings 18:1-16

Although he was crowned half a dozen years before the actual fall of Samaria, Hezekiah's reign in Judah is an appropriate place to begin this third and final section of the two books of the Kings.

Realizing that his father, King Ahaz, had taken Judah down the same path of disobedience that led Israel to her doom, Hezekiah moved quickly to reverse national policy and bring Judah back to the Lord. The parallel account in Chronicles refers to a number of godly achievements that are omitted here, but verses 4-6 mention a select few. Going much further than other good kings of Judah, Hezekiah removed the "high places," that is, the former sites of pagan worship that the people had transformed into altars for the worship of Yahweh.

One of Hezekiah's reforms in verse 4 is not found anywhere else in Scripture. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness. When God instructed Moses to fashion the bronze serpent, He intended it to be used as a

symbol reminding them that they were to put their trust in Him (Numbers 21:6-9). But now, centuries later, the people were treating it as a divine relic and worshiping it as a god. The means had become the end.

Hezekiah earned one of the highest scores on the author's royal report card. The language the author used to praise him is almost effusive, ranking him even above Solomon and David. "After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him" (verse 5). What else did Hezekiah do to deserve such unprecedented applause? In addition to the destruction of idols in verse 4, the king is also lauded because "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel" (v. 5), "he held fast to the Lord" (v. 6), "he did not depart from following Him" (v. 6), and he "kept His commandments" (v. 6). As a result of this enviable record of righteousness and faith, the Lord was with Hezekiah, so that he prospered wherever he went, he was enabled to resist the Assyrian oppression, and he totally subdued the Philistines (vv. 7-8).

Things went well in Judah for fourteen years, but then trouble appeared in the form of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who invaded from the north and captured "all the fortified cities" of Judah (v. 13). Taking up where his father had left off, Sennacherib occupied the Assyrian throne until 681 B.C., and the details of his eight military expeditions, including this one against Judah, are preserved in his royal annals. There he claims to have captured forty-six major cities and an unspecified number of villages in Judah and hemmed up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird within its cage." The attack on Judah was apparently provoked by Hezekiah's refusal to continue paying tribute to Assyria as his father Ahaz had done. In order to pay Sennacherib's assessment, Hezekiah surrendered all the silver in the temple and in the royal treasury (v. 15) and stripped the gold overlay from the temple doors and pillars. According to verse 14, that amounted to three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. In present-day currency the tribute would amount to \$1,267,200 in silver and \$3,379,000 in gold, for a total of \$4,646,200.

Sennacherib's Boast Against the Lord, 2 Kings 18:17-37

Hezekiah's last minute attempt to placate Sennacherib by paying tribute was not successful. In fact, it appears Hezekiah's capitulation simply emboldened Sennacherib, and he sent a three-man delegation with a detachment of soldiers from Lachish to Jerusalem to call for Judah's surrender. Since Sennacherib had not come himself but sent an envoy, Hezekiah decided to respond in similar fashion.

The arrogance of Sennacherib's boastful taunt is detected in the opening address of the Rabshakeh where he uses the term "the great king," which was probably Sennacherib's self-designated title. When Hezekiah's ambassadors requested that the parley be continued in the Aramaic language, the international language of commerce and diplomatic discourse in western Asia, they were trying to avoid a panic on the part of the population of Jerusalem who were listening from the city wall. The Assyrian delegation refused this request because they wanted to lure the people of Jerusalem to rebel as they listened to the attractive offers the Assyrians were making to Hezekiah. If they would "come out," that is, surrender, they would be allowed to eat their own fruit and drink from their own wells rather than being forced to eat their own dung and drink their own urine during a siege (v. 27). Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah returned to the king's palace "with their clothes torn," indicating their heavy hearts and grievous concern for the situation.

Isaiah's Prophecy of Deliverance, 2 Kings 19:1-7

Hezekiah's reaction upon hearing the boastful and blasphemous words of Sennacherib through his spokesman the Rabshakeh was commendable. He humbled himself, tearing his royal robes and replacing them with sackcloth as a gesture of repentance and remorse. Then he "went into the house of the Lord" (v. 1). He went into the house of the Lord to arrange for a delegation to go to Isaiah the prophet. This is the first time Isaiah is mentioned in I and II Kings, even though he had been active since the reign of Hezekiah's grandfather, Ahaziah (Uzziah) (v. 2). Verse 6 gives the impression that Isaiah didn't wait for the king's plea to be delivered by the royal delegation. He knew they were coming and already had an answer for the king before they asked the question. Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were not the only ones who listened to Sennacherib's reproach. God had listened to the blasphemous words too, and He had already set in motion His judgment upon the Assyrian king.

Hezekiah's Prayer for Help, 2 Kings 19:8-19

Sennacherib's envoys returned with their report of Hezekiah's response to discover that the Assyrian army had left Lachish to attack the nearby city of Libnah (v. 8). However, before he could complete the Libnah assault, Sennacherib heard the rumor about the threatened attack of Ethiopia's king, Tirhakah. So before Sennacherib rushed back to defend his own capital against a new enemy, he fired one last verbal missile at Hezekiah (vv. 10-13). This time the swaggering threat was issued in the form of a letter. Its message was similar to the earlier threat. One subtle difference, however, is that the first threat accused Hezekiah of deceiving himself, while this second threat claimed that it was God who was doing the deceiving (v. 10).

Isaiah's Word Concerning Sennacherib, 2 Kings 19:20-37

Even though Isaiah was not directly consulted, he responded to Hezekiah's prayer. There follows next a fourteen-verse poem, or song, from the pen of Isaiah. God asked Sennacherib in verse 22, "Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?" Obviously, the answer is not just "Jerusalem" or "Judah," for Sennacherib had also reproached "the Holy One of Israel" Himself. In verse 25, God speaks again through the prophet's song. Sennacherib's success has been possible only because God allowed it. His boasting has no foundation because it was God who brought all his accomplishments to pass.

In verse 29 God addresses Hezekiah through the medium of Isaiah's song. How encouraging it must have been to hear the Lord promise that Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem would not last long and that prosperity would flourish again in Jerusalem. During the first year of the Assyrian invasion, the war would prevent the people of Jerusalem from planting. They would have to eat what "grows of itself" without cultivation. The next year they would have to live on "what springs from the same," that is, what comes up naturally from the uncultivated crops of the past year. But in the third year, the residents would be able to "sow and reap" because the siege would be lifted.

"Therefore" in verse 32 seems to refer to verse 28. Because Sennacherib has blasphemed God, he will be prevented from conquering Jerusalem. The fulfillment of God's promise in verse 33 that Sennacherib would turn away is described in verse 35. With little detail, almost matter-of-factly, the author of Kings declares that the angel of the Lord wiped out the army of Sennacherib in one night. The king and whoever else survived awakened to find 185,000 soldiers dead. Notice how the author stacks up the series of verbs in verse 36: Sennacherib "departed...went away...returned home...remained." This unusual linguistic construction suggests the speed of the defeated king's frantic return.

2 KINGS 20-21

Hezekiah's Illness and God's Cure, 2 Kings 20:1-11

These eleven verses tell about a miraculous event that took place sometime before the Assyrian army was annihilated by the angel of the Lord. Since the miraculous healing extended the life and reign of Hezekiah "fifteen years" (v. 6), it must have taken place in about the middle of Hezekiah's twenty-nine-year reign. When the king heard Isaiah's diagnosis that his illness was terminal, he turned his face away from the people gathered around his sick bed, prayed, and literally "wept a great weeping" (v. 3).

His prayerful request for divine healing was grounded in four personal characteristics that he felt deserved the Lord's attention: (1) He had walked before God. This was the same trait with which the Bible described men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, David, and others. (2) He had been faithful, or true. His relationship with God had been one of genuine sincerity and reliability. (3) He had served God "with a loyal heart," literally "with a whole heart." There was no duplicity or deceit in his faith. (4) He had done what was good. God heard the king's prayer, and once again used Isaiah as the channel through whom He communicated His promised healing to Hezekiah (vv. 4-6). Applying the poultice of figs to the infection was a remedy used in that day for both humans and animals to draw the poison from a boil or wound.

As a sign, Isaiah allowed Hezekiah to choose whether to have the shadow on a sundial go miraculously ten degrees backward or ten degrees forward. "The sundial of Ahaz" in verse 11 is literally "the steps of Ahaz." The phrase could be the proper name of a sundial built by Ahaz for use in astral worship. The Septuagint, on the other hand, supposes that the phrase "the steps of Ahaz" refers not to a sundial but literally to a flight of steps in the palace arranged so that the shadow on them could tell the time.

2 KINGS 22-23

The Discovery of the Book of the Law, 2 Kings 22:1-13

Along with his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, Josiah ranks as one of the most important of all the kings of Judah. Since he was only eight years old when the people of the land crowned him, Josiah spent his first eighteen years as king under the tutelage and guardianship of the priests and elders. His first recorded independent act as king is recorded in this chapter when, at the age of twenty-six, he ordered the restoration of the temple.

As the ancient workers began the repair of the long-neglected temple, they made a "once-in-a-lifetime" discovery. Hilkiyah the priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord" (v. 8). Apparently, the Scripture scroll had lain lost and forgotten for seventy-five years – the fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign, the two years of Amon's reign, and the eighteen years between Josiah's coronation as an eight-year-old and the discovery when he was twenty-six. Since the days of Jerome, most biblical scholars have believed that it was an ancient scroll of the Book of Deuteronomy, which was also popularly known as "the Book of the Law."

Shaphan, who had first taken time to read the book for himself (v. 8), now brought it before King Josiah and read the book aloud. The reading of the word of God spoke to the heart of the young king and stirred his spirit to conviction and repentance. He “tore his clothes” as a symbol of repentance, and then he appointed a delegation to prayerfully study the book. The deputation was made up of Hilkiyah the priest, whose name means “Yahweh is my spirit” and whose grandson Seraiah would be the last high priest before the exile; Ahikam the son of Shaphan the scribe, a faithful supporter of Jeremiah; Achbor the son of Michaiah; Asaiah the servant of the king, who held a post of great importance in the court; and of course, Shaphan the scribe.

The Prophecy of Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14-20

In the light of so much discussion about women in ministry today, one cannot avoid asking the question at this point in the book, “Why did the king’s delegation go to Huldah the prophetess, a relatively unknown woman, when there were several famous prophets in Judah who were men?” The ancient rabbis answered the question in several ways. Some said the delegation went to a woman because they believed that she would be more tenderhearted and, rather than rebuking the people for their transgressions, would be inclined to pray for them, realizing they had sinned in ignorance. Still others explain that Huldah was the wife of one of the priests and therefore well known to them for her gifts. If they thought Huldah, being a woman, would somehow soften the message of the word of God, they were mistaken. Using the traditional “thus says the Lord God of Israel,” the prophetess delivered a forthright, clear, powerful, intense proclamation of the meaning of the book (vv. 15-20). The first part of Huldah’s interpretation applied to the people of Judah in general (vv. 16-17), but the last part was directed to the king himself (vv. 18-20). Josiah was to be spared the calamities written in the book because he had responded to its message receptively, with tenderhearted humility.

The Reforms of Josiah, 2 Kings 23:1-30

The Renewal of the Covenant (vv. 1-3). The entire population of Jerusalem was invited to join leaders from all across Judah to enter the temple for a ceremonial renewal of the covenant. “[He] made a covenant” is literally “[he] cut a covenant,” which goes back to the practice of cutting the carcass of an animal and separating the parts so the contracting parties could seal their agreement by walking between them.

The Removal of Idols from Jerusalem (vv. 4-14). Josiah’s grandfather (Manasseh) had installed all sorts of pagan idols in the temple and his father (Amon) had reinforced idol worship; but now Josiah ordered the idols all removed, burned

outside the city, and the ashes taken away to Bethel. Bethel was a defiled place from which idolatry had spread throughout the Northern Kingdom and, supposedly, into Judah as well. Throwing the ashes of the idol on the graves of the common people outside the city was not intended to defile their graves, but the very opposite. Any contact with death was believed to be an act of defilement, so scattering the dust on the graves served to defile the idols. Also the act symbolized the fact that the idol appropriately belonged in the cemetery because it was not a living god. "Perverted persons" in verse 7 refers to male and female prostitutes who participated in pagan religious rituals. Next, Josiah called in the country priests who led worship at the rural high places across Judah. He brought these erring priests back to Jerusalem, but he reduced their status and responsibility (v. 9).

The Removal of Idols from Bethel (vv. 15-20). In his zeal, Josiah even extended his iconoclastic purge beyond the borders of Judah, into what was left of the Northern Kingdom. Bethel was the place where Jeroboam had built the altar to the molten bulls (or golden calves) in an effort to keep his people from going south to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. After he had destroyed the images on the mountain in Bethel, Josiah looked around the mountainside and saw the cemetery mentioned in verse 16. He knew that spreading the ashes of the dead on the altar of Bethel would be an appropriate way to defile the site, so he dug up some of the anonymous graves, removed and burned the bones on Bethel's famous altar, and thereby desecrated the shrine.

The Reinstitution of the Passover Feast (vv. 21-23). For seventy-five years there had been no Passover feast held in Jerusalem, and even before that the ceremony had been diluted and revised to fit the whims of previous rulers. For example, Hezekiah observed the feast in the second month instead of the prescribed first month, and he did it without the proper purification of some of the people (2 Chronicles 30:2-3, 17:20). Josiah was determined to do it right, according to the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

The Removal of Superstitions from Judah (24-25). Consulting the dead through mediums and spiritists in order to foretell the future is an ancient practice that still prevails today. It was always forbidden by God. In spite of Josiah's moral and religious greatness, God's judgment against Judah would not be turned back. His reforms were noble, but they could not save the nation from inevitable destruction (vv. 26-27). Once again, the terrible fate of Judah is predicted, and the blame is laid at the feet of sinful King Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather.

Josiah's untimely death at the age of thirty-nine is described briefly in verse 28-30. Why Josiah had gone to Megiddo is not known, but he may have been trying to do the same thing Necho II was going – that is, extending his kingdom and authority in the wake of Assyria's downfall. After killing Josiah, Necho's combined army of Egyptians and Assyrians marched to Carchemish, where in 605 B.C. they engaged the Babylonians and were annihilated, bringing an end to the Egyptian bid for world power. The death of Josiah was a disaster of the highest magnitude for Judah. The nation mourned him greatly (2 Chronicles 35:25), and the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus tells how the king's memory was greatly treasured in Israel for centuries (Ecclesiasticus 49:13). All this happened at Megiddo, which in Greek is called Armageddon. This battlefield came to be the traditional site for the last great fight against the enemies of God (Revelation 16:16).

The Siege and Fall of Jerusalem, 2 Kings 25:1-21

Inasmuch as Jerusalem was practically void of weapons and skilled soldiers, why did it take the powerful Babylonian army under the leadership of king Nebuchadnezzar nearly two years to break through the walls and conquer the city? Some say it was because the city itself was strategically located for natural defense, and its fortifications were unusually well built and difficult to penetrate. Others point out that during the siege, Egypt once again made what turned out to be a feeble and unsuccessful attempt to attack Babylon. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar's attention was temporarily diverted from Jerusalem while he dealt with Egypt, thus extending the siege.

Eventually, since the siege interrupted two harvest seasons and halted the cultivation of the land, and since the circle of troops prevented any produce from coming into the city, the ensuing famine brought the people in the city to the point of starvation. Their will to fight waned; the defense broke down; and Nebuchadnezzar's troops encountered little resistance. The cowardly King Zedekiah and his troops tried to escape through a narrow corridor in the southeast wall that gave access to the Kidron Valley (v. 4). Verse 5 says the Babylonian's "overtook him in the plains of Jericho." Babylonian justice meted out its cruel punishment on Zedekiah. Before binding him, they forced him to watch the murder of all his sons. About a month after the capture of the city, Nebuchadnezzar brought in a Babylonian specialist in urban demolition. His name was Nebuzaradan and he is called "the captain of the guard" (v. 8). Methodically, he set about to demolish the beautiful city, burning the palace and chief buildings, breaking down the walls, and wrecking the temple.

The Appointment of Gedaliah and the Release of Jehoiachin, 2 Kings 25:22-30

We don't know much about Gedaliah except that his father was one of Jeremiah's friends whom King Joash appointed to the delegation that went to the prophetess Huldah to get her interpretation of the Book of the Law. The "captains of the armies" in verse 23 were Judean soldiers who had escaped from the city with King Zedekiah during the Babylonian siege along with other soldiers who had been assigned to various fortresses across Judah and therefore were not exiled with the defenders of Jerusalem. Gedaliah's plea for the men to give up their resistance and "serve the king of Babylon" fell on deaf ears as far as one of the officers was concerned. Ishmael and ten of his men returned later to assassinate Gedaliah, whom they considered a traitor. Then they fled to Egypt for asylum.

Twenty-six years after the fall of Jerusalem, about 560 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar died. Jewish commentators explain that the Babylonian king died on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month and was buried on the twenty-sixth. Then, the next day, on the order of his successor, Evil-Merodach, his body was exhumed and dragged through the streets of the capital.

The Book of Kings, in its last four verses, ends on a bright note. The last surviving sovereign of Judah is set free from the rigors and humiliation of Babylonian prison. He is shown honor and good will. Here is a hopeful sign that a better future is in store for God's people. Someday the exile will end, and ultimately the Davidic monarchy will be restored.