

# BIBLE CHALLENGE

## A 9 day study of the books 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles

The story so far: We continue this week to focus on the northern kingdom, Israel. (We will go back and trace the story of the southern kingdom, Judah, when we are finished with Israel.) Elisha, successor to the prophet Elijah, continues to preach to the northern kingdom. Elisha's story begins much the same as did Elijah's with miracles of healing and feeding, thus confirming Elisha's status as God's prophet. Just as Elijah fed the widow of Zarephath, Elisha provides a miraculous measure of oil for another widow (2 Kings 4), and just as Elijah raised the widow's son, so Elisha raises a child from death as well (also in chapter 4).

As the north continues its downward spiral, God sends additional prophets to warn them and call them to return to him. Following Elisha's story, we will look at the message of some of those prophets

Monday:

Read 2 Kings 5:1-19

What to look for:

- Once again God shows mercy and grace to an "outsider", one who is not of Israel. Naaman is a commander of the army of Aram, a nation that is most often either at war with or threatening Israel.
- Naaman is frustrated at the odd instructions that Elisha gives him, expecting that his healing would be some kind of magical accomplishment by Elisha himself. But Elisha's instructions are meant to clearly show that the healing comes from God, giving Naaman a reason for humility despite his power and wealth.
- Note Jesus' reference to this story at the beginning of his ministry in Luke 4:27, in which he makes the point that salvation comes from Israel, but it is *for* everyone.

Tuesday:

Read 2 Kings 6:24-32, 7:1-16

What to look for:

- 6:24 – remember, Samaria is the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel.
- This is no longer King Ahab...he was killed back in 1 Kings 22.
- The siege is so bad (6:28) that the people have been reduced to cannibalism.
- Who can believe Elisha's words (7:1) that they will be able to buy flour once again for a shekel, when times are so desperate that a donkey head costs 80 shekels?
- 7:3-11 – once again, as has happened so often before, God has delivered the people, though they have done absolutely nothing to

deserve it. The deliverance results in exactly what Elisha had predicted (7:16)

- In this story, God's word is once again proven to be trustworthy. In what way have you experienced the trustworthiness of his word lately?

Wednesday:

Read 2 Kings 9:1-3, 10:30-31, 13:1-3,10-11,14,20; 14:23-27

What to look for:

- These readings skim a number of years of history and reigns of kings in the north. Did you notice the pattern as to the assessment of each king's reign?
- We have reached a date now between 786 and 746 BC.
- During the reign of Jeroboam II (14:23) the northern kingdom begins to reassert itself as over against surrounding nations. The power of rival nations is on the wane and Israel is at peace with the southern kingdom, Judah. These are the best years, economically, for Israel since the days of Solomon and it is in this context that God will raise up new prophets to speak to and warn Israel of its coming destruction if the people do not return to the Lord.

This would be a good time to turn to the message of two prophets whose careers were in the north at about this time, Amos and Hosea. Unlike Elijah and Elisha, whose words were often accompanied by miraculous, powerful deeds, the remainder of the Old Testament prophets relied primarily on the power that comes from speaking God's word.

Does Israel repent and return to her first love? No. Not after Elijah's warnings. Not because of what Elisha said. Not in response to Amos' preaching. Not after Hosea's pleading. So, now we go back to 2 Kings to finish the story of Israel.

Thursday:

Read 2 Kings 15:8-10, 13-14, 17-18, 23-24

What to look for:

- Do you see the pattern? After the second Jeroboam dies in 746BC the long period of stability under his reign comes to an end. Israel experiences a whole series of revolts and short-term leadership. And of each king the same judgment is passed: He continued the sins of the first Jeroboam, namely, idolatry – the worship of false gods. The end, now, is very close.

Friday:

Read 2 Kings 17:1-6, 21-24

What to look for:

- The king of Israel has been playing both sides of a national security game, seeking to secure Israel through military allies rather than turning completely to God. Israel's king has struck a bargain with Assyria, and another on the side with Egypt, prompting Assyria to invade (vs 3-5)
- Assyria, rather than simply exterminating the people of Israel, deports most of them. (vs 6 and vs 23). In their place, Assyria resettles people from Babylon and other areas (vs 24), who bring with them their own pagan worship and intermingle and eventually intermarry with the remnant of Israelites left behind, creating a new identity as "Samaritans". We'll hear a lot about Samaritans in the New Testament.
- The year is 722BC and we have come to the end of the northern kingdom. These people will be permanently dispersed from their land and history will never again hear from this kingdom.

Now would be a good time to study the books of Mica and Isaiah.

Thursday:

Read 2 Kings 18:1-7

What to look for:

- Hezekiah was king during the time of Isaiah. In vs. 3 he is remembered as one of Judah's good kings, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, one of the very few kings beside David that is given that assessment.
- Note what Hezekiah did in vs. 4 that earned him his reputation as a good king: He destroyed the objects of the people's idolatry (the worship of false gods) which had even come to include the bronze serpent that Moses had created in the wilderness at God's direction for the people to look at and live when God was punishing them for their unfaithfulness (see Numbers 21:9).
- Vs. 7b – this is going to get Hezekiah in trouble.

Friday:

Read 2 Chronicles 32: 1, 9-32

What to look for:

- Hezekiah's story is told both in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The event we're reading about today is also related in 2 Kings 18 as well as in Isaiah 36 and 37.
- In rebelling against the king of Assyria, Hezekiah has put himself in difficulty.
- Note the attitude the Assyrians have toward God (vs. 13-15) It is a public mocking of the hope the people of Jerusalem had in God's ability to save them and a declaration that just as no other

god had saved any other nation from the hands of the Assyrians, neither would or could God save them.

- Vs. 20 – Hezekiah turns to Isaiah for advice who, as recounted in the 2 Kings version, counseled prayer and reliance on the power of God.
- Vs 21ff – Once again God acts on behalf of his people.
- Vs. 24 ff – even Hezekiah can't pull it off completely. His pride gets in the way, and at the end of his career he foolishly allows a new rising power, Babylon, to see his wealth, which will ultimately make Judah their target. (This portion of the story is spelled out in more detail in 2 Kings 20).

### Monday:

Read 2 Kings 21:1-6, 16, 19-24, 22:1-11

- Following Hezekiah's death, Judah experiences two of her worst kings, Manasseh and Amon.
- Manasseh undoes all of Hezekiah's reforms including erecting altars to Baal, restoring the means by which the goddess Asherah was worshipped, and building astrology altars within God's temple (21:3). He encouraged ritual male prostitution and resumed child sacrifice (21:6).
- Manasseh's son, Amon follows him and is just as bad. His courtiers finally assassinate him.
- Manasseh and Amon are followed by Josiah who, like Hezekiah, took the need for reform seriously.
- 22:11 – A Book of the Law is found in the temple (probably Deuteronomy) that had been lost and forgotten. Josiah reacts this way because he recognizes that the way they were worshipping was completely contrary to the manner in which God commanded them to worship.
- How might this year's Bible Challenge be for your life like the discovery of the Book of the Law was for Josiah?

### Tuesday:

Read Zephaniah 3:1-5, 8-13

- Zephaniah is speaking early in the reign of Josiah, likely before Josiah's reforms took place.
- The problem is that the people will accept no correction, even when it is necessary and for their own good (3:2) Note where Zephaniah places the blame for Judah's unfaithfulness: squarely at the feet of the officials, rulers, prophets, and priests (vs. 3-4). They are profaning the sanctuary (see yesterday's reading concerning what is taking place within the temple).
- The promise comes in vs. 9 and following. The nations will be gathered (vs. 8) and they will all come to worship the true God (and this in a nation, Judah, which is currently worshipping all the false gods of the surrounding nations.)

- Vs. 12 again references the promise of a remnant, those who will make it through the coming destruction from which God will build his people once again.

Wednesday:

Read 2 Kings 23:4-7, 10-15, 21-27

What to look for:

- This is an accounting of all the reforms that Josiah instituted throughout the land. He is truly cleansing the nation.
- Vs. 10 – Josiah wrecks the places where people had sacrificed their children so that they could no longer do so.
- Vs. 21-23 – True worship has returned to Judah, worship as God intended. This is a summary of Josiah's reign. But is it already too late?

Thursday:

Read Nahum 1:2-3, 7-8, 3:1-7, 19

What to look for:

- Unlike other prophets whose messages were for God's people, Nahum's entire word is directed to Assyria, the empire that had exiled the northern kingdom and was pressing in upon Judah. His message is a warning of the coming judgment on Assyria, whose capitol was Nineveh. The message takes the form of a recounting of the atrocities Assyria was committing on anyone who stood in their way, along with an indication of what will happen to them as a result.
- Nahum probably preached in about 700 BC. In 612 BC Nineveh fell to the Babylonians, the next great wave of empire. They in turn would be followed by the Persians.
- It was about this time, as well, that Josiah was killed in battle by the Egyptians (see 2 Kings 23:29) as he was attempting to rebel against the Assyrians.

This would be a good time to look at the book of Jeremiah.